

“Gospel Gifts from the Victorious King”

Ephesians 4:11

Hopewell ARP Church ▪ 2020.08.02 Evening Sermon

What is a “Holy Spirit” church or a “spiritual gifts” church? What is an “equipping” church? What is an “active” church or an “every member ministry” church?

These are important questions, not only because the section in vv11–16 establishes this as the soil in which worthily walking (cp. v1 vs v17) grows up. But also, because in our broader church context, in the past several generations, these ideas have taken on meanings that are unrecognizable by and indeed in tense incompatibility with what the New Testament teaches.

So, we’re going to slow down and work through them carefully.

What does a church that is full of the Holy Spirit look like? What are the first and primary gifts that the Lord Jesus gives? That’s what v11 is emphasizing to us, and the answer is pretty simple: a church that is full of the Holy Spirit is a church that is full of accurate Bible teaching and application, and that is accurately teaching and applying the full Bible.

Jesus’s giving apostles to the church is already familiar to us in this letter. To them, he adds the prophets of the post-ascension church—those through whom the final words of God came. And evangelists, those who become the first to take the words of the apostles and prophets to a region (such as Philip, Ac 21:8 and Timothy, 2Tim 4:5), even up to missionaries and church planters of this day.

We notice that these are all Word-centered officers. Preaching, teaching, and writing officers. Theologians by whom the ascended Christ, through His unifying Spirit, keeps us grounded and growing in the indispensable truths about the hope of our calling, about our Lord, about our faith, about all that is signified and accomplished in our baptism, about God the Creator/Ruler/Redeemer Who is also life-begetting, character-defining, all-providing Father.

It is specifically the apostles and prophets, as extensions of Himself the Cornerstone, whom the Lord Jesus has given as the foundation of the church. So how does the Holy Spirit build upon that foundation? How does the Holy Spirit build upon Christ? Through the application and implementation of that Word (which is what elders do as pastors), especially through proclamation of that Word and instruction in that Word (which is what elders do as teachers). This is how the Spirit builds. This is how He equips and makes effective the other gifts whether of “church member” and the specific gifts of “wife,” “husband,” “child,” “parent,” “slave,” “master,” “widow,” or whatever other role His Providence assigns to us in this life.

So, the first answer as to what a church full of the Holy Spirit looks like is that there is a lot of preaching, teaching, and shepherding by the elders. The Ephesians knew this perhaps best of all. The apostle taught theology class in Ephesus every day for two years (cf. Acts 19:8–10). Enough early manuscripts contain the scribal insertion that this took place from the 5th to 10th hours to warrant a footnote in the ESV. Though the hours may not be inerrant Scripture, it seems likely that these manuscripts are relating something that the church in Ephesus (still existing at the time of their writing) knew to be true.

5 hours of Bible and theology class every day, when people got off work due to the heat—spending it in the school of Tyrannus instead at home reading false religion (cf. Ac 19:19), or engaged in Diana/Artemis worship (cf. Ac 19:24–27), or engaged in hours of political rioting (cf. Ac 19:34).

This was how the church in Ephesus had started. They spent their entire midday break in theology school. This was the love that they had at first (cf. Rev 2:4), the first works that Jesus commanded them to return to (v5).

Now, does Jesus expect us to spend five hours a day in theology school? Perhaps not. But perhaps so. Do we have less leisure time than the first century Ephesians did? The truth of the matter is that between Ephesians 4 and Acts 19 and Ephesians 2:1–7, we have a composite biblical picture of how a biblically Spirit-filled church spends a large chunk of its time: under Bible-preaching from Christ’s appointed officers and Bible-teaching from Christ’s appointed officers, so that in the rest of their time they will be Bible-living.