

The Mission and Ministries of a New Testament Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction: 1) You are starting a church from scratch. How do you begin?

Where do you look for good models to emulate, worthy patterns to follow and put into practice? Before answering these questions, let me put before you the first and most fundamental question to ask: What did God have in mind when He conceived the idea of the Church? What plan, what purposes, what principles did He envision? What is God's blueprint? How would He lay the foundation? There are several New Testament texts that speak to this subject, each one providing a piece of the total portrait.

2) Matthew 16:13-20 addresses the confession and conception of the Church.

Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8 addresses the commission and vision of the Church.

Acts 2:40-47 addresses the priorities and practices of the Church.

Ephesians 4:11-16 addresses the mission and ministries of the Church.

Taken as a whole these text inform us as to who we are to be and what we are to do. And remember: who we are will always precede and determine what we do!

In a day when churches grope about in a fog of pragmatic and cultural confusion, especially in trying to determine what constitutes a healthy Church, understanding and applying the teachings of the Bible could not be more important. In fact, they are absolutely essential.

Transition: I would direct our attention specifically to Eph. 4:1-16. Here Paul outlines in 3 broad strokes the mission and ministries of the Church, that glorious and divine creation which He describes in Ephesians as the body of Christ (1:23; 4:16), the building, of Christ (2:20-22) and the bride of Christ (5:22-33). Here we gain crucial and critical insight in who we are and what we are to do as the people of God.

I. Lay a foundation of those things you must be united around 4:1-6

- Certain biblical and theological non-negotiables will characterize a healthy, biblical church. Paul says we must establish clearly and transparently how we live as repenting sinners and what we believe as confessing followers of Jesus.

1) Expect covenant faithfulness 4:1-3

- There is a life that bears eloquent witness to the power of the gospel (4:1). It shows the gospel in “life transformation.” There is what Paul calls a “worthy walk” (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15) that witnesses to the power of the gospel. It is a walk energized by the Spirit that, motivated by “gospel gratitude,” reflects Christ individually and corporately. It is an approach to the Christian life that asks: 1) “What did Jesus do” (Eph. 1-3), before it asks 2) “What would Jesus do?” (Eph. 4-6) (Keller tweet) These “gospel graces” include 1) humility, 2)

gentleness, 3) patience, 4) love for one another, and 5) an eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:2-3).

- By its very nature a gospel-centered church will strive for unity, a unity grounded in the Word and maintained by the Spirit (4:3).
- Churches devoted to covenant faithfulness pursue “character core values” and they pursue them at all cost. They do not get sidetracked or split over issues like building proposals, clothing styles, musical preferences, secondary theological matters or social class distinctions. They have a higher and more worthy agenda reflected in covenantal commitment, covenantal faithfulness. They pursue on earth today what the church will look like in heaven for all eternity. (cf. Rev. 7:9-10).

2) Expect confessional fidelity 4:4-6

- Theology matters. What we believe matters. It always has and always will. What we believe is wed to how we live. The two go together.
- Seven facets of our theological, confessional unity are noted in verses 4-6. The word “one” appears 7 times. Many believe these verses actually constitute an early church confession. I would agree.

Verse four is the Spirit's verse.

Verse five is the Son's verse.

Verse six is the Father's verse.

As our Triune God is one, we must be one.

- One body – no barriers, no separate agendas; one living organism.

One Spirit – the 3rd person of the Triune God who is the energizer and uniter of the body.

One hope – to be like Him and with Him, made possible by His work for us and the Spirit in us.

- One Lord – His name is Jesus (there are not multiple Lords). A simple and straightforward affirmation of soteriological exclusivism (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5). If you get your Christology wrong you will get the gospel wrong! It will always come back to what we believe about the person and work of Christ.

One faith – here our personal experience of faith probably is in view, our personal trust in the one Lord.

One baptism – here water is in view, though Spirit baptism must be close by!

Curtis Vaughn (p. 90) summarizes it well: “The point of the verse is that there is one Lord who is to be obeyed and adored; one believing experience that brings people into saving union with that Lord; and

one outward, visible ceremony by which believers confess their faith and are openly incorporated into the fellowship of God's people.”

- One God and Father – no polytheism in Christianity, no New Age mysticism like that of Shirley MacLaine who says, “Each soul is its own God. You must never worship anyone or anything other than self. For you are God. To love self is to love God.” (*Dancing in the Light*, 358). No, there is only one God who has revealed Himself as Father to all who believe in Jesus. He is above all (sovereignty) through all (immanency), and in you all (intimacy).
- Doctrine is important for the life of the church within. We must establish and make clear what we believe, where we stand. But, doctrine also impacts the life of the church without and her call to missions. How so?
- In a message entitled, “One Lord, One Spirit, One Body For All Time and All Peoples”, (11-8-92), John Piper rings correctly the missions bell that is embedded in this text. He asks, “What does this [text] have to do with missions? What does it have to do with the task of the church to evangelize the unreached peoples of the world? The answer is that since there is only one God (the Father of all who believe, Ephesians 2:12) and only one Lord (the Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians

1:2f), and only one Spirit (the Holy Spirit poured out from the Father by the Son, Acts 2:33) and only one faith (faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Ephesians 1:13, 15) and only one Baptism (into Christ in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19f), and only one body (the church of God gathered with Jesus as the head, Ephesians 4:15)-since there is only one God and one faith, we must take the news of this God and this faith to the nations. “There is no other name under heaven,” Peter said, “given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Other religions and other lords will not save. You might think that this text is about church unity, not about missions. But think again. The issue at Ephesus, ...was the issue of whether Gentiles could be full fellow heirs with Jews in the body of Christ. The answer was that Christ reconciled both in ONE body to God through the cross (2:16). Both have access in ONE Spirit to the Father (2:18). Those who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ and made into ONE new man (2:15). So the issue of unity for Paul is created by the mission of the church to “those who were far off” – the Gentiles, the nations – far off spiritually and far off culturally and sometimes geographically. In other words, the uniqueness of Christ – the fact that there is only one

Christ, and only one God, and only one faith – is the foundation for mission outside the church and the foundation of unity inside the church. If there were many true gods, and many Saviors, and many valid faiths, and many baptismal entrances into many genuine bodies of redeemed people, there would be little need for missions the way Paul sees the need. But there is only one God and one Lord and one faith and one baptism. And this salvation truth must be proclaimed to all creation – to all the peoples.”

- Two simple points of application: 1) Have a church covenant all members are required to affirm. 2) Have a confession of faith all members are required to affirm.

II. Celebrate the Diversity and Giftedness of your Leaders 4:7-11

God calls leaders to be disciplers, to be reproducers. I am convinced this is a tragically missing element in many philosophies of ministry in our day. I believe Greg Nettle is right, “The lack of discipleship undermines all else we seek to do” (*Disciples Who Make Disciples*). You see there is a world of difference between a teacher (a good thing) and a discipler (a better thing). Joel Rosenberg and T.E. Kashy in *The Invested Life* explain exactly what that difference is, “A teacher shares information, while a discipler shares life; a teacher aims for the head, while a discipler aims for the heart; a teacher measures knowledge, while a discipler

measures faith; a teacher is in authority, while a discipler is a servant; and a teacher says, “Listen to me,” while a discipler says, “follow me.” (p. 35).

This is a different model of ministry and leadership to be sure, but one that is more biblical and one that is, long term, more fruitful. It is the model intended by our ascended Lord when He showered gifts on His Church.

1) They are gifted by Christ 4:7-10

- The church is entrusted (graced) with servants of the Word. In fact all servants of Christ are graced with spiritual gifts sovereignly given by Christ the ascended Lord (4:7) who will “fill all things” (4:10). However, some servants are uniquely called and gifted for leadership assignment in the local church.
- These are grace gifts not natural talents or abilities.
- All receive such gifts. No one left out.
- These gifts are sovereignly bestowed by Christ. He makes the choice, not you.
- Certain gifts, such as these in Ephesians 4, are given to leaders in the Church for the purpose of fulfilling 4:12-16. Question: is discipleship at the top or bottom of your priority list? I believe this is without question one of the greatest challenges facing the church today.

2) They are gifts from Christ 4:11

- Spiritual gifts are mentioned in four texts of Scripture: Romans 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4 and 1 Peter 4.
- Verse 7 affirms that everyone has at least one. Again, spiritual gifts are not natural talents. Natural talents are abilities you have by natural birth. Spiritual gifts are what you receive by spiritual birth. Often the two have nothing in common! Sometimes they do overlap.
- Verse 11 gives attention to four spiritual gifts that are essential for the health of the church. “He Himself” is emphatic. Christ and no one else gave us these gifted saints.
- Apostles and prophets are foundational. Apostle in a technical sense refers to the twelve; in a general sense to any “sent one.” It would fit our missionaries. Prophets were forth-tellers even more than future-tellers. Prophets were bold proclaimers of God’s revelation.
- Evangelists are spiritual obstetricians gifted in bringing forth new births. Some, like Billy Graham and Luis Palau do it before large crowds. Others, most, are gifted in sharing their faith one on one. But never forget: all of us are to be faithful in sharing one on one.
- Shepherds and teachers is best translated pastor-teacher or shepherd-teacher. They are spiritual pediatricians who lead and feed, provide for

and protect the body of Christ. They minister to us and with us but not for us.

Point of application: Are you on the lookout in your faith community for those Christ has gifted for leadership? Are you releasing them and giving them the opportunity to fulfill their specific calling as empowered by Christ? Are you sharing the load of leadership? Of ministry? This leads us to our 3rd crucial principle.

III. Focus on equipping each member of the body for their work of ministry

4:12-16

- The time is right for a major shift in ministry strategy, a shift from a strategy of addition to one of multiplication. Every member a minister is a worthy motto for any church. It is also the biblical model. God has commanded us to make disciples, not get a decision! Jesus did not come to make Christians. He came to make disciples. Here is a major key in avoiding ministerial burnout, depression and frustration. The church is not a bus where the pastor does all the driving and does his best to coax and cajole as many as he can to get on the bus and take a seat. No! The church is a body and everyone has a job, a function, a part to play. Robert Coleman says, “One must decide if he wants his ministry to count in momentary applause

of popular recognition or the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men to carry on his work after he is gone.”

- Let me lay out my 5 observations from these 5 verses and then show you Paul’s logic all the way thru verse 16.

1) God has a job for everyone to do. 4:12

2) God intends for the body to grow and mature. 4:12-13

3) God wants believers to be grounded and safe. 4:14

4) God wants us to speak to each other in love. 4:15

5) God wants us to serve each other in love. 4:16

- Now, follow Paul’s airtight logic in these verses!

1) God’s gifted men (4:11) equip the saints for the work of the ministry (v.

12). Robbie Gallaty points out, “maturity happens through ministry, not vice versa.”

2) Saints doing the work of the ministry builds the body (v. 12).

3) Building the body results in unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son (v. 13).

4) This process produces a mature body that looks and acts like Christ

(4:13). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the *Cost of Discipleship* well said,

“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without

discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”

- 5) This mature body is prepared to recognize and handle doctrinal heresy and false teaching (4:14).
- 6) This mature body will be mutually accountable speaking truth to one another in love (4:15).
- 7) This mature body grows in every way into Christ (4:15).
- 8) This mature body has each part working properly (4:16).
- 9) This mature body keeps on growing (4:16).
- 10) This mature body builds itself up [also] in love (4:16).

(Interestingly the word “love” occurs 22 times in Ephesians. So crucial is it to the health of the church and the display of the gospel, it is found in all 6 chapters of Ephesians).

- All of this implies, I believe, a tangible covenant relationship and covenant community. Membership in a local, visible, body of believers involves committing our lives in covenant to one another in a community in love.

5 questions for leaders to consider:

- Are you working yourself out of job? Have you put to death what Larry Osborne calls “the Holy Man Myth?”, a myth that “mistakenly equates leadership gifts with superior spirituality” (*Sticky Church*, 49).

- Are you a Word-saturated church?
- Are you building a theologically informed people who can share both what they believe and why they believe (1 Peter 3:15)?
- Are you growing a spiritually wise congregation?
- Are you fostering spiritually humble people?

Conclusion: In essence, God is calling us to build churches that have discipleship as a core value built into the DNA of our faith community. How you do it may vary, but that you do it is essential. Some final thoughts for your reflection.

- 1) A strong pulpit ministry is a must but it is not enough.
- 2) Small group discipleship is absolutely necessary to the health and life of your church. Howard Hendricks, former “prof” at DTS and now in heaven believed that we all need to nurture 3 relationships in our life. We need a:
 - Paul – an older and wiser mentor from whom we can learn.
 - Barnabas – a friend who teaches, encourages and holds us accountable.
 - Timothy – a younger believer(s) in whom you are investing.
- 3) You must teach and train your people to think and live biblically and theologically. (Ex. Buddy Gray at Hunter Street. More than 800 taken thru Grudem. This year he will lead one group of 10th-11th graders and another of men in their 30’s.)
- 4) We must train our people to think missionally and equip them to evangelize.

5) We must focus on raising a generation of mature, godly men who are radically devoted to Christ. The need has never been greater.

You see today on planet earth King Jesus has a body that the Bible calls the Church. It has eyes that see the needs of this world. It has ears that hear the cries of the nations. It has a mouth that can proclaim the gospel. It has legs that can walk, arms that can serve, feet that can be blistered and backs that can be whipped all for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

This body makes Christ real to this world. Our goal is not to build buildings, grow budgets, merely acquire knowledge or be captivated by political or social agendas. Our goal is to build men of God and women of God. Our aim is to fill this world with Christ and His gospel. Our gospel strategies should reflect this. Our church life should reflect this. It is this and this alone that sets the agenda for the Church. Any other agenda will fall short. Any other agenda is not worth having.

George Martin provides a very appropriate challenge for our concluding consideration, “Perhaps today’s pastors should imagine that they are going to have three more years in their parish (church) as pastor—that there will be no replacement for them when they leave. If they acted as if this were going to happen, they would put the highest priority on selecting, motivating, and training lay leaders that could carry on as much as possible the mission of the church after they left. The results of three sustained years of such an approach would be

significant. Even revolutionary.” (David Watson, *Called and Committed*, 53). I agree so let’s do it! Let’s be a 1st century church in a 21st century context that puts on glorious display the beauty of Christ revealed in this thing called His body, this living and growing organism called the church!