

God's Plans for the Church

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Ephesians 4:11-16
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So *point #1), God's Plan Equips The Church. God's Plan Equips The Church.* We see that in verses 11 and 12. And the question we should ask is, who did God give to equip the church? Well, in verse 11 it says, "He gave the Apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers." Now, I'm going to do something here, and Pastor Todd is going to scold me, because he is training guy's in the training center, and you shouldn't do this if you're preaching and teaching, but I just got to do it for the sake of time. That's the pastor's excuse, the sake of time. I don't have time to develop why I don't think apostles and the prophets aren't around anymore. But you can ask the pastors on the plaza all those questions, and just take as much time as you need. But just in short, the Apostles were there to validate the words of the Lord Jesus of what they had seen and heard.

We see that from 1 John. "We are witnesses of what we have seen and heard, and we proclaim to you today." Right? So they were there doing that. We have the Scriptures, which we call the canon, the 66 books of the Bible. We think that's complete, because of what have been said in Jude. "It's once for all, handed down to the saints," once for all. So we don't need any more "prophetic words" from people. We have everything we need for life and godliness. We see that in 1 Peter, and we also see when the Apostle John, the last apostle by the way, wrote Revelation. He said, "Do not add or take away to anything in this book, or your name's going to be taken away from the Lamb's Book of Life." So, there isn't a functional need for the apostles and prophets anymore, because we have the Word. Okay? So, any more questions, please ask them on the patio.

Evangelists, we still have evangelists. I love this group. Okay? We're all called to go, and proclaim, and share to all the world. We're called to share the Gospel with every tongue, tribe, and nation, and we know that's going to be successful, because we're going to see them in heaven. But some people are given an extra special kind of gift of evangelism. And if you're breathing, and you've met one of them, you know, because they're going to get the conversation to the Gospel pretty quickly. They're going to share the Gospel with you, and make sure you're Saved. Even though they did that yesterday, they're going to do it again, today, and tomorrow. It's just what they do. Praise God for the evangelists, those who have the spiritual gift of doing that. Paul even told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, so that is a pastoral obligation as well. But we still have evangelists.

Next, we see shepherds, and teachers there in that verse. Now if you have a different translation, shepherds may be translated pastors. So, that's the word by which we get pastor from. So, it's pastors, and teachers. Something that's pastor, teacher, but for our purposes, we're going to speak

to the group as a whole, that they are given to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Saints, by the way, are not a special group of people who are dead, who need to be validated by a papal system from miracles that they supposedly did when they were alive. Notice we are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Dead people aren't still doing the work of the ministry. So, that kind of nullifies that whole teaching in one verse. Okay? So this is an understanding of, if you are in the church, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you've been Saved by His grace, you're a saint. So, married couples, you can go around calling each other saints if you like.

We get poured into all the time, a lot here. I love it. There are classes for just about everything under the sun. In fact, you can even hear a series on Ecclesiastes from Pastor Darryl during the week, which talks about everything under the sun. We love that, but we don't want to be like what one of my favorite preachers calls a tadpole. You picture a tadpole in your mind? A big fat head, little, tiny body, can't really do anything or go anywhere. We don't want to just be full of knowledge with no outlet, like the Dead Sea, where we're just getting poured into, and not pouring back out. So, our equipping is for, like it says at the end of verse 12, for building up the Body of Christ, not just ourselves.

I also want to say that the pastors are shepherds of the Church who proclaim the truth. Like I said, we're just waiters delivering the truth. So, we proclaim, and it's the kerygma in Scripture. It's this delivery of what's been written. In 1 Peter chapter 5, it's described more of what shepherds do. Peter says, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Now I just want to say this because you need to know that if you've been at a church that went south, and people have just kind of hobbled out of there, they are not following Scripture. They are not treating you the way you're supposed to be treated and yes, there's normally sin on both sides when there's a problem, but when we sin, we want to ask for forgiveness. We want to receive that forgiveness from brothers and sisters in Christ, and we want to move on strengthened, because now we have another person to walk arm in arm with, as unified people in God's church.

So, pastors who shepherd are to be accountable examples. Accountable examples. Sometimes people like to just gloss over that, and like, "Ooh, that's awkward. You're kind of talking about yourself being an accountable example." Yeah, that's the point. If you ever preach, and teach, and you don't feel the weight of that, you shouldn't be doing it. Philippians 3:17, Paul says, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." Okay, so now you're on the hook, too. You're welcome, right? "And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

So, whenever we see someone who is following Christ, we can follow their example, and if they're not following Christ, we shouldn't follow their example. This idea of imitating your leaders is uncomfortable for some, but it's replete throughout Scripture. You can see it again in 1

Corinthians 4:16, or you can look in Hebrews 13:7, or you can look in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, and there are more. But just with that, just what I've said so far, you have the Philippian Church, the Corinthian Church, the Church at Thessalonica, and you have the Church in Ephesians. All of these passages talk about accountable examples. Paul is not saying to, "Hey, look at me, I'm great." He says in Philippians chapter 3:3, "I put no confidence in the flesh." We know ourselves. It's uncomfortable to say, "Hey, watch my example and you'll be like Christ." That should cause us to think, "What is this power of God at work in people? It must be incredible, because we need a lot of work."

Paul says, "We glory in Christ Jesus." No confidence in the flesh, but we glory in Christ. Why? Because it's not I who live, but Christ in me who lives. We're just the outer glove. I bring this up because sometimes it's hard to consider a love for the church, when the church seems to be the one that's brought all the problems. We need to realize that people have ignored the clear teaching of Scripture, and we become the casualties. We ourselves need to be examples. But I just want to say, when churches go south like that, that's not God's design, and you just need to know that, and I pray that that would be encouraging to you, so that you can be built up yourself, and have a love for the church that grows. Just pray and ask God to help Him develop that in you.

So there's the equipping ministry. Look further at verse 12 with me if you would. He says, "Were given to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ." So there's equipping and there's building, right? There's equipping and building. There are so many classes here that equip the saints for the work of the ministry. By the way, if you don't know which class to take, just take the one that's called Foundations. Okay? It is an amazing class, and I've had that class at other places many times. It's kind of like when you get the pro football team together, and the greatest coach of all times says, "Fellas, this is a football." Right? You want to start with the basics, and then build your foundation. That's how you know you're going the right direction. So that Foundations class is the one to take.

But equip here means to make someone completely adequate or sufficient. We're not supposed to walk around wondering, "How is God ever going to use me?" That shouldn't happen. I know you do, as well as I do, I want to be capable, and used by God in some way. When I decided to leave my career and become a pastor, because I loved hearing the preaching, and teaching of God's Word more than anything else, I knew I needed training. I remember one time, before I went to seminary, I was given the opportunity to teach at a college class, and it was Friday night, it was like 7:00. They're all... Worked all week, 50 hours or whatever, and now they're here to hear some guys try out teaching, and the room's really warm, and the eyelids were getting heavy, and at about 45 minutes, I decided to teach another 15 minutes, like the plane's going to land, but then it takes off again.

After that I asked like, "Hey," to my mentors, "How'd it go?" I'll never forget what he said. He's like, "Well, I want this to be encouraging." I was like... He couldn't think of something specific, but we need to put ourselves out there, so that God can use us in a way for His glory. That

doesn't mean that we're good at things. It means we're available. Just be available to God. "God, I don't know if you can use this broken-down pot, but I'm here, so if you want to use me, I'm willing."

So, the church exists to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. God wants to have an army full of equipped saints, and you see that. You see people pouring into the little ones back there constantly. There's tons of teachers who do that. You see people greeting people, and having this warm demeanor, and this encouragement, using the gifts of hospitality God has given them. You see people serving, and setting up chairs, and doing all these kinds of things, and this is the design of God's Church, that we would use the things God has given us, and made us capable for to serve the Church and lift high the name of Christ.

When it says, "To do the work of the ministry," in verse 12, ministry is kind of a general term that we slap on everything, but ministry just means service. Some of your translations may actually say service, for the work of service, for building up the Body of Christ. So, RBC exists to help people know, love and serve. It's not just a slogan. We equip the saints; you'll see the knowledge of the Son of God here later as well. You'll see all of these things just in this one passage. It's that we want Redeemer Bible Church to be a convictional church. That how we do things, and what we do, and what we put our time and effort towards, come right out of Scripture. It's not an option for us.

You might say, "Well, are we doing church the way God wants us to?" Well, one way you can think about that is to go back to when the Church started, and think about what happened when the Church started? Okay, so that's Acts 2:42. Peter's preaching. You remember Peter? He's the great foot in mouth speaker. He's always getting himself into trouble, and he's misinterpreting things, right? You remember that, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter's there, Jesus is there. Jesus is speaking to Moses and Elijah. I mean, if there's any group you should probably not talk and just listen, it's that, right, and that's where Peter speaks.

Then the Father says, "Listen to my Son." It's like this quadrilateral rebuke for Peter. Well, that's the guy who's preaching in Acts 2. Something happened to him so dramatically that when he preaches, thousands of people get saved in Acts 2. Not because Peter was so great, but because the Word is so powerful, it's so transformative, and it does its work. It's like a lion, you just let it out of the cage, and it does its thing. You don't have to say, "Go eat." Right? It's what it does.

Acts 2:42, what did these saved and baptized people do? They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Sounds like we've got Church. That's teaching, that's fellowship, that's communion, that's prayer. You go, "What about the singing?" Well, singing is replete with God's people. Later, specifically, in Ephesians 5, after our passage, he talks about singing and making melody to one another with your hearts to the Lord, right? So, worship is this outpouring of your heart with Scriptural words which is pleasing to God. So, all of the elements that we have here at the church, the mainstays of our church, they're conventionally in place, because we see them as not an option, but given to

us by God Himself as the plan for the Church. So therefore we build up the Body of Christ with the things he gave us.

So point one is God's plan equips the Church. ***Point #2), is that God's Plan Unifies The Church. Unifies The Church.*** Chapter 4:13 says this, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." That, friends, is a tall order, that our maturity is supposed to aim towards, grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This verse in verse 13 of chapter 4 shows two results of God's plan for our lives. First, the plan brings a unity to our Church. It says, "Until we all attain to the unity," of what? Of the faith. See, teaching is in there. What faith? Well, that's the doctrine that we teach.

All the elders, the pastors, the teachers, they have to agree not to teach a different doctrine. Why? Because teaching a different doctrine divides the Church, and we want the Church to come together, to know why we teach what we teach, to know why we believe what we believe, and have a unified front, so if there's somebody in a class who has a question about it, we know they're going to get the answer that we think is correct in Scripture. If a teacher is teaching a different doctrine in a class, in any class, then that is divisive, and it separates people. It makes them not have this unity that we are looking for. It's not only just a unity of the faith, but it's of the knowledge of the Son of God.

That's why other cults who talk about Jesus, they don't see Jesus in the same way as we do, we don't call them brothers and sisters in Christ, because they don't have the same knowledge of the Son of God. They have a different knowledge, a different understanding of who Jesus is, and who He said He was. So this plan creates mature Christians who grow into the fullness of Christ. Paul is going to go on in chapter 4, and he's going to talk about specifically what our lives look like now, now that we're following this plan for the Church, and he's going to talk about putting off the old self, with its corrupt and evil desires, and putting on the new self, which is created, "After the likeness of God."

Your new nature is created after the likeness of God. It's not just that God thought it was a good idea to bring us all together, and it's not just that God saves us through Jesus Christ by His grace, which He does, but He's changed us. There is this effective, visible, outward change that happens, and it's called the likeness of God. You see, our pursuit is no longer ourselves. Our pursuit is Jesus. Our pursuit is no longer our own desires, and will. Those have all been changed, and now we pursue God, and as we pursue God in these ways, and we become more like Him, we understand the weight of this. That God is changing us, and making us more like Him for His glory.

So we want to make sure at church that we're building up the unity of the Church, not tearing it down. We don't want to be the person who goes around and is like, "Oh, there's so-and-so, talking again," making divisive conversations. We want to become mature Christians, not just hitting cruise control. I mean, if you've been a Christian for 50 plus years, I want to talk to you. I want to find out, how did you do that? How did you, for decade, after decade, after decade, stay

the course? How did you continue to pursue Christ? Because you must have had difficult times. You must have thought, "What am I doing?" At times.

I love specifically asking people who've been married for a long time, 40, 50, 60 years. That's amazing. I asked somebody that a few weekends ago, and their answer was... It was so clear. They didn't have to think, they didn't pause at all. They just said, "Only by the grace of God." It's God's grace at work in us that transforms us into His likeness for His glory. That's the beauty of the plan for the Church. When churches go off track, you need to know they have skipped Ephesians 4:13. They have tossed it to the curb and look, we're just one step away from doing things like that ourselves, right? We're not beyond sinning. It's just sin. We're not beyond those things. So, we continue to submit ourselves fully to God, and pray that He keeps us on track as we confess our sins, and we live by the grace of God.

So, why do we continue to learn and grow? There are even explicit reasons given. Look in verse 14 with me. "So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes." I mean, there are tons of deceitful schemes out there to lure you away from the truth of God. There are a lot of doctrines that seem mostly right, like a cup of water with a drop of cyanide. It's mostly water, but it's poison.

So doctrine here just simply means teaching. That's what doctrine is, a teaching on a given thing. So, that's what good, solid expository preaching does. We're going over the doctrine of the Church today. The doctrine helps us not be tossed by every wind of doctrine. If you've ever been to the beach, you've probably seen a little kid tossed by the waves. You can see the child running down the beach, and if you've had little kids do that before and you're like, "Where's the parent?" You're like, "Oh no, they're going to get it." They just keep running to the water, and their little feet go in, and then all of a sudden, the wave hits them, and it's like... It knocks them over.

Well, if you are steady, and have a strong foundation, you just slice through that wave. You just keep going. It has no ability or power to take you off course, because God, in His love and mercy, has helped us to understand the truth, right? Truth is spiritually discerned. It's not about intelligence, or anything else. It's about submitting ourselves to the Lord God, and the study of it. So, a well-equipped church turns the world, the culture, all of these fires that are going on, into like a lion without teeth. Looks dangerous, but no real effect, right? So, correct doctrine gives us the ability to have a sweetness about our love for the Church, because we see how it protects us, and guides us, and it helps us be stable. We all want to be stable, right?

I mean, since I moved to Arizona last year, in June, when it was warm, you and I need to get on the same terms here with our definitions, it was very hot, and I think that's on the way, but I am enjoying going mountain biking with some of the guys from church. I don't go as often as I'd like, but every time it amazes me what these bikes can do. I was used to Walmart bikes. It's got two wheels, and a handlebar. Like what else do you need? It's a bike, right? Well, these things are designed to keep you on the trail. So, when we're flying down the trail, going all over the place, and hitting rocks and stuff, and these guys are trying to keep up with me? I mean, when I'm

trying to keep them in sight, because it's like this, and I'm like, "Oh no, I wonder if I should have gone left, or right, or where are they?" They always find me.

But I appreciate the design of these bikes. I don't want to become a shish kebab wrapped around a cacti. That does not sound pleasant to me. While the trail is fun, my appreciation, though I appreciate all of the beauty that we get to see, is mainly for the bike, and especially the brakes. They work very well. I appreciate the stable design. You see, when you apply the Church's plan, the plan that God has given, you appreciate it. Now, the bike is still the bike in the garage, but I don't quite appreciate it as much unless I'm going downhill 20 miles an hour or so.

But you appreciate God's design when you utilize it. Sometimes we're just off course. We think we're doing church the way God wants us to. We think we're taking it in, and we're getting classes and stuff, but we're not applying it. We're not using it to build up the Body of Christ. We're just using it for our benefit. Well, we should use it for our benefit, but we should also pour it out to others for their benefit. God's doctrine brings stability. God's plan brings stability, but we must trust and apply it in order to enjoy it. If you've been hurt, and you just pump the brakes on God's plan for the Church in your life, I'd encourage you to get back on, and start riding again. That is when you start to enjoy the beautiful, wonderful plan of God that He calls the Church.

So point number one is that God's plan equips the Church. Point number two is that God's plan unifies the Church. **Point #3), is that God's Plan Grows the Church.** Look in verse 15 if you would. It says this, "Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head into Christ." Preaching is speaking the truth. It's declaring what's already been written. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." So we preach Christ, because we preach the truth. We preach the Word. Jesus said He is the Logos, right? That's a name for Him. The Word was with God in the beginning.

So we preach it from the pulpit, from the pews. Well, I guess we don't have pews. We preach it from the chairs. We preach it in classes, we preach it all over the place, because that's where the power lies, and we do so in love. 1 Corinthians 13 says, "If we don't have love, we gain nothing." You can have every single gift at its maximum potential, but if we're not living in love, we're just a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. I used to even share the Gospel with people when I wasn't Saved. I think it was mostly out of arrogance, or trying to parrot what I heard at church. But we need to be real with ourselves, that other people need the same kind of love, and latitude that we desire as well. So, that's why we say, when you're speaking the truth in love, that's how we grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ.

We have some amazing truths to consider. Have you ever just thought about, and I'm sure you have, but have you thought about recently, just the depth of the grace of God, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us? Ephesians 2 says, "We were following the prince of the power of the air, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you've been saved." Not because we were better than anybody else, or assented to some knowledge that we need to, or deserve it. We don't deserve it. We all deserve the same

place, and it's not heaven. That is the depth of God's grace to us. When we speak about that truth, and preach that truth, we understand that we're only here by the grace of God.

You'll have to listen to the end of the other sermons to hear all the other ones I talked about, but I want to get to this. Up till now, you're thinking, "Hey, you said there are no bench players. What about that? Is that just a talking point or is that a biblical truth? What about that one? Does it matter if I'm here? Will the church do just fine without me? I mean my part to play is so small. In fact, I don't even know what my part is anymore." Look in verse 16 of Ephesians 4. "As we grow into Christ, from whom the whole Body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

When how many parts? Each part, every single part of the Body of Christ, when it's working, it builds itself up in love. When it's functioning the way God wants us to, we are designed to have the Body grow into a healthy Body that brings God glory. You matter. You specifically. The Church is missing out if you're not serving in some way. That could be on the weekend, that could be during the week, that could be calling people to encourage them. There are a lot of different ways to serve, but God has so designed the Body for that specific purpose, that we are valued.

No, that's not just some... Again, a talking point. Let me prove that to you as well. 1 Corinthians 12:18 says this, "But as it is, God arranged the members in the Body, each one of them as He chose." You are here on purpose. On God's purpose. God wants to use you specifically for His glory. He says, "The parts of the body that seem weaker are indispensable." Is that how you feel? Do you feel indispensable? He says, "We give the lesser greater honor." Do you see how loving God's plan is for the Church? Do you see how amazing that is? As you and I grow, and apply this plan to equip, unify, and grow the Church, we all benefit. We all benefit because of God's plan. As I think about the future of Redeemer Bible Church, I'm excited to see how He's going to use each and every one of you for His glory. Let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for this amazing passage. Lord, I pray that you'd encourage us today with Your Word. Encourage us, Lord, that You have a specific job for us to do. Thank You for all of the people who teach and lead here. Thank You for all of the volunteers, and the servants. Lord, thank You for people who have a ministry during the week. We pray that it's all to Your glory, and Your glory alone. Amen.