

Ephesians 4:11-16

Peter Marshall has described 20th century Christians in the following words:

"They are like deep sea divers, encased in suits for many fathoms deep, marching bravely forth to pull plugs out of bathtubs."

When one reads the pages of the New Testament and tries to relate what he hears to the contemporary church, he is compelled to conclude that the relationship is sometimes more one of contrast than of comparison (Howard Hendricks).

Why the tremendous disparity between the early church and the contemporary church?

We are related to the same Person; we have the same power available; we're called to the same purpose. Why is there this inconsistency? It is possible we have forgotten the church is the Body of Christ? We treat it like an institution, when in fact it has a head, skin and bones, fingers and toes, sinews, joints, internal organs—all the parts of the body. It can be wounded, lazy, or strong. It can serve, love and care, or it can be selfish and war even within itself.

The church is a Body—Christ's Body.

It can become a disturbing element in society, a revolutionary force that will turn the world upside down, or it can be a pious, harmless group of religious people who are like islands of irrelevance.

What will make the difference in our understanding and the effectiveness of the church?

A Body mindset—one where each person in the church takes seriously the fact that he/she is a member of the Body of Christ and has a critical function to fulfill within the Body. In cooperation with other members of the Body, he/she is to continue the ministry of Christ today.

How do we know how we are to function in Christ's Body?

Each person has received gifts from Christ that help them determine how to operate in Christ's Body. What would you think of a person who received a gift from you, but did not open it, value it, or even thank you for it? How do you think the Lord feels when He gives gifts to His children and they never take the time to open them, thank Him, or put them to use?

Shelved away, never to be shared—that's where most spiritual gifts end up. In this session, we hope to share with you how the Body is impacted by spiritual gifts and what they will accomplish if we will take the time to unwrap them and put them into action.

Before we get to a discussion of individual gifts, however, it's necessary to have the basic primer. We will begin by asking and answering some specific questions about the Body of Christ and spiritual gifts.

In our [last session](#), we saw a [list of these gifts](#). What gifts have believers received from God? If you are unfamiliar with spiritual gifts and are a follower of Jesus, let's pretend we're having our first spiritual birthday party. We are going to unwrap a few of the many gifts that have come to us.

These gifts that arrive at the time of our spiritual birth are different from natural gifts which a person who is not a follower of Jesus might have.

What have we been given?

Here are just a few packages:

- All good and perfect gifts—James 1:17-18.
- The gift of eternal life—John 3:16.
- The gift of the Scriptures, the word of truth—James 1:18.
- All things that pertain unto life and godliness—2 Pet. 1:3. Can you think of anything *that* doesn't include?
- Every spiritual blessing in Christ—Eph. 1:3. Eph. 1 is a storeroom of gifts we have been given, a room with no dimensions; it's as big as we want it to be.
- All spiritual gifts—Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Pet. 4:10; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Cor. 12-14.

Three distinct groups of gifts are listed in the Bible, and 1 Peter 4:10-11 seems to be a compressed list of one of the three. It is important to understand, however, that these lists represent many unopened packages that God has specifically given to us. With those gifts in mind, an essential question is how the ministry of Jesus instructs us as to how believers are to use their gifts today.

Here is a summary of Jesus' ministry and what He came to accomplish:

- Mark 1:14-15: Jesus came **to teach** about the kingdom of God and **to declare** that we are to repent and believe the Good News.

- Mark 1:16-18: How would He accomplish this? **Discipleship**—"*Come and follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*" We follow and He makes us.

- Mark 1:32-34; Lk. 4:18-19: How will ministry be accomplished? The Luke passage tells us that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus and He was anointed to **preach**

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

Good News,
proclaim freedom
for prisoners, the
recovery of sight
to the blind,
release
for the oppressed and
proclaim
the year of the Lord's favor.

- Mark 1:35-39: How did Jesus know what to do and where to go? He spent plenty of time in a solitary place **praying** to His Father.

- Mark 10:45: What was His attitude? He came not to be served, but to **serve**, and to **give**

His life
for others.

What does His ministry have to do with us today?

Three passages are very helpful:

1. 1 Corinthians 12:27—*"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."*

2. John 17:18—*"As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."*

3. Matthew 28:18-20—*18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

Jesus' ministry is our model, and the things He was asked to do, we are to mimic in the power of the Spirit. The only difference is, we as individuals are all parts of His body. The following chart makes it clear how the ministry and commands of Jesus affect us today.

Matthew 18

19] *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

1 John 2

12] *I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13] I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men (youth), because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. 14] I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men (youth), because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

In order to understand how the ministry of Jesus is applied to the local church, we need to ask and answer the next question.

What do we know about the Body of Christ and its members and

functions?

Ephesians 4:7-16 is the key passage to study.

We know God assigned a specific portion of grace to *each* believer.

Eph. 4:7—*"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."* That implies that these are grace gifts, unmerited and free. We don't earn them by our faithfulness, goodness and efforts. These are specific gifts measured out by Christ to each believer.

- It is not an undefined amount—it has specific measurements.
- It is not an unknown amount.

Each believer has been given a measured deposit of grace, the gift we need to find and open. This grace is different than saving grace. The grace referred here relates to grace gifts apportioned, or given to all believers. Romans 12:6 tells us, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."*

These observation about these gifts are critical:

The gifts and grace are inseparable.

They are essentially the same word. The gifts of God should never be separated from the grace of God. Gifts without grace will produce what we see in the church at Corinth—1 Cor. 10-14 (fights, divisions, arrogance, pride, etc.). Gifts without grace will also produce a sinful condition and an ungodly church.

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

This subject, therefore, must be mixed with a healthy understanding of the grace of God. I heard of a church recently that had a fist fight during a business meeting. Other churches fight and destroy people by smear campaigns and rumor. They are gifted and blessed people caring less than pagans!

With that firmly in our minds, what else do we know about gifts?

We know each believer's grace gift is *totally unique*—Rom. 12:6; 1 Pet. 4:10; James 1:17-18.

These passages tell us:

Gifts will be different from others. Rom. 12:6—"*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.*" The expressions of even those who have the same gifts will be different. For example, teachers will differ, or those graced with prophetic gifts will look different. It all depends on the measure of grace distributed and how a person exercises what he/she has received.

Gifts will come in different forms. 1 Pet. 4:10—"*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*"

This means we will have some similarity with others, but we will also be special—uniquely gifted.

We know each believer is to do the following with their gifts:

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

1 Peter 4:10—*"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 11] If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

1. Each believer is to use his/her gifts along with the other priorities of: prayer, love, and offering hospitality. All four priorities operate beautifully together, but all four will probably be expressed differently, depending on the gift we have received.

2. Each believer is to use what gift he has received—1 Pet. 4:10a. How?

3. Each believer is to serve—1 Pet. 4:10b. Gifts are not for our fulfillment alone, so we can be kept busy and happy. Gifts are for service—Matt. 20:18; 24:14; 27:55; 2 Cor, 3:3; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:18; Philemon 13; Heb. 1:14.

4. Each believer is to faithfully administer God's grace in its various forms—1 Pet. 4:10. Here we have the picture of a house manager, one who is a slave and yet manages all the affairs and accounts of the household (e.g., Joseph in the Old Testament—Gen. 39:4). Then in a condensed list of Romans 12, Peter gives us an example of what he means in verse 11. Because we will all fit into one of the categories that follow, Peter has a strong word to say:

5. Each believer who speaks, e.g., prophesies, teaches, exhorts should do so as one who is speaking the very words of God. Don't alter God's words. Don't add to God's words. Don't treat God's words lightly—James 3:1. Those who do not have speaking gifts will fit broadly into the next category of service.

6. Each believer who serves should do it with the strength God provides. Service should not come from our desire to meet needs or from the requests of others. Our motivation should come from the strength that only the Lord can provide. If you're serving and have no strength, then you have the wrong motivation; you're doing something God doesn't want done; or you simply need a rest. Strength can be an indication of God's blessing and direction.

7. Each believer should do this **so that** in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ—v. 11. This is the highest goal for the use of our gifts.

If God's praise and our fulfillment is at stake, doesn't it make sense that we open and faithfully use and administer the gifts God has given to us? We have been given gifts, and God expects that we will open them up and use them. He hasn't left us to operate by ourselves; in fact, Ephesians tells us some specific help has been given us.

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

We know that each believer and his gifts are aided by some people gifts.

First, God gave Himself (Eph. 4:8-10) as a ransom for us and as a model to show us how to live.

Second, God gave some people gifts. v. 11—*"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..."*
What are these gifts for?

We know God's purposes for these gifts are threefold:

"...to prepare (equip) God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." Eph. 4:12

All the gifts in verse 11 are equipping gifts, used to equip/prepare God's people—v. 12. The definition of equip/prepare is many-faceted, and together the following meanings provide us with a fascinating picture.

- to shape up, to make fit, to complete.
- to repair, as repairing nets in Matt. 4:21.
- to outfit a ship for sea—a ship prepared, outfitted, so it can fulfill its seagoing mission
- to reset a bone that is out of joint.

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

When these gifts of men are released to fulfill this preparing process, amazing things can happen. The problem is, many pastors in the local church aren't released to do the job God has called them to. If they are, the saints serve other members of the Body and the world. v. 12b—"*...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*"

The ministry is not for a few. The ministry is for all the saints. If you're a saint, you're a minister.

What happens when you minister/serve? What happens when each person is involved in ministry? **The Body is then built up**—v. 12c. Please let this thought sink into your heart and spirit. We will return to it again.

More specifically, what will the Body look like when it is built up?

We know God's goal for the building process is summed up in three words.

v. 13—"*...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*"

The first of the three words is:

Unity

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

"...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God..." This doesn't mean there will be no disagreements or varying viewpoints—Acts 15:2; Rom. 4:1. We can, however, have unity in the Spirit in the midst of our diversity—Eph. 4:3.

There are two kinds of unity:

1. The unity of the faith. This is the development of faith, its purity and its focus. This is also a unity in what we are believing God for.

2. The unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. The knowledge of Christ has a powerful influence on our faith and our unity. The way this unity comes about is when all members, or a substantial number of the church has a primary goal to get to know Jesus. As we are pursuing that goal, there is marvelous unity and oneness in that pursuit—Phil. 3:7-10. As we begin to get to know Him more thoroughly, there is a unity in knowledge—similarity in our prayers, heart, vision, etc., because we are all reflecting a common mentor and focus. The way to become one is by coming to know Christ more thoroughly. He is the unifier.

Maturity

"...and become mature..." What does it mean to be mature in this context? The third word defines maturity.

Conformity

"attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Of course, this is an ongoing process. (See Philippians 3:12-15.) The attainment of this,

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

however, is the ultimate goal of the church: to produce in this present world men and women who are like Jesus.

What happens if we don't reach our threefold goal?

We know if God's goal for His Body is not realized, three problems occur.

v. 14—*"Then we will no longer be 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."*

These three problems are immense: immaturity, instability, and gullibility.

Immaturity

"...then we will no longer be infants..."

It is interesting to see what immaturity literally means: "does not talk, or does not talk properly"—as a mature person. It is the opposite of mature, not communicating properly, complaining, resisting change and being very self-centered. It is a sign of immaturity when a person can't communicate displeasure in an appropriate manner.

Instability

"...tossed back and forth by the waves..."

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

The word is a nautical word and means "to be carried around, to be tossed by the waves." The definition also means "to be agitated and mentally changeable." Immature and unstable Christians are like children, in that they are fickle. Their attention spans are short. Immature Christians are often up and down spiritually, unfaithful and undependable. Their opinions change frequently. Immature Christians may get stuck in a position of immaturity, even becoming rigid. Some mistake rigidity for maturity, but it is far from it. It's just another form of a temper tantrum on hold.

Gullibility

"...and blown here and there by every word of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."

The word "teaching" means the various teachings and philosophies of religious quacks—religious fools. "Cunning" means literally, the dice playing of men; and "craftiness" means a deliberate planning, or system/method. Compare this with the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. The words ".. blown here and there.." are nautical terms and give us a strong hint of what will happen if this condition is not corrected. The result will be a shipwreck.

The person will be thrown off course and be in danger of losing his/her way or their perspective. Here again is that picture of the boat in the bay, only here we can see why the ship is beached—there are holes in it. Could this happen to the people of Hillcrest? Can any of us get caught up in cultural ideals and miss the truth? One of the cultural ideals might be, "it doesn't really matter who Jesus is or that He is the Son of God, as long as you attempt to follow His teachings, that is all that matters." Or, "It doesn't really matter what a person believes as long as they are sincere." Those are winds that will blow us off course.

It does matter who Jesus is. If He isn't the Son of God and the one who came and died for our sins, then we are all lost. It does matter what we believe. It would be ludicrous if we were a mathematician to say, "it doesn't matter what you believe about math, as long as

you are sincere." There are laws of mathematics, just like God's principles and His truth should direct our lives. If we miss the truth, as God has told it, we will be blown here and there and the result will be holes in our boat and eventual shipwreck.

What's the answer? We come back to the process of equipping the saints and see the solution in a condensed form in the next two verses.

How do we make sure God's preparing/equipping process is successful? How do we avoid immaturity, instability and gullibility?

1. The necessity of honesty and accurate teaching. v. 15a—"*Instead, speaking the truth in love...*" This means "being or walking in truth; being true or truthing it." It means we have to have a commitment to be honest with ourselves and not live under a pretense. This also means we have to be committed to the honest teaching of the whole counsel of God.

2. The necessity of a right spirit—"*...instead, speaking the truth in love*"—v. 15a. It's not speaking the truth at all costs—"I call it like I see it." It's honestly speaking the truth of Scripture and yet covering it with love. What will be the final result if we all learn to speak the truth in love to each other? We will all be able to minister more effectively.

What will be the final result if everyone uses his/her gifts?

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

We will in all things grow up into Him. v. 15b—*"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*

(See also Col. 1:28.) Jesus is the head of the goal, but also the source of grace and power. That means we grow to Him, but

We will grow from Him. v. 16a—*"From him the whole body..."* He is the director of growth because He is the active Head of the church, but Jesus is also the source of life, of growth.

Let's put this all together. How will all of this happen?

What do the particulars of this growth process look like?

Here is how it all happens. All life comes from the head and through us to each other. *"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

But each member must function, too. v. 16—*"From him the whole body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament."*

As members of the Body:

- We are the agency, even though the power comes from the Head.
- We are the channels through which the supply of life from the Head is brought to

the various members.

- We are the bonds that bind the members of the Body together.

What an amazing thought that is to me. Each supportive ligament (each member) has the capacity to share and distribute life from the Head. What a privilege! When we do what we are gifted to do, we share God's life with others. That is what makes the difference—God's life flowing through us to others. This is the real thrill of ministry—being a channel of God's life!

So what will determine our effectiveness as agents as channels of God power and life?

The simple answer is: each person's/member's effectiveness will be determined by that individual saint's fellowship with the Lord/Head. If our fellowship with God is growing and we are closely connected to Him, we will share the life of our relationship! That means, then:

We will show mutual concern for the other members. v. 16—"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love..." As a result, there will be growth in our ability to function and minister as a whole. There will also be a building up of individuals as they are surrounded, energized and covered with love. (The whole and the part will grow!)

Don't miss this: The life that flows from us to others enables us all to grow and build each other up. This is the ultimate building program of the church. This growth and maturity comes when we as believers all fulfill our function.

v. 16—*"From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

It can't be said enough or strong enough, we all need each other to be able to grow and avoid immaturity, instability and gullibility! We can't rely on just a few. In fact, we are dependent on everyone to work/minister with their grace gifts in order for us all to grow. We're in this together.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with some important questions. The most important are personal in nature. We've asked and attempted to answer many questions, but more important than all of them is the following two:

1. Are you a member of God's family?
2. Are you doing your part in God's family?

If we can't answer both questions in the affirmative, then others in the Body are being hurt by our lack of involvement. Our ineffectiveness is also affecting our growth—v. 16.

Ray Stedman has described the church as follows:

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

"Saints are very difficult people at times. Contrary to popular impression, saints are not made of plaster. They are sometimes made of very hard, resistant materials. They are certainly not made of sugar and spice and everything nice. They conform much more closely to the frogs and snails and puppy dog tails. Saints are often made up of stubborn hardness, harder than diamonds, and laziness, slower than Christmas. In other words, they are made of the same stuff as pastors and teachers! God trains saints by starting with the leaders and knocking the rough spots off them to shape them up. The leader can't do much to help others, unless he has been through this treatment himself.

But all this is necessary for shaping us up together, in building this amazing building that God is building today; this great structure which, in secret, is taking shape through history, invisible to the world. God is building a building that will be for His habitation, not only now, but through all eternity. As Christians, we need to get our eyes off the superficialities to the reality of this... Hear and see the most exciting things that the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst."

He is building us into His Body. He is the Head and we are the parts. As each part does its work, we will be built to His glory.

Application Questions

1. Why do you think most people don't appreciate or use the spiritual gifts they have received from God?
2. What feelings do you have when you read John 17-18 and Matt. 18:18-20? Does it excite you, grieve you, depress you, etc.? Why?
3. How will a person's definition of the church affect how he/she functions in it?

Priorities for Extraordinary Times, Part 6

Written by Bob Stone

4. Why is it important to the church that grace and spiritual gifts are inseparable? Why do you think God gave specific and unique grace gifts to every person?

5. What are we to do with our spiritual gifts according to 1 Pet. 4:10-11? How will the prayer, love and hospitality described in 1 Pet. 4 affect the use of our gifts? How will the use of our gifts affect our praise (1 Pet. 4:11 and Phil. 4:18)?

6. According to Eph. 4:11-12, how is the Body of Christ built up?

7. Describe how the ministry of the Body specifically affects our unity, maturity and conformity to Christ.

8. Using the thoughts of Eph. 4:14, describe a church where the ministry of the members is not taking place.

9. According to Eph. 4:16, what part do you play in the growth process of this church? What will happen if you aren't doing your part?