

## **Intro**

How should a local church function? How should the work be divided?

Maybe you're accustomed to a model where the church officers are responsible to do most of the work. Say the elders and deacons. It's their responsibility to do all the pastoral stuff, take care of needs, and evangelize. The officers serve while the flock receives. The local church exists to provide the flock with a certain set of services. Kind of like a business exists to meet the needs of consumers.

But God provides a different model. He tells us how critical it is for every believer to be functioning properly. It's kind of like an automobile. If some of the parts aren't working, the vehicle won't work as designed. If other parts aren't working, the vehicle can't work at all. Say the tire's punctured. The car will still move, but eventually you'll destroy a wheel. Say the brakes aren't working. You'll still be able to get around. But you'll be putting your life and others at risk. Say the radiator's leaking, the car might still run, but eventually the engine will seize and shut the whole car down. But if your battery is dead, or your spark plug goes bad, you can't even start the car. What's my point? In an automobile, you need every part to function properly for optimal performance. If some parts aren't functioning properly, it ruins the whole vehicle.

It's the same with the local church. Every part, every believer needs to function properly for optimal growth. This morning we learn that...

**BIG IDEA: Every member is critical to the local church's growth**

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

Growth in this passage is the character of God's people, not the number of people in the pews. We're talking spiritual growth.

**Point 1: Sin disrupts unity (4:1-6, 13-16)**

### **Explanation**

Did you see this in the passage? Paul urges the Ephesian church to "walk in a manner worthy of" their calling. And then he spells this out:

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4:2-3)

The issue is we're supposed to walk in unity. After all, we have so much in common. We're one body. We're united by same Spirit. We share the same hope, serve the same Lord (Jesus), we share the same faith (same core beliefs), we've experienced the same baptism (water baptism by immersion after conversion), and we're children of the same heavenly Father. So why is unity such a challenge? Because of our sin. The Spirit creates unity by bonding us together, but we have to maintain that unity. Well, what sin stands in the way of our unity?

- 1) Lack of humility = lack of selflessness. Lack of Christlikeness. Jesus, God the Son, humbled himself by taking on human flesh and dying on a cross. Self-interests disrupt unity.
- 2) Lack of gentleness = dealing harshly with others. Civil and courteous discussion, whether discussing political matters on Facebook or discussing doctrine with a fellow church member, preserves unity. Contentious, argumentative people disrupt unity.
- 3) Lack of patience = inability to remain calm when provoked, easily angered. Patience speaks of the ability to bear with difficult people with emotional calm when provoked. A short fuse disrupts unity.

Look at verse 13.

- 4) Lack of knowledge of the Son of God = lack of knowledge in the core doctrines related to Jesus (e.g., deity, sinlessness, substitutionary atonement, return). Ignorance of foundational Christian doctrines stunts our growth. Core doctrines are intended to inform our understanding, shape our affections, and inform our life goals. Paul assumes a unity based on a shared faith and shared doctrinal convictions.
- 5) Susceptibility to error = "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." The solution is spiritual maturity. Mature manhood is contrasted with being spiritual children. Again, unity is based on a faith derived from core doctrines. Deception severs unity, because deception breeds doctrinal disagreements.
- 6) Lack of love. In verse 15, we see the need to speak the truth in love. When doctrinal error occurs, the truth needs to be spoken. But it needs to be spoken in a certain manner: in love. It's easier to learn facts about the Bible than it is to love difficult people. Thus, the need for humility, gentleness, and patience.

## **Application**

It is critical that our faith is grounded in right knowledge, in Scripture. It is critical to be committed to the core doctrines of the Bible. Doctrinal error requires speaking truth. But it isn't enough to just speak truth. The truth needs to be spoken in a Christlike way. In love. With humility, gentleness, and patience. Speak the truth motivated for another's spiritual well-being, in a courteous and considerate manner, and bear with their refusal when they persist in error. Bear with any personal attacks or charges of intolerance. Speak the truth in love.

We also see that God saved us in order to unite us with fellow believers. The Spirit has united God's people and it's our duty to maintain that unity. In other words, our calling is a calling to community life, not merely a private relationship with God. Faithfulness to Christ requires fellowship in a local church. This is how the NT one another commands are lived out. This is a challenge because sin disrupts unity. How has God acted to remedy our plight?

## **Point 2: God has provided gifted individuals to equip us (4:7-11)**

### **Explanation**

First, God, in his grace, has given spiritual gifts to every believer:

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (4:7)

Every believer in the Ephesian was gifted in some manner for service in the local church. And their gifting was determined by Christ alone. Their spiritual gifts were “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” = Christ determined which gift or gifts each believer receives, and he determines the extent of a person’s gifting in a particular area. These gifts are acts of grace, unmerited, so there’s nothing we can do to attain them. They’re undeserved. They’re given because of Jesus’ steadfast love for us. Jesus provides gifts, like gifts of serving, generosity, or mercy, to build up the local church (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26).

Second, Jesus provides his church with equipping gifts. Verses 8-10 portray Christ as a triumphant victor who, after ascending to the throne, received gifts from his captives, and then gave those gifts to his people. Christ descended into the lower regions. Whether it was his incarnation (coming to earth), being buried in the earth, or going to the underworld to proclaim victory over rebellious demonic powers, forty days after Jesus rose from the dead, he returned to heaven and now he reigns at the Father’s right hand, interceding for his people. Having ascended, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and distributed spiritual gifts to his church.

This includes the equipping gifts of verse 11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors), and teachers. These gifted individuals serve a purpose: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry (4:12).” In other words, Jesus provides equipping gifts so that every believer in the local church can be equipped to minister. Jesus’ design is every member ministry. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers equip. But it’s the saints who do the work of ministry. Here’s how it works:

The Spirit unites us to one another at conversion. But sin disrupts unity, so God has additional work to do. At conversion, we’re undeveloped spiritually. We need to mature. We need to grow. To counteract our sin problem, God gifts certain individuals with equipping gifts. Think elders, preachers, Sunday school teachers, teachers on Sunday and Wednesday nights. Through biblical instruction and modeling godliness, these gifted individuals equip each and every believer in the body to do the work of ministry themselves. Whether it’s evangelism, teaching young children, discipling a new believer, restoring a wayward brother or sister, giving wisdom, or praying with someone going through trial, these are the responsibilities of every believer, not just the elders or a woman’s Sunday school teacher.

### **Illustration**

It’s like evangelism and teaching. Some people are divinely gifted to teach and evangelize, but every believer is called to evangelize. And every believer teaches in some form or another (e.g., parents, grandparents, explaining core doctrines to new believers, giving spiritual advice, etc.). Divinely gifted individuals equip us to carry out our responsibility to do “the work of ministry.”

### **Illustration**

It’s like the nursing professor and their student. The professor doesn’t exist to do the actual nursing. No, the professor exists to equip the student to go out and serve in a hospital. Sure the professor has experience nursing. But they teach the student so that the student can do the actual work of nursing. So it is in the church. Gifted individuals “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” This is foundational for our

understanding of how a local church is to function. The church grows through every member ministry. This isn't to say that a pastor doesn't evangelize, counsel, or encourage. It's just to say that every member should be doing these things, not just the pastor. The pastor exists to equip the saints to minister.

### **Application**

God is the source of all our spiritual good. We have a need, so God sends gifted individuals to equip us. This is how God works and relates to us. In the gospel we're spiritually needy. God meets our needs by sending Jesus to die as our substitute. And by sending his Spirit to give us new hearts. God remedies our sin problem. We can't fix it ourselves. We need God's grace.

Evangelists. Pastors. Teachers. Steward your gifts. In his grace, God has chosen you to be a means of growth in his church. By using you to equip others for the work of ministry. Paul exhorted Timothy:

**1 Timothy 4:14** Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Gifts can be neglected which means their effectiveness can decrease. Evangelists. Pastors. Teachers. Be diligent to cultivate growth in your gifting. Don't let your skills wane. Continue to sharpen yourselves by using your gifts and pursuing gift development through learning. It's the duty of the elders to ensure gifted individuals with the requisite character are not sidelined.

### **Point 3: Get equipped (4:13-16)**

#### **Explanation**

The biblical model is gifted individuals "equip the saints for the work of ministry." Gifted equippers do this "for the building up of the body of Christ." These are the results of an equipped body of saints that ministers:

- 1) Unity of the faith
- 2) Knowledge of the Son of God
- 3) Mature manhood
- 4) Measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ
- 5) No longer tossed to and fro by false doctrines
- 6) A local church body that is building itself up in love

Well, if these are the fruits of an equipped body that is doing the work of ministry, it is imperative that you, the saints, do everything in your power to ensure that you are equipped. It is the elders duty to ensure that the church is structured in such a way that equipping is provided. It is the saints duty to ensure that they make use of equipping provided by the elders. Why does Sunday school exist? "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."

#### **Application**

The practical response to today's passage is make use of equipping opportunities like Sunday school. If the saints do the work of ministry, and they need equipping to minister, the saints need to utilize equipping opportunities.

I've briefly alluded to some examples of the work of ministry: evangelism, teaching young children, discipling a new believer, restoring a wayward brother or sister, giving wisdom, or praying with someone going through trial. In context, we see that believers are supposed to speak the truth to one another in love

(4:15). So being equipped includes having knowledge of the core doctrines of the faith (truth) and the character to communicate truth well (in love).

So use what's available to equip you in knowledge of the truth and character?

Make use of great Christian resources available to you. We live in a remarkable time. There is such an immense collection of helpful Christian writings on virtually any topic or question we have. In times where I wanted to learn how to answer an unbeliever's toughest questions, in times where I struggled to be joyful, in times where I needed advice in parenting, I looked to helpful Christian authors steeped in Scripture, not human wisdom. Great equipping resources are readily available to you.

A word of caution. Make use of outside resources, but don't depend on them only. God has saved us to make use of equippers in our local church. I love John Piper. Great message at SING. I've been inspired and helped by numerous teachings from John. But John Piper's not going to personally counsel me, he's not going to visit me, he's not going to pray with me, he's not available to answer my questions, he's not going to admonish me, he's not going to listen to me when I'm despairing. What I'm saying is make use of the resources available at PCC. Make sure you're equipped. Utilize what's available. Actively seek your own growth. You are critical to church the health and unity of this church. That's the way God designed the local church.

Do an inventory. Examine biblical categories like doctrine, wisdom, character, evangelism. Am I capable of giving biblical advice? Am I capable of loving a difficult person? Am I capable of sharing the gospel with an acquaintance? If not, it's your duty to get equipped so you can do the work of ministry.

#### **Point 4: Fulfill your function (4:15-16)**

##### **Explanation**

Instead of being tossed to and fro by false doctrines, God's will is that we are "speaking the truth in love." This assumes a commitment to the truth, an understanding of the truth, and a heart that desires the spiritual good of the person we're talking to. Not what we can get out of them. Not winning a debate. Genuine concern for their spiritual good.

And what's the result of a local church where saints are speaking the truth in love?

"we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ," = speaking the truth in love yields spiritual maturity in the local church

"from whom the whole body [the entire community of believers], joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped [local church is held together by every individual believer that has been granted to it], when each part is working properly [local church function requires every believer to be equipped and functioning properly], makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love [an equipped body that fulfills its functions is a local church growing in love]."

The picture presented is a local church composed of equipped individuals who are doing the work of ministry (fulfilling their function) and growing in love. A church growing in unity because humility, gentleness, and patience have replaced selfish ambition, hostile debate, and explosive anger. Jesus provides spiritual gifts so that we grow in love.

##### **Illustration**

Remember how an automobile needs every part to function properly for optimal performance. It's the same with the church. When every saint is functioning properly, equipped to speak the truth in love, the church grows in love.

### **Application**

Paul believes that every member ministry is essential to church growth (depth). What does this teach us? We're fed to serve.

“The body of Christ is not a place to sit and soak, but to serve.” – Clinton Arnold

Every believer is granted a spiritual gift for the common good. Jesus grants equipping gifts to the local church so that the saints can be equipped for the work of ministry. We consume of the ministries in the local church for a purpose: to mature so that we can build others up. Each of us is critical for PCC to function properly. Each of us is critical for PCC to be built up in love. Each of us has value. God has gifted each of us for a unique role. And God has assigned common duties to all of us. It's our duty to be equipped so we can minister. God's design is every member ministry.

Every member ministry works well in small groups or informal gatherings (e.g., cookout). The goal isn't a guilt trip. If you're limited by age or physical issues, minister as is possible. The goal is that everyone of us serves a function in building up this body in love.

### **Conclusion**

We've learned that **Every member is critical to the local church's growth**. God sees our plight: **Sin disrupts unity**. God acts: **God has provided gifted individuals to equip us**. We have a responsibility: **Get equipped**. We have another responsibility: **Fulfill your function**.

This is an encouragement and a challenge. You are valuable and critical to PCC. You have something to contribute. We need you to fulfill your function so that we can be built up in love. This also means that you have a role to fill that can't be neglected. We're counting on you to help the body to grow in love.