

Niagra Bible Conference
A Model for Discipleship - Ephesians 4

Introduction

We have now looked at our Lord's command in Matthew 28:19-20 in some depth. We are to make disciples of all nations by going, baptizing and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded. We have also seen that the failure to carry out this command has resulted in a weak church in America. Christians are being more effected by society than having an effect on society. And we have briefly examined the pattern that Jesus and the Apostles have set for us in carrying out this command.

If we remember the command is to make disciples instead of "win souls" we will not only avoid the major perversions of the gospel prevalent in our land, but we will also be following the pattern set for us by Jesus and the Apostles. We will proclaim Jesus to others and invite them to continue to learn more of Him without neither coercion or intimidation, nor enticements and marketing ploys. We tell the truth in love and let the Holy Spirit convict and bring about regeneration. It is up to Jesus to build His church. It is up to us to be faithful workers that follow His directions as He builds His church.

Today I want to look at Ephesians 4 and the manner in which the church is to work together in this process of making disciples of all nations. The church is the body of Christ, and it is made up of many members which must work in harmony with one another in order to function properly. When those in the church are properly fulfilling their part in the body, the result is making disciples which in turn results in the building up of the church and the planting of local churches in new areas.

Overview of Ephesians

Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus explains the position of the Christian in Christ as well as how the Christian should live in view of His position in Christ. Since it is God that has "*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him*" (Eph. 1:4), then it is only reasonable that we "Walk in a manner worthy of our calling" (Eph. 3:1). We were dead in our trespasses and sins and God by His mercy and love made us alive together with Christ saving us by His grace through faith as His gift (Eph. 2:1,4,8), therefore it is reasonable that we walk no longer as the Gentiles in the futility of mind (Eph. 4:17), but as imitators of God we walk in love (Eph. 5:1-2) as wise men (Eph. 5:15). Because God is at work and has called every true Christian to be part of His household and therefore can have access to the Father through the Spirit (Eph. 2:18-19), we can be strong in the Lord and stand firm against our adversary, the devil, and walk in victory over him (Eph. 6:10-20). The result is a manner of life that is set apart to the Lord in every area, not just in the church, but also in our personal lives, our family relationships, and our dealings with the business world and society.

The Context of Ephesians 4

As Paul begins Ephesians 4 he entreates (παρακαλῶ) them to "*walk in a worthy manner*" of God's calling of them. He is imploring them to live in a way that reflects their salvation from sin. He points out in verse 2 & 3 that their lives were to be characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There are two things necessary for true unity to be present. First, there have to be the characteristics already mentioned otherwise pride will destroy the relationships between people. Second, there has to be common belief and experience. Unity must be founded on having the same doctrine and practice. Paul lists our their common ground in verses 4-6. ⁴"[There is] one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

There cannot be unity with those who reject these fundamental Biblical doctrines, but there should be unity with those all who do believe these fundamentals of Christianity regardless of other physical and/or cultural differences. However, that unity will be quickly destroyed if those professing to believe these things do not walk in the spirit as described here in walking in humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance in love.

In verses 7-10 Paul removes a common cause of pride in the church, and that is the differences in spiritual gifts. As with nearly anything else, people are quick to assess themselves by those around them. If they have something others do not they think themselves to be superior in some way. If they have less, they will think of themselves as inferior, and usually resent it and try to find some other area in which they can be superior. This is really nothing more than pride, but Paul removes the source of that in these verses by pointing out that any gift and ability we have is according to Christ who has distributed them as He desires. He has the right to do this due to his victory over sin and death. These gifts include not only particular abilities and ministries such as those listed in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, but also in the people who are given particular offices within the church.

Gifts to the Church

Ephesians 4:11 states *“And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers.”* These four gifts are not qualities and abilities given to individuals, but rather individuals who have been given qualities and abilities to serve in foundational and leadership capacities in the church.

The apostles mentioned here are those who were witnesses of the resurrected Christ and were specifically called by Him and sent with His authority to establish the church. They accomplished this task by receiving and declaring the revelation of God's Word (Eph. 3:5; 2 Pet. 3:2; Jude 1:17), and by confirming it by signs, wonders and miracles (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3,4). This includes both the basic gospel message and the doctrine of the church. They laid the foundation of what the church was to believe and teach (Acts 2:42 Eph. 2:20). After the New Testament was completed, their function ceased and so there are no more apostles like them today. There is no Biblical basis for the idea of apostolic succession. The only apostle ever replaced was Judas after he became apostate and committed suicide. Note that James was not replaced after his martyrdom (Acts 12:1).

The prophets are similar to the Apostles in that they too laid the foundation of scripture (Eph. 2:20). There are no differences between the Old Testament and New Testament prophets. Both had ministries of foretelling and forth telling the Word of God - i.e. telling what God would do as well as boldly declaring what God had done. The difference between apostles and prophets is that the prophets tended to have a more local ministry and were not necessarily eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ. This office also ended with the completion of the New Testament. There are those around today that claim to be prophets. I don't argue with them. I just point them to Deut. 18:20-22 and ask if they are willing to be judged by the Biblical standard of a prophet. If they are less than 100% accurate in all their predictions and entice people to go after any other God than the Lord God of the Bible, they are false prophets and are subject to death. The difference between a pompous fool and a true prophet is 100% accuracy. Less than perfect predictions come from the devil, not from God.

The third gift to the church is the evangelist. This particular term is only used three times in the New Testament. Here, where it describes an office in the church; in Acts 21:8 where Philip is called an "evangelist;" and 2 Timothy 4:5 where Paul tells Timothy to *"do the work of an evangelist."* While the references may be few, the ministry of such a God equipped person is far reaching. This is true in regards to particular individuals gifted as evangelists such as Philip and those such as mentioned here that are called by God to train others in evangelism. This gift is not a person that does the evangelism for the church, but enables those in the church to do the work of evangelism.

The fourth gift is the Pastor-teacher. The two terms are linked together in the Greek so that they refer to one office, not two. A pastor is simply a “shepherd.” That is the meaning of the Greek word with the term pastor coming from the Latin. A shepherd tends sheep and this shepherd analogy is used throughout the Scriptures to describe the person that cares for, protects and feeds those in his congregation, which Paul calls the “*flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*” in Acts 20:28. Teaching is directly tied into this ministry because feeding the flock, teaching, is a main duty of a pastor. Believers need to be fed a good diet of the Word of God.

How does a shepherd feed his sheep? In several different ways. First and foremost he leads his flock to a good pasture and lets the sheep loose. The sheep are eating for themselves from the area the shepherd has led them too. Isn't that about all any sermon can do? The format does not allow the interaction and time that would be needed to really digest any text. A sermon can only bring a basic understanding of the text and suggest some ways for its truths to be applied. The people have to meditate on what the scriptures and apply it to their own lives.

A pastor can also give his sheep a special diet as needed. He can give more robust food to sheep that are strong. A pastor does that with additional times of teaching that are more in depth, intricate and theological with the church leaders and those that are serious about growing. He can also give a diet that is easier to digest for the young and those that are weak so that they can gain their strength. That is what pastoral counseling is about. Trying to nurse the sick back to spiritual health and putting some muscle on the weak. In both of these cases there is personal interaction to make sure the lessons are being learned and applied.

A third aspect of feeding sheep is keeping them away from noxious weeds. There is a lot of poisonous stuff out there and the shepherd has to be on guard against it. He will lead the flock away from an infested field, will eliminate it from the field he is in, and he will try to teach the sheep to stay away from poisonous plants. Pastors must be sure that what is taught in their congregation is healthy, remove anything that is unbiblical or theologically poisonous, and teach the sheep to recognize the difference between the two. We cannot be afraid of giving even specific warning about false teaching and false teachers. Tragically, there are a lot of false teachers on what is supposed to be “Christian” TV, radio and the internet.

I have used the analogy of wild mushrooms to warn my flock. Wild mushrooms can be great if you know what you are doing, but if you do not, they can be very dangerous. Some are wild mushrooms are great tasting and great for you. Others are noxious and can make you sick, but there are others that are toxic and can kill you with just a bite. If you can not tell the difference between what is good, what is bad and what is lethal, then stay out of the mushroom patch. If you can not discern a good teacher from the aberrant and the heretic, then ask your pastor or keep the TV and radio off and stay away from the internet.

The Purpose of the Gifts to the Church

Ephesians 4:12 gives us a very specific reason for God giving the church Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers, “*for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.*” “Equipping” means “to render fit, sound, complete.” It is to bring something that has limited value and use and make it into something valuable and useful. Each of the gifted offices listed is part of a team effort to cause believers into become what they should be and help them to fulfill God's design for them.

The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation in giving us the Scriptures upon which everything else is built. The evangelist is specifically given to equip the saints in the church to go out and proclaim the gospel to the community and world. That is the first step in making a disciple. The pastor-teacher is to equip the saints so that they can use their gifts in the work of service which is to result in the building up of the whole body.

The work of service is ministry. The words here mean to do the work of a servant. The particular work done by an individual varies with the particular gifts he or she has received from God, but all of it together makes up the work God has given to His Church. The work of the church is done by the people of the church, not a paid staff!

Handout: *The Traditional Approach*

The traditional approach in churches is to hire professionals to do the work of ministry, but that is the opposite of what Paul says here. Any church in which the pastor is doing all the ministry will eventually fail. It work for awhile, especially when a church first starts, but it cannot sustain and grow. More importantly, is not the Biblical approach that either Jesus or the Apostles used. Jesus ministered to the multitudes, but His concentration was on his disciples, who then went out and did the same. They also ministered to the multitudes, but they concentrated on disciples who then went out and did the same. The is the process of 2 Timothy 2:2 - *“And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”*

Handout: *The Leaders’s Role*

The Biblical model for the church is for the pastor-teachers & church leaders to train the people to go out and do the work of ministry. It is the responsibility of all the people in the church to use their particular spiritual gifts to minister to the rest of the body so that the whole body matures becoming strong, stable and effective in reaching their community and beyond.

The Goal of Serving Saints

Several Scripture passages list out various spiritual gifts, and because there are major difference in each list with none of them listing all the gifts, I do not believe it was God’s intention for us to know all the possible gifts He will give to His people. (Handout- Spiritual Gifts Chart). What we do know is that according to 1 Cor. 12:4-7 is that every one of the variety of spiritual gifts (which all come from the same spirit), and every one of the variety of ministries (which all come from the same Lord), and every varied degree of effect or power of those gifts and ministries (which all come from the same God who works all things in all persons), is *“each one given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* It is *“one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills”* (vs. 11). It is up to God, not the individual, what gift, ministry and its effectiveness are given, but all of it together is for the building up of the whole body to the glory of God.

The body of Christ is built up numerically as disciples are made. New people come to salvation and join in as part of the church. The body of Christ grows in maturity as each Christian is taught to "observe all that [Jesus] commanded." That takes everyone using their gift, but note that "observing" Jesus' commandments is different than just knowing about Jesus commandments.

It is fairly easily tell people what Jesus said and how He wants you to behave, but getting you to believe and behave that way is a different story. That takes everyone using their individual gifts in mutual ministry. The people in the congregation have to be personally involved with one another in fulfilling all the one another commands including pray for, encourage, exhort, and admonish, as well as love, be patient and bear one another’s burdens. This takes personal involvement in a host of areas.

Within the text here in Ephesians 4, Paul lists out three goals of the interaction of the body of Christ. Let me briefly list these out and explain them.

1) Unity of faith. Paul had already said there is only "one faith" (vs. 5). God is not fragmented and divided against Himself and neither is His truth. Doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity lead to disunity, but as every part of the body does what it is supposed to do, then the apostles doctrine is taught by the pastor-teachers and all the people help one another to live accordingly. Unity of faith and practice is then attained and God is glorified.

2) The knowledge of the Son of God. Paul is not referring to the knowledge needed for salvation, but rather the deep or full knowledge of Christ that comes through a personal relationship cultivated with Him in prayer and in study and obedience to His word. This is *hJ ejpignwvsew*, personal knowledge gained by experience. This is the knowledge Jesus spoke of in John 10 that *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them."* Paul had already prayed for the Ephesians to gain this kind of knowledge of Christ (Eph 1:17), and it was his own goal to *"know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings"* counting everything else in his own life as "rubbish" in comparison to this (Phil 3:8-10).

Again, this kind of intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ comes as the whole body is fulfilling its various ministries, because much of this knowledge only comes in serving Christ by serving one another and taking the gospel message to those that have not heard.

3) Spiritual maturity - which is measured by the standard of Jesus Christ Himself. The very purpose of our salvation is to be *"conformed to the image of His Son"* (Rom 8:29), to *"walk in the same manner as He walked"* (1 John 2:6), to be *"imitators of God, as beloved children"* (Eph. 5:1). We long for the day when *"we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2). Each of us moves closer to this measure of maturity as we each fulfill our part in the body of Christ. We *"spur one another on toward love and good deeds"* (Heb. 10:24), we *"bear one another's burdens"* (Gal. 6:2) and *"admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, and help the weak"* (1 Thess 5:14). We will not reach perfection this side of heaven, but we can and should become "complete" or "mature" in Christ as Paul says in Col. 1:28-29 for that is the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14).

THE RESULT, vs. 14

What is the result of pursuing these goals? Verse 14, *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming . . ."*

Spiritual maturity means our people are no longer easy pickings for the cults and false teachers. Individually, this requires an increase in wisdom and understanding to be able to pick out who is speaking the truth and who is not, and corporately, it is even better because where any individual lacks, then someone else in the body is strong. Everyone together can warn and help one another overcome the wiles of the false teachers.

Notice the description of the immature. First, children. Children are characterized by ignorant trust. That is why parents spend so much time trying to teach them discernment. They have to learn when to trust someone and when run away. It takes awhile to teach them to obey some people like policemen and firemen and yet to runaway from a stranger that offers them candy. New believers are susceptible to anyone that seems friendly and acts like they know what they are talking about including the cult knocking at their door or the false teacher on television.

Paul also describes the immature as being tossed around as in a storm. They go and believe whichever way the wind blows. They think it must be okay because so many others believe it or are doing it, yet God's people have always stood out from the crowd. We are called to walk with Him regardless of what the rest of humanity is doing. It takes a mature faith to do this as James 1 points out. We have to know what we believe, why we believe and then hang on without doubting. This is not accomplished in a day, but only after being diligent like the Bereans of Acts 17 to study the Scriptures for yourself. We must be careful ourselves and teach our people not to believe something just because their "pastor" or someone else they respect has said it. All must be discerning and base their beliefs on what the Scriptures say and not the opinions of people.

The believer must also be cautious because false teachers come with the "trickery of men" and "by craftiness in deceitful scheming." We get the word, "cube" from the word "trickery" here. It was often

used of dice and refers to the way in which professional gamblers would "load" the dice to their own advantage. They "rig" the game so that they will win. Similar ideas are conveyed in "craftiness" and "deceitful scheming." "Craftiness" refers to the careful and clever manipulation of facts to make error look like the truth. "Deceitful scheming" is used of the devil's efforts against us in 6:11 and refers to a systematic effort to lead astray. False teachers are good at all these things.

Unless the believer is mature and well versed in the Scriptures they can easily succumb to the cultist and false teacher who can easily and quickly pull verses from here and there to confuse and make it seem like what they are teaching is the truth. It really does not take long for a false teacher or cultist to take the Bible and twist it to lead the immature into believing all sorts of half truths and outright lies including they are the only ones that can understand the Bible.

The good news here is that as the whole body does what it is supposed to do, those that would be susceptible to being lead astray or blown about are protected. Warnings are given, false teachers are held at bay, and wavering saints are surrounded and encouraged back into the fold. Unity of faith, knowledge of Christ and spiritual maturity stand strongly against the trickery, craftiness and deceitful scheming our adversary plots against God's people.

THE METHOD, vs. 15

In verse 15 we find the method by which the body grows. *"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspect into Him, who is the head, even Christ."* Rather than be tossed around by false teachers, we speak the truth to one another in love. This love is not some fuzzy warm feeling, but rather a committed, sacrificial concern for one another because believers are part of the same family.

True love, agape love, is always kind, humble, patient, and willing to forgive, but it does not back down and it will warn, admonish, and rebuke as needed. Mature Christians are to be marked by the joining of these two qualities of truth and love. They are blended together into a powerful testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ living within them. They themselves are growing and they prod others to also grow up in all aspects into Christ, who is the head.

A false teacher will always lack one of these qualities and usually both. 2 Peter 2 talks about false teachers, their greed and how they exploit their people, but there are also those that have great compassion, but they lack truth so they lead people to hell.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was such a person. Wonderful compassion and great personal sacrifice on her part which is to be commended, but since she did not have the truth she let the Hindus, Muslims, animists and others she served slip into eternal damnation without ever hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ which could have brought them to salvation.

The goal of true Christianity is in growing into the likeness of Christ who is our head, our leader, our commander, our Lord, therefore it is to be marked by truth spoken in love.

THE POWER, vs. 16

Where does the power come for all these things to be accomplished - verse 16, *"from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."*

"Fitted" and "held together" are two passive participles indicating that it is Jesus Christ that has designed and holds the body together. This cannot be accomplished by human effort. It is not the individual Christian, their leaders or their church structure, but the head, Jesus Christ Himself, that accomplishes this. The analogy here is that of a body where every part is fitted and joined together. No individual part can exist by itself, but must be attached to the body. The body did not design itself, but Christ designed it and it is by His design that the whole thing functions and grows.

This does not mean that the individual parts are not important, but simply that for them to work they must be crafted in by Christ. In fact, each individual is important for as the text says, "each joint

supplies." Every part of your physical body adds to the rest of the body its strength. Again, by itself, it is nothing, but when all the parts are joined together in unity the body becomes powerful. When every part fulfills its proper function the body will grow, but it takes all the parts otherwise the body is left handicapped.

Ministry is to be the work every disciple in the church, and the pastor's job is to equip them so that they can do the work of service. Tomorrow we will look at some pragmatic ways of accomplishing this goal of making disciples that will in turn make other disciples that will in turn make other disciples, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF EPHESIANS

THE CONTEXT OF EPHESIANS 4

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH - vs. 11
Apostles

Prophets

Evangelists

Pastor-teachers

How does a shepherd feed his sheep?

1)

2)

3)

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS TO THE CHURCH - vs. 12

The Work of Service

The Traditional Approach - Handout

The Biblical Model - Handout

THE GOALS OF SERVING SAINTS - vs. 13

1) Unity of faith

2) The knowledge of the Son of God.

3) Spiritual maturity

THE RESULT, vs. 14

No Longer Children

No Longer Tossed About by the Winds of Doctrine

THE METHOD, vs. 15

THE POWER, vs. 16