

## **LEADERS EQUIPPING THE SAINTS**

By Terry Jones, May 18, 2008  
Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

**CENTRAL SERMON THEME – Church leaders minister to the church family to prepare them to serve as they mature.**

**INTRO.** - The Bible is not an outdated old book. The world has yet to catch up with the teachings of the Bible about how to love God and love each other. Though our Bible is ahead of our world the church lingers behind in reaching people. We always appear to be late. I have two different kinds of clocks in my office. One clock runs accurately on the time, the temperature and the date. The other clock is a souvenir that never keeps the correct time. After I install a fresh battery it is behind again in a few days. I thought about removing the slow clock but I decided to keep it. The accurate clock informs me of the correct time. The slow clock reminds me I too can be out of date and behind the times.

Our Mission Statement is timeless and up to date. "To lead people to a personal, lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ." Our Mission Statement directs what we do on a daily basis. Our Vision Statement is likewise timely and timeless. "A church of Christ-sharing people who study and apply the Bible, display a Godly love for our families, friends, and community, and provide the necessary resources to fulfill the mission of the church." Our Vision is what we want to become in 10 to 15 years.

I believe the church of Jesus Christ is the best hope for healing our nation's ills. On Memorial Day in 1978, Atlantic City, New Jersey, opened their casinos. The ads soliciting people's votes promised, "Help yourself, Help Atlantic City, Help New Jersey" and "Balance taxes, create jobs, boost the economy, and cut down on street crime." After thirty years of casinos, how is Atlantic City doing? There is \$5 billion a year in income but two blocks from the casinos, the crime, prostitution and drug activity are not better. In addition the city's problems have worsened with corrupt city leaders. When criticized for not fulfilling their promises the casinos argue they can not solve all the problems. Contrast the plight of Atlantic City with another community.

A man accepted the challenge to establish a church in a community run by drug dealers and criminals. The people feared for their safety when they ventured out at night. This church started slowly but this minister finally

converted a drug addict. Later he converted some prostitutes. Some of the notorious drug dealers who preyed on the community came to know Christ. Some alcoholics came to Christ. Thieves and robbers came to Christ. The drug, liquor, and sex business suffered because these converts changed their lifestyle. People started using their money they once wasted on sin living to pay for homes. The Word of God lifted this community to a higher level of living.

As our world's experiments fail, we have an opportunity to transform lives with the truth and the love of God. Are we ready to help our world? Before we transform our community the church needs to prepare to take on this task. We prepare by returning to the biblical principles that made the church a powerful force for needed changes. I want to be part of a healthy powerful church. Do you? Join me as we learn what God wants us to be from the Ephesian church.

## **I. LEARN TO SERVE WITH FELLOW BELIEVERS, Vv. 11-13**

### **A. God gave the gifts of leaders to His church.**

1. Illus. - In a wedding the minister asks, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?" The father usually says, "Her mother and I." He is probably thinking, "No one is giving anything away. This has cost me dearly." No one ever says, "Who gives this man to be married to this woman?" In the original wedding God performed God gave Eve to Adam. When God gives a gift that gift comes in the form of a person.
2. John 3:16 - God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son.
3. When God gives gifts to the church, He gives leaders to the church.
  - a. Apostles - God gave men who were with Jesus and were eyewitnesses of Him after His resurrection to the church as messengers to witness of Christ.
  - b. Prophets - God gave prophets who wandered from one community to another to give God's message given from the Holy Spirit.
  - c. Evangelists - God gave the church messengers of good news who present the news of Jesus' grace and mercy for sinners needing salvation.
  - d. Shepherds/Teachers - God gave special men to the church to care for and instruct the members. I am a shepherd/teacher.

B. Leaders equip the church to serve.

1. Why did God give these leaders to the church?
2. These leaders are to equip the church to serve God.
3. Applic. - The role of church leaders; ministers, pastors, administrators, etc. has often been confused. Churches tend to think of their staff as serving the wishes of the members.
4. Illus. - In the early days of the telegraph, a fabric company sent a buyer to the south to purchase cotton. The price had increased so much he wired back the price of the cotton with this question, "Do I buy at this price?" His boss wired back this message, "No, price is too high." The telegraph operator omitted the comma and the message the buyer received said, "No price is too high." He bought the cotton at the high price bankrupting his company. They called the mistake the Fatal Comma. Christianity has a Fatal Comma. We interpret this text to say minister or leaders are to perfect the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body of Christ." The original text does not connect the leaders with the work of ministry. A more accurate translation states, And He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service. Leaders are to equip the Christians to perform service for God.

C. Leaders build up the body of Christ, the church.

1. By leading the church to be united.
  - a. Leaders can do nothing without the service of the membership and members will accomplish nothing without proper leadership.
  - b. What are we asking you to unite with other Christians? The answer is found in 4:7 - God not gave gifts of leadership but He gives us at least one spiritual gift at our conversion.
  - c. Ephesians does not list spiritual gifts but Romans 12 lists prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting (encouragement), giving, leadership (administration), and mercy.
2. By leading the church to be mature.
  - a. The word, mature, is in contrast with being immature as a child.
  - b. The measure of maturity is Jesus Christ who was mature as a man to the fullest degree.
  - c. Maturity is the biggest need in the church today.

d. Illus. - Maturity means I can set aside my personal wants for the cause of Christ and His church. I was never instructed about being mature as a Christian until I discovered it myself. In Paintsville the church built a new auditorium and basement on most of their parking lot. An acre of property became available next door to the church property. An old twelve room house was on this lot. We bought the property for additional parking. One of the members asked me what we were planning to do with the old house. He told me, "Tearing down that house would be a big mistake." At a church leaders meeting, the group decided to tear down the old house. This man was very upset when the meeting ended. He visited me the next morning in my office to discuss the decision. I feared what he would say. He said, "I believe we have made a terrible mistake." He continued, "I will go along with what was decided. I have a worker in my business who wants to tear down the house for the lumber. I will also pay his bond to insure the work is completed. I still do not like the idea." That is maturity. We give up our preferences for the healthy and good of the local church.

## II. DO NOT BE LIKE CHILDREN, V. 14

A. Do not be tossed here and there.

1. Being tossed by the waves on the sea illustrates the trends of our world.
2. Illus. - The media dictates opinion for the majority. Oprah Winfrey is the best known woman in the world. In a book about her, *The Gospel According to Oprah*, Marcia Nelson outlines some of her spiritual qualities. Much of her guidance is from a Christian background. Do not be deceived about her connection to Christianity. She holds to four basic ideas: First, "all is one, and one is all." "God is all and all is God." She believes humans are gods. Second, since most people do not realize they are gods, they need to be enlightened, which can come from many sources such as "spirit-channeling" or a spirit. The Bible is not the source of being enlightened in her views. Third, everything is relative. They believe the truth is simply within you. They reject Jesus' statement, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Fourth, there is the belief in reincarnation that upon death humans reappear on

earth in other forms of life. (Source - Serious Times, The Church of Oprah, May 1, 2008)

3. If we believe in such trends we will be tossed around later by another worldview.

**B. Do not be blown around with every type of false teaching.**

1. Be not tricked.
  - a. The word suggests dice being thrown with tricks to win.
  - b. Illus. - People who discover counterfeit money do not study the counterfeit money. They study the real money until they know every detail. After knowing the real thing, determining a counterfeit is easy.
  - c. Know the Bible to avoid being tricked into false teaching.
2. Be not deceived by craftiness.
  - a. This thought is slightly different from being tricked.
  - b. Do not be deceived by a system of craftiness.
  - c. Applic. - It is popular today for preachers to promise solutions to every problem giving comfort and ease. God does provide comfort and strength but the Bible seeks to transform and change us to be like Christ. Do not be deceived.

### **III. GROW UP TO BE LIKE CHRIST, Vv. 15-16**

**A. Speak the truth in love.**

1. Truth without love can be harsh and love without truth has no direction.
2. The truth in love grows children up to be mature in the faith.
3. The purpose of speaking the truth in love is to grow up in all aspects to be like Christ.
4. Illus. - William Willimon is the chaplain at Duke University and a graduate of Yale University. He shocked an audience once saying, "We are living in a pagan nation." Willimon defines pagan nation as becoming obsessed with job success, material goods, emotional fulfillment, sex, and other such desires. Our obsession with ourselves has led us to devalue human life and dignity. Murder continues to be one of the worst problems in our society. Rapists possess no respect for others or themselves. Child abusers often are victims of abuse. What can we do to change our pagan nation?

B. Christ supplies unity in the body of the church.

1. The body of Christ, the church, is fitted and held together.
2. The word for fitted is like the ligaments of a joint.
3. Our serving with our gifts joins us together in action.
4. As leaders we want to offer opportunities to serve.
  - a. Mission trip to Slidell, Louisiana, September of 2008, to aid rebuilding/repairing homes damaged by Katrina Hurricane.
  - b. Mission trip to Suriname, South America, in late August and early September of 2009 to assist with VBS and maintenance of their church building.
  - c. Educational trip to the Holy Land, in the spring of 2010.
  - d. Mission trip to Brazil with Haubners for construction projects and medical boat project in late two weeks of June in 2011.
  - e. We will have a meeting for anyone interested on Sunday, June 8, 6:00 PM.

C. Each individual part causes the growth of the body.

**CONCLUSION** - Aesop wrote a fable about an old crow becoming very thirsty while out in the wilderness. He had nothing to drink for days. He came upon a jug with some water in the bottom. The old crow reached his beak into the jug to drink, but his beak was not long enough to reach the water. This wise old crow picked up pebbles with his beak one at a time and dropped them into the jug. As more and more pebbles dropped to the bottom of the jug the water level rose up in the bottle. Finally the level rose high enough for the old crow to drink all that he wanted.

Our service to God seems so challenging to us but it is so small compared to the needs of our world. In unity we throw our pebbles of service together. As a result of our works we raise the level of God's love until people can drink of His mercy and grace.