

## **Glorifying God in the Church – The Goal of the Church**

**Ephesians 4:11-16** *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Imagine if an angel gave you the task of coming up with something that would give God maximum glory, what would you invent? You can do whatever you want – make a monument, select a section of God’s creation, produce some kind of song or poem. What do you think would be the thing that brings God maximum glory during this time?

God has already answered that question – and it might surprise you. The thing which will bring God the most glory now, and probably throughout eternity, is the church. The church, made up of all believers from the day of Pentecost until his return - made up of thousands upon thousands of local churches. But this unexpected thing, which often looks unattractive, unremarkable, unappealing – this is the things which will bring God most glory.

**Ephesians 3:21** *to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

If the church is a temple of living stones, what is it that we do inside that Temple which gives God so much glory? Certainly we could say – it is our songs and our prayers and our testimonies of praise – and we would be correct to say so. And these things form part of the grand design for how churches glorify God.

There is something about the church, what it is, and how it operates that brings great glory to God, and honours Him for His wisdom and power and love. There is something in the blueprint of a church that, when fleshed out, truly becomes a people proclaiming God’s praises and offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. If we are to be a church that worships well, that gives glory to God with appropriate responses to Him, we must understand how we do that as a local church.

Here in Ephesians, Paul is explaining just that. He is showing how the church has been designed and gifted and how it functions to display God’s glory to the world and even to the angels. If we study the relevant portions in Ephesians 4 closely, we will have a very good idea of how we will bring God glory as a church. We will understand how our life as a corporate body will ascribe to God the value that is due to Him.

I want us to focus our attention this morning on verses 12 and 13, which describe the goal of the church. In verses 7-11 Paul tells us how Christ has given gifted men to the church. In verse 12 we find out the role of these gifted men. And in verses 15 and 16 we see the role of every believer in the church. But all of these things revolve around verses 12 and 13 – which

is the goal. Christ gave gifted men to the church to help the church reach this goal. If every member does what verses 15 and 16 say, the church will reach its goal. But before we tackle those things, we need to know what the goal is. What should a church be, or do, or look like, to bring glory to God? When is a church truly successful in God's eyes? When is a church really worshipping and glorifying God?

In these verses we see three marks of a God-glorifying church – its unity, its maturity and its conformity to Christ. As we study each one, let's compare our church to this standard. Let's see where we are succeeding, and where we need to change.

### **I. A God-Glorifying Church Has Unity**

***Ephesians 4:13*** *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God*

The word *till* lets you know that this is the goal, or the end point of ministry. This is what a church aims to do or become, so as to bring glory to God. And the first place we need to arrive at is a place of unity. But that unity is qualified. It is a unity *of the faith*, and of the *knowledge of the Son of God*.

The funny thing about unity is that you never get unity when you aim for unity. When a church tries to feel more unified and it tries to set up get-togethers and picnics and breakfasts and events, it might succeed in getting people to be in each other's presence more often, but that doesn't mean it has unity. When you're merely aiming to make church feel friendlier, you'll miss it every time. You'll just get people together who are probably still as divided as they ever were.

You get unity by aiming to have people unite around one thing. You get unity not by trying to get people to look at each other and feel closer, but by getting them to look at and embrace something in common. When they do that, they will have unity.

So what is it that God wants believers in a church to have? Unity of the faith - ***the*** faith, not simply faith, as if he means the experience of faith. The faith, which means the teachings of Christianity. The faith is a body of doctrine that we believe in, that we have faith in.

Christians gain their unity not by looking at each other first, but by looking to the Word of God and studying it to find out what the faith is. When they find that they agree on the faith that becomes the basis of unity. We do not unite on the basis of common hobbies, or economic levels, or educational pedigree, or racial group, or language group or age group. We unite around the faith.

Tozer said that if you try to tune 100 pianos to each other, you will have a horrible mess. But tune them all to one tuning fork, and they will be in tune with each other.

So the way we reach this goal which brings God glory is not by minimising doctrine and teaching, but by maximising it. We have fairly detailed statement of faith that we ask people to read and agree with and sign before they join. That's a way of uniting around the faith. We sometimes recite one of the ancient creeds. That's a way of uniting around the faith. We give the bulk of our time on a Sunday to the teaching of the Word. Why? Because this is how we

achieve unity of the faith. We could all gather and have one person read a text, and then go around the room and have each of 100 people tell us what they think the verse means to him or her. But will that achieve unity of the faith? No. Discussion and dialogue are good in their place, but God's means of achieving unity of the faith is to have a God-gifted and church-called man stand and give an extended monologue of what God has said. It is by far the best method and it's God's chosen method. Gather My people, read My Word, explain what My Word says, then let them all say Amen, and meditate on how to apply it individually.

Why will this unity bring great glory to God? Well, have you noticed that once you get more than one human being in a room, there is more than one opinion? Have you noticed that the more humans you get, the more difficult it is to get them to agree on anything? There is a reason why employment contracts are so technical and detailed, why trade agreements and peace treaties and the like have to be so filled with 'legalese'. Because humans naturally are selfish, self-willed and look for opportunities to go their own way and assert themselves.

Now you have this group of people who voluntarily assemble. They are from every conceivable background. But without any manipulation or brainwashing, they consider the truth of the Word of God, and within a local church, they come to a unity of the faith. That is a remarkable thing to behold. It is an anomaly. It brings God great glory.

It's not only a unity of the faith; it is also a unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

The church, which is made up of believers, claims something extraordinary. We claim that there is a man who died, but came to life again. We claim that through His work, we have come to know Him in a real and personal way. We have not yet seen Him, but we have by faith entered into a relationship with Him, and therefore we know Him, and we know the Father.

The word in the original language is not simply the word for ordinary knowledge. It means experienced knowledge, knowledge that is internalised.

And on this point, we have unity. What unites us is not common interests or common activities, but a common Saviour. We have been drawn from all kinds of backgrounds and times and places, and we are identified with one Shepherd. And when any one of us gives his or her testimony of salvation, of how he/she came to know Him, it resonates with all the others.

Why will this kind of unity bring great glory to God? Because in a church, when you take the differences, differences in language and employment, and social status and backgrounds and age and interests, and you add up all those differences and put them on one side of the scale, it is a huge potential for disunity. But then you put knowing Christ on the other side, and you now have people who wouldn't cross the road to see each other formerly, now willing to die for one another. Only Christ can do that.

That kind of unity brings God much glory.

Unity of the faith and of the Son of God is a display of God's power and wisdom to a watching world. It brings Him glory. But there is a second way that we as a local church can bring God glory.

## II. A God-Glorifying Church Has Maturity

***Ephesians 4:13*** *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man*

When Paul says 'perfect' man, does he mean sinlessly perfect? The word in the original is a word which can mean without fault, but it also means to reach a goal, to reach an end-point. And since in verse 16 we read that this is a process of growing up, the word *perfect* here means mature. Mature - God wants local churches to be growing to the point where they are characterised by Christian maturity. What does that look like?

Well, verse 14 gives you a glimpse of the opposite of maturity:

***Ephesians 4:14*** *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

To be immature, to be childish is to be tossed about by opinions, to be deceived and easily blown over. One opinion comes today, and you are there. The opposite one comes tomorrow, and you are there. There is a gullibility and a lack of stability. Immature Christians are easily led here and there. Their judgement is weak, it hasn't yet stabilised.

When your children are little, you tell them what to believe, and you make decisions for them. You know that they don't know enough, nor are they experienced enough to figure things out alone, or to make the correct decisions. But as your children get older, you start to teach them why they ought to believe what they believe. You give them reasons for their beliefs. You let them challenge their beliefs. You encourage them to make their own decisions. You are there to guide them, but the joy of seeing children grow into young men and women is seeing them judge wisely. They are no longer ignorant, unstable, unreliable. They are grounded, and discerning and can judge for themselves.

The same is to happen in the church. We might begin as spiritual infants when we are newly saved, and everything is new, and we are at that time completely dependent on others to teach us and show us and tell us what the right decision is. But as we mature in the body, we should grow to a place where we know not only what we believe, but why we believe it. We should be able to make decisions based on various Scriptural principles that we draw together.

Spiritual maturity is increasingly gaining the mind of Christ. You begin to think like Christ does, and learn to apply His thinking to situations that aren't spelt out in Scripture. You can apply the Word.

The character of the church becomes one of wise, maturing Christians, who do not need a rulebook of twenty volumes. Instead, as they are saturated with God's Word, they learn to apply it correctly and wisely to all kinds of situations. That's why one of the most enjoyable

times for us as a church ought to be our business meetings and prayer meetings. There we together judge how to handle situations, what is wise, what is not, when church discipline is required, how we should spend God's money, what ministries we should be involved in or begin or support. Don't shy away from business meetings. There is nothing more enjoyable than seeing saints who are maturing together, finding they have unity in their judgement of situations. Likewise, to be present at Bible studies and to hear mature answers to questions, mature perspectives. To seek counsel from another believer who provides you with wise judgement which helps shape your own.

Why will maturity bring great glory to God? Because people will see what kind of stability, and good judgement, and sound wisdom characterises the lives of those in the church. The decisions of the church as a whole will be wise, and discerning and careful and balanced and show forth God's priorities.

We show forth God's glory when we have unity, and we show forth His praises when we have maturity. But there is a third way that we worship God as a Body.

### III. A God-Glorifying Church Has Conformity to Christ

***Ephesians 4:13*** *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

The image here is of a body growing up and developing until it perfectly suited for the head. Your head is one of the first parts of your body that reaches full bone size. That's why when we growing up we sometimes look like we have these outsized heads on these little bodies. The body grows up to match the head.

Christ is the head of the church. The church is His body. For a body to grow up to the head is for it to become more and more like that head in appearance and size. So for a church to grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is for us to grow in conformity to Christ's character. We are together becoming less like the people we were, less like the world, less like the old person, and more like Christ, more like citizens of His kingdom, more like the new person.

Christ is committed to growing His church into a Bride fitting for Himself.

***Ephesians 5:25-27*** *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, <sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup> that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

Jesus wants to be wed to a group of people like Himself. He does not want there to be a mismatch, so He undertakes this process we call sanctification, whereby He helps us put off old ways and put on new ways, and become more and more like Himself. He's preparing a Bride for Himself, and He wants her to be His complement. That means growing us to be more like Him. That means like Him in attitudes, and desires, and loves; like Him in priorities and goals and ambition; like Him in speech and word and even non-verbal communication; like Him in work ethic; like Him in stewardship; like Him in servant hood;

like Him in family; like Him in friendship; like Him with enemies; like Him with neighbours; like Him towards the truth; like Him towards false teaching. We together become people who love what He loves, and hate what He hates.

Did you ever think about the word *Christian*? It only occurs in the Bible three times, but it is such a powerful term. Christians – Christ ones, ones who follow Christ, ones who resemble Christ. They are named after the one they are becoming like - Christ- or Messiah. Believers are Messiah-ones; they increasingly resemble the One who has saved them.

The more the church is like a mirror for Christ, the more glory God gets. When we flesh out who Christ is and what He is like, God gets glory.

Would you believe the statement that the church brings more glory to God than the seas, the sky, the stars, and the mountains? Those are his handiwork and they speak of His power and wisdom and greatness. But do you realize that a local church, functioning like this, brings God more glory. Its unity says – Christ is greater than what divides human beings. He can become more important to people than their deepest held identities. Its maturity says – Christ is wiser than all the learned of this world. A simple fellow in Christ can have more wisdom than the genius with 3 Ph.Ds. It says to the world – life works and makes sense and is not a crushing burden, when you live it under Christ. And its conformity to Christ simply reflects Him, in His glory to the world - His meekness, His forgiveness of enemies. His patience. His firmness. His courage. His kindness. His compassion. His tenderness. His mercy. His humility. His wisdom. This is our goal.

How are we doing? How is our unity? How is our maturity? How is our conformity? What are you doing as an individual to make this a reality?