

## GOD'S PLAN FOR CHURCH GROWTH

As members of the body of Christ (which is the church of Christ—**Ephesians 1:22-23**), we are interested in helping it to grow. God's plan for church growth is in **Ephesians 4:11-16**.

In this passage, the process is not described only once, but twice. The process is found in **verses 11** and **12**, and it is found in **verses 15** and **16**. The middle part of this paragraph (**v.13-14**) defines the goal of the process, *"that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."*

**Verse 11** begins by listing the gifts that Jesus had given for the church's benefit. First, Paul mentions the apostles. Secondly, he mentions prophets. These are in order of importance in **1 Corinthians 12:28**. Both functions necessarily involved inspiration. An inspired teacher had an inspired calling. *Apostles* were chosen to be apostles by Jesus (**Galatians 1:1**). They had to be eyewitnesses of His resurrection (**Acts 1:21-26**). They are ruling on twelve thrones (**Luke 22:30**), and their word still has authority today (**Acts 2:42**).

The apostles had a unique authority to lay their hands on others and impart a spiritual gift (**Romans 1:11, Acts 8:14-25**). The Spirit decided who received which gift, and He determined that some receive the gift of prophecy (**1 Cor. 12:7-11**). This made them *prophets* who received and spoke the word of God by direct revelation.

The rest of the people listed in **Ephesians 4:11** may or may not have been inspired. Those who were inspired were to use the spiritual gifts given to them by the Spirit; the others were to use the natural abilities that God had given them. *Evangelists* (preachers) were those who proclaimed the gospel. Their focus was to reach the lost with the word of God, but, as **verse 12** indicates, they also were to equip the saints.

*Pastors* (shepherds) were spiritual leaders of the flock among them (local church—**1 Peter 5:1-3**). They were made elders, bishops (overseers), or pastors by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 20:17,28**) when they proved their leadership in the congregation by bearing the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22-23**) in their daily lives. Then the generic word *"teachers"* is used. Everyone in **Eph. 4:11** is a **teacher**.

**Verse 12** goes on to say that the purpose of these teachers in the church is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Many call the full-time preacher "THE minister." If this is the actual case, then that local church is in trouble (as we will see when we investigate **verse 16**). Instead all the teachers in **verse 11** are to equip the saints (all Christians as in **Philippians 1:1**) to minister. Every saint is to be a minister. Every Christian has a ministry.

"Ministry" means "service," not a work of a professional clergyman. The teachers' responsibility is to teach the saints, all the regular members to serve the Lord in their daily lives. Much of each one's ministry will be in the workplace, the home, and in the community (**Eph. 5:22-6:9**).

Religious assemblies are not the focus of our ministries; this should be a small (but necessary) part of our service to God. They are the teaching and training sessions designed to instruct us, strengthen us, and motivate us (**Hebrews 10:24-25**) to go out into the world and be a good example and share our faith with others. When the saints are taught, and they properly apply what they have been taught, then the church will grow.

First, it will grow in knowledge and wisdom. Paul prayed that our love would abound unto more knowledge and discernment (**Phil. 1:9-11**). Secondly, the increase will be seen in more activity. The assemblies are to be instrumental in provoking us unto greater love and good works (**Heb. 10:24-25**). The more we all teach (**Heb. 5:12**), the more we all sow (**1 Cor. 3:7**), the more we will reap (**2 Cor. 9:6**). God promises to give the increase, and the church will grow. This is not merely a theory. It is historical fact demonstrated by the first century Christians and recorded in the book of **Acts (2:47; 8:4; 9:31; 11:19-26; 16:5)**.

### EPHESIANS 4:11-12



Now let us look at **Eph. 4:15-16** to better understand how each part of the process contributes to edification. Instead of mentioning the teachers again, **verse 15** says what the teachers are to do—speak the truth in love. This

is the work of an evangelist (**2 Timothy 4:2**); it is the qualification of an elder (**1 Timothy 3:2**) because that is one of his functions (**Titus 1:9**).

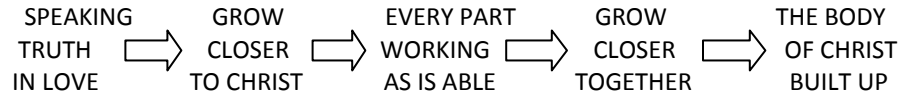
What they all teach is vitally important. It must be the truth, the word of God (**John 17:17; Romans 1:16-17**). Only the gospel of Christ has the power to change our lives and to save us.

Equally important is how we teach. It must be with love. This will determine our manner of speaking. Gentleness is the rule (**2 Timothy 2:24-26, Galatians 6:1-3**), but circumstances may call for an appropriate exception (**Acts 13:6-12**).

**Verse 15** goes on to say that the word causes each of us to grow closer to Christ. **Verse 13** says that we are to know Christ to the degree that we become like Him in our character and behavior. This draws us closer to Him as the branches are to the vine (**John 15:1-8**), and it naturally draws us closer to each other, which **verse 16** discusses.

**Verse 16** says the whole body is “*joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share.*” The togetherness of the church is based upon what **every** part supplies. Unity in variety is one of the strongest and most important attributes of any body. All the parts do not have the same function, but all the parts do have an important function for the same purpose. Whenever any part is not doing its share, unity is not present.

### EPHESIANS 4:15-16



I cannot make up for what is lacking in someone not performing up to their ability. If I do more for that purpose, then I was not doing all I could do before I started doing more to do that the other member ought to be doing.

Appearances may be deceiving. A church may be very active, but it may still not be functioning in the way God wants. In most organizations, 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Churches that function as a human organization instead of a body will eventually die out. Most members of churches look at their responsibility as attending weekly meetings, making their donations through which they do their work with little personal involvement, and leadership and influence are based on seniority.

If we call Bible things by Bible names, then we will not speak of church membership. We are members of a body, which means we will crave more interaction from each other and crave to be more involved ourselves in order to help each other do all we each are able. With this attitude of interdependence and purpose, the church will thrive and eventually grow numerically.