

**Ephesians 4:7, 11-12**  
**Church by the Book Part 2**  
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This morning as we begin our study together, I'd like for you to put your finger in Ephesians 4 where we'll be going in just a moment. But I want to start back in the gospel of Matthew. Turn back to a familiar and famous passage, Matthew 16. It's in the last year of our Lord's ministry when He tells the disciples clearly, unequivocally that He is going to die. And in conjunction with that shortly thereafter is the great transfiguration when they see the glory of Jesus Christ clearly, and His humanity as it were slips aside and they see the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, in that magnificent display. Just before that in Matthew 16:13 says,

... when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, [that's the Messiah] the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter [you're a rock, a boulder], and upon this bedrock [that is the bedrock of your confession] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." [Hades being that place where unbelievers are kept, being hell itself the gates of Hades has to do with death. In other words, death itself will not overpower My church. Even the greatest enemy that the enemies of My church can bring and that is to kill My followers will not overpower My church. I will build My church, Jesus said.]

Now that sweeping statement delivers to us several implications that I want you to think about as we begin our study this morning. That statement of Christ, "I will build My church..." implies that Christ is the One and only One who is in the position to build His church.

Secondly, it implies that the church is Christ's great priority today. There's nothing more important to Jesus Christ today than building His church. The headlines you read on the front page of your paper are unimportant to God and to Christ in the scope of what they're really doing. History is not about the great empires and the great leaders. Human history in the mind of God is about the building of His church.

Another implication of this is clearly that Christ has a plan. He has a plan for how to build His church, and another implication would be that that plan then is revealed to us in the Scripture alone. Since Christ promised to build His church and since He will do it only in the way that He has revealed, then we need to make sure we know what His plan is since it's so important to Him that we know what His plan is and that we are pursuing it. Christ's plan for His church is spelled out for us in a few short verses in a section (a larger section) on unity in Ephesians 4 where I invite you to turn with me now this morning, Ephesians 4.

Understanding how important this plan is that this is what Christ is doing. By the way, the church is the only organization, the only institution that Jesus Christ promised to build. And He said I will build it. It's happening, and nothing can stand against it, not even this life's greatest enemy death itself can overturn Christ's plan to build His church. So, it's happening. Here in Ephesians 4 we find that plan unfolded in a larger context.

You remember we're studying this passage that begins in Ephesians 2, excuse me Ephesians 4:2 and runs down through verse 16. In this paragraph Paul provides us with the means for preserving unity in the church. He's telling us that we must preserve the unity that's been created and here are the means to do that.

In verse 2 put on the attitudes of unity.

In verses 4 - 6 focus on the basis of our unity.

And then beginning in verse 7 and running down through verse 16, he tells us if we want to preserve the unity in the church then work on Christ's plan for unity. Christ has a plan for the

church and if we will simply put that plan to place and stick with that plan it will preserve unity in the church of Jesus Christ.

Now as we flow down through this third means for preserving unity that begins in verse 7 and runs all the way down through verse 16, we're following an outline, and I'm going to give you that outline again just so you don't get lost as we look at this plan.

In verses 8 - 10 there's the biblical defense of the plan.

In verses 7 and then 11 - 12 you have the five parts of the plan.

Verse 13 the ultimate goal of the plan and in verses 14 and 16 the practical application of the plan.

And we're working our way through this passage. The key point of this section is that Christ has a plan for His church and if we will simply follow that plan it will preserve the unity that we enjoy.

We've already examined the biblical defense of Christ's plan in verses 8 - 10. Last week we began to look at the heart of the plan itself, the five parts of Christ's plan, and we want to continue and complete that point this morning. We're looking at the plan itself, the five parts of the plan of Christ for His church. Let me read for you again verses 7 and then we'll skip down and read verses 11 and 12.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.  
... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists,  
and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of  
service, to the building up of the body of Christ;”

Now as I said this plan has five distinct parts. We looked in detail last week at the first part of Christ's plan and it's this: Christ distributes spiritual gifts to His church. We saw that in verse 7.

Every individual member of the church, every genuine Christian has been given a special capacity by Jesus Christ to serve in the church. Today we want to look at the rest of the plan.

The second part of Christ's plan for His church is: Christ appoints leaders of the church. Christ appoints the leaders of the church. Notice verse 11, "And He gave some *as* apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...." You see, not only did Christ give spiritual gifts to every member of His church as we learned last week in verse 7, but He also gave gifted leaders to the whole church. Notice when Paul says, "Christ gave these leaders to the church," it implies that it lies completely and totally within Christ's power to appoint the leaders of His church. He gives them to the church. He gave them, that is He decided who they would be. The church, folks, is not a democracy it's a monarchy. It's a sheep fold with one chief Shepherd, and that chief Shepherd mediates His loving rule and His care through under-shepherds that He Himself appoints.

Now, that same expression back up in verse 11, "he gave" or "Christ gave" means that the leaders of the church then, from the apostles to the elders of a particular local church, are intended to be Christ's gift to His church. They are for the churches benefit; they are for the churches' good. So, exactly who are these gifted men that Christ has given to His church? Let's look at the first two of them together, verse 11, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets,"

Now we've already seen both of these groups, these two positions earlier in this book, and we've discovered that they are foundational to the life of the church. Turn back to Ephesians 2:20. You'll remember, he uses the image of the church as a building, and he says, verse 20 of Ephesians 2. "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone." And then the whole building is built on that foundation.

You see as we have already seen the apostles and prophets were foundational to the church in the sense that they had one basic responsibility. That was to receive God's revelation and to declare it and to preserve it in the case of the apostles for all of us. You see this by the way in Ephesians 3, we've just read Ephesians 2:20, just a few verses later in Ephesians 3:5, he says, "this mystery

of Christ and the church,” verse 5, “which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;”

In other words, Paul says already by the time he was living in the middle of the first century, the foundation had been laid, the apostles and prophets had received the revelation of God, and now he was charged with communicating that revelation.

As strategic as the roles of both of these offices (apostles and prophets) were in the early church, they both disappeared with the completion of the canon. That’s why Paul even uses the image of them as the foundation that’s already been laid. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 3 he says, “I laid the foundation and now you are building on it.” So, their job is complete. They received the revelation from God, they laid the foundation by in-Scripturating that revelation, and now we are building as it were, on that foundation. They established the foundation through their revelation, their job is done.

Now the third group of leaders that Paul mentions in verse 11, back in chapter 4, he says there were apostles and some prophets and some he gave some as evangelists. The term is only used a couple of times in the New Testament. It’s used here, it’s used in Acts 21 of Philip, you remember Philip one of the six chosen in Acts 6, and later he becomes (according to Acts 21:8) an evangelist. The only other time in the New Testament that this word is used is in 2 Timothy 4:5 where Paul tells Timothy (you remember) to do the work of an evangelist. Timothy was a pastor, pastoring in the church in Ephesus, interestingly enough later and Paul tells him as you fulfill your ministry, as you preach the Word, I also want you to do the work of an evangelist.

Now, the Greek word translated evangelist here is related to the verb to preach the gospel or to the noun gospel. So, the work of an evangelist then is to be an evangel, he is to proclaim the good news of the gospel, the good news of forgiveness, to preach the true gospel. In the New Testament these men as we saw with Philip in Acts 21 were missionaries. They were church planters who evangelized and trained the people in the Word of God and then continued to see that duplicated in place after place after place. I believe this position still exists. Our church ought to be and is supporting men and women who do the work of evangelism who are

particularly given for this work of evangelism. That doesn't mean that all of us shouldn't be evangelizing. We're commanded to do that, but there are people, men who are uniquely gifted, and we see this even in men like Doug Briggs and others who are uniquely gifted to carry out this work.

The final office in verse 11 is pastor-teachers; pastor-teachers. Now you'll notice that in the *New American Standard* it's translated, "that He gave some as pastor and teachers." Some see these as two different roles, but the construction in the Greek language and the fact that the idea of pastoring and teaching are usually combined in one person in the New Testament, probably mean that this is one office – that of pastor-teacher. The word "pastor" comes from the normal New Testament word for "shepherd". These men are shepherding-teachers or teaching-shepherds. Pastor teachers do for the church what actual shepherds do for the sheep. They feed the sheep. They keep the flock from going astray when members of the flock go astray. They go and bring them back. They protect the flock from wolves and predators who would bring in false doctrine and evil practice and they help heal those who are hurting. That's what real shepherds, who cared for actual animals, sheep did and that's what pastor teachers, shepherding teachers do as well.

But this raises a question as we look at this term pastor teacher. What is the relationship of a pastor teacher to those other leadership roles that are in the New Testament? The roles of overseer and elder. Well, those three New Testament words, "elder, overseer and shepherd" all refer to exactly the same office and the same position, the same group of men. How do I know that? Well there's several ways I know that. Let me show you in a couple of passages why this is clear. If you were to turn 1 Timothy 3:1, you would find (and you're familiar with this), a list of qualifications for leaders in the church. It is a trustworthy statement, 1 Timothy 3:1, "if any man aspires to the office of overseer." So, here you have overseer and then there's a list of qualifications.

Now it's interesting if you turn over to Paul's letter to Titus, turn over to Titus 1. Notice in verse 5 he says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you...." And then he has a list of qualifications that are

almost identical to the list for overseers back in 1 Timothy 3. Also notice that here in Titus, that Paul tells Titus to appoint elders, you see that in verse 5, and then begin a list of qualifications and then he calls this same office down in verse 7, the office of overseer. You see that? In verse 5 “appoint elders,” in verse 7, “for the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward.” So, he equates those two together.

In 1 Peter, Peter brings all three concepts together. Turn over to 1 Peter 5. First Peter 5:1, he says,

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you as *your* fellow elder *and* witness of the sufferings of Christ,” [So, there’s our first word, elders] “and a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed,” Verse 2, “shepherd the flock of God....”

So, you “elders” need to be shepherds. There’s our second word, and notice the next expression in verse 2, “exercising oversight” [there’s the verb form of what we are we’ve already learned is to be an “overseer”. So, Paul brings or excuse me, Peter brings all three terms together and makes it the same office – “elder, overseer, and pastor or shepherd”.]

Paul uses all three terms interchangeably. Turn over to Acts 20, in Acts 20 he’s speaking to the Ephesian elders, the last time he’ll see them alive on this earth. And in Acts 20:17, as he speaks to them or as he speaks about them Luke does. He says, “From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.”

There’s our first word: the elders. So, the elders of the church in Ephesus come and meet Paul. Look down in verse 28, here’s what he tells them. “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made your overseers,”

There’s the second word: to “shepherd.”

There’s the third word: “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

So, here you have both in Peter and in Paul the three words for leaders in the church brought together and made clearly to be the same office the same position.

By the way, did you notice in those verses I just read to you, in Acts 20 as well as in many others in the New Testament, it's clear that there was a plurality of elders in every church. Look again at verse 17. "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the "elders" plural, "of the church" singular, that is the church in Ephesus. There was only one church in Ephesus at the time. Verse 28, "be on guard for yourselves and for all the 'flock' singular, 'among which the Holy Spirit has made your overseers," plural. So clearly, the church in Ephesus had a plurality of godly men, pastor-teachers, elders, overseers, all the same office, but a group of them leading and shepherding the flock.

It's interesting by the way if you go over to 1 Timothy 5, still written to Timothy who was in Ephesus at the time, there is also a plurality of elders mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:17. So the three terms – "elder, overseer, pastor" are used of the same office. "Elder" emphasizes his "character"; he is spiritually mature. "Overseer" emphasizes his "function"; he exercises oversight over all the church. And "shepherd or pastor" emphasizes his "attitude", he has a shepherd's caring heart. John MacArthur writes, "The term elder emphasizes who the man is, overseer speaks of what he does, and pastor or shepherd deals with how he ministers."

So, Christ has given leaders like that to each church. How do we identify those men? How does the church identify those men whom Christ has given to lead His church? How do we know whom Christ has appointed as leaders in His church? Well, there isn't some mystical way to find that out. There's nothing written in the sky you can't go outside and see you know some supernatural, crop writing where God has somehow spoken and said, "these are the men." So how do we know? Well, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 lays that out. First Timothy 3, if we were to take time to go there you would find that there are essentially four characteristics of a man whom God as appointed, whom Christ has appointed. I (to keep them clearly in my mind) use C's just so I remember them.



There is first of all: craving. First Timothy 3:1, “if any man desires the office, (it is a) it is a good work he aspires to or desires to do. There has to be craving, there has to be a desire in his heart to be in that role of leadership, and not just in the role, but notice it is a good work he desires to do. He has to want to do the work that goes with being an elder in a local church.

Secondly: there is character in both Titus and 1 Timothy 3 there are a list of character qualifications that are laid down. Those things have to be present in the man’s life.

Thirdly: there is capacity in 1 Timothy 3 there is a capacity to teach, he has to be able to teach verse 2 says and verses 4 and 5 say that he has to be able to manage. And he demonstrates that by how he manages his own household because he’s going to be an overseer, remember. If he can’t be an overseer of his own household, how’s he going to be an overseer of the church of God?

So, craving, character, capacity to teach and to manage and fourthly, confirmation. In 1 Timothy 3:10 there’s a verse in the middle about the deacons which says let these also first be tested. What does that imply? The deacons were to be tested in the same way the elders are. So there is to be a confirmation that involves the elders of the church who are elders already and the congregation saying, yes that man meets the qualifications, he has a desire for the office, he has the character qualifications, and he has the capacity. And the congregation says, amen, that’s right. And when all four of those things are true then you have a man whom Christ has appointed to lead His church.

Do you understand what that means practically in Ephesians 4 when we say that Christ has appointed leaders for His church? Do you understand that means that if the elders in this church meet the biblical criteria if both the elders and the congregation affirm that they meet those criteria and both of those things have happened then the elders who lead this church have, in fact, been appointed by Christ Himself. Now, the fact that Christ has given leadership to His church and has given the leaders to this church He has given should affect your response to those in leadership. How should you respond to the leadership of the church?

We live in the state of Texas which prides itself on individualism. We live in America which prides itself on individualism, and I'm not going to submit to anyone, even our revolution began with, "we serve no sovereign here." And so, we have a spirit that is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. How are we supposed to respond to the leadership Christ has put in place? Very briefly, let me give you a couple of things the New Testament teaches.

Number one: appreciate and esteem them. By the way, I don't tell you this as self-serving, I'm just teaching the Scripture okay? You do these things, but I'm just reminding you. Appreciate and esteem them, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 13,

... we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ... that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Secondly: you should imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith."

And number three: you are to obey and submit to them. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Now, don't misunderstand this. This is not some great club that some autocratic leader can use to tell you everything you ought to do. My authority as an elder stops where the Word of God stops. Submit and obey your leaders as they show you from the Word of God what the Word teaches. I have no right to tell you where to live or what car to drive or what color socks you ought to wear today or who you ought to marry apart from how the Scripture speaks to that issue. But where it does speak and where the elders urge you to obey, you are to obey and submit to them as to the Lord.

So, that's what your responsibility is. But in Ephesians 4 there's one more part of that responsibility. According to Ephesians 4 you should view them as Christ's gift to you and thank

God for them. He gave them to the church for its benefit, for your benefit. You know, I personally, as one of the elders can say I thank God for the rest of the elders of this church. I don't know a better group of elders anywhere. We're not perfect men. You know that, you've seen that. But there's a genuine desire to love and to serve Christ and to do what the Scriptures command. You see it was from the deep love of Jesus Christ for His church that He gave His church, that He gave this church gifted men to lead. And He appointed them for a very specific service.

That brings us to the third part of Christ's plan for His church. Number one, Christ distributes spiritual gifts to His church. Number two, Christ appoints the leaders of the church.

And thirdly the leaders equip the members of the church. The leaders equip the members of the church. Notice verse 12, He gave these men "for the equipping of the saints..." Now, the most important decision in interpreting verse 12 is to determine the relationship of the three phrases.

You see the three phrases in verse 12, "for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." What's the relationship of those three? Well, some would say that all three describe what the leaders are to do. In other words, the leaders are to equip the saints, the leaders are to do the work of service, and the leaders are to build up the body of Christ. But the best way to understand the relationship of these three clauses is that they build on each other.

The leaders equip the saints, the saints do the work of service, and all of that together causes the church to be built up. The reason I say that's the best view is because it best reflects the original language. In the Greek text there are three different prepositions used.

Also, it makes sense of why Paul spent three verses, back in verse 7 - 10 on individual gifts. Christ distributed spiritual gifts to every Christian so that every Christian could do the work of ministry. So then, the primary role of the leaders of the church, verse 12, is not to do the work of ministry or as the *New American Standard* says the work of service, but to equip the saints to do it. The Greek word that's translated "equipping" here is a noun that describes "preparing

something or putting something right”. In secular Greek it was used of setting a bone. In the New Testament it’s used of mending nets, restoring a sinning brother. In 2 Corinthians 13:11, Paul uses it like this, “finally brethren, rejoice, be made complete.” Be made complete.

But perhaps the best insight from this word or of this word comes in Luke 6:40; you remember that famous saying of our Lord’s? “A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, [fully equipped] will be like his teacher.” “To equip” then means “making something complete, providing it all the parts that it needs to function properly”. That’s the job of the leaders of this church. How do we do that?

Well, God’s given us two primary tools to equip you, to give you all the parts you need, all the skills you need to function properly in the church. Here are the tools we have, number one to teach you the Word of God. Luke 6 makes that clear doesn’t it? When it says that equipping is teaching, a pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone after he has been fully equipped will be like his teacher. Teaching is the tool we have. Remember what the leaders of the church are called? Pastor-teachers. How do we as spiritual shepherds feed our sheep? Through teaching the Word of God. The food is the Scripture and we teach that word to you. That’s how we equip you.

It’s interesting in 2 Timothy 3 that familiar passage we often quote about the Scripture being inspired. You remember how the rest of it goes? It says, “all Scripture is inspired”, and then it says, “so that the man of God can be adequate, equipped for every good work.” You are equipped through the teaching and then your understanding the Scripture. Now folks, the implications of this are huge, and the church today is running absolutely contrary to what this clearly teaches because we live in a day when churches are reducing the teaching time to ten to fifteen minutes. Why? So that multi-media and drama and even interpretive dance can have a place in the corporate gathering of the church. And no, I’m not planning to do that any time soon. It would not be a pretty picture. Other churches are replacing the teaching of the saints altogether. And they’re replacing it with services intended to reach seekers. That doesn’t build up the church. This is the only way the saints can be equipped is through the teaching of the Word of God. This is the primary way.

Charles Hodge observed that through out history true Christianity has flourished just in proportion to the degree in which the Bible is known and its truths are diffused among the people. The nations where the Bible is unknown sit in darkness.

Folks I hate to tell you, but American evangelicalism is slipping back into darkness because the Bible isn't known. So, folks, place yourself regularly under the teaching of God's Word. Read and listen to sermons by godly Bible teachers. Read the Scripture for yourself. Go to our bookstore and get some good books that will challenge you to think about what the Scripture teaches. That is how you will be equipped to function in the church.

But in addition to teaching, there's another way the leaders of this church can ensure that you are equipped. Ultimately, God is the only One who can equip you, and that's why we have to pray. There's a kind of prayer in Hebrews 13:20, listen to what he says. The writer of Hebrews says,

Now the God of peace ... equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ....

That's it folks, those are the two tools the leaders have to equip you. Teaching the Word of God and praying that God would use His Word in your life. That's why the apostles, you remember in Acts 6, said they were going to devote themselves to what? The Word and prayer. Because those are the tools. Those are the tools spiritual leaders have to equip the saints. So, the leaders of Countryside are to equip you by teaching and preaching and then by praying that God would equip you through that understanding of His Word.

So, Christ's plan for the church is very clear. Christ distributes spiritual gifts to His church, Christ appoints the leaders of the church. The leaders equip the members of the church, and that brings us to the fourth part of the plan.

The members accomplish the service of the church. The members accomplish the service of the church. Look at verse 12 again. "For the equipping of the saints," that's what pastor teachers and evangelists do. They equip the saints for the work of service. What specifically are the

leaders to equip the saints to do? The work of service. The Greek word translated “service” comes from the very familiar word “deacon”. It’s a general word for service of any kind. It’s often used in a general sense for whatever is done for God. On the one hand, it can describe the teaching of the Word of God - missionary work.

On the other hand, the same word is used of everyday service. In Luke it’s used of preparing food, of serving food, in Acts of serving food to widows. That’s a wide breadth of service. Here’s the point, folks, don’t miss this. Every member of the church is to be involved in service at some level. And that’s anything from teaching God’s Word to preparing food and everything else you can imagine. This is the responsibility. You are to be doing the work of service. This is so fundamental and foundational, and yet it’s so often misunderstood.

James Montgomery Boice pointed out that because the church has misunderstood this, people have wrong views of the relationship between the clergy, as we are called, and the laity, as you are called. People have these flawed views of how we ought to relate to each other. Boice identifies three of them, he says, the first wrong view is “clericalism”, that is the work of the church is based on the clergy. This view says the work of the church is to be done by those paid to do it. In this system the role of the lay people is just to support it financially.

Historically this view grew out of the Roman Catholic Church where only the priests were authorized to serve in the church, much like the Old Testament priesthood. It also reflects the sort of human predisposition to be in charge, to be in control, to dominate. Some people just like to be in charge of everything, and so this system sort of grew up. Another factor that contributed to this clericalism, the idea that the clergy ought to do everything, is simply the tendency, can I say this with out offending you, of lay people to sit back and let the pastor do it. I love this quote John Stott mentions in his book, he says, “What does the layman really want? He wants a building which looks like a church. Clergy dressed in the way he approves. Services of the kind he’s been used to, and to be left alone.” Unfortunately, that’s how many people who call themselves Christians think.

Boice goes on to say, “Failure to see that truth has led in church history to what John R. Stott has termed ‘the clerical domination of the laity.’ There has developed with the church a kind of division between the clergy and the laity in which the clergy are supposed to lead and do the work, while the people are to follow and of course give money to support the clergy in their work.”

There’s a second flawed view Boice identified, not only clericalism but the second would be “anti-clericalism”.

You see what happens is sometimes lay people rightly become so fed up with their leaders that they overreact, and they react against the concept of leadership altogether. There’s a new movement by the way, especially in the emergent church to do away with the concept of leaders in the church, instead there ought to be facilitators. We’re not leaders, we’re facilitators. Well, frankly look through the New Testament. You’ll find a hard time substantiating that from Scripture. There are no facilitators in the New Testament. There are leaders and shepherds and elders and overseers. Words that are offensive to many in modern sensibilities.

There’s a third false view of the relationship between leaders in the congregation. Not only clericalism, and anti-clericalism but “dualism”. This is the perspective that the clergy and the laity have their own spheres or territories, and neither is to trespass onto the territory of the other. You know it’s the attitude that says, “Look we won’t tell you what to preach, and you don’t tell us how to run the church.”

The biblical view is found right here in Ephesians 4, and it’s that the leaders equip the people and lead, and the people serve.

Now as you’ll look at those three views, which of those do you think would be more a temptation in our day? Obviously, clericalism, let those who are paid to do it, do it. Why? Because we live in an audience culture. We’re professional spectators. We are trained to be spectators. We watch movies. We listen to music. The average person spends more than five hours a day watching television. We watch sporting events. I’m sure you’ve heard the definition

of professional football that says its 80,000 people desperately in need of exercise watching 22 people desperately in need of rest.

It's hard to break the habit of just watching, but folks, the church is not a spectator sport. It's about work and service. It's time for all of us, you included to get involved. You say, how do I get involved, what kind of service is this anyway?

I like the way Wayne Grudem summarizes the service of the church. He says basically the church has three duties. They have a duty or a ministry to God, that's "worship". They have a ministry to believers, that's "nurture and care". And they have a ministry to the world, that's "evangelism and mercy". You have been given very specific spiritual giftedness to enable you to serve in one or a combination of those ways. Folks in Christ's plan the members are to accomplish the service of the church. Are you following His plan?

That brings us to number five: the fifth and final part of the plan. If Christ distributes spiritual gifts to the church, and He appoints the leaders of the church, and the leaders equip the members of the church, and the members accomplish the service of the church, then this fifth part will happen, and it's this. The plan results in the growth of the church. The plan results in the growth of the church. Look at verse 12 again, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service" And when that happens, it comes "to the building up of the body of Christ."

That clause summarizes what the result of the plan will be. Now the phrase "the body of Christ" here is a metaphor obviously for the church. It's a metaphor that can describe a local church like ours. We are in one sense the body of Christ. First Corinthians 12 uses it like that. But it can also be a reference to the entire family of believers across the globe, and it, and I think both concepts may be in view in this passage.

Here's Paul's point. When the Christ appointed leaders here at Countryside equip you, and you get involved in serving in this church, this church, Countryside, is built up. But we also become a part of something that's much bigger than this church. We participate in building up the universal body of Christ. You see, you and I can become very myopic and think that things are all about us right here in Southlake in north Texas. But Christ isn't just concerned with this local



church and neither should we be. We should serve here faithfully with the understanding that as we serve here and fill our part here, the entire body of Christ is built up. We are having an impact on the kingdom of God.

Now what does it mean to build up? Well, the Greek word was used literally of “erecting a building of construction”. Here it refers to the construction of spiritual maturity in the entire church. It’s like the growth of the human body. I saw a video several years ago of what each cell in our body is actually like; truly amazing. Each cell consists of dozens of tiny little organic machines. Your DNA is essentially an assembly line that produces other cells; remarkable. And as each one of those tiny little machines and each one of those little cells in your body does its part, that cell functions and stays healthy and grows, but it contributes what? To the overall health of the entire body. That’s how it is when you and I do our part as it were in this cell here, we’re not just contributing to the health of this cell; we’re contributing to the health of the whole body.

When the church has gifted men, leaders appointed by God identified by the elders, confirmed by the congregation and those gifted men are teaching and equipping the people, and the people are mixing that teaching with their gifts and are serving in the church, then the members individually and the church as a whole grows spiritually, and we even contribute to the growth of the whole body of Christ. Folks, this is incredible. You know, we live our little lives, and we don’t think on the large scale. Understand, Christ has a plan, and you are a part of that plan. He planned to give you a particular gift and for you to use that gift and that you would use it in the church.

There’s nothing wrong with being involved in para-church ministry. There’s nothing wrong with being involved with a secular organization. But listen carefully, not if it pulls you away from the priority of filling the role that Christ has assigned you in His church. Folks, don’t exhaust all of your time and all of your resources and all of your skills in professional associations, in social organizations, in organized sports, or in any other activity if it means that you have little to no time left for what God has gifted you to do in His church. That would be to prostitute the gift you’ve been given and folks to waste your life. Christ is about one thing today, it’s building His

church. To Him the church is the most important thing in the universe. It's His greatest priority. I just want to know this. Can you stand before Christ some day and say that it was yours? That it was your greatest priority. Christ has a plan. He is building His church. Are you working on the plan?

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we marvel at Your great wisdom. In three simple verses (locked away in a passage on preserving the unity we enjoy) You have explained to us profoundly how the church of Jesus Christ is to function; His plan for how the church is to work.

Father, forgive us for our tendency to embrace one of those flawed perspectives to think that somebody else is supposed to do it; to think that it's not our responsibility that it doesn't really matter what we do. Father, I pray that You would help each Christian here today to understand that they have a role to play in Christ's great eternal plan. It may seem small and insignificant as the function of one of those little engines in one of our little cells in our human body may seem. But Father, You have a much bigger picture in mind. Help us, O God to embrace that picture, to embrace that reality.

And Father, forgive us most of all for having skewed priorities, for wasting our lives with things that don't matter to our Lord. Father, give us the perspective of eternity. Remind us every day that the day is coming when we will stand before our Lord Jesus Christ, and may we then hear from Him, "well done, good and faithful servant."

We pray it in Jesus name and for His sake, Amen.