

“The Prescription of the Church”

Eph. 4:11-16

- INTRO. - So far, in our study of the church, we have seen the house God is building (from 1 Peter 2), the builder of the church (Matt. 16), characteristics of a contagious congregation (from Acts 2), and the commission of the church (Matt. 28)...
- Today I want us to examine the *prescription* of the church in Ephesians 4. In Eph. 4:11-16 we have a prescription for the operation of the church. If Jesus said, “I will build My church,” then we who make up the “living stones” (with which He is building it) need to know *how* He intends to build it.
- And we read that text earlier in the service, but I want to read it again so that we have it clearly in our minds. Eph. 4:11-16, “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 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 fulness of Christ. 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to

grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ, 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.”

- About 30-40 years ago, a new movement sprang up in the church that has had a dramatic effect on how a lot of churches go about doing their ministry. That movement is usually referred to as the “modern church growth movement.”
- It all started with 2 guys named Donald McGavran and Win Arn, and it has been *incredible* how many conferences and seminars and books and tapes and organizations and programs have resulted from the movement these guys started. All these have been devoted exclusively to coming up with new ways to help the church grow numerically.
- But listen, my belief is that there has been absolutely *nothing* of spiritual value that has resulted from the modern church growth movement, that does *not* fall within the parameters of the prescription for the church that we see given to us in Eph. 4:11-16.
- Jesus said that He was going to build His church, and in Eph. 4 we are told *how* He is going to do that. And I believe that anything that is *not* consistent with the procedure given here will only

produce superficial works of the flesh, and *not* true church growth.

- Now don't misunderstand. I am *not* saying that *no* good has come from the church growth movement. I am saying that any good that *has* come from it is going to be consistent with what we see in this prescription for the church in Eph. 4.
- Here we have God's pattern for His church, all in one complete package. So we really need to understand what this says. But before we move into it, we need just a little background.
- Those of you who have studied the book of Ephesians know that the first three chapters are *doctrinal* in nature, and describe our identity in Christ. The last three chapters are *practical* in nature, and describe how to live out who we are in Christ.
- The first part of chapter 4 begins to detail the "worthy walk" that we (as believers) are called to walk, and when we get down to v. 7, we are told that *we* are *not* the ones who do this on our own, but God gives us exactly what we need to be able to do this.
- Beginning in v. 7 we are told about three critical resources that God gives to us which enables us to walk this worthy walk. He gives us "a measure of grace," He gives us spiritual gifts, and He gives us some gifted men to lead us.

- Now, we are going to spend much more time on the second one in the weeks to come, and we will discuss the third one in detail this morning, but I want to camp on that first one for just a moment. What is that "measure of grace?"
- Look again at v. 7. Here's how the NAS has it, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."
- And what we need to understand (here) is that the word used for "grace" in this verse is *not* the same as the word used for spiritual gifts. It is "charis" and *not* "charismata," so it refers to the enabling *power* through which the gifts operate.
- This word implies a divinely-enabling power that is given in perfect measure to every individual believer. Notice that this "grace" is "given according to the measure of Christ's gift," and since our Lord does everything perfectly, the way this is structured, the idea is, that Christ knows exactly how much grace each of us needs, and He gives us exactly that much grace.
- Listen, you and I cannot walk the worthy walk on our own. Apart from that measure of grace that He gives us, we have no hope of living the life that He calls us to live. He is the One who supplies the power we need to live it.

- As I'm sure you know, the NT, (just like the OT), contains many commands and responsibilities that we are called upon to live by. And we are no longer under OT law (at least in the sense of the law God gave specifically to the nation of Israel), but there are still a number of clear commands we are called upon to obey in the NT.
 - We still have moral standards to live by. We still have standards for pleasing God, which are spelled out in the NT epistles. We still have commands to live by, even as NT saints.
 - But what we *must* understand, is that we do *not* have to do this on our own. God's plan is that He provide what we need to walk this worthy walk, just as He provides what we need for eternal salvation. He provides for our sanctification in the same way.
 - And it is significant that, as soon as Paul admonished the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, he immediately reminded them that this was only possible as God granted them grace to do it.
 - So the first thing we are promised by God is that He will measure out to us exactly the right amount of grace that we need to do what He has called us to do.
 - Listen, God will never call on us to do something without also providing what we need to get it done.
- (pause) Now, does that mean we don't need to worry about being disciplined and being diligent on our part? No. *Not* at all.
- The Bible is very clear that we have a responsibility to live the Christian life and to discipline ourselves and to obey His commands. But the promise (here) is that, as we do that, He promises to supply the measure of grace we need.
 - So we see from this passage of Scripture that God gives us (individually) His grace. But He also gives us some things that help us *collectively*. He gives us some spiritual gifts, and He gives us some gifted men, so that we can all be built up as His body.
 - And the focus of Eph. 4 is *not* really so much on the spiritual gifts, but on the gifted men that God gives to His church. Later on, we will focus on the spiritual gifts in some other passages. But let's spend some time this morning understanding these "gifted men."
 - Look with me at v. 11, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers..."
 - God *not only* gives gifts to individual believers, but He also gives some gifts to the church as a whole. He has given apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors. All of these gifted men are

divinely placed in the church to help fulfill God's purposes.

- Now, we could certainly spend a lot of time on each of these offices (and perhaps even get bogged down into too much detail), but I believe it is important for us to at least get some understanding of what God had in mind in the giving of these men to the church.
- In 1 Cor. 12:28 Paul said, "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers..." Now, this verse *not only* re-iterates the pattern we see in Eph. 4, (even though "evangelists" here are apparently lumped in with "teachers"), but we also get the idea that the *chronological order* is significant as well. The apostles and prophets come first and after that come the teachers.
- And what I believe Paul is emphasizing here, is that the NT apostles and prophets were part of the foundation of the church, while the teachers took up the baton afterwards.
- These first two classifications were given three primary responsibilities: 1.) To lay the foundation, the groundwork for the church. As we are told in Eph. 2:20, the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*..." The Bible clearly declares that the NT offices of apostle and prophet are foundational in nature.
- But they also had a second responsibility: 2.) To receive and declare the revelation of God's Word. In the first few verses of Eph. 3, Paul is discussing the divine revelation God gave concerning Christ, and in v. 5 he said, "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." (expound)
- We now have what we call the NT because God gave it through the NT apostles and prophets. But once that canon of Scripture was given, it was no longer necessary to continue to provide revelation, because He has given us all we need in His completed canon of Scripture.
- There was a third thing that God did through the NT apostles and prophets: (and that was) 3.) To give confirmation of that divine revelation through supernatural "signs and wonders." In 2 Cor. 12:12 Paul wrote, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles."
- The "miracle sign gifts" were given for several reasons, but one of the most important of those reasons is to show the authority of the NT apostles and prophets as they laid the foundation of the doctrine of the church.
- The authority of the apostles (in particular) was critical for the acceptance of Gentiles and

Samaritans into the church (as is clearly seen in the book of Acts). It was absolutely critical that they were seen as those who had the authority to speak for Christ.

- So let's go into a little more detail (here) and examine each of these four offices listed in Eph. 4:11. And we will begin with:

I. APOSTLES

- What does the Bible *mean* when it talks about "apostles?" Well, in a general sense, an apostle is simply someone who is sent on a mission. So in that sense, *all* of us (who are born again) could be considered apostles, because the Bible says that we are ambassadors for Christ.
- And there are certain people in the Bible, such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Philip, (and a few others), that we call "apostles" in this way.
- But in its primary and technical usage, the term Apostle (capital "A") was used in Scripture to refer to the original twelve disciples of Christ, to Matthias (who took Judas Iscariot's place), and to Paul (who was considered the "Apostle to the Gentiles").
- The criterion for Apostleship (in this sense) was that of being an eye-witness of the resurrected Christ, *and* having been divinely chosen and

appointed by Christ Himself (this can be seen in Acts 1:22-24 and in Mark 3:13).

- But, you see, with this understanding of the role of an Apostle, it is easy to conclude that this office was never intended to remain for the duration of the church. It was given only in the foundation of the church.
- That is why it is impossible for someone today to claim to be an Apostle (in *this* sense of the word). There are no longer any among us who walked with Christ and witnessed His resurrection firsthand. There are no longer any among us who was personally appointed by Jesus Christ as an Apostle.
- And maybe it would help to see it this way: Someone once said that the NT apostles and prophets were like members of a constitutional convention. When the convention was over, the positions ceased as well.
- Once the church was established, and the NT was completed, the office of Apostle and NT prophet ceased, (at least in the strictest terms). The term "apostle" is no longer used after Acts 16:4, and there is nothing in the Bible about any of the Apostles being replaced after their deaths (other than, of course, Judas Iscariot).
- We don't see anything about that in any of the writings of the early church fathers either. Once

the Apostles passed from the scene, there were no longer any Apostles in the church.

- And, by the way, I don't need to open up this can of worms this morning, but the writings of the early church fathers also confirm that the miracle sign gifts also passed off the scene with the death of the Apostles.
- I believe the NT teaches "cessationism," that both the Apostles and NT prophets ceased, as well as the miracle sign gifts that were given to demonstrate their authority. Secondly, we see:

II. PROPHETS

- Who are the NT prophets? These guys have also been greatly misunderstood, but let's see if we can simplify it by saying that they were similar to the Apostles in their roles, but the difference was that while the Apostles had a *broad* ministry throughout *all* the churches, the prophets had a localized ministry to a specific church.
- Now, don't confuse "prophets" here with those the Bible says have the "gift or prophecy." That is something different, and we'll see that when we get to the spiritual gifts.
- But these guys were part of the foundation of the church (as we clearly see in Eph. 2:20) and they sometimes spoke a new revelation from God (as in Acts 11:21-28) and sometimes they simply

proclaimed the truth that had already been given (as implied in Acts 13:1).

- These NT prophets were secondary to the Apostles, and according to 1 Cor. 14:37, their message was to be judged by the Apostles. Like the Apostles, their office ceased after the completion of the NT canon.
- And, by the way, we shouldn't be surprised at that, because this is exactly as it was with the OT prophets. The OT prophets ceased after the OT canon was completed (about 400 years before this).
- And even though there is nothing in the Bible that explicitly says that these first two offices were replaced by the last two, in actuality history shows that this is exactly what happened. The evangelists and teachers took up the baton from the Apostles and NT prophets (when they passed off the scene). So let's look thirdly at:

III. EVANGELISTS

- Who are the evangelists? Well, from the word "evangelist" itself, we learn that these are those who proclaim the "good news." The only time this specific term is used in the NT is *here*, and in Acts 21:8, where Philip is referred to as an evangelist, and in 2 Tim. 4:5, where Timothy is admonished to do the work of an evangelist.
- But while this title has limited use, there are many commands to evangelize in the NT. The verb form

(to proclaim the good news) is used 54 times and the noun form (good news) is used 76 times.

- The work of an evangelist, then, is clearly that of proclaiming the good news of the gospel to those who have *not* yet believed. An evangelist is a proclaimer of the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.
- Now, (in the NT era), evangelists also served as missionaries and church planters. We, (in our day) have *added* these classifications, but they were all seen as evangelists in that day and time.
- They were those who went to those places where the name of Christ was *not* named, and led people to faith in Jesus Christ, and taught the new believers, and planted churches where there were none.
- The NT evangelists were *not* like our often-distorted concept of an evangelist. They were *not* men with 10 suits and 10 sermons, who roam the country and publish newsletters claiming hundreds of decisions for Christ.
- They were certainly *not* Charlatans who got on TV and bilked millions of people in the name of the Lord. They were *not* those who grabbed people by the collar and yelled, “Turn or burn you sinner!” (They weren’t flame throwers for Jesus)

- They were godly men with a passion for the lost, who were out there on the front lines for Jesus, boldly proclaiming the good news of the gospel of Christ, and establishing new believers and new churches everywhere.
- And I believe that God wants to give every NT church some of these people who have a passion for the lost and are out there proclaiming the good news of the gospel. Fourthly, we have:

IV. PASTORS AND TEACHERS

- Now, the first thing we need to understand (here) is that this is one office and *not* two. The pastors and the teachers are the same person. The Greek construction indicates that the pastors are a sub-set of the teachers, so the best way to write it would probably be pastors and other teachers. But the emphasis is on the pastor as a teacher.
- ILL. - This would be similar to the statement, “The deaf and handicapped people of our city.” The word “deaf” would be a sub-set of all the handicapped in the city.
- And, by the way, let me get really technical here for a moment (for all you Greek scholars out there). Some have appealed (in this verse) for the application of the Granville Sharp rule, to say that this is saying the same thing.

- The Granville Sharp rule is a rule that applies to the Greek, when there are two nouns connected by a “kai” (and). In certain cases, it means that the two nouns refer to the same thing, but in *this* case that doesn’t work, because these two nouns are plural, and the Granville Sharp rule does *not* apply when the nouns are plural.
- So that’s your Greek lesson for the day, but even though this probably should *not* read as “pastor-teacher” here, it is *still* talking about a pastor who is a teacher.
- 1 Tim. 5:17 clearly puts these two functions together in this office, when it says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”
- This *literally* reads, “those who labor to exhaustion in the Word and teaching.” The emphasis (here) is that this is a teaching pastor. This is an elder who works very hard in giving instruction to the people of God.
- And, if you have been through our orientation class, you will know that the Bible uses three different Greek terms to refer to this person. These three Greek terms are translated into English with the use of several titles.
- The Greek term “poimen” is often translated as “shepherd” or as “pastor.” The Greek word “presbuteros” is translated as “elders” (and is always in the plural), and the Greek term “episkopos” is translated into the English as either “bishop” or “overseer.”
- All of these terms are clearly used interchangeably to refer to the same person. Textual evidence is more than sufficient to show that all three Greek terms point to the same office, but with different aspects (or roles) accentuated.
- For example, 1 Peter 5:1-2 uses all three terms in instructing *elders* to be good *bishops* (or overseers) as they *pastor* (or shepherd the flock of God).
- Here’s what it says, “Therefore, I exhort the elders (presbuteros) among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ²shepherd (poimaino) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight (episkopeo) not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*...(etc., etc.)”
- And we could go to Acts 20 as well, where all three terms are used in a similar way to refer to the same person. (pause) Now, if you combine all the aspects of all these terms together, you understand that an elder has a responsibility to feed, protect, nurture, lead, oversee, exhort, and teach the flock of God.

- And it doesn't matter if you call this guy an elder, a pastor, a bishop, an overseer, or a shepherd. He's the same person, and he is responsible for all these aspects of ministry in the body of Christ. We use the term "elder" (here) because it is the most common biblical term.
 - But it is interesting to note (here in Eph. 4) that the primary emphasis in all this is his teaching. The other things are accomplished primarily through his teaching ministry.
 - For example, in 1 Tim. 3:1-7, where the qualifications are given for elders (there called bishops or overseers), the only qualification given that has to do with function is that he must be "able to teach." All the other qualifications listed (there) have to do with his personal character.
 - In Titus 1:7-9 we have another listing of the qualifications, and (there again) the element of teaching is emphasized. It says, "...the overseer must be... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."
 - And understand, *not every* elder will be as gifted in this as others. The text does *not* say he must be a *gifted* teacher; just that he must be able to do this. *Not* every elder is going to be gifted in the same way, as far as public teaching and preaching is concerned. But they *all* have to be able to teach, and they all have to be able to exhort in sound doctrine, and they all have to be able to refute those who contradict the truth.
- So the term teaching pastor is a good term for the leader of a NT church. He is a man with a shepherd's heart, who works hard at teaching and exhorting. He is one who leads, but *not* by force or dictatorial power. Rather he leads by example and by precept.
 - He is one who protects the flock from error, by continually feeding the sheep with sound doctrine, so they will know what is false when they see it. He's doing all these things because all these various roles are included in his office.
 - Well, we've covered one verse, and as you have probably already guessed, we will *not* be able to get through this entire passage today. We can't race through this text because it is too critical for us to understand, so we will come back to it again next week.
 - PRAYER