

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS
(LESSON FIFTY-FIVE)
“NO LONGER CHILDREN”

EPHESIANS 4:11-16 (KING JAMES VERSION)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

EPHESIANS 4:11-16 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

11 Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.

12 Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

13 This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

16 He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

In **Ephesians 4:11**, the Apostle Paul identifies the ministry gifts which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church. He writes, “*And he gave some, **apostles**; and some, **prophets**; and some, **evangelists**; and some, **pastors and teachers**.*”

In verse **12**, he informs his readers that the purpose of these ministry gifts is for “*the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” The purpose of the ministry gifts, is to completely outfit the members of the Body of Christ for service. Paul explains that it is the responsibility of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip believers to carry out the work of the ministry, so that the Body of Christ might be edified.

It is **not** the responsibility of the ministry gifts to do the work of the ministry. Their work is to **equip** the believers to do the work of the ministry. And the instrument or tool that they are to use to do the equipping is **the Word of God**.

It is the opinion of many believers that it is the job of the pastor and the other leaders to do the work of the ministry, but such a view is **not** based on the revelation of Scripture. God's design is **not** for believers to hire a pastor to do the work of the ministry for them. God's design is for believers to follow the leadership of a God-called, God-gifted pastor, as he equips them to do the work of the ministry, by utilizing the instrument of God's Word. It is God's revealed will for every member of the Body of Christ, and not just a few leaders, to carry on the work of the ministry.

Unfortunately, most churches today do not follow this New Testament template for "success." It is common practice for the leaders to do the bulk of the work, when their job is to train the saints to be the workers, which will make the overall ministry far more effective.

The statement of the great purpose of the ministry gifts, given by Christ to His Body, is followed in verse **13** by a statement of the time this provision is to last, or the point at which the great purpose in view is to be realized. Paul writes, "*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*"

The equipping work of the ministry gifts is to continue until all the members of the Body of Christ have come to their proper unity and maturity in their Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul gives no clear indication of the specific time that this will occur, and it may be, therefore, that he has in view only the goal itself and the attainment of it at whatever time that may take effect.

Paul writes, "*Till **we all come** in the unity of the faith.*" The words "*we all*," are a translation of the Greek word **pas** which means, "all in the sense of every part that applies." It means, "all without exception." The Greek word strongly suggests a collective idea and clearly indicates that, in Paul's understanding, **Christian growth and development does not occur in isolation. God's people come into the unity of the faith, not as individuals, but together.** It is not a goal to be attained by a select few "elite" saints only, but by all believers, and it will be fully attained by all believers when our Lord returns. If an individual believer is to mature fully, he or she needs the fellowship of other believers. The idea of an arm or a leg of a physical body developing in isolation from the other members of the body is ridiculous! In the same way, it is not possible for any member of the mystical Body of Christ to attain full spiritual maturity apart from the rest of the Body. When Christ returns, the entire church will arrive at complete maturity or glorification.

It is vitally important for us to understand and appreciate that it is impossible for the Body of Christ to attain unto the unity of the faith in the absence of doctrinal integrity. The unity of the faith is attained when the body of doctrinal truth is taught, believed and practiced. This oneness and harmony among believers is possible only when it is built on the firm foundation of sound doctrine.

The phrase "*the faith*," as it is used by Paul in this context, does not refer to a person's trust or belief in the Lord Jesus Christ per se. Rather, it refers to the **content** of what he or she believes. It refers to a very specific system of belief, which of course, is **the body of revealed truth that constitutes Christian teaching**, particularly the complete content of the gospel. In other words, Paul is not speaking here of the **act** of believing but rather to **what** is believed.

Brothers and sisters, it is the will of God for all believers to attain, not only to the unity of the faith, but to "*the knowledge of the Son of God.*" This is not a reference to the knowledge of Jesus Christ by which we were first saved, but to a deeper, more intimate and experiential knowledge. Paul is referring here to a growing encounter with the Lord Jesus Himself, so that we come to know Him more and more - not merely know about Him, but know Him, directly and personally.

Brothers and sisters, the work of the ministry gifts is to continue until “*we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*”

The word “*perfect*” is a translation of the Greek word **teleios**: (tel'-i-os), which means, “brought to its end, finished; lacking nothing necessary for completeness; perfect.” The word speaks of proficient soundness and includes the idea of being whole. **Teleios** also speaks of that which is fully developed as opposed to that which is immature. It describes persons who are full grown or mature. A man who has reached his full-grown stature is **teleios** in contradistinction to a lad. A student who has reached a mature knowledge of his or her subject area is **teleios** as opposed to a learner who is just beginning. In the New Testament, the word does not imply complete knowledge but a certain spiritual maturity in the faith. It refers to that which is in a state of full preparation or readiness.

In all the above variations of meaning the underlying idea is that of a purpose being achieved. The idea is of something or someone carrying out the purpose for which it or they were designed.

Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit desires for all of us to measure up to the full and complete standard of Christ! What a goal! In a word, this is Christ-likeness or conformity to the image of Christ, which is what every believer was predestined to, according to **Romans 8:29**. The state at which unity is lacking is the stage of immaturity; the stage in which oneness in faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ is reached, is the state of mature manhood in Christ. The apostle has in mind the spiritual maturity of each saint.

The expression “*the fulness of Christ,*” refers to the sum of the qualities which make Christ Who and what He is. These Christ-like qualities are to be reflected and modeled in the Church by every believer. When these Christ-like qualities are consistently seen in us, we will have reached a state of spiritual maturity and attained to the goal set before us. The term, “spiritual maturity,” as applied to a believer, is always a relative term; it is never an absolute term. The process of conforming a believer to the image of Christ begins with the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification as soon as he or she is saved, and this work is never completed, no not even in eternity, for the finite can never equal the infinite.

In summarizing verses **11-13**, we may say that **the first evidence of spiritual growth is Christlikeness**. It is the responsibility of the ministry gifts identified in verse **11**, to properly prepare and equip the saints for the work of the ministry, in order that the whole body might be built up. This is to continue until the time comes when, in the unity of the common faith and common knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity. And that maturity is measured by how closely our lives and ministry reflect the life and ministry of Jesus Christ! The saints do not call a pastor and pay him to do the work. They call him and follow his leadership as he, through the Word, equips them to do the job. The members of the church grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other.

The second evidence of spiritual growth is stability. This is what Paul emphasizes in the next two verses. In verse **14** he writes, “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*”

The word “*that*” at the beginning of the verse, is the translation of a Greek word which means “as a result.” This word defines the purpose of attaining to the Christ-likeness mentioned in the previous verse. The purpose of the maturity discussed in verse **13**, is emphasized by the presentation of the contrasting picture in verse **14**, of an immature, indecisive child who is spiritually unstable, easily tricked in spiritual matters and easily led astray from the truth.

The word “*children*,” is a translation of the Greek word **Népios: (nay’-pee-os)** which literally means, “not speaking” and so refers to a helpless infant. Figuratively, the word refers to one who is unlearned, unenlightened or simple. Paul is referring to the spiritual immaturity of a child as opposed to the relative perfection of a man of full stature in Christ. Perhaps you may have observed how unaware of danger little children appear to be. In the same way, spiritually immature believers seem to be unaware of the danger of false teaching. A child who is not yet old enough to speak is vulnerable. He or she is unable to express his or her wishes. The ministry gifts are designed to get us past this vulnerable stage of infancy in our Christian lives.

The American theologian **Samuel Lewis Johnson** made the following comments concerning immature believers:

“One of the things that characterizes a child is a lack of stability. Any new sight or sound is sufficient to change the purpose of a child. You notice that particularly in children. Nothing holds their attention for very long. To speak of it scientifically, they have a very short attention span. Now that is characteristic of new believers. When they are listening to the ministry of the word of God, their attention span is often very short... Now a second thing that’s characteristic of children is that they are easily deceived... You can play trick after trick on children. I did it with all of my children... Christians are easily deceived. It’s amazing the things we are deceived by: by the false teaching, by the cults, and not only by the false teachers and the cultists, but even by other new Christians. And then some who are just a little above them, who don’t have any real deep comprehension of doctrine, but who have some really wild ideas. And so they are deceived by them. One of the duties of all teachers of the Word is to seek to answer the questions that the children have.”

Paul says that immature believers are “*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*” The words, “*tossed to and fro,*” are the translation of a Greek word which means, “To be tossed by waves.” Metaphorically, it means to be thrown into confusion, to be mentally disturbed or agitated like the waves of a stormy sea. It describes a person whose opinions are always changing, someone who fluctuates in the way he or she thinks or believes, depending on the latest popular teaching. Such persons are like a small boat being blown in one direction and then another by a wind that keeps changing direction.

The Greek word translated “*carried about,*” literally means to carry about from one place to another, to carry here and there, or to transport hither and thither. The verb has the idea of carrying about in circles. Such is the confusing effect of false doctrine.

Immature believers are carried about “*with every wind of doctrine.*” The word “*wind*” here is a figurative description of doctrinal instability. Immature believers tend to be gullible and unstable. They are easily influenced or “blown away” by the distorted novelties and trends of professional tricksters. They become religious nomads, wandering about, moving to and fro from one appealing spiritual fantasy to another.

The word “*doctrine*” is the translation of the Greek word **didaskalia: (did-as-kal-ee’-ah)**, which means, “teaching, instruction, that which is taught, doctrine.” The different teachings of religious hucksters are represented as winds, blowing the unstable soul in every direction.

In the latter part of the verse, Paul reveals the character and the strategy of the false teachers. He writes, *“By the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”* The **New English Translation** renders the clause as follows: *“By the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes.”*

The Greek word translated *“sleight”* literally means, “dice-playing.” It refers to gambling and to anything that turns out by mere chance as a game played with dice does. It describes a person whose opinions seem to be the result of mere chance, or mere human reasoning. Anything like casting a die, or like opening the Bible at random to determine a doctrinal position, or a course of action, instead of calmly and sincerely examining the Holy Scriptures and seeking God in prayer for divine enlightenment. A person who forms his or her religious principles by chance, can “uniform” them in the same way! This *“sleight of men”* is in contrast with *“the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God”* that Paul spoke about in verse **13**.

The words *“Cunning craftiness”* are the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “all working,” or “capable of all work.” In the New Testament, the word generally has a negative meaning and conveys the ideas of trickery involving cunning, cleverness, craftiness or treachery. It conveys the idea of clever manipulation of error to make it look like the truth. Someone who practices *“Cunning craftiness”* would be willing to do anything to achieve his or her goals. The word speaks of dishonesty that stops at nothing.

The words, *“lie in wait”* is the translation of the Greek word **methodeia: (meth-od-i’-ah)**, which means “To follow up or investigate by method and settled plan; to follow craftily, frame devices, deceive.” Our English word “method” comes from this Greek word. The word refers to an orderly logical effective arrangement usually in steps. It describes deliberate planning or a systematic approach. In this context, **Methodeia** has reference to planned, subtle, systematized error. It refers to organized error with its systems and its logic! What was being taught in Ephesus, and what is being taught by false teachers today, is not merely error. It is calculated deception that proceeds from the *“father of lies” (John 8:44)*.

Brothers and sisters, we must always be alert for the cunning craftiness of Satan-inspired men and women. Their aim is to mislead immature believers who are not grounded in sound doctrine. Behind the evil men and women who seek to expound false teaching, there is a supernatural evil power who seeks to deceive unwary saints with his devilish cunning.

The Apostle Paul warned the believers in Corinth concerning this *“cunning craftiness”* and the demonically inspired methods that accompany it in **2 Corinthians 11 (New English Translation)**. In verses **1- 3**, he writes the following:

1 I wish that you would be patient with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are being patient with me!

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

3 But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

He goes on in verses **12-15** to write,

12 And what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may eliminate any opportunity for those who want a chance to be regarded as our equals in the things they boast about.

13 For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

15 Therefore it is not surprising his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will correspond to their actions. (New English Translation)

Satan's attacks are carefully and methodically selected to target each person's specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities. His schemes and methods are usually attractive, always deceptive, and often ensnaring. Immature believers are unskillful in the word of righteousness, and their senses are not exercised to discern between good and evil (**Hebrews 5:13, 14**). They inevitably meet false teachers, usually legalistic cultists, who impresses them by their zeal and apparent sincerity. Such persons are usually proficient at supporting their teaching with verses of Scripture taken out of context. Because they use religious jargon, the believer thinks that they must be true Christians. If they are not very careful, they will be carried about by the wind of doctrine of the false teachers and led into a form of systematized error.

Brothers and sisters, Satan and his demons are orderly and logical in their approach as they seek to destabilize us and overthrow our faith. This realization should prompt each of us to be even more appreciative of the fact that we cannot stand against our invisible enemies in our own strength or by relying on human "methods." We must put on the full armour that God supplies in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, are we seeing how important the work of the ministry gifts identified in verse **11** is? Again, we say that it is the responsibility of the ministry gifts to properly prepare and equip the saints for the work of the ministry, in order that the Body might be built up. Their Word-work is to continue until the time comes when, in the unity of the common faith and common knowledge of the Son of God, the Body attains real maturity. Paul says in verse **14**, that when this maturity becomes a reality we will "***henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.***"

Brothers and sisters, Paul's emphasis in **Ephesians 4:12-14** on the growth of the Body of Christ from infancy to adulthood - from immaturity to maturity, not only highlights the Church's ongoing need for sound Bible teaching from the ministry gifts, but it also underscores something important about our own place in redemptive history. Many persons believe that the first-century church had it all together and that if we could return to the apostolic era, we would have it made. But Paul's exhortation for the first-century Ephesian church to grow past childhood into maturity indicates that the Body of Christ was somewhat immature even in the apostolic era. In fact, despite the problems in the church today, it is not inappropriate to see ourselves as better off, at least in some ways, than the first-century believers. For example, the first-century Church did not have access to the entire canon of Scripture as we do today. We also have centuries of teaching from ministry gifts who have been used by the Holy Spirit to shed great illumination on God's Word and contribute to our understanding of revealed doctrine.

Until our Lord returns, however, let us pray that God would continue to gift His Body with ministry gifts who will help us to progress toward the day when "*we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*"