

## “The Prescription of the Church”

(Part 2)

Eph. 4:11-16

- INTRO. - When the slow-moving clerk in a small store was not around one morning, a customer asked the owner’s young son, “Where’s Eddie? Is he sick?” The boy said, “Nope, he ain’t workin’ here no more.” The customer said, “well, do you have someone in mind for the vacancy?” The young man said, “Nope, Eddie didn’t leave no vacancy!”
- APPL. - Let me ask you this morning, “If you suddenly were no longer around, would you leave a vacancy in this church body?”
- How involved are you in the life of this church? Are you playing a vital part in the ministry and outreach and success of this church? How are you using your spiritual gifts to help build up the body of Christ here at PBC?
- You say, “Well, I haven’t been asked to serve.” Really? Are you serious? Do you have to be asked by someone in order to do what Christ has commanded all of us to do?
- Someone once said, “A church member waiting to be asked to serve in his own church is just like the member of a family waiting to be invited to pull weeds in front of the house where he lives.”  
(apply)
- Well, we’re in a series of messages this summer on the church. We’re looking at what the Bible has to say about the church, and we don’t have to re-invent the wheel when it comes to the church. We don’t have to come up with some kind of creative strategies because God has given to us in His Word what He wants the church to be and do.
- And as we began seeing last week, Eph. 4 tells us that God has given everything that is needed for us to live the Christian life, and He has given us everything we need for the church to be successful.
- He had given each of us a measure of grace, He has given us spiritual gifts, and He has given the church some gifted men.
- And as we saw last time, the first two listed here (the Apostles and prophets) were *foundational* offices. They were given for the foundation of the church, and then they passed off the scene to be replaced by the last two, the evangelists and the pastors who are teachers.
- And these (last) two categories of gifted men are given for the duration of church history -- to equip, build up, and develop His church, by following the prescription we have (here) in this passage of Scripture.

- We covered v. 11 last week, but *now* we need to move on to the rest of the text. In vv. 12-16 we see:

## I. THE PROGRESSION OF FOLLOWING GOD'S PRESCRIPTION

- The progression of this pattern for the church can be summed up in three words: equipping, serving, and building. Look with me (again) at vv. 11-12, "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..." Let's examine each of these three more carefully:

### A. Step 1 - Equipping

- The first thing that the leadership of the church is commissioned to do is to properly and thoroughly equip the saints (which is a title given to all true believers).
- The evangelists are responsible for bringing people to Christ through the preaching of the Gospel and helping to get these new believers off on the right track spiritually.
- The teaching shepherds are then to take up the task of providing spiritual food and resources which will result in believers being molded into the likeness of Christ.

- The word for "equipping" refers to that which is fit, restored to its original condition, or is made complete. This word is used for a doctor setting a broken bone so that it can heal properly. It is used of mending nets.

- But *here*, the idea of the word is more like what Paul meant in 2 Cor. 13:11, when he said, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete." And *not only* does this word carry the idea of each *individual* Christian being made complete, but also the *whole body* of the church (as we see in 1 Cor. 1:10).

- As individual members of the body are made complete, the whole body is equipped as well. And God has given us three basic *tools* for equipping the saints. These are all spiritual tools (because we know that the works of the flesh can produce nothing spiritual). The first tool is:

### 1. The Word of God

- 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
- So the first priority for a pastor (who is a teacher) is to make sure that he feeds *himself* on the Word of God, and then in turn, that he is faithfully feeding the flock of God.

- And part of the aspect of equipping, is teaching people how to feed *themselves* on the Word of God. Pastors need to teach their people how to hustle their own spiritual groceries. We're to help our people become like the Bereans in the book of Acts, who examined the Scriptures daily. But there is a *second* tool God has given for equipping His church, and that is:

## 2. Prayer

- For this we see an example in Epaphras, in Colossae, whom Paul described as "always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect (or complete) and fully assured in all the will of God..." (Col. 4:12). (expound)
- I believe we often fail to see the importance of prayer in the overall equipping of the saints for the work of service. We often see prayer as kind of an add-on -- as some kind of spiritual luxury rather than an essential tool God wants to use to equip His church.
- Well, there is a *third* tool that God uses to equip His church, and it's one that most of us are *not* too crazy about. It is:

## 3. Adversity

- This includes both testing and suffering. These are purging instruments for refining our holiness.

James said, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result (which is, as he goes on to say), that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

- Peter said, "And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." (1 Peter 5:10)
- Now, God wants to use all three of these tools to equip and perfect His church, but the last one (adversity) is entirely *His* doing. *He* sends adversity according to His sovereign will.
- But the other two instruments for equipping the saints fall under the responsibility of the gifted men that God has given to the church. Just like the Apostles in Jerusalem, the evangelists and pastors (who are teachers) are to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- Now, this brings us to a very important point of application, *not only* for the evangelists and teaching pastors, but for the whole church: ***These gifted men must be freed up of other demands so that they can spend the bulk of their time in prayer and the ministry of the Word.***

- Listen, administration and hospital visitation and counseling has its place, but that is *not* the heart of a NT church. The heart of a NT church is the promise that God will build His church as we are faithful to pray and teach His Word.
- The greatest need of the church has always been *spiritual maturity* rather than *organizational restructuring*. Even *less* does the church need more entertainment or gimmickry! What the church needs is more prayer and more of the Word of God!
- And listen, the study of the Word takes a lot of time. If the teaching pastor is going to do a good job of feeding the flock of God on the Word of God, then he is going to have to be able to spend a great amount of time in his study!
- Evangelists and teaching pastors cannot fulfill their responsibility if they are always burdened down with administration or hospital visits or counseling or a hundred other things.
- And listen, you're hearing this from one who *enjoys* administration. (expound) But I know that my greatest priority during the week must be prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- Just as the Apostles (in Acts 6) knew that they could *not* afford to neglect prayer and the Word in order to wait tables, so a pastor must keep his priorities straight, because there are always a number of other things that seem to be attempting to draw us away from those things.
- I believe that the surest road to spiritual stagnation in the church (and to the pastor's burnout), is for the pastor to get so engulfed in other things that he begins to neglect these two highest priorities.
- ILL. - During the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, an American reporter was flying over the Sinai desert and spotted about 50,000 stranded Egyptian soldiers, who were dying of thirst. The situation was reported in a number of newspapers and many government and relief agencies tried to get something done about it. But every time a plan was devised, it got bogged down in some kind of diplomatic red tape, and by the time they finally got water to those soldiers, most of them had died.
- That is a tragic story, but it is just as tragic when churches spin their wheels in programs and organization or entertainment rather than giving what people most desperately need: the spiritual water of the Word (bathed in prayer). (apply this to pastors)
- Now don't misunderstand. We *do* need some administration. We *do* need some organization. We *do* need some programs. But that is *not* what we need the most! (expound)

- So the first step in the progression of following God's prescription is *equipping*. The second step is "serving."

### B. Step Two - Serving

- Verse 12 says, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." Now, it is *not* the gifted men who are called upon to do the work of serving.
- Well, that's *not* completely true because the pastors are sheep as well as shepherds, but the primary calling of the pastors is to equip the saints. However, it is the responsibility of the saints to do the work of ministry.
- Listen, no pastor, (no matter how talented or gifted he may be), can do everything in the church that needs to be done. The work to be done will always surpass his time and abilities.
- But the design of God for His church is *not* for the pastor to try to play Superman and do everything. It is for others in the body to be equipped and motivated to do the work of service as they are faithfully taught God's Word.
- Spiritual service is the work of *every* Christian! Every believer is a minister! Listen, don't just sit back and wait for the pastor to do it all. Don't even sit back and wait for some other believer to do it all.

- You have a place of responsibility to the body of Christ. The building up of the body depends on every saint doing the work of the ministry. That's why you are being equipped. That's why you are being taught the Word of God.

- You aren't being fed just so you can sit around and get spiritually fat. You are *not* called to be a spiritual couch potato! Find out what your gifts are and throw yourself into the work of service!

### C. Step Three - Building

- If the evangelists and teaching pastors are doing their job, and the saints are doing their job, the ultimate result will be that the church will be built up.
- The word used here for "building up" is the same word that would be used for the building of a house. It is used for any kind of construction, and it implies spiritual edification and development.
- The body is certainly built up *numerically* through evangelism, but it is interesting to note that the emphasis here is *not* on the *external* growth, but *internal* growth, as believers are nurtured to faithful service through the ministry of the Word.
- This follows the pattern of other passages, such as Acts 20:32, which says, "I commend you to God and to the Word...which is able to *build you up*."

- We must always have the heart of God to reach out to the lost, but building up the church starts with the maturing of the saints, which in turn, should result in reaching the lost.
- The first responsibility of church leadership is with the *full* seats, *not* with the *empty* ones! As we build the body in regard to maturity, evangelism and numerical growth will be a natural result. But we must be careful *not* to turn that order around, because it doesn't work the other way. (expound)
- So that is the progression of following God's prescription. Now let's consider:

## II. THE RESULTS OF FOLLOWING GOD'S PRESCRIPTION

- Look with me at vv. 13-15, "...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. 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..."
- Now, there is a lot here, (and we could spend a lot of time on this), but for our purposes this morning note that the building up of the body of Christ

produces 2 ultimate objectives: the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

- And out of these two flow three other results: spiritual maturity, sound doctrine, and loving testimony. If we are following God's prescription for His church, we should be seeing these things take place. Notice, first of all:

### A. The Unity of the Faith

- When you take medicine of any kind, you always want that prescription to bring about a desired result. It may be to battle an infection or to relieve pain or to increase your vitality.
- The same is true with God's prescription for the church. When we follow it, we can expect it to produce certain results. The first result of following God's prescription is unity of the faith.
- Now, understand something very important here: The way the word "faith" is used here is *not* referring to an act of belief or obedience (as in other places). Here it refers to the body of Christian truth (or Christian doctrine) that we hold to. The "faith" is the content of the Gospel in its complete form. It is the whole counsel of God.
- And, from this, we see that it is impossible to have unity in the church apart from doctrinal integrity. Only a biblically equipped, faithfully serving,

spiritually maturing church can attain to the unity of the faith.

- We can see this graphically illustrated, for example, in the church at Corinth. The lack of unity and presence of chaos and division in the Corinthian church was a direct result of spiritual immaturity and doctrinal ignorance.
- On the other hand, when believers are properly taught, and when they faithfully serve, and are being built up in spiritual maturity, unity of the faith will be the inevitable result.
- But oneness in fellowship is impossible apart from the foundation of commonly held beliefs. One of the main reasons why some churches have no unity is because they either have *not* been taught well the Word of God, or they are *not* in agreement concerning sound doctrine. Secondly, Paul points to:

#### B. The Knowledge of Christ

- The second result of following God's prescription for the church is attaining the knowledge of Christ. Now, obviously Paul is *not* speaking of salvation here, but about that deep knowledge of Christ that comes through a daily intimate relationship with Him. It is that "epignosis" (full knowledge) that comes from prayer and Bible study and obedience to His Word.

- That was still Paul's prayer after years of walking with Christ. He said, "I count all things as loss in view of the surpassing value of *knowing Christ...*" He prayed, "that I may *know Him...*" (Phil. 3) He also prayed the same thing for the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae.
- Folks, it is *not* enough just to know that you are saved. God wants you to know Him in an intimate, personal way. He desires for our relationship with Him to be growing deeper and deeper all the time. And this will be one of the results of following God's prescription for His church.
- Now, the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God are the two *ultimate* objectives of following God's prescription. But along with these results, there will also be some secondary benefits. The first one is:

#### 1. Spiritual Maturity

- As we attain the unity of the faith and a knowledge of the Son of God, we also become "a mature man, to the (degree of) the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."
- God's greatest desire for His church is that every believer, (without exception), becomes just like His Son. Rom. 8:29 says, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son."

- The deeper we grow in our knowledge of Him, the more He conforms us into His likeness. This process of divine sanctification is a life-long process of maturing -- through those tools of prayer, the Word, and adversity.
- Now, it is obvious that believers, (although we have been made new in Christ), still have a battle with the flesh, which wages war with the Spirit, and (as a result) cannot attain *perfectly* (in this life) the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.
- That won't be *perfectly* realized until we are in glory. But regardless of that, we apparently *can* reach a degree of maturity (in this life) that pleases and glorifies Him. This level of maturity Paul is talking about is *not* "pie in the sky by and by" -- it is for the "nitty gritty here and now." A second benefit is:

## 2. Sound Doctrine

- The Bible also says that the Christian who is properly equipped and mature, will no longer be a child that is tossed about by every wind of doctrine. He won't be deceived by the trickery of men or the craftiness of deceitful scheming.
- The word for "trickery" (here) is the term from where we get the word "cube." It was used of dice playing, (and just as today), the dice were often

loaded. So the term for "dice" became synonymous with deception of any kind.

- The words for "craftiness" and "deceitful scheming" are similar words, and Paul's whole point (here) is that those who are grounded in the Word, and are mature in the Lord, are *not* going to fall for that which is false.
- Spiritual "children," on the other hand, who have *not* grown up in the faith (such as those believers in Corinth), are in constant danger of being suckered by the enemy into many kinds of false systems of belief.
- The word for "children" (here) is a word that means "one who does *not* talk." (expound) Spiritual babies are always in danger of being carried away into false doctrine just like a small boat with no anchor would be tossed by the waves in any direction.
- In *those* days, the danger was gnosticism or antinomianism or paganism; in *our* day it is humanism or relativism or liberalism. The labels may change, but the danger is the same; it is still the same old deception by the same old deceiver, and the only prevention is the same today as it was then: Becoming grounded in the truth; getting anchored in God's Word.
- You know, we tend to look back at history and chide former ages as being superstitious and

gullible, but folks, (as sophisticated as we think we are), people are deceived just as much *today* as in any other time in history.

- And it is amazing (to me) how *any* religious huckster can come along, and before long he will have a huge following -- regardless of how far his teaching is from the truth of God's Word.
- People pour millions of dollars into their coffers (and even drink poison Kool Aid) at the prompting of their false messiah.
- And don't think that *we* are beyond that (*not* that I am going to ask you to drink poison Kool Aid), but it is amazing how much easy-believism and pop-psychology Christians in America are falling for and thinking it is in line with the Word of God.
- It is amazing how often we fall for the latest fad or trend coming down the pike, regardless of whether it is doctrinally sound or *not*.
- ILL. - Have you ever seen a family that is totally dominated by the children? (expound) (apply to churches that are dominated by spiritual infants) Well, there is a final benefit, and that is:

### 3. Loving Testimony

- In direct *contrast* to being carried about by every wind of doctrine, we are to "speak the truth in

love." This applies to every aspect of Christian ministry.

- "Speaking the truth" (really) means *more* than just verbally speaking. It means "speaking, dealing, or acting truthfully." It literally means "truthing it." It means that every part of our lives is lived with integrity.
- So we see that this word has a very broad application. But the only other time it is used in Scripture is in Gal. 4:16, and *there* it is used to refer to the preaching of the Gospel.
- So we can extrapolate, that although our witness must be backed up by a life of integrity, the emphasis is still on the *verbal witness* of proclaiming God's revealed truth.
- *Not only* are we to have a good *defense* against deception (that of being grounded in the truth), but we are also to have a good *offense* (a testimony to God's truth, backed up by a life that exemplifies that truth).
- A church that is equipped and maturing, is a church that is going to (also) be reaching out in love with the truth of the Gospel.
- *Here* is where the *numerical* growth of the body comes in. It is the ultimate result of spiritual growth and maturity -- and brings us full circle to start the process all over again. (expound)

- Now, we could say a lot more about keeping a balance between truth and love (an absence of either one can be very destructive), but we are out of time...
- Very quickly, (in conclusion), vv. 15-16 brings us back to the *head* of the church, and reminds us that it is all His doing. All the authority and power and blessing comes from Him.
- Look at it, “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.” (expound)
- PRAYER