

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:11-13

Context

- **v7-10** - v11 begins “So Christ himself gave...” which reminds us that these verses flow naturally from the previous verses. In v7 Paul told us that “to each one of us grace as been given as Christ apportioned it.” Christ gives gifts to all his people “in order to fill the whole universe” (v10). Christ’s purpose is therefore to fill the whole universe with his rule (see back to 1:9-10 and 1:20-23.) This is important to see as we now focus on the church in v11 onwards. Christ’s purpose for his church (v13) and his purpose for the universe are linked.
- **v14-16** - Although we are just studying v11-13 this week it is important to notice that the theme of building up the church to maturity continues into v14-16. The consequence of being a mature church is that “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves...” (v14.)

Structure

There is a simple structure to these verses that helps us as we study them

(Christ) ascended higher
than all the heavens...

↓
... **IN ORDER** to fill
the whole universe...

↓
... **SO** Christ himself
gave the Apostles, the
prophets, the
evangelists, the pastors
and teachers...

↓
... **TO** equip his
people for works of
service...

↓
...**SO THAT** the body
of Christ may be
built up...

... **UNTIL** we all reach unity
in the faith and in the
knowledge of the Son of God

... **AND** become mature,
attaining to the whole
measure of the fullness of
Christ.

Notes and Tricky Bits

• *Apostles and Prophets*

- The reference to apostles and prophets here seems to be referring to their foundational role in the establishment of the church and the New Testament (see 2:20 and 3:5 and the notes for these studies.)

• *Are there apostles and prophets in the church today?*

- The term apostle is used in different ways in the New Testament;
 1. On one occasion it is used to describe all Christians when Jesus says “A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent (same greek word as used for apostle) greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:16.) In that sense all Christians are sent out by Christ into the world and so it could be argued that all Christians are apostles/‘sent ones’ though this would be potentially very confusing.
 2. There were what Stott refers to as ‘Apostles of the Church,’ people who were sent out by a church either as messengers or on some other errand (see 2 Corinthians 8:23, Philippians 2:25.)
 3. There were the ‘Apostles of Christ’ men specially commissioned by the risen Christ who were witnesses of his resurrection. This included the 12 (with Matthias replacing Judas), plus Paul and James (the brother of Jesus.)
- In answer to the question, “Are there Apostles today?” we can therefore say that all Christians are still sent out by Christ on mission and that churches still send out missionaries (though it is very rare for them to be called apostles) but that there are no longer ‘Apostles of Christ’ because there are no eye-witnesses of the risen Christ alive today.

• *What about Prophets today?*

- The main use of the word prophet in the Bible is as someone who was “a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation” (Stott.) When one of these prophets such as Isaiah spoke they could legitimately say, “Thus says the LORD.” With the completing of the New Testament canon the work of such prophets was completed. This is why Paul describes these prophets, along with the apostles, as foundational in the establishing of the church (2:20). Prophets in this sense cannot exist today because if they did then we would have to add their words to scripture and the whole church would be compelled to listen. This line of arguing lies behind the claims of both Mormonism and Islam to be fuller revelations than Biblical Christianity.
- There is much debate over whether prophecy does continue today and if it does continue then exactly what it is. This really is not the place to get into what is a complex argument. All I would say is that we need to be careful when speaking about prophecy that we do not in any way undermine the uniqueness of the foundational Apostles and Prophets. We must be very careful not to set any modern day prophecy alongside scripture as equal or even superior to scripture. Scripture is our ultimate authority.

• *Evangelists*

- Very little is said about evangelists in the rest of the New Testament (see Acts 6:3-6 and 21:8 and 2 Timothy 4:4-5.) The word and the actions of Philip suggest that they were engaged in the proclamation of the gospel. While the term included itinerant evangelists going from place to place proclaiming the gospel it was not limited to them. Timothy was placed within a static congregation and yet he is told to do the

work of an evangelists amongst his other pastoral duties. Furthermore, here in Ephesians 4, Christ gives Evangelists to equip the church for works of service. This implies that Evangelists not only spent time sharing the gospel with non-Christians, they also spent time equipping the rest of the church for evangelism.

- ***Pastors and Teachers***

- Pastors are those who are to shepherd Christ's flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; cf. John 21:16.) Pastors are Overseers and Elders who are to lead the church by caring for and nurturing the church.
- There is some debate over whether Pastors and Teachers describes one group of people or two different but overlapping groups. It seems likely that it describes two groups so that whilst all Pastors are teachers, not all Teachers are Pastors.

- ***“Equip his people for works of service”***

- Christ gives teachers to the church not just for entertainment, edification or education but for the church's equipping. As O'Brien puts it 'The ministry of the officials does not find its fulfilment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister'. The job of Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers is to equip the rest of the church for service/ministry.
- In this sense every member of a local church is a Minister! Everyone has been given a ministry/a portion of grace (v7) and it is the job of the word ministers to equip everyone for their different ministries. The job of pastors and teachers is not to monopolise ministry but to multiply ministry.
- Richard Coekin uses the illustration of the church as like a football match. He says that the Church is often like a football match because at a football match there are usually 22,000 desperately in need of exercise and 22 people desperately in need of a rest. He argues that the biblical picture of the Church is “not about a crowd gathering on a Sunday to watch expensive professionals (pastors and teachers) playing the game. Instead the players on the pitch are the congregation. The Bible-teachers are the player coaches, training them to play the game of loving God, loving each other and loving their community, working as a team against the world, the flesh and the devil. The spectators are the watching world.”
- Each of us has a ministry and that ministry is to be directed towards building up the body. Again we return to the repeated theme of how our individual gifts and ministries are not for ourselves but for the sake of the church.

- ***Unity***

- In 2:11-22 Paul told us that Christ has united us. Then in 4:3 we were told to maintain the unity of the Spirit and now we are being told to work for unity. This could seem like a confusing tension or even contradiction until we remember that we live in the now and the not yet. We are united in Christ by the Spirit but that unity is yet to be fully realised and will ultimately only be perfectly realised when Jesus returns. In the meantime we are to serve and minister with the goal of ever greater unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.
- Together we are to pursue a better and better understanding and knowledge of God as he has revealed himself through his Son in scripture. Together we are to pursue maturity as we leave our childish thinking and understanding about God behind and press on to know him better and better as he really is. This is not something we can do alone but something that we must do together.

- **Mature**

- We often talk about mature Christians and here Paul shows us that Christ is the standard for maturity. The perfect character of Christ is the standard which we are aiming for. Christ is the perfect human and so as we grow in doctrinal unity we are also to grow in Christ-like character. The two must go together.

Big Idea - Every member of BEC has a part to play in building up the church

Applications

- **Our attitude to the local church and our ministry** - The church is not just where I come to receive or to spectate. It is the body of Christ which I belong to. It is a group of people who need me to serve and minister to them so that together we can all grow up to become more like Jesus. Sunday services and other meetings are now just opportunities for me to receive they are also opportunities for me to serve. I come to be equipped to serve rather than just to be educated or entertained. All of us are ministers of the church!
- **Our attitude towards the Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers of the Church** - A church that employs people full-time can often wrongly feel that it's the job of the paid staff to 'do ministry.' This passage challenges such thinking. Full-time word ministers are a gift from Christ to equip and mobilise the rest of us for our ministries. When a church employs a Pastor it should mean everyone else doing more ministry rather than everyone else doing less ministry.

Suggested Questions

Starter - Someone has said that “*church is often like a football match; 22,000 people desperately in need of some exercise and 22 people desperately in need of a rest!*” **How true do you think this is? What will be the consequences for a church where the majority of the ministry is left to just a few people?**

Even if Football isn't your thing this analogy should serve to open up discussion about what the church is like. Whilst we don't want to encourage people who feel like the 22 to moan, we do want to consider the damaging consequences of a church where the majority of the ministry is done by a few. There are various reasons why this situation may occur. It could be that a few people cling to the ministry and don't let others get involved. Alternatively it could be because the majority refuse to get involved.

We will return to this analogy later on.

1. What is the job of Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers? What is the point of Bible teaching?

As a church we make a big deal about Bible teaching and so it is important that we are clear on the purpose of word ministry. It is not just for our own education, edification or enjoyment. Instead it is meant to equip us to go and serve. This has implications for how we approach sermons and Bible studies. Have I come just to soak up teaching or have I come to receive and then pass on what I've learnt?

2. Think about a typical Sunday at BEC. When does 'the ministry' happen? What does 'ministry' look like?

Instinctively we might think that the ministry is what the paid ministers do up the front during the service. Whilst this is ministry it is not the only ministry that goes on. Ministry/ service is going on before the service as people set up and serve coffee. It's going on as the music group leads us in singing, it's happening as people serve coffee and welcome, it's happening in the children's groups and the creche. It's happening as people chat and encourage one another after the service. It's happening as people show hospitality over lunch etc etc.

As with last week you might want to revisit some of the material from 6 steps to loving your church.

3. Go back to the football analogy. According to Ephesians 4, who are the players on the pitch? Who do you think are the spectators? Who are the player-coaches?

4. How does this change our attitude to coming to church or home group?

You could tackle questions 3 and 4 together. Whereas we might normally think that the players are the pastors and teachers who are up the front and the congregation are the spectators, now we begin to see that the congregation are the players. The pastors and teachers are the player-coaches who equip the congregation for ministry but then also play alongside. The spectators are then the watching world and the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms (see 3:10.)

Such a mind shift should help us all to see that we have a vital part to play in the ministry of BEC. Every member of BEC is a valued team member who has a vital ministry given to them by Christ.

5. What is Jesus' goal for his church?

6. What will it look like for BEC to be a mature church?

Christ wants his church to be built up and mature and his definition of maturity is a greater doctrinal unity as well as his church becoming more and more like him in it's character. You could take the time to pick out examples of Jesus' character and think about what it would look like for your group and our church to reflect Jesus' character more.

7. Practically how can we use the gifts that Jesus has given us to serve the church and help us together become mature and built up?

As with last week you might want to break into smaller groups or pairs for this part. We don't just want to talk a good game we actually want to play the game. Try and think about practical things that you could be doing this Sunday or this week to serve others and build them up. This will be different for each of us because we have different gifts but there will be something we can all do.