

Ephesians 4:12-16 Answers Why Churches Need Leaders

**** **Why did Christ gift the church with leaders (4:11-16)?** The reason He gave the church leadership gifts “to” (in order to) to equip the saints for ministry (Hendriksen, p. 198).

Preposition: The word “to” (4:11) is from *pros* and in this case means a goal aimed at or striven toward with a conscious purpose (BAGD, p. 710).

— Equip —

1. Church leaders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. **What does it mean to equip someone for something (4:12)?** In English, to equip means to furnish for service, to fit out, to supply whatever is needed for efficient action, to prepare someone with a skill. The KJV translates this as “the perfecting of the saints”. The Greek word here is from the noun, *katartismos*; preparation as in thorough training or discipline (BAGD, p. 418). It was used with reference to mending a net or reframing a ship (MATBS class notes, Dr. Richard Henderson, 1983) and the setting of a bone (BAGD, p. 418).

The word work (*ergon*) is also a noun. What are some synonyms for the noun work (4:12)? Synonyms include occupation, employment and job.

Application: Having an effective ministry involves work. Ministry does not simply happen. You are to work at it. Job number one for every one of us who believes in Jesus is ministry. Further, whatever ministry God has given you should be given serious attention, as you would any work, job or occupation.

Whatever ministry God has given you, do you really “work” at it or do you play at it?

What does the word ministry mean (4:12)? Ministry is from *diakonia* and simply means service. Each believer is to work at serving Christ.

ESV 2 Thessalonians 3:11 . . . we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

2. **What ministry has God given you to work at (4:12)?** *Rhetorical.* The possibilities are endless. It may be educating your children at home, bring up your children in the fear of the Lord, teaching, serving others, prayer, evangelism, a wife serving her husband, hospital visitation, counseling, older women training younger women, counseling, caring for the sick, encouraging others, etc.

3. **Based on 4:11-12, are church leaders more like the star quarterback on the field or the coach on the sidelines?** *Explain.* In one sense, and without pressing the analogy too far, church leaders are to be coaches on the sidelines who equip the church to be the players on the field. The saints are in the “ministry” (4:12) as surely as are any church leaders.

Each believer has a sphere of influence and a God-given spiritual gift that is to be used to serve others. In as much as there are many more non-leaders than there are leaders, if nothing else than through sheer numbers the non-leaders do far more ministry than do the leaders.

Prophets equip the church through the encouragement of their prophecies and prepare the church to face tough challenges. Teachers equip the church to know right from wrong through their teaching and also in training others how to teach. Evangelists build up the church by adding to its numbers but they are to also equip the rest of the church in how to evangelize.

— Building Up —

Based on 4:12, what is the purpose, or reason behind, equipping the saints? The reason church leaders are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry is so that the body of Christ will be built up.

Are there two things in 4:12 that church leaders are to do or only one? *Explain.* It all depends on the placement of the comma (which is not inspired). Some take it that church leaders are to be doing both the equipping and the building up. However, the Greek could also be read so as to mean that the purpose for the equipping of the saints is so that both leaders and saints ministering together will build up the body of Christ. The entire church should be engaged in spiritual labor. Thus it might be rendered, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry with a view to the building up of the body of Christ” or “so as to build up the body of Christ” (Hendriksen, p. 198).

In the sports world, what does it mean to be a bodybuilder? A bodybuilder is someone who does special exercises to build a brawny musculature.

Joke: I’m been told I have the body of a god: *Buddha!*

4. Both church leaders and saints are to be bodybuilders, building up the body of Christ.

What does it mean to do that? The KJV renders this “edifying”. The Greek beneath “building up” is *oikodomé*. Literally it refers to the construction of a building. Figuratively it means to strengthen spiritually (BAGD, p. 558-559). Thayer defined it as “the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness” (#3619, p. 440).

The entire church, leaders and non-leaders alike, are to build others up in the Lord, to strengthen people’s faith and walk with the Lord.

— The Unity of the Faith —

According to 4:13, how long is all this equipping and building up supposed to last? This ministry is to continue “until” we all attain unity and knowledge of the Son of God. In 4:12 we are given the purpose of leaders and here in 4:13 we are given the duration of their ministry. These are also the goals (4:13).

Preposition: “Until” (4:13) is from *mechri*, a conjunction that tells you how long before something happens (BAGD, p. 515).

5. Based on the context leading up to this, what would it look like for us all to attain to the unity of the faith (4:13)? *See back to 3:1-6, 4:1-6.* This probably refers to the church maintaining the unity written about earlier in the chapter, a unity despite ethnic diversity (Jew and Gentile). Since there are not a lot of Jewish believers in most churches today, this could extend to unity in any church despite cultural differences, ethnic differences, national differences, etc.

Lack of unity is a mark of immaturity.

ESV **Matthew 12:25** . . . Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

What does it mean to be unified in the knowledge of the Son of God (4:13)? Closely associated with the unity of the faith is the knowledge of the Son of God. We are to be unified in our knowledge of Jesus. Beyond the primary application of unity between Jew and Gentile, there should be agreement about Jesus' identity, work and teachings: Jesus is God in the flesh, the 2nd person of the Trinity, who died on the cross to pay for our sins and who rose from the grave and who deserves our worship.

Sometimes it is cried, "Doctrine divides; Christ unites". This is a false dichotomy. One writer boasted that in his church doctrine was unimportant: "I don't ask him about his beliefs and he does not ask me about mine." Yet what if one of them worships a false Christ? What if he believes Jesus was merely a great teacher, or only a prophet, or an angel in human form and not God?

Amos asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Am 3:3, or as I like to say it, "unless there be a creed"). Doctrine does not divide; contentious people divide. One of the best ways to unify a church is with a strong faith in Jesus as well as a mature understanding of His person and teachings (doctrine).

— **Mature Manhood** —

6. As relates to Christianity, what does mature manhood look like (4:13)? *See ahead to 4:14.* Feminists probably recoil from this wording in horror!

ESV **1 Corinthians 16:13** Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

The contrast here is with being children (4:14). There is such a thing as being mature versus immature. There will always be Christians in the church who are immature, especially as new converts are added. The goal is for all of us to end up in mature manhood spiritually: walking in love, living by faith, worshipping in unity with other people and with a full measure of the fullness of Christ. Looking ahead to the "so that" of 4:14, mature manhood spiritually means we are no longer like children who are tossed to and fro by the waves of false teaching.

— The Fullness of Christ —

7. What is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13)? Christ is the measure, the standard, for maturity. We are to be full of God, full of the Spirit and full of Christ. We are to be filled with Christ, to overflow with Christ, to be dominated by Christ.

What does stature mean (4:13)? In English, stature has to do a person's with height, size and figure ("She was small in stature"). Figuratively, it refers to one's importance or reputation gained by ability or achievement ("A leader of international stature"). The Greek word (*hélíkiá*) carries the idea of maturity of age or fullness of time (Thayer, p. 277).

Thus, the measure, the standard, for maturity is being filled with Christ, which means to be controlled by Christ, under the influence of Christ, Christ-like.

The Trinity: Ephesians 3:19 spoke of being filled with God the Father and 5:19 will speak of being filled with the Spirit.

— No Longer Children —

8. What benefit of spiritual maturity is given in 4:14? Based on the wording of the text, we are to be mature "so that" we will no longer be children, tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

Preposition: "So that" (4:12) is from *hina* and generally means "that, in order that, so that". The NAS has "as a result". The KJV simply has "that".

Synthesis: 4:12 states the a major *reason* for church leaders ("to" equip); 4:13 states *how long* their ministry is to last ("until" maturity is reached) and 4:14 states a *benefit* of all this ("so that" we are no longer children).

9. In this context, what does it mean to be children (4:14) as opposed to mature manhood (4:13)? A spiritual child falls victim to bad doctrine and is suckered by craftiness and deceitful schemes (4:14). Those who are mature in Christ are more stable.

Self Test: *Are you a grown up or a child?*

10. What can we learn about bad doctrine from 4:14? See 1 John 4:1, Jude 1:4, Revelation 2:2., Titus 1:9. Bad doctrine is not accidental. It is the result of human cunning, craftiness and deceitful schemes. Satan will see to it that ungodly people invent and spread bad doctrine to confuse spiritual children with the church. Bad doctrine is purposeful. It is aggressive. It is presented in a crafty and deceitful way. Like a wolf in sheep's clothing, it can be hard to detect.

Trotsky is supposed to have said, "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." Similarly, you may not be interested in false teaching, but false teaching is interested in you.

11. Why did Paul compare bad doctrine to waves and wind (4:14)? The Greek term used here is nautical (Wuest, Vol. I, p. 103). Waves toss boats about (this way and that way) and the wind blows things that drift in various directions. Wind often changes direction quite frequently. So too bad doctrine comes at you from all directions and will toss the unstable about, to and fro.

Word Study: “Carried about” (4:14) is from *periphero*; *peri* means around (as in perimeter) and *phero* (basis for our word ferry) means to carry. Thus, to carry around in circles (Wuest, Vol. I, p. 103).

What is cunning (4:14)? Cunning is from *kubeia*, “to play dice”. It carried negative connotations because dice player often cheated and defrauded their fellow players. *Kubeia* is the basis for the English word “cube”, two of which form dice, a gambling tool. The NAS renders *kubeia* as “trickery”; the KJV has “sight” (as in sleight of hand).

Word Study: “Deceitful” (4:14) is from *plané* which originally meant to wander or to stray (Thayer, p. 4103). It was used to refer to asteroids which do not follow a set course as do planets (Dr. Richard Henderson, class notes, MABTS, 1983). In fact, it eventually became the basis for our word “planet”. Figuratively, it refers to a person who wanders or strays mentally, morally or doctrinally. Then it came to refer to deceit, error or fraud.

What do you think of what you think of a scheme, as in a Ponzi scheme? The Greek is *methodia* (“methodical”); used only negatively in the New Testament. It means deceitful scheming, wiles, stratagems (BAGD, p. 499).

ESV 1 John 4:1 . . . do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

ESV Jude 1:4 . . . certain people have crept in unnoticed . . . who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

*Teaching that the homosexual lifestyle is acceptable to God is perverting the grace of God into sensuality.

ESV Titus 1:9 (An elder) must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The Ephesian church evidently got Paul’s message: Jesus Himself later commended them for sounding out false teachers (Re 2:2):

ESV Revelation 2:2 I know your works . . . how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

Lack of unity is a mark of immaturity. Part of Paul’s solution for immaturity was the teaching of Christian doctrine.

— Grow Up —

Rather than remaining children tossed about by bad doctrine, what are we to do (4:15-16)?

Rather than remain confused children, we are to grow up in Christ and teach the truth.

12. Based on 4:15, what is the goal or purpose of teaching? Teaching should help us to grow up in every way into Christ. Teaching must not merely be a content dump; the goal is not merely information but also transformation.

13. Based on 4:15, in what context must truth always be presented? *See 1 Corinthians 13:1.* The truth must always be spoken in love and it must grow people up into Christ.

A person can be just as straight as gun barrel theologically and just as empty. It is not enough to merely teach the truth. It must be coupled with love.

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

ESV John 13:35 . . . all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

14. What does Paul compare the church to 4:15-16? Paul continued his analogy of the church as the body of Christ, with Christ as head and each believer making up a part of it and playing a role in building up the rest of the body. This take us back to 4:12. Paul has come full circle from be equipping and built up 4:12 to ending with being equipped and built up.

15. Based on 4:16, what is the impact when each believer works properly and uses his spiritual gift? *See 1 Corinthians 12:7, 12.* When each believer uses his gift, the result is that the church builds itself up in love.

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

ESV 1 Corinthians 12:12 . . . just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

So What?

16. What purpose do church leaders serve (4:11ff)?

17. How can you keep from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine (4:14)?

18. Suppose a church had no one in with any leadership gifts. What risk would they be running?

19. Why do you think so many house churches have no one with any of these leadership gifts? In my experience, I have found that most Western house churches are far too small to have the diversity of spiritual gifts that Christ wants the church to have. Even if the Ephesians 4:11 ministers are itinerant and not found in every church, many house churches are so small that they never have anyone qualified to serve even as elder. Typically, no one gifted to teach is present in the church. As a result, these micro-churches fall short of the New Testament standard. Their members are not equipped for ministry, not built up in the faith and are slow to mature. Disciples are not being made. The best thing that can be said is that such a church's shelf-life is often very short. Why do house churches not have deacons? Simply because they don't need them; they are accomplishing much by way of ministry.

One brother observed that while on one hand they insist on meeting in homes (the New Testament example), on the other hand they violate the much more important New Testament pattern of having elders and teachers. It is far better to have qualified elders and not meet in a home than to meet in a home and not have elders.

The problem is that the modern nuclear family is far different than was a Roman household. A typical Western house church is composed of a small handful of believers around a table in an intimate environment sipping coffee and worshipping. A Roman household was composed of an extended family of multi generations complete with servants and their families. The home was not considered nearly as much of a private retreat as are our modern homes. The house often doubled as a business and with an office and was more like a modern store with strangers commonly coming and going. Further, the common Roman house plan had large open areas, such as the atrium (a formal entrance hall) or the peristylum (a colonnaded garden) that could accommodate scores of believers gathered for church.

Priorities: The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Ideally every church should be large enough to have leadership in place than can equip, build up, unify and mature the congregation. Fulfilling the *function* of the church is much more important than slavishly following the New Testament *form* of the church.

God's heart is for the church ~ the bride of Christ (Ep 5:25-27). What is the purpose of the church? See *Ephesians 1:3-6, 14-14, 2:4-7, 3:20-21*. The church exists to the praise of God's glorious grace, to the praise of His glory, to show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ, to glorify God.

How are we, the church, to glorify God and help build up His bride? Imagine a diagram of an aero plane, looking at it straight on. In the center is the fuselage. This represents the church's core goals: to glorify God through worship, obedience, disciple making, equipping, teaching, and training. In this plane diagram, out from the core fuselage, are two wings. One wing could represent evangelism, outreach and missions. The other wing could represent the planting of new churches. The church glorifies God as it does these things together in tandem.

These things are the goals, the ends. A study of the New Testament can give us guidelines on how to accomplish these ends (the means to the end). Based on the New Testament example, a church of thousands of people is too big to accomplish this. Conversely, a tiny Western house church of just a few people is too small to accomplish this. New Testament churches were composed of scores of people, maybe even between one and two hundred folks, but not hundreds of people or thousands in the same congregation.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher's note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Coving each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

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