

## **Christ's Plan for His Church**

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In his letter to the Ephesian church, the apostle Paul explains the eternal plan of God as it relates to Christ and His church. The first three chapters capture the rich theology and doctrine of that plan. When chapter four begins, Paul explains how Christians should respond to the spiritual blessings they have received in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Paul writes, “Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). In the subsequent verses, Paul explains how believers must live in light of what God has done for them through Christ. Christians serve Christ and one another in Christ’s church. Ephesians 4:7–13 says:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’ (Now this *expression*, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

In these remarkable verses, we discover Christ’s plan for His church, how it should function.

First, Christ sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts to each member of His church. Ephesians 4:7 says, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

Second, Christ appoints the leaders of each church. Paul writes, “He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). This is a list of gifted leaders that God has given, in Christ, to the church.

Paul uses the expression “pastors and teachers” to identify one particular office within the church, that of teaching shepherds. The office of “pastor-teacher” is also described in the New Testament as an “overseer” and “elder” (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1–2). In fact, all five terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe an elder of a church. Both Acts 20 and 1 Timothy 5 describe a plurality of elders who shepherded the church in Ephesus, some of whom were paid and others were not (1 Tim. 5:17).

Third, the leaders of the church are to equip the members to do the ministry of the church. Those in church leadership positions are called to equip the people of God (4:12). The primary role of the elders isn't to do the ministry. Rather, it's to equip believers to do the work of ministry. If the pastors and the elders do all the work, that represents a skewed view of Christ's plan for the church. A healthy, biblical model is for the elders to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Fourth, the members do the ministry of the church. Church leaders ought to be equipping the members of the church "for the work of service" (4:12). The Greek word for "service" can be used for any kind of service. For example, in Acts 6:4 it's used for ministering the Word. In Luke 10:40 and Acts 6:2 it's used for preparing and serving food. Therefore, every member of the church is required to be involved in service at some level, from the public proclamation of God's Word from the pulpit in corporate worship, to menial acts of service across the church. The point is everyone should be serving!

Fifth, following Christ's plan results in the spiritual growth of the church. Paul refers to this as "building up of the body of Christ" (4:12). As God's plan for the church unfolds and as we faithfully serve one another, the church grows spiritually. Service, then, isn't peripheral. Instead, service is integral to Christ's plan for His church, including the spiritual growth of every brother and sister in Christ. Therefore, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, His plan for you is to serve in His church, and to do so faithfully.

But leaders in Christ's church, just like the apostles in Acts 6, cannot serve in every ministry of the church. Not only is that an impossible task, it is also an unbiblical one. We simply do not have the capacity to lead every ministry, and Christ doesn't require us to. Our role as elders and church leaders is to identify those in the church who can lead ministries, and equip them to lead God's people. The elders also have a responsibility to identify and train men that God has called to lead the *entire* church—those men that meet the biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Church leaders also must identify and train people in the church who don't hold a particular office in the church but whom God has gifted to lead various ministries.

You likely have faithful and gifted believers leading the ministries of your church. Praise God for His goodness in that! But you probably have others who are new to your church that would benefit greatly from a biblical understanding of leadership. They desperately need to be established in the truth of God's Word. And even seasoned leaders need encouragement to press on and further develop their leadership skills.

It is critical that pastors and church leaders understand they cannot and are not called to do every ministry. Rather, they are called to lead others according to Christ's plan. That is how He designed leadership—in His church—to work.