

RECAPTURING THE MASTER'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH

(Part 3: Ephesians 4:11-16)

Ephesians 4:11-16 presents the biblical design, model and pattern of the church which is the Master's plan for the church: Gifted and godly leaders equip the believers for ministry for the building up of the church towards unity and maturity. The goal of the building up of the church is its growth in spiritual maturity. Christian maturity is not just an individual pursuit. Christian maturity is a community project. The maturing of the individual Christian will never happen apart from the church. And the maturing of the church as a whole will only come through the maturing of individual believers. As we look at the third feature of Christ's plan for the church, we'll consider the characteristics of a spiritually mature church.

1. Christ gives gifted and godly leaders to His church.

2. Gifted and godly leaders to equip the believers for the work of ministry.

3. The church is built up in unity and maturity.

a. A mature church aspires for unified _____.

As every believer and church member is equipped by the pastors and leaders to do the work of the ministry in serving one another and in proclaiming the gospel to the lost, the entire church is built up and edified (Eph. 4:12). Paul uses the term build up or edify to refer to the spiritual development and growth of the Christians from being spiritual children to becoming spiritual adults. As the church is built up, there are positive results. In Paul's words, the church will be unified in "*the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God*" (Eph. 4:13). The *unity of the faith* that we must all aspire for is a shared understanding of the core truths and essential doctrines of the Christian faith as revealed in the Scriptures (Acts 2:42). At the heart of our unified faith is the common knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Foundational to our unity as a church is a clear understanding of the person and work of Jesus, the Son of God. This knowledge of Christ is more than intellectual or head knowledge. This knowledge involves an intimate, deep, experiential heart knowledge, a growing personal and intimate relationship with our Lord (Matt. 22:37; Eph. 6:24).

b. A mature church aims for continuous growth in _____.

When Paul speaks about Christian maturity, he refers to the collective maturity of the church, not just to individual maturity. Paul also identifies the proper standard for measuring spiritual maturity. The standard and goal toward which every believer is to grow is "*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). Paul is pointing us to Christ, in all of His fullness, as our perfect standard of maturity. In other words, our character must be conformed to that of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Spiritual maturity then is defined by Christlikeness. After all, the Christian life is all about imitating the person and life of Christ. We must grow together as a church in the grace of God and in our pursuit of Christlike maturity (1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; Phil. 3:13-14; 2 Pet. 3:14-18).
