

## God's Plan for Building the Church (Part III: God's Purpose for the Church)

January 31, 2003

### Ephesians 4:7-16

*7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this [expression], "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 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; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him who is the head, [even] Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what 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.*

After identifying the characteristics of the worthy walk and emphasizing the unity of believers, Paul moves on to discuss God's plan for building the church in verses 7-16. Paul began in verses 7-11 by addressing God's provision for the church, while in verses 12-16 he highlights God's goals or purposes for the church.

- *According to verses 7-11, what gifts were given to the church?*
- *According to verse 12 why does God give gifted men to the church?*
- *In the context here what does it mean to equip?*
- *As gifted men are the instruments that God uses to equip and train the saints, what tool or tools are these gifted men to use in order to train and equip the saints? (Cf. Acts 20:32; 1 Peter 2:2)*
- *What is the work of service that Paul is referring to in verse 12?*
- *Is service optional in the Christian life? Is it true that all of us are called to be ministers?*
- *What does it mean to build up the body of Christ?*

- **According to verse 13, what are the three goals of God's plan to build the church (note the word "to")?**

1-

2-

3-

1. The unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God: [Unified in Christ]

One of God's desired goals of providing gifted men to the church is that they equip the saints so that the saints might attain to a unity of faith and a unity in their knowledge of Christ.

- The term, *attain* means "to arrive at the appropriate destination." It is used nine times in Acts for travelers arriving at their destination.
- *Faith* here refers to the body of revealed truth that constitutes Christian teaching including the complete content of the Gospel.
- *Knowledge* here is not salvation knowledge but a deep knowledge of Christ that comes through prayer, faithful study of God's Word and obedience to His commands. [MacArthur, p. 157] The term emphasizes a deep, precise and correct knowledge.

In our current day many churches sacrifice doctrinal integrity in order to achieve unity with other believers. However, the Scripture makes it clear that God's plan is that there be unity based on doctrinal integrity.

2. A Mature Man: [Complete in Christ]

Another of God's desired goals by providing gifted men to the church is that they equip the saints so that the saints might arrive at being spiritually mature or complete in Christ.

The term translated *mature* means, "complete, perfect or mature." The picture here is of a full-grown man, who is strong and mature. The emphasis is on mature adulthood in contrast with children mentioned in the next verse.

As an example the Apostle Paul sought to train and equip fellow believers so that he may present every man complete in Christ. In fact he labored and strived to do so. (Cf. Colossians 1:28-29)

- The measure of the stature, which belongs to Christ: [Living like Christ]

Another of God's desired goals by providing gifted men to the church is that they equip the saints so that the saints might attain to the measure of the stature, which belongs to Christ.

The idea here is to come to be like Christ. God's desire is that every believer become like Christ. In other words they are to manifest His character qualities. We are to radiate and reflect the character qualities of Christ. We are to walk in the same manner as He walked. (Cf. 1 John 2:6)

- **According to verses 14 and 15, what is the ultimate and necessary result?**

NOTE: The picture of children being tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine is speaking of *spiritually immature believers* who are not grounded in God's Word. These individuals are inclined to accept all kinds of doctrinal error and false interpretations of Scripture. It is important to note, that much of this false doctrine has been intentionally brought about by deceitful, false teachers.

NOTE: We are certainly to take strong doctrinal stands and be thoroughly equipped in sound doctrine. However, Paul emphasizes a common error among believers here. We are often harsh and unloving as we impart doctrinal truth. There have been many churches divide not necessarily over a specific doctrinal truth, but over the manner in which it was presented (harsh and unloving). We are to speak the truth in love. It could literally be translated "*truthing in love.*" Compare **1 Peter 3:15-16**.

NOTE: We are to grow up in Christ. This continues the picture of moving from childhood to adulthood or moving from being immature to mature.

- *How does v. 16 describe us?*

God has provided the church with gifted men so that they might equip the saints motivating them toward service and building each other up so that they might move from being immature in the faith to growing spiritually mature in the faith, able to stand firm on sound doctrine and speak it forth in a loving way.

**APPLICATION:**

- *To what extent are you preparing yourself to minister to fellow believers?*
  
- *To what extent are striving to be complete in Christ?*