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**Five Principles for the Church in the 21st Century - Part Two**

By Tal Davis

People's reasons for joining (or leaving) a church vary according to many factors. Some would say, "I really like the church's preacher, his (or her) sermons really inspire me!" Another might say, "I like the music in the church, it makes me want to sing and dance before the Lord." Still another will say, "I really enjoy my Life Group. The Bible studies and the fellowship are very special." Others may say, "I like the way the church is organized with deacons and elders who manage its business well."

The point is, people have different tastes in preaching, music, kinds of Bible studies, fellowship, and church organization. Those are usually the factors that draw someone to join a church. But all of those are determined just by culture or personal preference. In the big picture they do not make a great deal of difference. Any church, regardless of its worship style, how it functions, or how it is organized, can be a solid, biblically sound Body of Christ.

In this two-part series, we are examining five key principles that the Apostle Paul laid out to the church in Ephesus that should characterize a genuine and healthy church. None of them revolve around the above factors. The church in Ephesus was a strong body that Paul had helped start and grow in the early AD 50s. He later (around AD 61) wrote a letter of encouragement to them that we have preserved in the New Testament as the book of Ephesians. In chapter four of that book, we find these five elements that Paul addresses for building and maintaining a faithful Christian fellowship. The principles he highlighted

for the First Century are just as important for churches in this the Twenty-First Century!

In part one we looked at the first two principles based on Ephesians 4:1-6. The first principle we examined is that the Church in the 21st Century should humbly walk in the way of love (Ephesians 4:1-2). Humility and love are essential for a body to remain healthy and as a witness to a skeptical world. To read Part One click here:

<http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/11/five-principles-for-the-church-in-the-21st-century-part-one-tal-davis/>.

The second principle is that the Church in the 21st Century should be united in Christ (Ephesians 4:3-6). In verses four through six, Paul lists several "Ones" around which he regarded as essential for a Christian church to be unified: *one body; one Spirit; one hope; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one God and Father*. These represent the Gospel and essential theological bases to which any Christian body should adhere. The unifying foundation is God the Father, the unifying person is Jesus Christ, the unifying power is the Holy Spirit, and the unifying theology is the "one faith."

These two initial points set the table for, and make possible, what comes next. Now we turn to three other key principles Paul and Jesus accentuated for a church in the first century, and no less so for a church in the 21st Century. These are all intensely practical.

**Principle Three: The Church in the 21st Century Has Members Who Are Spiritually Gifted for Christ's Service.**

Do you know what an oxymoron is? No, it is not a stupid bovine species. It is the term for a phrase or title

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in which contradictory terms are used in conjunction with each other. Several possible examples might include: "a fine mess"; "a calculated error"; "cheap gas"; "Congressional ethics"; "Dodge Ram"; "double solitaire"; "educational television"; "genuine imitation"; "jumbo shrimp"; and "sweet and sour chicken." Wives especially like this one: "adult male."

Now here is one more example especially applicable for a church: "inactive member." Anyone who claims membership in the Body of Christ and does not participate in its life is a living oxymoron. A church member can no more be inactive than can a hand or foot claim to be part of a human body but do nothing for it.

Yes, we are to be united in Christ and active in His church. However, that does not mean we are all the same. In fact, quite the opposite. In Ephesians, chapter four, Paul makes it clear that God has gifted each one of us to serve in the church in some particular way. He says the Holy Spirit has graciously given each of us a spiritual gift (manifestation) to exercise in the body. We are "the Body of Christ" in which each part has a function. Not to function would be like a hand who says, "I don't want to hold that fork." Notice how Paul explains this principle of unity in a diversity of spiritual gifts.

*7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the inter-*

*pretation of tongues. (Ephesians 4:7-10 NASB)*

Verse eleven is the lynchpin of this principle. The Holy Spirit decides who gets what gift.

*But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (Ephesians 4:11 NASB)*

Paul expresses this concept even more fully in his first letter to the Corinthians.

*14 For the body is not one part, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has arranged the parts, each one of them in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many parts, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again, the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary it is much truer that the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those parts of the body which we consider less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor, and our less presentable parts become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable parts have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one part of the body suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if a part is honored, all the parts rejoice with it. (1Corinthians 12:14-26 NASB. See also chapter 14 where Paul specifically addresses the gift of speaking in tongues.)*

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The key point is that every part of the body (every genuinely born-again church member) has a spiritual gift to serve Christ in the church. Some individuals may have more than one gift, but everyone has at least one. No one has all the gifts and no one has no gift. When all the parts work together, then the church can, and will, accomplish its purposes. If a member fails to exercise his or her gift, then the whole body is handicapped.

Nonetheless, in order for the members of the body to function adequately, good leaders are needed to train and inspire them. This why the next principle is so important.

### Principle Four: The Church in the 21st Century Follows Godly Leaders.

Beginning in verse eleven of Ephesians chapter four, Paul delineates certain positions of leadership that are necessary to pilot the church to accomplish its goals.

*11 And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; 13 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.* (Ephesians 4:11-13 NASB)

Paul declared that God the Holy Spirit Himself provides gifted leaders (*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers* - v. 11) to the church. Note their purpose is highlighted in verse twelve: *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ*. An old error some made in the past wrongly interprets this passage to mean that only the "ordained clergy" are to do "the work of ministry." That mistake may be partially due to a translation error in the King James

Version (KJV) of the Bible, and other ancient versions. The KJV renders verses eleven and twelve this way: *And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

Did you notice the difference in how the KJV and the NASB (and nearly every other newer English version) renders this passage? The KJV translators inserted a comma in verse twelve between "*perfecting of the saints*" and "*for the work of the ministry*." That one unnecessary little punctuation mark makes it read like the leaders themselves are to perfect the saints and to do the work of ministry.

That is the exact opposite of what Paul is saying. The leaders – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (and nowhere is ordination ever mentioned) – have the responsibility to equip and train the saints (ordinary Christians in the church) for them to do the work of ministry to edify the church! Every part of the body has an important function, regardless of how prominent or humble it may seem. Every part, big or small, matters.

The key point is that when Godly leaders are doing their jobs, and when the people follow those good mentors and utilize their gifts, the whole church is outfitted for productive ministry. So all these factors are absolutely necessary for an effective Twenty-First Century Church: love, humility, unity, members willing to serve, and good leadership. And everyone needs to participate. There are no spectators in the kingdom of God. As Jesus Himself asserted: *From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.* (Luke 12:48 NASB)

But there is one more key principle needed for God's modern church. And this one comes from Jesus Himself.

### **Principle Five: The Church in the 21st Century Has a Vision for the World.**

Sometimes people ask, "When is Jesus coming back?" The honest truth is that we do not know. Jesus said not to speculate (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32). But He did say this:

*19 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20 NASB)*

And in answer to the above question, Jesus also said this:

*"And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14 NASB)*

In this, the 21st Century, we have the first real opportunity in history to accomplish these commands of our Lord Jesus. With the technology and human resources now available to the churches, there is no reason why the whole world cannot hear the gospel message in this generation. But this means that churches must have a vision for reaching every people group. Christians need a renewed worldwide vision for evangelism and missions. Only then can we truly be the church in the 21st Century that Jesus desires before He comes again. Otherwise, the "evangelical church" is just another oxymoron.

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