

Ministry is important. If you have been saved by God He saved you to serve. That’s why we say that *every member is a minister* at WBC. It’s why we had a Ministry Fair last week. It’s why we’ll be kicking off our Ministry Teams this evening.

But the fact is, as important as ministry is, it’s not the end. It’s a means to something. Just what is that something? We need to know or we’ll get discouraged (and even quit) when ministry gets tough. We need to know or we’ll get ticked off when our ministry ideas aren’t accepted by others. To what end is ministry a means? We’ll find out from God’s Word this morning.

In the past month in a series entitled, “What’s So Special about the Church?” we’ve been learning about two vital subjects...

I. We are learning about the church.

There are two key lessons the Bible teaches us concerning the church.

A. The church is special.

To whom? Did you realize that the church is special to all three members of the Triune Godhead? It is indeed.

1. The church was a gift from the Father to the Son (John 17:1-2).

The night before His crucifixion Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven and revealed something very special about the identity of His followers.

John 17:1-2 “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life *to all those you have given him.*”

In eternity past God the Father chose to give a love gift to His Son. He elected a people that would exist for the praise of His Son forever and ever. It would be a bride for His Son. That’s why the church originated, brothers and sisters. The Father designed and decreed its existence and gave it to His Son as a very special gift.

How did the Son respond? He reciprocated the Father’s love. He chose to obey His Father’s plan regarding the church. How? By coming to the world to rescue His bride.

2. The church is a bride for which the Son gave His life (Eph 5:25-27).

If you find yourself doubting how important the church is, just read the following...

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, just as *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* to make her holy, cleansing her by the

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

The Father loved the church and gave it to His Son. The Son loved the church and gave His life to make it a spotless bride. You say, “The church doesn’t look very spotless to me.” No, but Jesus isn’t finished yet. She will...because God always finishes what He starts. And what about the third member of the Trinity?

3. *The church is a temple for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16).*

That’s why what you do with, in, and to the church is so important, as Paul emphasized in...

1 Corinthians 3:16 “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

When I say the church is *special*, I’m not suggesting the church possesses some innate worth that makes it special in God’s eyes. God the Father didn’t choose us, God the Son didn’t die for us, and God the Holy Spirit doesn’t live in us *because* we are special or worthy, for we are undeserving sinners and what we deserve is the judgment of God. But in spite of our unworthiness, the Father chose us, the Son died to redeem us, and the Spirit indwells us until the day of our redemption.

We have a pet, a cat named Chloe. Chloe is special to our family, but that’s in spite of what she is. She was a stray kitten living in an abandoned van when my daughter found her. She was matted and dirty, but my daughter set her affection on that creature. She chose her (and begged her parents to do the same!). When I say Chloe is special to our family, it’s not because she’s any better than any other cat in this world, but she’s special because our family chose to love her and my daughter has poured out blessing after blessing on her life.

Quite frankly, I don’t think the cat realizes how good she’s got it! Nor, so often, do we as members of the church. The church is special to God. Is it to you? Here’s how we show it’s special to us...

B. The church is healthy when its people participate in three corporate activities.

In other words, we have three congregational responsibilities (things we do together as a church) that ought to be priority in our weekly schedules...

1. *We are to worship together (Heb 10:25).*

Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together...”

Yes, we who have been saved by Christ ought to worship Him daily on our own. But on the Lord’s Day we do what we can’t do on our own. We gather to worship Him *together*.

2. *We are to fellowship together (Acts 2:42).*

Acts 2:42 “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and *to the fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

We must make *koinonia* a priority in our weekly schedule. We need to develop relationships in the church for accountability and encouragement.

3. *We are to serve together (1 Peter 4:10-11).*

1 Peter 4:10-11 “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ...”

We who have received so much have ample reason to give much. That’s what service is, giving our time and energy to help others all to the glory of Christ.

II. We are learning about ministry.

The Bible (and especially the book of Ephesians) answers four critical questions for us regarding ministry.

A. Who can be a minister? Ephesians tells us...

Every so often someone will come to our church and say, “I’d like to get involved in ministry at your church.” And I appreciate their willingness, but they need to know something. God has a high standard for those who would serve in His church. To be used by God you must...

1. *You must be in Christ (1:3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, etc).*

The fact is, we are sinners and sinners can’t do God’s work on their own. Indeed, their self-righteous efforts to please God fall far short and actually offend Him.

The good news is that God sent His Son to rescue sinners. He died on the cross, conquered the grave, and will save any who will call upon His name in repentance and faith. When God hears a sinner call upon His Son, He places that sinner *in Christ*, granting that sinner all the merit of Christ Himself.

Ephesians 1:13 “And you also were included *in Christ* when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked *in him* with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...”

So if you want to be a minister, you must be *in Christ*.

2. *You must be in the church (1:22; 3:10, 21).*

Ephesians makes this very clear as we saw last time. The church is at the center of God’s plan in this age.

Ephesians 3:10 “His intent was that now, *through the church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known...”

Ephesians 3:21 “...to him be glory *in the church* and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

God’s agenda for ministry is the church. You say, “What about para-church ministries? Doesn’t He work through Christian camps, schools, and mission agencies?” Yes, but remember they are *para-church* ministries, that is, ministries that *come alongside* the church to help it fulfill its purpose, not to replace the church but to be an extension of it.

If you want to be a minister for God, you must be *in Christ*—you must know Christ as your Savior—and you must be *in the church*—you must be plugged into a local church where there’s meaningful accountability.

Note: Our next New Members class begins next Sunday...

3. *You must be living a life worthy of your calling (4:1).*

Ephesians 4:1 “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, *I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling* you have received.”

What does a worthy walk look like? Simply put, if you say you love Christ on Sunday it should be apparent on Monday through Saturday, in your personal life (chapter 4), in your family life (chapter 5), and in your work life (chapter 6).

B. How does ministry work? Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us...

It’s a two-step process...

1. *Leaders equip the saints (11).*

Ephesians 4:11-12 “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God’s people* for works of service...”

2. *Saints minister (12).*

Ephesians 4:12 “...to prepare God’s people *for works of service*...”

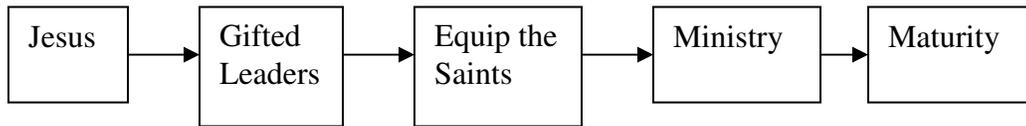
The church is supposed to be a training ground. God expects pastors to teach His Word so that the saints learn how to ministry. And God expects the saints then to do the work of the ministry.

Note: In recent weeks you’ve heard about our ministry plan to help every member of this church plug into the ministry for which God has gifted them. This evening will be our Ministry Team Kickoff service. I encourage you to come...

That brings us to this very important question...

C. What is the goal of ministry? Ephesians 4:13-16 tells us...

The following diagram illustrates God's master plan for ministry in the church.



Notice carefully the final two boxes. It's important to see that ministry is not the final box. Maturity is. God's master plan doesn't end with verse 12 but with verse 16. Our ultimate goal in the church is edification, not ministry. Ministry is an intermediate goal, a means to an end.

Key: God uses ministry to produce maturity in us.

Yes, throughout the Scriptures we see that God's goal for us is maturity...

Romans 8:29 "For those God foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

Colossians 1:28 "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, *so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.*"

James 1:4 "Perseverance must finish its work *so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*"

2 Peter 3:18 "But *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

If maturity is God's goal, how can we tell if it's happening? When my sister was in med school she spent the first year studying *the healthy body*—how the body is supposed to function. In year two they studied *the diseased body*—the malfunctions, the problems.

Ephesians 4 is like the first year of med school. Paul is teaching us about the healthy Body of Christ (how the church is supposed to operate). In other places he deals with the diseased body:

- 1 Corinthians (the disease of division)
- Galatians (disease of legalism)
- Colossians (disease of mysticism, New Age philosophy)

If we look carefully at Ephesians 4, especially verses 13-16, we can answer our question...

D. What are the marks of a mature church?

Paul gives us seven marks. I encourage you to rate yourself in each of the areas, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 indicating "maturity needed" and 5 indicating "maturity demonstrated"). And keep in mind that these seven marks come to light in the context of ministry (you either see them or your need for them).

1. *We are living in harmony with each other (13a).*

Ephesians 4:13 “...until we all reach unity in the faith...”

The KJV says, “Till we all come in (lit. INTO) the unity of the faith.” Please note that the first mark of maturity in a church is the ability of its people to live in unity and harmony with each other. Christians are not lone rangers. We need each other, and what’s more, we need to live rightly with each other.

Look some time at the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Out of the fifteen works of the flesh, eight deal with problems in the area of unity (hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy).

Listen to what our health manual is saying to us. If a church does not have unity, it is a diseased church. If a Christian does not live in harmony with other believers, he or she is not a healthy, mature Christian. And unity, according to Ephesians 4:3, is something that takes effort to maintain.

Answer this. What is it that unites us and gives us harmony? It’s mere not sentiment nor a feeling we work up. What produces unity? Paul tells us in the next phrase, “unity *in the faith*.” “The faith” has the capacity to produce unity. What’s that? “The faith” refers to the truth we believe, that great storehouse of truth God entrusted to His church in the written Word, the truth concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Some people say, “Don’t teach doctrine. Doctrine divides.” The fact is, sound doctrine unites. When people love the same truth (particularly about Christ and His redemptive work) and when they are committed to learning, protecting, and proclaiming that truth together, they have the potential for a bond of unity that the devil can’t crack.

There’s the first mark of a maturing church. Its people live in harmony with each other. Does that trait describe you?

2. *We are growing in our knowledge of Christ (13b).*

We see this mark in the next phrase in verse 13...

Ephesians 4:13 “...until we all reach unity in the faith *and in the knowledge of the Son of God*...”

The word “until” acts like a spotlight in the night sky for it focuses our eyes on the goal. Verses 11-12 tell us that leaders equip and saints minister. But for how long? Verse 13, “until...” Until what?

Until we “all” (not some, but all of us) “reach unity in the knowledge of the Son of God.” In other words, until all of us in the church have come to know Christ.

You say, “Well I’m a Christian. I already know Christ. So this doesn’t apply to me, right?” Hold on. Do you recall what Paul told the Ephesian church members back in 1:15-17? First, he thanked God for them because they knew

Christ (15). But then he prayed for them that God would enable them to know Christ better (17)!

Are you growing in your knowledge of Christ? Ponder this...

****If you are not growing, you are stagnating.**

You say, "How can I know if I am growing in my knowledge of Christ?" Answer two questions...

1) Is getting to know Christ better a priority in your life? Is it? Even for many who call themselves Christians, it is not. . .

2) Do you set aside time consistently for your own personal study of God's Word? For prayer? For Scripture memory?

3. *We are becoming more like Christ (13c).*

Ephesians 4:13 "...and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Listen carefully. Contrary to New Age teaching, we are NOT divine. And Paul is NOT teaching here that we can become God. What then is he saying? This, that Christ is our standard. We are to be like Him. We are to allow Him to live in us and through us. We are to cooperate with His Spirit who desires to produce the fruit of Christ's character in us (5:9; Gal 5:22-23).

The phrase "and become mature" [KJV "perfect man"] in verse 13 describes God's intent for us, that we be fully developed, robust, and mature. But remember the context. Paul is talking about the church corporately, not individual Christians. *We together* are supposed to be becoming more like Christ. Yes...

****The maturity of the church ought to be the goal of every member of the church.**

It ought to be the goal for me as an individual, as well as for you as an individual, as well as for us as interdependent members of the church. Beloved, maturity is the goal for every member of this church.

Let me give you one implication. I want to see this church grow and I hope you do, too. But God's intent is that we grow UP before we grow OUT. We need not pray for more people if we are not faithfully nurturing and developing those God has already sent us.

Do we look like Jesus, beloved? Again, make it personal. How much do we resemble Jesus Christ? He was loving and selfless and kind? Are we? Are you? He was committed to doing the will of God no matter what the cost. Are we? Are you? He invested His life for the Kingdom. Are we? Are you?

4. *We have doctrinal stability (14).*

Ephesians 4:14 “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

Here we're told what we are NOT to be like. “Infants.” The Greek word refers to a very young child. What are young children like? They have a short attention span. They're also easily influenced. They tend to be fickle and finicky. They vacillate. They're naive. They'll believe just about anything. That's kids for you, they'd trade a \$100 bill for a shiny nickel and think they got a bargain.

Unfortunately, young children aren't the only ones like that. So too are immature Christians. They follow after Christian fads and fashions. They run after the latest teacher. And they're gullible and susceptible, unfaithful and undependable. And they're in serious danger of falling prey to doctrinal deviation.

Listen to Paul's description of the danger. He warns of being “tossed back and forth by the waves” [the Greek word for "rough water, surf"]. Paul was an experienced sea traveler. He'd seen firsthand the effect powerful waves could have on a boat, knocking it back and forth.

That's the picture of immature Christians. They don't know the Word of God well enough to state their convictions. They stand for the latest preacher they heard. Or book they read. They're easy prey for what Paul calls “every wind of teaching.”

Remember the crowd at Lystra in Acts 14? One minute they hailed Paul and Barnabas as "gods" (11). The next they stoned Paul (19).

A mark of maturity is doctrinal stability. Now lest you think, “Well I'm okay in this area. I'm not about to follow some cult. . .” Let me ask you two questions which you must be able to answer "yes" if you are doctrinally stable.

⇒Can you recognize doctrinal error when you hear or see it?

That goes for the music you listen to, the magazines you read, the experts you hear on television (Dr. Phil).

⇒Can you defend the truth using biblical references?

If you can't then become a student. Take advantage of the opportunities available in this church—come to Sunday School, Wednesday evening Bible study—listen to Bible teaching on Christian radio, read a good theology book.

You say, “Is it really that important?” Yes! This is a critical mark of a maturing church. *Doctrinal stability.*

5. *We deal with our problems on the basis of truth and love, not our feelings (15).*

Ephesians 4:15 “Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

Verse 15 begins, “Instead.” In contrast to the gullible folks described in verse 14, we are supposed to be “speaking the truth in love.” Literally it says, “Truthing in love.” We are to cherish two things: truth and love.

What does “truthing in love” have to do with ministry in the church? A lot! Answer this. What happens when a church full of people start doing their ministries? A lot of activity takes place. And a lot of potential for misunderstanding takes place, too.

It’s like your car engine. As long as it’s sitting in the garage it doesn’t break. But start it up and you’ll be going places, and you’ll also have to deal with potential breakdowns and malfunctions.

It’s the same way when the machinery of the church operates. Things happen. Misunderstandings happen, too.

“Well, I taught that VBS class last year. Why didn’t they ask me this year? Didn’t they think I did a good job?”

“I can’t believe the Board okayed that ministry expense. Don’t they know we need money on our ministry team, too?”

“My team leader said he wanted our input, so I gave it. But they’re not using my idea. What’s wrong with that leader anyway? Didn’t he hear what I said?”

Answer this. What needs to happen in each of those cases (and the answer isn’t that the person should go sulk and sit on a pew)? The parties involved need to *speak the truth in love*. When there’s a misunderstanding, I need to go *speak the truth in love*. When I feel that I’ve been slighted, I need to go *speak the truth in love*.

And it goes both ways. I need to *listen to* the other person as he speaks the truth in love. Proverbs 27:6 says it well, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” Remember this...

“Truth without love is brutality. Love without truth is hypocrisy.”

Brothers, we need both, a tenacious commitment to the *truth*, to making sure things are done in an excellent way that reflects well on our excellent Savior, but commitment to truth that’s bathed in love.

So here’s another great evidence of maturity. It’s when ministers *speak the truth in love*. When there are misunderstandings and even disagreements, they *speak the truth in love* to each other and about each other.

And what’s the result? Paul says that people who speak the truth in love “will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” You see, God’s goal is to produce people that resemble His Son.

6. *We make decisions based on what Christ wants, not what we want (16a).*

One of Paul’s good friends was a physician and he was with Paul when he wrote Ephesians from Rome (acc. to Col 4:14). His name? Luke. And apparently Luke helped Paul illustrate spiritual truth by using medical terms.

What was Paul’s favorite metaphor for the church? Over and over Paul says the church is like a what? A *body*. And here he uses the body to reveal the sixth mark of maturity...

Ephesians 4:16 “*From him the whole body...grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*”

Every joint is vital in the body. Every member is necessary, from the toes to the head. The health of the body depends on the health of its parts. So it is in the church.

But as with the physical body, this too is true of the Body of Christ. There is only *one head*. In fact...

“A body with more than one head is a monstrosity.”

Who’s the Head of the church? The one head is Jesus Christ. Is that important to remember when a church does its ministries? Absolutely. Every member is a minister in the church, but there’s only one head, one that calls the shots. This is Christ’s church.

Beloved, when we make decisions it must be based on what HE wants, not what WE want.

You say, “How do we know what He wants?” He’s given us His Word. He’s also given leaders to His church, elders, men that He will hold responsible for decisions made.

7. *We function as a body, not isolated parts (16b).*

Ephesians 4:16 “From him *the whole body*, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as *each part* does its work.”

Some Christians are involved in ministry, but they’re not team players. They don’t know how to work well with other Christians. They function as if the church existed for them. They don’t understand the teamwork involved in ministry.

E.g.—Phil 4:2-3 “I plead with Euodia and Synteche . . . same mind”

Friends, it’s not enough to say, “Hey, I’m involved in ministry. What more could you want?” The question is, are you building up the Body?

Sadly, some active church ministers tear down more than they build up. What’s needed? They need to see themselves as but one member of the Body rather than an isolated part.

Let me put it another way. Consider three models of the church...

⇒A Pyramid 

Some view the church like a pyramid. This model is taken from the corporate business world. The pastor is a CEO at the top, then the board. The next layer contains the SS teachers, and the rest of the congregation makes up the base at the bottom.

⇒A Bus 

The pastor does the driving. The congregation members are the passengers. Their task? Make sure the bus has gas and then enjoy the ride.

⇒A Body 

In a body every part is important for every part does something that contributes to the health and well-being of the body. But no part can exist on its own. In fact, when a part of the body stops obeying the brain and starts doing its own thing, we call it a malfunction (like a tumor) and the doctor takes action to correct or remove it.

It's the last model which reflects what God's Word teaches about the church. The church is a body, the Body of Christ. The implications are huge...

**"In order to please God, I need you, you need me, and we need each other."

We've seen seven marks of maturity this morning. A mature church is not simply a church where there's a lot of programs and activities. It's where you see this...

1. *We are living in harmony with each other (13a).*
2. *We are growing in our knowledge of Christ (13b).*
3. *We are becoming more like Christ (13c).*
4. *We have doctrinal stability (14).*
5. *We deal with our problems on the basis of truth and love, not our feelings (15).*
6. *We make decisions based on what Christ wants, not what we want (16a).*
7. *We function as a body, not isolated parts (16b).*

Brothers and sisters, the goal is NOT. . .For ALL of us to meet SOME of the marks. . . , or for SOME of us to meet ALL of the marks. . . , but for ALL of us to meet ALL of the marks. That's the goal. That's God's design. That's my prayer.

Make It Personal: Keep this in mind as we do ministry...

A. As we minister, we will face problems.

All kinds of problems. Budget problems. Personnel problems. Problems where one ministry gets more recognition than another. Problems where someone doesn't follow through on a commitment. And so on. Don't be surprised. Remember, ministry isn't the end, but the means to an end.

B. As we minister, we will have wonderful opportunities to mature and grow.

When you see a problem developing, don't fret and certainly don't run. See the wonderful opportunity in it...for you as a Christian and for us as a church body *to mature and grow*. But always keep this in mind...

C. As we minister, we must make it our aim to please Christ.

He's the One that matters. This is His church.