

THE EXPECTATION OF LEADERS

PART II

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

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The Expectation of Leaders Part II

Ephesians 4:11-16

As a church family, we set aside this Lenten Season as a time for reconciliation and a time to get relationships with God and one another right, and to move on in a new way to an exciting future. We have the following expectations. As we come to see a need for us to go and be reconciled with someone, we will do so right away. Secondly, we expect all these to be done before our Good Friday Service. The Good Friday Service will be one in which we confess our sinfulness as a church and as individuals to God and then to anoint each one as a sign of repentance and healing. So I would like to encourage us once again, if we come to see an area in which we need to get relationships right, we should do so immediately. Lastly, our hope is to finish this all and lay it all to rest before Good Friday. Our hope is never to have to mention this again. Instead we would like to go on building the foundation for a glorious future for Devon Church.

Let me quickly recap where we have been since Ash Wednesday. We examined the malignancy of sin and how it can contaminate and destroy our lives, the lives of our loved ones, and our church. Next, we put the whole reconciliation process into the context of how much God has forgiven each one of us. Compared to how much God has forgiven us of, what we are called upon to forgive one another of is relatively small. The realization of what God has forgiven us of should fill us with so much love and thankfulness that we should be excited to extend grace and mercy to one another. We followed that up by reminding each other that in the case of false teachers, false doctrine, slander, and lies, people who claim to be Christian ought to be mature enough to assist the leaders in purging the church of divisive and harmful people and doctrines. That didn't happen here so we almost succumbed to this. However, God was gracious and preserved the church.

In the reconciliation process, we went on to say that if we find ourselves in a position in which we have to apologize to someone and make things right, we need to do it right away. Jesus said it is a prerequisite for worship. His point was that you can't worship if your relationships are not right. Therefore, when we realize that we need to get a relationship right, we need to do it immediately.

Last week, we talked about how we as leaders failed the congregation in protecting you from false teachers. This morning we will continue to lay out the responsibility of pastors and board members.

We have seen that leaders have an incredible responsibility to protect the church and this week will see we have other serious responsibilities. That's why even though some may think we choose leaders according to this method, I can assure you we don't.

Several body parts tried to determine who would be boss. The brain said, "Since I already coordinate every function of the body I am the logical choice to be boss."

The heart objected, saying, “Without my pumping blood throughout the body, none would be able to function, so I should be boss.”

The eyes said, “Without us, the body would not know where it was going. We should be boss.”

The mouth said, “I speak for the body. I should be boss.”

One by one, each member of the body gave his reason as to why he should be boss. Finally the neck spoke up and said that he should be boss. “You!” said the brain, “Why you? You don’t do anything to begin with.” “Yea,” said the heart, “We wouldn’t even miss you if you weren’t here.” This made the neck very mad, and he became tense. His muscles knotted up, and he began to exert excruciating pain. So intense was the pain that the brain couldn’t think. The eyes became blurry, and the heart had to work so hard that it became tired and began to skip a beat every now and then. After a week of this, all the parts of the body agreed that the neck could be the boss.

The moral of the story? You don’t have to be a brain, or have a heart to be a leader. All you have to do is be a pain in the neck.

Well, after saying that, maybe that is how Mike and I became pastors and board members became board members.

Last week we said that church leaders are charged with the task of protecting the congregation from false teachers and false theology. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. **ONE OF THE MAJOR JOBS OF LEADERS IS TO EMPOWER THE CONGREGATION TO FULFILL THEIR DESTINIES AS CHILDREN OF GOD.** In other words, God has a plan for each one of our lives and He has a plan for this particular local church. Leaders are responsible to assist people in identifying their calling and then empowering them to accomplish what God has called them to do.

LEADERS TO MATCH THE MISSION (VS 11)

Since there are so many things God wants to accomplish in our lives and in the life of the church, verse 11 informs us that God has gifted and appointed all sorts of leaders to match the various missions. **IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THE MISSIONS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH, GOD RAISES UP LEADERS IN ALL AREAS.** There is no way one person could possibly be gifted and talented enough to inform, educate, train, and disciple people in every area of ministry. I think that perhaps the gifts listed in verse 11 are only representative of many ministries. However, they lay out for us the major ministries. Basically the two major ministries of the church are outward and inward. In other words, the people of God are called to evangelize those who have not heard the Gospel or do not believe. Secondly, we are called to minister to believers by disciplining them to minister to one another and to the lost.

First of all, the church is responsible to reach unbelievers. One of the primary reasons for the existence of the church is its ministry to the lost. As Christians we have been commanded to tell people about Christ. Every Christian should be able to give a personal testimony about how

coming to know Jesus as Savior has changed his or her life and how God is making a difference in his or her life right now. Secondly, every Christian ought to be able to explain what it means to be a Christian and how to become a Christian. Thirdly, every Christian ought to be able to lead someone to saving faith in Christ. In this list, we find that the gift of apostle is the foundation for ministry to the lost. The word apostle is a relatively simple word in Greek. It refers to a person sent on a mission. In the secular world, it could mean a government official sent somewhere to accomplish a specific task. It could refer to a soldier on a mission, or an ambassador sent to another country. In biblical usage, the word refers to at least three different types of people. First of all, it referred to the 12. They are often referred to as The Apostles or The Twelve. The 12 are the primary means by which Jesus sent the Gospel out into the world. Jesus commissioned them to be His witnesses throughout the entire world. Secondly, there is a larger group of apostles. Jesus sent them out to preach the Gospel in several towns. And finally, there is a spiritual gift named apostle. There has been a lot of debate about this gift. It would certainly be worth reading about. However, if we don't try and split hairs, I think it's not too difficult to come up with a definition that would not offend any of the scholars. Let's start with the fundamental meaning of the word. It refers to being sent out on a mission. We know that Jesus sent out the 72 with the specific job of preaching the Gospel, namely that Jesus the Messiah had come and that He was offering salvation to all who would believe. Their mission was evangelistic in nature. It seems to me that the gift of apostle refers to someone who has the gift of being sent. Today we would call them missionaries. The primary quality is that they have no trouble with being sent to foreign places, and have the ability to adapt. The primary mission is to evangelize the lost but missionaries may not necessarily have the gift of evangelism. They may go in support roles such as pilots, mechanics, teachers, physicians, etc. There is a lot to do on the mission field.

However, the ultimate goal is to present the Gospel and that is where the gift of evangelism comes in. The church needs evangelists. Now to be sure, evangelists, may or may not have the gift of apostle. For example, we have all sorts of people with the gift of evangelism that can work in the church or overseas. They work on college campuses, in schools, with children and adults. People come to know, recognize, and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior through the work of evangelists.

I have always wanted the gift of evangelism. I would love to lead people to Christ by the hundreds, but alas, that's not my gift. So the gifts of apostles and evangelists seem to be directed towards the lost.

On the other hand, the gifts of prophets, pastors, and teachers tend to focus on ministry to believers. In other words, these gifts seem to be for the purpose of building up the church in their faith. Evangelism and apostle seem to build up the church in numbers. Prophets, pastors, and teachers are to build maturity in the people who have given their lives to Christ. The church must be balanced between ministry to the lost and ministry to believers. If you have a church that is geared simply to reach the lost, they will end up with a lot of immature believers. If a church is geared simply towards believers, they will sooner or later die off. Listen to how Jesus put it:

¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands

*I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age”
(Matthew 28:19-20 / NLT).*

Let’s describe these gifts. We tend to think of prophets as people who predict the future. Sometimes that may be the case. Even in the Old Testament, predicting the future was only a part of the prophet’s job. The main function of the prophet was to call people back to God. In other words, God laid out His commands in Scripture. When the people wandered away from the faith, God would raise up a prophet who would preach the Scripture to them, explain the Scripture, show how they had disobeyed the Word of God, and laid out the consequences if they refused to turn their lives around.

The New Testament lays out the conditions by which a prophet speaks his or her message. It should be tested and approved by other prophets. I think that when we preach exegetically, and then applying the truths to everyday life, we are in essence participating in the prophetic ministry. Good preaching should explain the Bible, help people measure their lives according to it, and then give the some instruction as to how they can change their lives so they are in line with Scripture. Good prophetic preaching should lay out the consequences of disobedience as well.

The gift of pastor is that of a people mover. In other words the word pastor literally means a shepherd. The job of a shepherd is to guide the flock where it is to go. Shepherds have to sometimes use gentle methods, other times call for more sever measures. For example, if a sheep is headed in the wrong direction, the shepherd may have to use the hooked side of his staff to drag the sheep back in line. Pastors must be people persons and know how to guide and protect the flock.

Finally, people need to learn how to find the gifts for ministry. They need to learn how to read and understand the Bible. The primary responsibility of teachers is to teach people what the Bible says, how to interpret it, and how to apply it. So here we see ministry leaders who understand how to minister to the lost and how to minister to believers. If these leaders do their jobs, they will have a vibrant, healthy, and growing church. **IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THE MISSIONS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH, GOD RAISES UP LEADERS IN ALL AREAS.**

Here is what I want us to understand at this point. There is no one leader who makes decisions. A healthy church has a group of leaders with different talents, abilities, and temperaments. They should be mature and able to work together. If you take time to look at our pastoral staff and board members, you will notice that we have both male and female, we have different races and ethnicities, we have both introverts and extroverts, and we have very different gifts, abilities, and personalities. And yet, we work together nicely.

GOALS OF LEADERSHIP (VS 12-13)

This diversity of leaders who work together well helps us accomplish the goals of leadership laid out in verses 11-12. I think for years, people have looked at board members and viewed them as people who simply paid the bills, maintained the buildings, paid for programs, and kept the doors open. However, according to these verses, **CHURCH LEADERS ARE TO BE ABOUT THE**

BUSINESS OF DISCIPLESHIP. Discipleship has to do with teaching, preparing, training, and empowering people to live out their Christian faith. Let's look at how leaders are to be about the business of empowering the congregation. Let me remind us what Paul told the Ephesians two chapters earlier:

“¹⁰For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10 / NLT).

God saved each one of us for the purpose of accomplishing the good works He prepares in advance for us to accomplish. Let's think about this. God called us and saved us. When we were born, He infused us with all sorts of talents and abilities. When we were born again at salvation, He infused us with the Holy Spirit and a gift or gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through our experiences in life, He gave us different ways of seeing things. In other words, we are created as unique masterpieces. Now here is what I really want us to grasp. God has prepared us and He has also prepared works that we in particular are fit and prepared to accomplish. I think that we only do things we like to do or are comfortable doing. But look at verse 12. We are to accomplish the works that will build up the body of Christ. In other words, our gifts and good works are meant to bring people into the church and to grow in the church.

Leaders are called to make sure people are trained in knowing, understanding, and applying the Bible to their everyday lives. Further, leaders are to train the congregation in how to share their faith with others. Leaders must always have their eyes on God and the congregation at the same time so they can help people discover God's plan for their lives. Let me give a quick example. Let's say that you had been raised in a multi-generational home. You had loving great-grandparents and grandparents who showered you with love and affection. You grew to love their stories and enjoyed spending time with them. Later in life, you became a Christian. God the Holy Spirit gave you the gifts of mercy and service. You found yourself in a Bible believing church where you were taught how to read and apply the Bible. One of the leaders in charge of visitation noticed that you had this incredible pull towards older people and so she hooked you up with the nursing home visitation program, and also hooked you up with the Senior Small Group. Here you would be able to accomplish many of the good works God prepared you for. And as you ministered to the elderly, the body of Christ would thrive. Good church leadership will be constantly training people for ministry and plugging them into ministry.

The first half of verse 13 reminds us that good leaders help the congregation grow in unity. Let me start by saying what unity is not. Unity is not unison. Everybody does not have to think the same way or be involved in the same things. Unity is like harmony. Harmony needs different notes. Unity needs a variety of gifts. The trick is to blend them all together. Look carefully at verse 13. Leaders are to bring the congregation to unity in their faith. People often get into their own little cliques of ministry. Our faith is not in the Christian Education department. Our faith is not in the Fellowship department or the Ministry department or the Evangelism department. Our faith is not in any leaders or pastors. Unity only comes as we grow in our faith in God. Secondly, we must grow in our knowledge of Christ. In other words, we don't run the church on people's personal opinions. We make decisions based firmly on the Word of God and our knowledge of Who Jesus is. Leaders must be like skilful conductors who can take all these different gifts and personalities and direct them to the faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

When we are focused on growing in our faith and knowledge of Christ, we will grow to maturity as described in the second half of verse 13. That is quite a statement Paul makes here. He says that as good leaders lead and the congregation follows, the church will become mature. And then look how he describes maturity. Maturity is for the church to attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. The idea here is that we as Christians grow up to adulthood in our faith. In other words, our lives should look more and more like Jesus everyday. As John the Baptist said about Jesus, “He must increase. I must decrease.” The church should grow to look more like Jesus and less like the world. This is an awesome task for pastors and church leaders.

CHURCH LEADERS ARE TO BE ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF DISCIPLESHIP.

RESULTS OF GOOD LEADERSHIP (VS 14-16)

Even though this is an incredibly daunting task, the results of good leadership are proportionally satisfying as described in verses 14-16. **IF LEADERS LEAD AND THE CONGREGATION FOLLOWS, THE CHURCH WILL BE A HEALTHY BODY GROWING IN NUMBERS AND GROWING IN GRACE.**

We have just described a healthy body of believers as adults in the faith. Verse 14 puts some meat on this and describes an adult body as mature in theology. I think that this is an extremely important point to make. One of the most fundamental things that have to take place for a church to thrive, grow, and mature is for this multi-gifted group of leaders to be teaching the Bible in a very serious manner. The congregation must also be studying and submitting to the teachings of the leaders. Look how verse 14 starts out, “Then we will no longer be infants.” It is like any other situation in life. We can only get out of something what we are willing to put into it. I need to say this again. We were never given the right by God to pursue happiness. We are commanded by God to pursue holiness. Reading the Bible, memorizing the Bible, and meditating on the Bible are not to be done when we have time leisure time. Pursuing holiness is our primary job in life as Christians. Nothing should take priority over our relationship with God. The sign of a mature Christian is that pursuing holiness is what consumes their thoughts. The sign of a mature body of believers is that the church is firmly rooted in the word of God.

And then Paul switches metaphors and describes what infants in the faith look like. Infant Christians are ones who are easily confused by false teachers and false doctrines. It became clear here that even though so many people claim to be in all sorts of intensive Bible studies and claim to be so into the Word of God, not very many seemed to be able to follow the Biblical reasoning and theology of the Board. In fact, when the mediator read the Board’s response to all the false doctrine, the deceitful scheming, and the slander, he remarked what a well thought out, well reasoned, and theologically mature document it was. And yet, most people remained unconvinced or the claimed to be neutral. Verse 14 describes exactly what happened to us because our church was not mature in understanding Scripture. This really was characteristic of our church. Listen to how Paul described us:

“¹⁴ ... infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:14 / NIV).

Churches that are comprised of people who are not steadily growing in their understanding of the Bible will be characterized by division, fighting, and chaos. However, it's not just enough to be mature in theology. As verse 15 points out, we must also be mature in our behavior. In our pursuit of holiness we must remember that the ultimate goal is to become more Christ-like. The goal is not to just gain more knowledge; the goal is that we allow God to transform us into people who imitate Christ in thought and behavior. In other words, the nature, the love, the power, and the glory of God should show through our lives. Paul said that a mature Christian is able to speak the truth in love and a healthy church is a church that speaks forth the truth in love. Some people are good at speaking the truth. However, they don't do it in love. For example, when children get mad at their parents, they often say things like, "I hate you." You know these kinds of people. They don't care who they hurt. They feel it is simply their job to speak out their opinions. They are more concerned that people hear them than they are interested in hearing what others have to say. Angry and legalistic people are really immature even though they appear to know Scripture.

On the other hand, some people feel the church is simply about love. Their motto is, "Can't we all just get along?" These people are only interested in feeling good about themselves and making others feel good. Oftentimes people who run around doing a lot of good works appear to be really holy. However, when truth is missing, there will never be things like justice, holiness, unity, or health.

Verse 16 is a beautiful description of what it means to be mature in love. We will all have Jesus as our head. In other words, leaders must follow Christ and empower the congregation to discover their talents, gifts, and abilities as they grow in Scripture. When leaders lead, when the congregation follows, our church will accomplish all the good works God has prepared for us to do.

Let me just close this section by leaving us with Paul's promise to churches who have mature leaders leading a mature congregation:

"¹⁵ ... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15 / NIV).

The point is this. **IF LEADERS LEAD AND THE CONGREGATION FOLLOWS, THE CHURCH WILL BE A HEALTHY BODY GROWING IN NUMBERS AND GROWING IN GRACE.**

The Bible is clear about this point. If we are Christians, then this is an authentic Christian church. We are a group of believers gathered together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If we are an authentic Christian church, then God has a destiny for us. He has prepared us to accomplish many good works and He will make sure we find them. **ONE OF THE MAJOR JOBS OF LEADERS IS TO EMPOWER THE CONGREGATION TO FULFILL THEIR DESTINIES AS CHILDREN OF GOD.**

Usually I end with a single illustration. This morning I want to end with two illustrations; one that describes an immature church and the other a mature church.

Let's start with the negative illustration first. Two congregations were located only a few blocks from each other in a small community. They thought it might be better if they merged and became one united body, larger and more effective, rather than two struggling churches. Good idea ... but they weren't able to pull it off. The problem? They couldn't agree on how they should recite The Lord's Prayer. One group wanted, "Forgive us our sins," while the other demanded, "Forgive us our debts." Unintentionally, a newspaper report described what happened both at a human level and a spiritual level: "One church went back to its sins, while the other returned to its debts." That's what happens with immature churches.

On the other hand, let me summarize one of the concepts of a healthy root system as described in an article entitled "What Good Is a Tree?" from *Reader's Digest*. The article explained that when the roots of individual trees come in contact with roots from other trees, there is a substance present that reduces competition. In fact, this unknown fungus helps link the roots of different trees together, even of different kinds. A whole forest may be linked together. If one tree has access to water, another to nutrients, and a third to sunlight, the trees have the means to share with one another and even survive difficult conditions.

Like trees in a forest, a healthy Christian church has Christ as its head, leaders who lead, a congregation who follows, and the Holy Spirit connecting all the believers and their works together. Mature unity in Christ is a beautiful thing.