



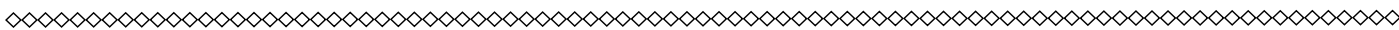
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International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: Eph. 4:7-16

Title: God's Church: A Trim, Fit Body

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Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

God's church: a fit, trim Body. That's the theme of today's sermon. As we continue our series of messages on the nature and mission of the church, I want to focus attention today on organizational structure. This will be the first of sermon sermons in coming weeks on how the church is to be organized. Today's emphasis is intended as foundational to these subsequent messages.

In the athletic world, a person is never successful in sports competition unless he / she is in excellent physical condition and at the top of their skill development. Countless hours of training go into preparing for the game. Without this preparation and physical conditioning, no sports team is ever going to be successful on the playing field. The same is true for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need training and organizational structure.

One of Paul's favorite metaphors for the church is the Body of Christ. This word picture stands behind Paul's concept of the church in our text, Ephesians 4:7-16.¹ These verses are a part of a larger unit of material that includes vv. 1-16. The emphasis in these verses is upon the unity (vv. 1-6) and the diversity (vv. 7-16) of the church as the Body of Christ.

Just like an athletic team, the church must work together toward a common goal. Shared belief, common commitment to Jesus Christ, everyone willing to serve -- these are behind Paul's call in 4:1 for the Ephesian believers to walk worthily in their calling from the Lord: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." No church can ever success when everyone is doing 'what seems right in their own eyes.'² Instead, a church must work together as a team. The implications of this for our church will be explored over the coming weeks as we begin re-organizing and defining our common goals and mission.

But today I want to focus on the diversity aspect of the church as found in verses 7-16. A careful analysis of this text uncovers two essential points made by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians and other churches in the region around Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia Minor.³ Those two points are what I want to stress

¹NRSV: 7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." 9 (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Gk. NT: 4.7 *Ἐνὶ δὲ ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 4.8 διὸ λέγει, Ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις. 4.9 τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς; 4.10 ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.*

4.11 καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους τοὺς δὲ προφῆτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, 4.12 πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4.13 μέχρι κατανησόμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4.14 ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, 4.15 ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, 4.16 ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβασόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξῆσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

²See Judges 21:25 (NRSV): "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes." The declaration is not set forth as a positive claim. Instead, it stands as a condemnation of the disorder and chaos that prevailed among the Israelites at the close of the era of judges. It paved the way for the move to a king and an unified nation, which was eventually achieved under David.

³For details, see the Circular Letter nature of Ephesians in the foundational Bible study on this passage.



to you today.

BODY

I. God enables each of us to serve, vv. 7-10

In these verses, Paul focuses on a basic principle in verse seven and a scripture proof from Psalm 68 as the foundation for the axiom. I want to take these two segments and attempt to relate them to us today. What he says here does have importance to our church as we're trying to establish an organized structure in order to accomplish our mission assignment from the Lord. Let's examine closely Paul's words to the Ephesian believers.

We each have been gifted by God's grace, v. 7

First and foremost comes the declaration that each person in the church has been 'gifted' by God's grace in Christ for service. What does Paul mean with the term "grace according to the measure of Christ's gift" (*ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ*)? In simple terms Paul asserts that each believer was "gifted by God's grace" upon receiving Christ as Savior. Elsewhere in Ephesians, Paul talks about the grace of God that comes in salvation and stands as the foundation of our conversion experience. As Eph. 2:8-9 declares, "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast." God's grace, His favor concretely expressed to us through Christ, plays a critical role on our salvation experience. But God's grace doesn't end with our conversion. One continuing aspect is the gifting aspect for ministry. When we come to Christ that divine grace that comes to permeate our lives also provides the needed spiritual resources for ministry and service to Christ as believers. It is closely related to Paul's concept of spiritual gifts, but is not exactly the same thing. The grace gifting alluded to here is broader and foundational to the spiritual gifts made available to us as believers. What God presents to us as believers is His grace, an active dynamic of the Divine presence, that stands as the foundation for all that we do as believers. Sometimes this is called the leadership of the Holy Spirit; sometimes spiritual gifts. But Paul's concept here seems to be more basic and inclusive than either the Holy Spirit's leadership or spiritual gifts.

What this strongly suggests is that any ministry contribution we make as believers should -- and must -- originate out of the divine grace gifting. If we serve within the limits of our own abilities and strength, that service will not possess the breath of God permeating it and empowering it. Some positive accomplishment may take place, but ultimately it will not be the quality service that enables the full blessing of God. Our experiencing of God's grace in salvation should be a life changing moment. And out of that change should come a life of ministry flowing through this grace of God, as it energizes us in service.

My vision for IBC church is that whatever ministry and service that is given by each member -- from pastor down to every last member -- comes out of this divine gifting of grace. We must serve this way; not by our own strength and effort and determination! Then and only then can the rendered service find the full blessing of God! Such service avoids the pitfalls of showmanship, of self-serving interests, of power control, etc. Human effort based service falls prey to the corrupt human nature and then limits severely how well God can use it to get the work of the church done. All of us want what we do in service to last and to be blessed of God! For this to happen, that service must arise out of the grace gifting of our God.

Second, and also important, is the emphasis that Paul makes upon each individual member as being grace gifted: "each of us was given grace" (*Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις*). Literally, the Greek text reads, "And to each one of us was given grace..." Prominent emphasis is placed on the individual member of the church. The defining measure, "grace according to the measure of Christ's gift," (*κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ*) alludes back to varieties and differences in the grace gifting. The verb *ἐδόθη* in the Aorist tense of the Greek stresses the giving of this grace gift at the time of conversion. Thus special emphasis falls upon what each member of the church has received.

What does that mean to IBC church? Just this: every member of this church has been 'grace gifted' in preparation for service through the church! Every member of this church has been given a ministry assignment. No one can say, "I can't do anything." To say this is to deny Paul's words here in our text. Even more, to say that you don't have the ability to do anything is to say God didn't tell the truth when He gifted you in conversion.

My vision for IBC church is that the entire body of Christ here will function in a positive way with each member contributing ministry to the life of the church. We've already begun a process of re-thinking the organizational structure of the church. Over the next weeks and few months detailed plans will gradually emerge for the church to consider adopting. New ministries for women and young people will be set forth. Clear definition of ministry contributions in evangelism, missions, Bible teaching, etc. will be put on the table for the church to adopt. We hope to move toward establishing a deacon ministry in the church during this church

year. My dream is that we can offer to every member of the church a specific ministry opportunity. Through prayerful consideration every member can find that place of ministry that God is leading them into.

Folks, if we move into this kind of congregation, watch out! The IBC church Cologne will become a powerful witness to the Gospel in our city. We will experience spiritual awakening that will transform our congregation. I know it can happen. I've pastored as senior pastor and interim pastor several churches over the past fifty years of ministry where just this very thing has taken place. In two particular instances -- one a pastorate and the other an interim pastorate -- God moved in the churches in such a powerful manner. In one this happened in 1969-1970 and continues to this very day. In the other, it began in 1993 and is continuing with explosive growth to this very day as well. These are long term growth patterns where deep spiritual awakening and constant renewal are occurring. In both congregations the attendance is significantly larger today, upwards of twice to three times what it was in the beginning. One church just moved into a brand new multi-million dollar church facility last year and grew from about 150 in attendance to almost 600 every Sunday. So I know from experience that such renewals can happen. I pray for something similar to take place here in our church.

This gifting is based on a crucified and resurrected Jesus, vv. 8-10

The second point that Paul makes in verses 7-10 is to link this grace gifting with the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. In verse eight he quotes from Psalm 68:18 as scripture indication of the granting of grace gifts by God. His citing of Psalm 68:18 is rather different than the OT text itself:

Psalm 68:18 (NRSV): "You ascended the high mount, leading captives in your train and receiving gifts from people, even from those who rebel against the Lord God's abiding there."

Paul's quote of it in 4:8: "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

This variance has troubled students of the Bible from the late second century onward. Any number of explanations have been put forward to reconcile the differences, but most all of them are artificial and clearly inadequate attempts. (Cf. my discussion of this in the [background Bible study](#), pp. 5-6, on this passage for greater details). The more recent explanation put forward by a growing number of New Testament scholars makes better sense than the others.

In Jewish interpretative tradition, this Psalm was typically understood to allude to Moses ascending up Mt. Sinai to receive the Law of God and then he delivered that Law as a gift to the people at the base of the mountain. Ancient Jewish [targumaic](#) interpretation went along these lines:

You ascended the firmament, Prophet Moses; you took captivity captive;
you learned the words of the Law; you gave them as gifts to the sons of man.

By substituting Christ for Moses, Paul sees the Psalm as alluding to Christ's incarnation, His descent, and Christ's ascension to the Father, His ascent, in this Psalm. Thus the Psalm takes on a new and different meaning from that attributed to it in ancient Jewish understanding.

This is further underscored by the association of this Psalm with Pentecost and the first century Jewish understanding of Pentecost as celebrating the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. But from the coming of the Holy Spirit as a divine gift to the church on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2) onward, Christ gifted His church in ways far beyond what Moses accomplished with the Law on Sinai.

What does this imply for us today? It is a powerful reminder that whatever we can contribute to the life of the church as a member is inseparably linked to a crucified and resurrected Christ. Setting up chairs before the worship service, washing dishes in the kitchen after the fellowship time, practicing with the Worship Team -- all these jobs are not mere jobs. They are spiritual ministry growing out of the presence of the living Christ in our lives. These actions are done to praise Him who died for our sins and was raised for our life. But even deeper, as grace gifted people we do these things motivated and energized by the living Christ in our lives. Everything we may do in the church should have this deeper aspect to it. Then and only then will our actions be blessed by God to His glory.

II. God provides leaders to help us serve, vv. 11-16

The second point I want to make from our text this afternoon is that God has gifted the church with spiritual leaders. Individual members are grace gifted. The congregation is gifted by God with leaders.

Paul mentions several channels of leadership ministry in this single, very long sentence of the Greek text in vv. 11-16. He speaks in a representative way and the five groups of leaders are not to be considered as all inclusive. Other leadership roles are mentioned elsewhere both in Paul and in the New Testament generally (See the [background Bible study](#), pp. 8-11, for the details.). The apostles stand in a separate category from the others in the way Paul words the text. They are at the 'top of the list' reflecting the unique authority the original Twelve Disciples and Paul possessed in the first century. Although all of them are long since dead, we continue to hear them speak to us today with the same divine authority they possessed in their earthly min-

istry. How? Our New Testament is made up of twenty seven documents composed by these apostles either directly or indirectly. Over the first few centuries of Christian history, Christianity came to see the inspirational Breath of God was permeating these documents and thus they alone should stand as sacred scripture alongside the Old Testament scripture. Later on we will explore in much greater depth some of these issues. What I want to stress from these verses today is a twofold point: leadership is a divine gift and is to prepare the saints of God for ministry.

Leadership comes as God's gift, v. 11

That this is Paul's point is clear from the main clause statement in verse eleven: God gave leaders. Leaders didn't decide themselves to lead. Even the church didn't arbitrarily decide upon its leaders. Fundamentally and most importantly the leaders of a church should be -- yea, must be -- those whom God has chosen. When the church elects its leaders, it should be electing only those it has concluded God has chosen to lead. God chooses; the church in election acknowledges that divine choice to the best of its ability. This is how the process is supposed to work. And when it doesn't work this way, the church is in trouble. Our fairly recent history here at our church unfortunately underscores this principle in dramatic fashion. My deep, deep longing is that we will always follow God's process of deciding upon leaders for the church.

Another implication of leadership as a divine gift pertains to the attitude of the leaders themselves. God never chooses any of us because of what He sees already existing in us! No one leader in the church can lay claim to a leadership role because of being superior, more talented, deeply spiritual, extensively gifted or any thing else. Leadership comes exclusively because God in His infinite wisdom chose you to serve Him in this capacity. Look at the Twelve Apostles. No one of them was highly educated. No one of them came out of aristocratic heritage. Everyone of them had severe limitations at different points in their lives. Only the Apostle Paul was exceptionally educated, and yet from his statements in [Gal. 4:12-15](#), nothing in his physical appearance made him attractive to other people. For over three decades of ministry the apostle was deeply appreciative of his calling from God as he expressed it toward the end of his life in [1 Tim. 1:12-14](#) (NRSV).

[I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.](#)

May God give us only these kinds of leaders! They can be a blessing to the church. And God can powerfully use these kinds of leaders. Self-centered, power hungry leaders will kill the church! May God deliver us from such people.

Leadership is to equip us to serve, v. 12

The heart of the goal of leaders is defined in verse 12: "[to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ](#)" (*πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*). The leaders are not to do the work of ministry (*ἔργον διακονίας*); instead; all the saints together are to perform the different tasks of ministry and service. The leaders are to train and equip the others for ministry.

Here is where churches in our day often fail. In a day of salaried church staff, the tendency is to say, "Let the church staff do the work of the church! That's what we pay them for!" From my almost thirty year experience with the Landeskirche in Germany, I've come to realize that this problem is often worse here than in American Christianity. The church does not, and can not biblically, pay the preacher to do all the work of the church! This is a sure fire recipe for killing a church. It may build big buildings but it will leave them largely empty on Sunday mornings. It turns Christianity into a spectator religion where the church members watch the church leaders to the work. Biblical Christianity has no such trait!

According to Paul, the leaders are to equip the saints, the saved folks who make up the church, to do the work of ministry. Thus the role of a church leader is much like that of an athletic coach, ein Sportstrainer. And perhaps even more like the team captain in an English cricket team (das Cricket). He guides the team during play, while he is on the playing field alongside the other team members.

And what is this ministry (*ἔργον διακονίας*) the saints are to be doing? The next phrase, *εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, defines the nature of this ministry as "[for building up the body of Christ.](#)" Ministry includes service that leads to the edification, i.e., the spiritual growth, of the church.

As we move forward in our re-organization of the church, I pray that every job that opens up in the life of the church can be understood this way. If some action or activity contributes to the spiritual development of the church, it is ministry -- ministry based on biblical principle. And thus can be blessed by God. And everything that each member does in service should produce this result: the building up of the church. As church members we're construction workers! But we're in the business of building churches! Not tearing them down!

Growth is primarily in spiritual development through ministry, vv. 13-16

And how long should this ministry continue? “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (*μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οί πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοὺς υἱοὺς τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*).

God has laid out enough work for us to last until Christ comes again. If you remember the first sermon that I preached to you last June, I stressed Jesus’ words in Matt. 16:18, “I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not be able to withstand its onslaught.” When Jesus promised to build His church, the same Greek word was used by Matthew as that used here by Paul. Building, οἰκοδομέω, is an on-going process, not a quick set up job. It will take much longer to build Christ’s church than it did to build the huge cathedral, der Dom, in downtown Cologne. And that building required centuries of construction work to complete.

What possible implications does this have for us? I see in this a need to go slow and very deliberately in developing ministry structures. We have plenty of time to put together a ministering church. Planning must be done prayerfully and carefully. And thus the reorganization plans may take longer than some anticipate. But as your pastor, I want us to pray through and think through and discuss through all the plans for ministry that emerge. We’re putting together something that should last for years and years to come. It needs to be done right!

What positive impact will this have on the church? “We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” (*ἵνα μηκέτι ὄμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ*).

For the church at Ephesus and elsewhere, the congregations needed to develop Christ like maturity in order to ward off false teaching which was corrupting the Gospel and leading believers into false thinking and behavior. The antidote to false teaching is growing up in authentic Christ likeness with the help of good leaders. One of the growing problems among evangelical churches today is the surfacing of all kinds of “screwballish” theology. That’s an American term with roughly the meaning of “Wirkkopfdenken.” Even during the short time in Cologne last summer I became aware of some horrible twisting of scripture by many of these so-called independent church pastors. Most evidently have no formal training in theological studies, at least by a legitimate seminary or divinity school. Consequently superstition gets mixed into a few Bible verses lifted out of their context in order to form a set of doctrinal beliefs. But Paul was having to deal with the same thing in the middle of the first Christian century. So “nothing is new under the sun.”

We must build a church made up of spiritually mature believers who know their Bible and have strong defenses against such false influences. As long as we genuinely follow Christ according to scriptural principle, we will mature into Christ-like believers who are properly following the paths Christ laid out.

The role of Christian love is especially highlighted by Paul at the end of this long sentence. Ministry by everyone in the church must be immersed in Christian love. All that we do stems out of our love for Christ, our love for one another, and our love for a lost world. May God help us to become the most loving caring congregation in our city!

CONCLUSION

Folks, here’s our challenge. God wants us to grow. But growth according to God’s plan. And that means primarily spiritual growth. We must move increasingly toward a spiritually alive community of believers who are serving Christ faithfully. No one is left out. Everyone is serving and contributing to the work of the church. As we work together in Christian love through ministry, God will bless our church with the needed numbers of people and finances. That we have already begun experiencing over the past six or seven months.

But we must never be content until every person is faithfully serving Christ in the life of the church. And that we will endeavor to do in the coming weeks. In new structures that will gradually come together, every person in the church will have a place of ministry contribution. We will go slow in developing these structures. Too much change too quickly can be harmful. But we earnestly want to become a New Testament congregation. Only then can we become the church God desires us to be.

Our word to you today is simply this: join our team! God is putting together a winning team in the IBC church Cologne. We need you to be a part of it.