

OCTOBER 13, 2019

WALKING FORWARD

Ephesians 4:11-16

INTRODUCTION

The church is an organism meaning that it is designed to grow. The Lord has equipped the church with gifts which, when operating in love and truth, bring about fruitful saints, equipped to demonstrate the life of heaven on earth. This growth is not only to bring about the kingdom of God upon the earth but, to build and strengthen faith. Effective witness of the gospel to the world always follows effective in-reach where advancement in faith, unity and community encourage believers to live out their faith with evident distinction.

EQUIPPERS GIVEN (Ephesians 4:11)

The enthroned and reigning Lord is present among His church through the gifts given for their edification and maturity. The church cannot become like Christ without the proper functioning without these specific four-fold gifting. In our day there has been the emergence of those who call themselves apostles and or prophets. According to the scripture, however, these two gifts are no longer necessary since their purpose was, by the Spirit, to establish the authoritative Word of God (Ephesians 2:20). One can and do act prophetically (*speaking boldly the Word of God*) and operate in the spirit of an apostle (*being sent or commissioned by the church to spread the gospel where it is not known – see Acts 13:1-3*). Yet, in each of those instances neither is designated as one who *is* a prophet or an apostle since no one can add to the foundation – the Word of God (Ephesians 2:20). Another point that challenges those who would be apostles is found in the criteria used in selecting Judas' replacement which no one in these days could fulfill (Acts 1:21-22). *Evangelists* (those who are gifted in proclaiming the gospel effectively to the lost), as well as *pastors and teachers* (those gifted in caring for the saints as well as preaching and defending the gospel) are the gifts that are present within the church today. Apostles and prophets were moved to communicate the Word of God while the evangelists along with the pastor-teacher were given to spread the gospel throughout the world and to guard as well as equip the saints to grow in doctrine and practice.

TO MOVE BELIEVERS FORWARD (Ephesians 4:12-14)

The church is to be mobilized to impact the world with the gospel and this is *the* purpose of the gifts given in verse 11. Christians are created to move, not sit. They are created for ministry – works of service within and without the church. Those who are gifted to accomplish this must understand they are equipped for God's glory as well as for the health of the church and not their own fame. Growth is not to be viewed merely in numbers but in the mobilization of the saints in laboring for the advancement of the kingdom of God and unity in the body (Ephesians 4:12). This work of the *evangelists, pastors and teachers* is not complete until believers are united in faith or doctrine (Ephesians 4:6-7) and evidence Christ likeness in the whole of their lives and relationships (Ephesians 4:13). This goal of Christlikeness can only be achieved in the Spirit, is to be the singular purpose and focus of the leadership of the church. Paul teaches that the measurement of our effectiveness must always be in believers shaped in the *fullness of Christ*. Internally they are experiencing an ongoing transformation of desire and delight in Christ which enables them to remain strong in devotion to Christ and truth amid the temptations of deceit and false teaching (Ephesians 4:14). The proof of this devotion is seen in the saint not merely imitating Christ but being like Christ in the church and society.

AS A BODY (Ephesians 4:15-16)

One aspect of the Body is that we are united in love – a common love *of* Christ and *for* Christ. Yet, love for one another must mark the church's engagement in community. Deception characterized not only false teaching but also immaturity (Ephesians 4:14). Unity in the body is only preserved by a commitment to speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). No one in the church can grow in maturity without genuine, Christ-centered relationship with those in their faith family. Christ will not receive individuals; He will receive His Bride – the whole of the church. For that reason, our desire to grow is to be seen in connection with the growth of those in the church we belong. Paul strengthens this argument saying that growth happens *when each part is working properly* (Ephesians 4:16). That is, when the present gifts of leadership given by Christ to the church are working properly the Body grows and matures in Christ likeness. This can also be applied to *every* member in the church. God has gifted all of us for the purposes of being blessings to our local congregations. If we are not operating in our gifts, in love (working properly) we not only are being disobedient but are also in danger of being hindrances to the growth of others within the body.