

Blueprint for the Church
Ephesians 4:7-16 (7-12; 13-16)
Reading: Psalm 100

Bethany Baptist Church (a.m.)
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...pray...

Engineers & architects & project managers & technicians & software developers & business consultants live in world of ...

Blueprints & flowcharts & process diagrams.

Great big *pictures* of the *end to end* (start to finish) *details & direction* of how something works!

Sort of like a *roadmap* for *reach you goal*.

The NT has a *blue print* (*flow diagram*) for building a *strong church!*

Let's *unroll it* together this morning!

Join me in Eph 4:7-16.

The *church & the church's unity* have emerged as the **2 big ideas** in Paul's letter.

Some believe that this *text* you've just read is the *focal point* of Paul's epistle!

The *goal* is the *church*, but the *starting point & the most imp't point* is **Jesus!**

Let's trace how the victorious Christ *equips* His church to *grow strong*.

(So our message...)

How Jesus builds a strong Church.

- 1. Christ gives gifts vv.7-10.**
- 2. Church gets gifts v.11.**
- 3. Church grows strong V.12.**

Christ gives gifts to His church.

1. Paul *refocuses* a little as he begins to *move on* into the second half of his letter (ch.4-6).
 - a. His opening call to *walk worthy of your calling* drew heavily on the ideas of “*all*” Christians & “*one*” body of unifying truths.
 - b. Now he shifts gears and writes “*each one of*” (7) and refers to “*some*” in v.11. So Paul wants to point out how Christ does deal with each of us and for each of us.
 - c. Yet the idea of the *church & unity* has not disappeared at all!
2. Jesus gives *grace & gifts* to *each* of His people (7)!
 - a. The Bible has a lot to say about *spiritual gifts*. There are several lists of *spiritual gifts* in **NT**: Rom 12, 1 Cor 12 (2), Eph 4:11 (here), 1 Pt 4.
 - b. *Every Christian* receives a *spiritual gift* when he/she is *born again*.
 - i. The *purpose* of your gift is to arm you to *help* your church in a specific way.
 - ii. The basic *nature/function* of your gift may be found in one of these *lists*.
 - iii. ...but *some* Bible teachers suggest that God *customizes* your gift by *mixing* parts of the basic gifts found in the **NT** (the way you mix *ingredients* in a *recipe*).
 - iv. That way you are gifted to meet the *particular needs* of your *church family*.
 - c. Not only do you get the *gift*, Paul says God gives you the **grace** (*desire & power*) to use it the way Christ intends! Paul’s familiar expression (7) – “*according to the measure*” simply means the *grace* matches the demands of using the *gift*.

3. Paul goes on to stress Jesus' *right* to give *gifts* to *each* of His people and *all* of His church. He starts w/ **OT** reference to **Psa 68:18... (read v.8)**.
 - a. **Psalm 68** is one David's *victory psalms*. It celebrates the conquest of a *Jebusite* city and the return of the *Ark of God* to Jerusalem.
 - b. In the *victory parade* the king displays the *spoils of battle*.
 - c. He also leads **two** groups of *captives*...
 - i. The first group are his *vanquished enemies*.
 - ii. The second group are *no longer* captives – they are former Jewish **POWs**, *freed* by David and *restored* to Israel.
 - d. And *one more thing*...the conquering king has every right to *divide* the *spoils of victory* with his *faithful troops*! He gives them *gifts*.
 - e. Which is the *idea* Paul wants to bring out – Jesus has *conquered Satan & sin & death*, and our King is *willing & authorized* to give *gifts* to His people, as He *chooses*.
4. Paul then drills down into his **Psa 68** reference (*tweaked* a little – an apostle can do that!). So we see in **vv.9 & 10** (in *parentheses*):
 - a. *Christ ascended* – but that clearly *implies* something! In order for the *Eternal One* to *ascend*, He first has to **descend**.
 - b. Christ *descended* when He took on *flesh*, became a *man* (sinless, perfect), *died* on the cross for His people and was *buried*.
 - i. **I.e.** Paul is referencing Christ's *incarnation*: that the *Word became flesh & dwelt among us* (Jn 1).
 - ii. The apostle's ref to the "*lower parts of the earth*" is debated. It could provide the additional detail of *even down into the grave*.
 - iii. ...it might even possibly allude to *Christ visiting Hades* (1 Pt 3:19,20) between the *crucifixion & resurrection* to declare His *Calvary victory* to *fallen angels* – *incarcerated* since the days of the *Flood*!

- c. And the *Lord Jesus Christ*, the conquering *King of Glory*, raised from the grave, then ***ascended*** to the right hand of the Father, *far above the heavens*, where He *lives (right now!)* forever to *reign*. Over all *creation*. Over His *Church!* Over *you & me!*

Jesus gives *grace & gifts* to His *people*, & He also gives *gifts* to His *Church*
(read v.11).

1. Now Paul focuses on a particular *category* of gifts. These gifts are gifted *men* who are given to the *church* as *gifts*.
2. The apostle lists **four** critical *equipping gifts* (*gifted men*) given for the *health* of the church.
 - a. **OBTW**, this list & its order are very similar to 1 Cor 12:28 - *And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teacher**...* This verifies that there is a *sense* of *priority* to the list.
 - b. And perhaps you *recall* that Eph has already made references to the *apostles & prophets* in **2:20 & 3:5**....
3. Christ has given the church the gift of His *apostles*.
 - a. *Apostle* meant *representative* or *proxy*. These men ministered w/ the *authority of Jesus*.
 - b. Primarily, this is a referenced to His *disciples* – who were *with Him & witnessed* His resurrection – and to *Paul*, appointed by Jesus to be the *Apostle to the Gentiles*.
 - c. Secondly, in *this* context, it *might* include a group of men who worked w/ the *apostles*, like *Timothy* or *Silas* or *Barnabas*.
 - d. Their *mission* was to *start the church, nurture the church, & communicate* Christ's *instructions & teachings* to the *church*. By the Holy Spirit, the *apostles'* teachings (= Christ's) were *captured* in what we now call **NT**.

4. Christ has given the church the gift of His *prophets*.
 - a. The *prophets* also communicated *truth* to the *churches*. Sometimes that meant *explanations & applications* of existing teaching, sometimes they spoke about the *future*.
 - b. One example was *Agabus*, a *prophet* from Jerusalem. God directed him to warn the church of *famine* (Acts 11) & later of Paul's impending *imprisonment* (Acts 21).
 - c. It is *believed* that **NT** *prophets* ministered primarily in *their own individual churches* and *primarily* applied the Scriptures to *specific 1st century* needs.
5. The *gifts* of *apostles & prophets* disappeared by the close of the **1st** century, as the church became *established* & the **NT** *completed*.
 - a. I read an interesting observation this week that there is **no** record of any *incident* or *procedure* in **NT** to *refill* these offices as the *apostles* were *martyred*!
 - b. But the next **two** *gifts* of *gifted men* are still in *operation*...
6. Christ still gives the church the gift of *evangelists*.
 - a. *Evangelists* are particularly gifted to *communicate* the Gospel to men & women **w/o** Christ.
 - b. *Missionaries & church planters* are a good example of *evangelists*. You might call them "*the tip of the spear*" of the Great Commission.
 - c. And this week I read a *powerful appeal* to modern churches to *re-emphasize* the importance of *identifying & incorporating evangelists* into their ministry teams. What if we had a *Holy-Spirit gifted evangelist* in our church that we *set loose* to tell people about Jesus!
 - d. *Of course, we gotta be careful!* Even though Jesus has *blessed* the church with spiritually gifted *evangelists*, each one of us is still responsible to *witness* to our *neighbors*!

7. Christ gives the church the gift of *pastor - teachers*.

- a. Scholars put Paul's *intent* & his *grammar* get put *under the microscope* here. Is this **two** people: *pastors* and also *teachers*, or **one**: *pastor – teachers*?
- b. I believe that this is **one man**: the gift of a *local church leader* who is *pastor & teacher*.
 - i. There are actually **3 Gr** terms for *pastor* that the **NT** uses *interchangeably*: *pastor* & *elder* & *bishop*. **Bishop** seems to emphasize *leading* skills & **elder** suggests *spiritual character & lifestyle*.
 - ii. But **pastor** is the term Paul uses *here*; the underlying Gr word means **shepherd**. It's remindful of *nurturing & protecting & guiding & feeding* Christ's *flock*.
 1. **Jer 3:15** (God) – *I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge & understanding.*
 - iii. By *feeding* the Bible means **spiritual feeding – teaching**. Which is why the title is *hyphenated*. Pastors *teach*... In fact, **NT** associates local church leadership w/*teaching*.
 1. In **1 Tm 3 & Titus 1**, one of the criteria for an *elder* is his *ability to teach*.
 2. Another *caution* – Paul *isn't* suggesting that *only* pastors teach, but only that **every elder must be a gifted teacher**.

iv. Although I'm convinced *teaching/preaching* is the single **biggest** responsibility on every *pastor's* job description, the **NT** also suggests: **praying** (Act 6: *prayer* & the *ministry of the Word*), **leading** (godly example), **counseling** (individual, targeted Bible teaching), **modeling** (e.g. marriage, family), **encouraging** (weary!), **admonishing** (dealing w/ unruly, lax), **administering** (ministry), & **protecting** (spiritual error).

1. That's a *long list*, which is perhaps why the **NT** norm was for churches to have *multiple pastors*!
2. In fact, the indication is that every congregation should have *multiple pastors*.

8. The Lord is **no longer** giving *apostles & prophets*. He is **still** giving *evangelists & pastor-teachers*. Yet *all four* still serve the church. *How?*
 - a. Thru *God's Word*! Every one of these *four gifts* is associated w/ *teaching the Word*.
 - b. The Word is the product of the *pens of the apostles*, and they were reinforced by the **NT prophets**.
 - c. **Evangelists** still preach the *very same Good News* preached by Paul: "*for I delivered unto you as of **first** importance that which I also received, that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was **buried**, and that He was **raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He **appeared** [to many]!*"
 - d. Faithful **pastors** still *unfold* those *Gospel stories & precious letters* every Lord's Day to prayerfully *teach & preach the Word* to the church!

And as the Church receives these gifts, it grows strong (read v.12).

2. If you can picture this text as a *flowchart* for the church *traced* on a great roll of *engineering paper*, then as we come to **v.12**, then the apostle *unrolls* his *diagram* a little further to *explain* the next steps in developing a *strong & united* church.
 - a. We've seen that Christ gives *gifts* to His every one of His people.
 - b. As a part of that, He's given the gifts of these *gifted men*, w/their corresponding *offices*, to the *church*.
 - c. Now (12-16) he begins to point out the *results* of their "*Scripture-powered*" ministries.
 - d. The first **three** *truths* (12) are *progressive*. The *first* leads to the second, the *second* to third. Then **vv.13-16** will provide some *additional details* on the development of *strong congregation*.
 - e. The initial **three** are *equipping*, which leads to *serving*, which leads to *building up*

3. God gave the church *apostles & prophets & evangelists & pastors* for the purpose of *equipping* each saint in the *sanctuary*! That is the *immediate goal* of these ministries.
 - a. In a sense, the *apostles & prophets* have done their job by compiling our *training manual*. ☺ Who has their ***training manual*** w/ them today (hold up your *Bibles & your smart phones & your tablets!*)? ☺
 - b. *Evangelists* began the process by telling you the *Gospel* – that Jesus *died* to pay for your sins & was *raised* from the dead to *prove* that its true & that you need to *turn away* from your sins & *trust* in Christ, only & completely.
 - i. But wouldn't an **evangelist** *also* be useful to *train* us in how to be *effective witnesses*!
 - ii. And provide a *consistent example* of someone who shares his faith!?!

- c. *Pastors equip by teaching what the Bible means and then how to obey it.*
 - i. It suggests familiar ideas like: *teaching, preaching, disciple-making, training, mentoring, & modeling.*
 - ii. The pastor's primary *equipping lab* is probably the Sunday morning *pulpit*...
 - iii. But there are many other *venues & processes* for *equipping the saints.*
4. And we are *equipping* you for a purpose: **to serve** – spec (12 – middle) *to works of service.*
- a. If you *joined this church* because that's just what *good folks do* then you *don't get it!*
 - b. If you are showing up every once & awhile to get your “*Sunday morning faith-fix,*” you aren't following God's *plan* (Eph 4).
 - c. If you are coming to church to *fill your head* with *Bible trivia* then you are *missing the point!*
 - d. You joined this church to *worship...to witness...and to work tougher.* And that idea comes *straight out of this text!*
 - e. Your church (pastor, etc.) should *train* you to *read* your Bible, *pray*, *discern* truth from error, *share* your faith, *resist* temptation, *live* in community, *raise* your family, be a *good employee* (-er), *resolve* your conflicts, *take* your place in your congregation, *live & give* generously, do *good deeds*, ... *live* holy lives! ...**pause**...
 - f. We could certainly *grow* that list *but you get the point.* Being a Christian is *not* a **90** minute Sunday–morning entry on your weekly *to-do* list! You come here to *worship & be equipped* (that's a great **two** word *distillation* of what goes on, on Sundays), & you will *leave* here in a few minutes to *serve!*

5. And ultimately, as we are all *equipped* & we all *serve*, the *Body of Christ* is *built up*.
- a. Paul uses a word that suggests a *construction project*. The **KJV** uses the term “*edify*” < *edifice, building...or building a building!*
 - b. It occurred to me as I put together my *preaching notes* this week that I’ve used the term “*church*” over & over, but Paul hasn’t used it here *once!*
 - c. *Don’t get me wrong*, the apostle *is* describing God’s *blueprint* for the *church!*
 - d. But he chooses the expression “*the Body of Christ.*” Just glance at **1:22-23**.
 - i. That lovely title brings *beauty & eternal seriousness* to **who** we are & **what** we are being equipped to do.
 - ii. **BBC** belongs to *Jesus!* The Lord said, *I will build My church!*
 - iii. He wants you to become the Christian He has *saved & gifted &* is now *training* you to be.
 - iv. **You won’t ignore that, will you!?!**

So we've begun to trace Paul's *flowchart* of the church:

Begins...

The *Exalted Christ* (7) →
 Gives *gifts* to His people →
 incl. the *gift* of these *gifted men* (11) →
equip saints (12) →
minister (12) →
 (result) *build up* the Body of Christ (church) (12).

Next week (Lord willing)...we'll examine the details of *working together* & *growing stronger*....

So let me close by applying Eph 4's *church process* to a **2** specifics here @ **BBC**:

First, I've been explaining our new *mission statement* on Sunday mornings. Let me *read* that for you again (bulletin) & as I do, just *think* how this morning's verses explain our *mission* (i.e. **v.12**):

Our mission is to walk in love and make disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ as God's Word equips us to worship, to witness, and to work together. (2X)

Second application. Are you wondering how you can *serve* & *build up* your church? → Pray over your **Ministry Opp Form**, fill it out, & *turn it in*...! ☺

Third application. If you have been working You are a *vital part* of the plan! Your church *needs* you! We **work** & we **grow...together!**

...pray...