“Ephesians – God’s Plan For Every Believer”

Chapter 4:4-16

Paul explains what unifies believers in verses 4 to 6

These verses are trinitarian in nature

Verse 4 – God the Holy Spirit

Pentecost – inception of New Testament church

Sealing guarantees our future hope

Verse 5 – God the Son

Jesus is Lord over all creation

It’s only through faith in Him one can receive eternal life

Once we trust Him, we become baptized to acknowledge we’re committed to following His ways

Verse 6 – God the Father

He is the cause and source of everything which exists

He is omnipresent throughout this entire universe

He gives life to all living things

 2

These truths never change universally, culturally or generationally

We must graciously but tenaciously upheld them without compromise no matter what opposition may come our way

Paul transitions next to the topic of spiritual gifts

How he introduces this subject isn’t what one would naturally expect

I have to admit I was truly mystified by these verses when I was a young Christian

They seemed to be out of place, not fitting logically within this chapter’s context

However, this could not be true since all Scripture is inspired through the Holy Spirit and therefore is precisely what God wanted written

Why does Paul reference Psalm 68 in verses 8 to 10?

He is emphasizing how there’s to be unity in doctrine but diversity in giftedness within the church

Everyone must believe the same essential doctrines but every believer does not have the same role in Christian ministry

But why use these verses to explain this?

These verses picture Jesus as the conquering hero

 3

He descended to earth, was born of a virgin, died on the cross, but rose victorious and then ascended back into heaven

His victory gave Him the right and privilege to disperse gifts to those under His divine reign as the conquering King

Paul centres his focus upon the most significant gifts Christ gave to His church

These foundational gifts will ensure His eternal kingdom becomes established in the world, while continuing to strengthen and grow and flourish according to God’s plan

These gifts actually come in the form, not of specific characteristics but specific individuals themselves

Yet, at the same time, He gives these people special abilities to function within their roles

Let’s take a closer look at each of these designations

We will notice how there’s a clear methodical progression in God’s establishment of the church from its inception up to this present time

The apostles were the foundation of the early N.T. church, which was initially built around Christ as the chief cornerstone

Some of these apostles were instrument in writing inspired Scripture, such as John, Paul, Peter and Jude

 4

We do not believe apostolic succession exists today

One of the qualifications to become an apostle was having seen and interacted with the risen Christ

John was the last apostle who was alive in the first century

After apostles come those gifted as prophets

We commonly think of prophets as giving incredible predictions regarding future events

This certainly was true throughout the O.T.

However, there was another emphasis to prophecy when Paul penned these words

The prophets provided hope for the early N.T. church

We must continually remember how believers from Paul’s era were experiencing great persecution

Prophecy was tailored toward helping these believers remain committed to living for Christ and serving others while going through these trials

Apostles such as Peter and John functioned within a prophetic role, e.g. the book of Revelation and predictions regarding Christ’s second coming; creation of a new heaven and earth

We do not believe inspired prophecy exists today

 5

Next come the proclaimers of the good news

The evangelists guaranteed both the expansion and preservation of the early New Testament church and still have an instrumental role in currently spreading the gospel

Every Christian is to practice evangelism but not every believer is gifted as an evangelist

The last category is those who are gifted as pastors and teachers

Grammatically, this refers to only one person

The pastor/teachers provide continual biblical instruction, guidance, comfort and exhortation

They help the church to remain committed to its mission, true to its doctrine, and steadfast in its service

So the church is like a living temple, its foundation was established upon Christ, the apostles and prophets and is being built up through evangelists, pastors and teachers

The Bible is complete – there’s no new necessary God-ordained information we need to know

This is what Paul was emphasizing in verses 4 to 6

 6

Therefore, what we need right now is for the gospel to be proclaimed and believers to be strengthened in their faith

Gifted leadership is to have a primary equipping ministry

“Equip” = ‘to put right” or “restore something to its original pristine condition”

It was used in Paul’s time in reference to setting broken bones or mending fishing nets

Christian leaders, through their guidance, teaching, supportive encouragement and example are to help believers move from spiritual dysfunction to greater spiritual health and wholeness

When this occurs, the saints, in turn, will be much better positioned to edify others within the body of Christ

Edification in this sense is the practical outworking of Christian ministry

When believers edify others, they nurture them either through words of comforting hope or loving correction

Notice how the church is not to rely only upon paid professionals to do everything within its various ministries

Every single member within the body of Christ is to actively, consistently, willingly practice Christian service through whatever “ministerial” gifts they have received from God

“Equipping” to “Engagement” to “Edification”

 7

What should be the primary emphasis of a church?

It’s not to centre around property, products or programs

In the next four verses, Paul outlines the primary goals Christ has for His church and they must be ours as well

Let’s evaluate MBBC according to Jesus’ standards

**The first goal is a unified faith**

In other words, everyone is committed to believing the same essential doctrines foundational to Christianity

Of course, we have been emphasizing how this requires discerning between what are indispensable doctrines and what are simply preferences

Can you outline our church’s most important doctrines?

MBBC has a statement of faith which outlines the most important doctrines we believe

You can check it out on our church website

This points to how vitally important it is to keep teaching and preaching the primary doctrines of our faith as believers

We must root ourselves in biblical truths before moving into practical applications of Christian living

 8

**The second goal is to gain a deeper, spiritually intimate knowledge of Christ**

This constitutes not only believing in Jesus but walking with Him throughout life in close relationship

There’s nothing more important than truly knowing Christ

What can help you and me achieve this?

Spending time reading and studying the four gospels and communicating with Him daily in prayer

**The third goal is to grow into Christlike maturity**

Each and every passing year should reveal my life more closely reflects Christ through the way I think, speak and act

This requires honest introspection and an intentional desire to grow spiritually

1 John 2:3-6: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked.”

 9

**The fourth goal is to practice keen, spiritual discernment and exhibit consistent, spiritual stability**

Children have a tendency to act in immature ways

They are very easily influenced by peer pressure, temptation, excitement and what immediately gratifies

An immature, unstable believer is characterized by constant vacillation, chasing what is trendy and are supposed new insights into already established Christian beliefs

Read text note, “The MacArthur Study Bible,” p. 1809

This presently holds as much importance as it ever did throughout Christian history

With the advent of the internet and the ever increasing, incredible influence of social media platforms, there is a plethora of false teaching and heretical information being propagated today

This is one of the reasons why it is vitally necessary to be plugged into a Bible believing, local church

If a professing Christian is not sitting under sound teaching from God’s Word in a significant way, he or she will be much more likely to believe what does not truly line up with Scripture

“Lone Ranger” Christians will inevitably be gullible, unstable believers

 10

Trickery “refers to the arts used by gamesters, who employ false dice that will always throw up one kind of number, which is that by which those who play with them cannot win.” (Clarke, BLB)

To become a spiritually stable believer necessitates both quality biblical instruction and quantitative participation

In other words, believers ought to go to a church where God’s Word is taught in a clear, accurate passionate way and then take utmost advantage of putting themselves under such teaching

I’m constantly amazed by how, in most local churches, only a small percentage of people who identify with their church actually participate in scenarios where the Word of God is being taught by divinely gifted leaders

What are some examples of erroneous doctrine infiltrating churches within our society today?

Heresy is not really the total denial of the truth but a distortion of the truth

Jehovah Witnesses will say Jesus is the son of God but not God the Son

The Bible contains the Word of God but is not the Word of God in totality

 11

Belief with no commitment; prosperity gospel, universalism, moral tolerance

If you have questions about what you are listening to or viewing, your elders are readily available to provide Bible-centred advice which will help keep you from buying into what is not the truth

**The fifth goal is to speak God’s truth in a loving way**

To speak what is true with no love is tyranny

To speak in a loving way with no truth constitutes enablement

An unbalanced approach has no actual benefit

Church leaders are not to harshly rant against false doctrine

However, speaking up against what is heretical is absolutely necessary

This requires what I often refer to as a gracious tenacity

We must take a stand for the truth in a loving manner

Christ perfectly exemplified what it was to be a truth speaker who was truly loving to those around him

This was the same approach Paul utilized when writing various churches who need a course correction in their lives

What tendencies do we have in this?

 12

When we communicate what is true in Iove, we help others grow into Christlike maturity

The end result will be a spiritually healthy, vibrant, effectively ministering church

Everyone will have a clear recognition of their responsibility to serve within the church

There will be an evident cohesiveness, a manifest synergy

Let’s pray we will continue to become a church which reflects what the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 4

How can I make this happen through ministering to others?

Let’s earnestly pursue this

How has God spoken to us through these Scripture verses from Ephesians today?