

The Equipping of the Saints – *Ephesians 4:11-13*

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I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

If you'll open up your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4 this morning, we're going to pick up again today on our journey of discovering what it means to walk worthy of the calling we have received and how we can actually do it in a practical sense. Today we'll look specifically at the process God uses to equip the saints and lead each of us into that walking worthy lifestyle, where we each become mature and grow into a unified body.

If you'll remember from my last three messages on Ephesians, in chapters 4 through 6, Paul is showing us what it will look like when we learn to live and walk in the light of the new identity we have in Christ. He's showing us what it will look like when we begin to walk like the new creations we are, relying on the Holy Spirit's power and allowing the Word of God to transform the way we think and live our daily lives. After detailing these truths about our new identity in chapters 1 through 3, Paul opens chapter 4 by pleading with us to walk worthy of the calling we have received. And he shows us that a walking worthy life will be characterized by two essential qualities: humility and gentleness.

We learned in our previous studies that humility must be present not only at salvation but must continue also in our daily walk, as we walk with a continual awareness of our desperate need for God every moment of every day. And when we walk in this moment-by-moment dependence on God, that's when we see God doing amazing things through us that we could never otherwise do in our own power and strength.

And we saw that gentleness, on the other hand, flows out of humility. It's only when we make an honest assessment ourselves and truly see and understand our own desperate need for God that we can then extend the same grace that God has shown to us to the people around us.

Then, most recently, in my last message on Ephesians verses 4, verses 3 through 10, we looked at how Paul is also calling us to walk worthy in unity and oneness as the body of Christ. When we're each walking worthy, it will lead to unity and peace in the body, rather than to division and strife and arguing. And we are called to diligently preserve this unity...to be actively working hard to maintain unity and oneness in our body...because this unity and peace is what the Spirit desires and is what enables us to glorify God and accomplish things as a body we would never otherwise be able to do.

Recent events in my life have driven home just how important humility and gentleness are in preserving unity in the church and in all our personal relationships. When confrontations are made without humility and love and gentleness, the immediate result is strife and hurt feelings and friction. However, when the same issue is confronted gently with love, and humility and a desire for restoration, unity is preserved and growth occurs, even though feelings may still be temporarily injured. Let's face it, we all get our feelings hurt when someone has to confront us about something, but when we sense they are doing it gently with love and with a sincere desire for our growth and improvement, we can take it and learn from it and make the necessary adjustments.

And humility and gentleness and love also need to be present in the life of the person being confronted if unity is to be preserved. We all need correction sometimes and if we're wise we will receive it humbly and allow it to lead us on into further growth in Christ. We always have a choice: we can allow these situations to create bitterness and resentment inside of us, or we can honestly assess ourselves and see if maybe it's an area of our life where we really do need to grow. As long as we're finding our security and value in Christ and not in our attempts to have perfect behavior, we will have the freedom to do this and won't need to sink into despair or resentment when someone confronts us about something. It's the old choice between stepping stones or sinking sand. We can use these challenges to be the stepping stones that guide us safely on in our walk with the Lord, or we can allow them to lead us into the sinking sand of bitterness and anger and resentment.

Proverbs speaks so very clearly on the importance of humility and gentleness in confrontation situations:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1). ***There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of the sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*** (Proverbs 12:18). ***A fool rejects his father's discipline, but he who regards reproof is sensible*** (Proverbs 15:5). ***The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to counsel*** (Proverbs 12:15).

The important thing to remember is that humility and gentleness need to be operating on both sides in order for unity to be preserved.

Now at the end of my last message on Ephesians, we briefly touched on the diversity that God has built into the unified body of Christ. We saw that Christ has given gifts to each of us and that each of us has a role to play in the body. Every one of us has been given a gift to be used in the body of Christ. And this is where we'll pick up in our study today in verse 11 of Ephesians chapter 4, where Paul lists a few of the gifts that Christ has given to various members of the Body of Christ.

Let's read Ephesians 4, verses 11 to 16:

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to 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. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Today we'll focus on verses 11 to 13, and then we'll move through 14 to 16 next week.

II. THE GIFTS GIVEN BY CHRIST

So the first question I want to ask you today is: what is your spiritual gift? It was very clear in my last message that each of us does have a gift and a part to play in the body of Christ. So when you think about your own life, where do you see that God has specially gifted you and empowered you to contribute to the growth of the overall body of Christ? If you can't think of one, spend some time in prayer and ask God to show you. We know that each child of God has at least one.

Now in Ephesians 4 verse 11, only five gifts are listed. But we know that there are many other spiritual gifts that have been given out by Christ. Many of these are outlined in 1st Corinthians chapter 12. So as you think about what gift you have, I'm going to list out not only the gifts that we see here in Ephesians, but also the gifts that are listed in 1st Corinthians chapter 12. And keep in mind that you may not fit snugly into one of these categories, but that doesn't mean that you haven't been given some kind of spiritual gift that can be used for good in the body of Christ. Every one of us that has the Spirit of God living inside has been given a spiritual gift from Christ Himself. So let's briefly go through the list of spiritual gifts from the Bible while you think about which ones might be yours:

- 1) apostleship
- 2) prophecy
- 3) evangelism
- 4) pastoring or, more literally, shepherding
- 5) teaching
- 6) wisdom
- 7) knowledge
- 8) faith
- 9) healing
- 10) working of miracles
- 11) distinguishing of spirits
- 12) speaking in tongues
- 13) interpreting tongues
- 14) helping or serving
- 15) administration

As you can see there are a wide variety of gifts. And what we know from Scripture is that each and every one of them is important. Our tendency is to put more value on certain gifts and look down on others. But that is not God's way. In God's kingdom, what the world views as least shall be the greatest and the last shall be first. By God's design each of these gifts serves an essential role in making up the complete body of Christ.

Just think about it: if we're missing any part of our body, even something like our big toe, we'll have some serious problems to deal with and we'll have to make some major adjustments in order to get things done and even function well with ordinary tasks.

So I hope as I read that list you were able to determine where God has specially gifted you by His Spirit to fulfill an essential role in the body of Christ. And if you've been holding back on using that gift, please don't hold back anymore. We need each of us to be a complete and unified and powerful and effective body representing Christ to each other and to the world around us. It's so easy to tell ourselves that we're not worthy or we're not courageous enough or that we're not needed or that we don't know enough... And that's exactly what Satan wants. He wants us to be incomplete and not functioning as God intended.

In my own life I went to college at Moody Bible Institute and was fully intending to go to the mission field after graduation. Following my second year at Moody, I had participated in a really successful and fulfilling six-week mission trip to Egypt, and I came back energized and really excited to finish up my schooling and head back to the mission field. But sadly, in the following 2 years before my graduation I allowed my confidence to be shaken and to let my fears and my weaknesses convince me that God was no longer leading me to the mission field and that I was silly to think that shy and quiet Joe Davis could actually be a full-time missionary. I instead went back home and tried to figure out what else I could do with my life, eventually ending up in the accounting field.

Fortunately, God is patient and faithful and He continued to walk with me and guide me through situations in my life that would help me grow my faith and confidence in Him rather than in my own abilities.

I continued to seek the Lord and walk with him and over time and through various circumstances and challenges He mercifully taught me to start putting my full trust in Him and His power, and to start giving up those fears of inadequacy that haunted me for so many years. I always comfort myself with the fact that it took 40 years in the wilderness to prepare Moses to fulfill the role that God had for him. Fortunately God's time frame is much bigger than ours and He takes the long-term view and does what is necessary, patiently and carefully, to guide us into the calling and gifting He has for us.

My point here is in no way that I've finally arrived and have it all together now. I am an imperfect and weak person who still needs the power of God just as much now as I did back when I was in college. I still have fears and challenges and I make mistakes. My point instead is that our adequacy and our ability to function in the gifts that God has given us, comes from God alone and from walking in a moment by moment relationship with Him and allowing Him to break down those fears of inadequacy that Satan tries to instill in each of us to keep us from using our gifts. Please don't be waiting to use your gifts until you feel adequate and confident in your own abilities. That's exactly where God doesn't want us to be, since it means we're still relying on our own strength and power. Instead, we begin to function effectively in our gifts when we give up on ourselves and draw near to God...When we say no to Satan's lies and start believing that God really can work through us, even in our weakness, as we trust Him.

Now let's look briefly at the specific gifts that are listed here in Ephesians 4 verse 11. Apostleship is first on the list and it literally means "one sent forth." The gift of apostleship seems to be something that was specific to the early church and applied to the men God had specially called and given the challenging task of establishing his church throughout the world. In Scripture it is most often used for those men who had spent time with Christ during his earthly ministry and had been intentionally trained by Jesus to carry forth the gospel of the kingdom of God. However it is in a few instances used in a broader sense for others outside of the 12 disciples. Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles as well as Silas and Timothy, Andronicus and Junias and Epaphroditus. But the heart of the gift of apostleship was that it was one sent forth by God to establish and grow His church. A modern day equivalent to me is a missionary who is sent forth to share the gospel and establish God's church in areas where it has not yet taken hold.

The next gift listed in our passage today is prophecy. The word used for prophet here means “one who speaks forth or openly” and “a proclaimer of a divine message.” We tend to think of prophets as those whom God speaks through to tell us about things that are going to happen in the future. And that’s definitely a big part of what prophets do. But another significant role of prophets is to speak a direct word from God that may not have anything to do with predicting the future, but instead communicates something we need to know now or maybe explains a passage of Scripture in a powerful way.

In discussing the Greek word for “prophet,” *Vines Expository Dictionary* says that the New Testament use of the word indicates both “a preaching of the Divine counsels of grace already accomplished and the foretelling of the purposes of God in the future.” So prophecy often involves the foretelling of the future, but also can be involved with the preaching and explanation and interpretation of the Word of God. What comes to mind for me is when Jesus explained the whole Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and suddenly everything made perfect sense to them. Jesus may have been exercising the gift of prophecy in that situation.

The next gift is evangelism. An evangelist is a bringer of good news. In Scripture, an evangelist is someone who preaches the good news about salvation through Christ’s work on the cross. Now we know that all of us have a responsibility to share the hope we have in Christ with others, telling them the good news and giving them an opportunity to place their faith in Christ. But we also know that there are some people who are just especially gifted and passionate and Holy Spirit-led when it comes to evangelism.

Pastor Dave definitely comes to mind as someone who is extremely effective and bold and unafraid when it comes to sharing the gospel with anyone he comes into contact with. There are probably some of you who are here today because Pastor Dave cared enough to speak the truth into your life and give you the opportunity to find your hope in Christ alone. I can think of several others I’ve known in my life who definitely had the gift of evangelism. And if you have the gift, please use it. There are so many people who are wandering around in the darkness and trying to find their hope in all the wrong things. May God give us each the courage, even if this isn't our special gift, to share the hope that we have in Christ with the people God brings across our paths.

The final two gifts listed here in Ephesians chapter 4 are pastoring and teaching. Now pastoring might be better translated, "shepherding," because the Greek word literally means a herdsman or a shepherd. Sometimes we can think of pastors as primarily being teachers or the person who brings the sermon on Sunday, and that is definitely part of what a pastor does. But when you think about the job of a shepherd, you realize that a pastor's job is a lot more involved than just giving a message on Sunday.

One description of a shepherd's role that I found while preparing for this message said, "A shepherd in the near East was responsible for watching out for enemies trying to attack the sheep, defending the sheep from attackers, healing the wounded and sick sheep, finding and saving lost or trapped sheep, loving them, and sharing their lives to earn their trust." To that description I would add feeding the sheep and guiding the sheep. Sounds like a big job, doesn't it?

To me the heart of the pastor's job is to care for and love and watch out for the best interests of the sheep. This involves guiding them faithfully to where they can find food, which is the unchanging life-giving word of God, and which has the ability to transform the way we think and live our lives and enable us to make choices that will keep us healthy and honoring to God. A pastor's job involves being there for the sheep as they walk through difficult times and challenges and pointing them to the One who alone can give them the strength and the power to face whatever comes their way. A pastor's job involves being willing to confront in love those who are involved in destructive behaviors and activities that are inconsistent with their new identity in Christ. And a pastor's job involves planning ahead and providing for the needs of the sheep and making sure the herd is heading down the correct path.

One thing is certain, a pastor is only effective as he walks in dependence on God with the constant realization that he does not have the power within himself to fix all the problems and heal all the wounds and force people make the right decisions. But what he can do is preach the Word, love people, speak the truth in love, pray fervently for the body, and trust God to do His work.

Now teaching is the final gift listed here in Ephesians and doesn't require a lot of explanation. God has specially gifted certain people with the ability to communicate His truths to others in a way they can understand and apply to their lives. How many of you can identify a person in your life who's had a significant impact on you because they had the gift of teaching and helped you to be able to understand the Word of God in a practical way? I can think of several people in my life, but two that stand out above the others: my pastor and uncle, Larry Huntsperger and one of my high school teachers at the Christian school I attended. We called him Mr. C. because his last name was nearly unpronounceable and often misinterpreted as inappropriate words. Both of these men spoke God's truth into my life in a way that brought it alive and made it real to me. Through the gift of teaching God had given each of them, God drew me into His kingdom and expressed his love and personal care for me. Never underestimate the power of Holy-Spirit empowered teaching!

A final note on verse 11, notice that key repeated word, "some." Not everybody is an effective teacher, or a powerful evangelist, or a gifted pastor. Some people have the gift of teaching and others do not. Some people are powerful evangelists and others are not. We don't need to feel bad if we're not good at some of these things. That's why we need each member of the body. We each have something to offer and none of us possesses all of the gifts and the ability to effectively operate the body of Christ on our own. We need each other!

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

As we move on to verse 12 of Ephesians chapter 4, we find out the purpose of these gifts Christ has given...we find out why they were given and how they're to be used. We first see that they are to be used for the equipping of the saints for a certain task.

When I looked at the meaning of the Greek word for equipping I was struck by a certain characteristic of this equipping or preparing, which was that it indicates a complete equipping or preparing fully. The idea is that these gifts have been given so that they can be used to fully and completely prepare the saints for the task God has given them.

These gifts haven't been given so that those possessing them can bring attention or glory to themselves or impress other people with their amazing talents. Instead they've been given to be used for the benefit of other people...They're to be used to fully prepare believers for the task to which God is calling them.

And what is the task to which God is calling the saints? Verse 12 tells us that it is to the work of service. The word "work" indicates action and not just feelings and words. We as saints are being called to practical action. And the word, "service," involves ministering to other people. Think of the life of Jesus during His time on earth. What did He do? He preached the Word. He healed the sick. He gave up His life for others. He was a true servant in every sense of the word. He demonstrated His love and care for people in both His words and His actions. His life was devoted not to Himself and meeting His own needs, but instead it was devoted to the people around Him...to the lost sheep without a shepherd. In everything He did, He expressed His deep, personal love for people.

And we are each called to the same task: to express the love of Christ to our fellow believers and to the world around us through both our words and our actions. We are called to minister to each other in practical ways. And the gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring and teaching, are specifically given to fully prepare the saints to carry out this task. If these gifts are being used for other purposes, then they're not fulfilling the true purpose for which they've been given.

So as we saints become fully equipped through the understanding of prophecy, experiencing new life through evangelism, and then growing in our newfound faith through preaching and teaching, we learn to care for and minister to each other not only in our words, but through practical works of service. And this is how the body of Christ is built up and grows and becomes healthy and unified, moving on toward becoming an accurate reflection of who Christ is. This equipping for the work of service leads to the building up of the body of Christ.

IV. THE GOAL OF THE GIFTS

In verse 13 of our passage today, we see what the building up of the body of Christ looks like, as well as what the goal of the building up is. Paul tells us in verse 13 that this process of equipping the saints to care for each other in practical ways is ongoing and is intended to continue until three goals are reached:

- 1) that we all attain to the unity of the faith
- 2) that we all attain to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God
- 3) that we all attain to a mature man.

What's immediately clear, first of all, is that unity in the body of Christ is an essential goal of this whole process. Unity has been a central theme for all of Ephesians chapter 4 as we've looked at how to walk worthy. Unity and oneness in the body is very important to God and let us not ever forget it or sit idly by while our body is full of division and strife. We must always keep before our eyes that we are part of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.

What's important is not our rights and our feelings and our opinions about the way things should be done. What's important is that we individually and as a unified body are knowing and loving the one true God and making Him known, being willing to walk in humility at all times, forgiving each other no matter how painful the hurt, setting aside our personal preferences and wounds we've experienced in the past, in order to accomplish the greater purposes of God. Just as we've been forgiven in Christ, we must offer that same grace and 70 times 7 forgiveness to each other as we work through issues and learn to love each other.

Next in verse 13, we see that when we grow in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, we will be led into this unity we're talking about. The Greek word for "knowledge" here is *epignosis* and it means "a precise and correct knowledge" or "a full and thorough knowledge." So the knowledge we're talking about here is not just a surface knowledge where we have a basic understanding about Christ, but rather a full and complete knowledge of the Son of God.

In other words, when we really begin to truly know and understand our Savior and His heart, we will long for and be powerfully drawn into unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will hate strife and division and seek to prevent it at all costs, knowing the harm that it causes within our body and even to those watching from the outside. We'll be willing to set aside our hurt feelings and opinions because our desire is for Christ and His purposes to be accomplished. We'll be willing to do whatever it takes to reconcile with our brothers and sisters and diligently work at preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So we've looked at the first two goals of the process of equipping the saints to care for each other in practical ways and let's close today by examining the third and final goal: that we all attain to a mature man. According to Paul in verse 13, we can know that we are each being drawn to maturity in our faith. And there are many other passages of Scripture that describe this process as well. We're being drawn from helpless babies to full grown, mature adults who have left behind childish ways. And how is a mature man described in verse 13? A mature man from God's perspective is a person who has reached the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. The picture we get here is that we are considered mature when we look like Christ in how we think and live and act.

That word, "fullness," is interesting because it refers to that which is filled, like a ship that is filled or manned with sailors, rowers or soldiers. I get a picture of the figurative body of Christ, filled with mature, godly believers who, working together as a unified body, each person fulfilling their role, with Christ as our head, become a faithful representation to the world of who Christ is. Christ's body, the church, is filled only when we are unified and operating in the gifts He's called each of us to. And on another level, we each need the filling of the Holy Spirit to carry this out.

Jesus Christ in His time on earth had all the gifts. He was completely filled with the Holy Spirit and always followed the will of His Father and was a perfect representation to the world of what God is like. We on the other hand are now called corporately to be Christ's body on this earth and to faithfully represent what Christ is like to the world.

We simply can't do this by ourselves or as a fractured and divided body. We need each other and we need the Holy Spirit. It's only as we go through this equipping process and learn to love each other in practical ways, just as Christ loves us, that we are built up as a body and attain to the unity and maturity that God is calling us to.

And don't forget that key word, "all," in verse 13. We are ALL called to unity and maturity, not just some of us. This equipping and building up process continues until we ALL reach unity and maturity in Christ.

V. APPLICATION

These truths could not be more important than right now in our body here at Union Baptist Church. We're going through a major transition with Pastor Dave moving on to other things. There's a lot of potential for hard feelings, criticisms about the way things were handled, and accusations against each other, and Satan would love to use this opportunity to create division and disunity and strife in our body. But let's not let him do it! In all of this we know that God still has a plan and is still accomplishing His purposes and will still continue to bless this body of believers as we seek Him and walk with Him and continue on in the process of equipping the saints for the work of service. He is going to walk us through the challenges ahead and continue to lead us on to maturity and to the unity that is so important to Him.

As we interact with each other, let's always, always, always, walk in humility, being willing to acknowledge our own failures and mistakes and forgive each other. Let's not hold hard feelings toward each other, but be willing to do whatever it takes to reconcile and preserve peace in our body. There may be times when we're not able to completely agree on who was at fault in issues, but let's always be sure that we reach a point where we forgive and move on. No amount of hurt is worth bringing disrepute to the name of Christ, which is what happens when fellow believers in Christ can't forgive each other. We've each been forgiven so much and we must extend the same grace to other people.

In my message on Ephesians next week, we'll see what the end result will be when we are equipped for the work of service and grow into the unity and maturity to which God is calling us.