

Ephesians 4:11-16

Several years ago Ray Stedman wrote a book called Body Life

It told us how Ephesians chapter 4 should be practiced

The premise of the book is this: **Every Christian has at least one gift**

And he or she must use it if the church is to be healthy

This was the pattern of the early church

He wrote: Whenever anyone passed from the kingdom and power of Satan, into the kingdom of God's love, he was immediately taught that the Holy Spirit of God had not only imparted to him the life of Jesus, but had also equipped him with a spiritual gift, or gifts, which he was then responsible to discover and exercise.

For years vs 11-12 were misunderstood to mean

That these men – apostles prophets evangelists pastors teachers - were sent to do it all

The rest of the body of Christ had nothing else to do – now I'm quoting

“But to let themselves be led and to follow their pastors as a docile flock”

Bible commentator Armitage Robinson was the first to notice the error

Since then almost all commentators agree with him

Here is the real meaning

Those who have been given the gift of pastor and teacher

Are to use their gifts to equip or prepare the saints for the work of ministry

They are to build up the body of Christ – equip them

And then everyone in the body does works of service

All of the saints are to do the work of ministry

Too often we are content to let the “professionals” handle it

But in the church of Jesus there are no professionals

There are saints with gifts

And the body of Christ is designed to be a vital organism with each of us fulfilling our specific role

The true role of evangelists pastors and teachers

Is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry

Paul is really saying that the proper role of the clergy is service

And the proper role of the congregation is service as well

Gifted individuals are to prepare the body of Christ to do the work of ministry

Having thus been prepared

The body of Christ is to build up the church and minister Christ to the world

Our passage today gives us God's plan by which Christ produces church growth

Jesus said of Himself – I will build My church

If the body of Christ is to grow it must be by Christ ordained means

Any attempt to build a church using manmade methods

Only competes with the work of Jesus

In verses 12-16 we are shown

The Progression the Purpose and the Power of God's divine pattern

For the building and function of His church

We begin with the Progression of Christ's pattern for building His church

READ VERSE 12

Jesus strategy is simple

Gifted people equip the body

The equipped body does works of service

Those works of service build the church

The Greek word translated equipping means to be made complete

The writer of Hebrews used that same term in his closing prayer

He wrote - Now may the God of peace equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing to His sight

Now Paul doesn't just want individuals made complete

He wants the entire body made complete

1Cor chapter 1 – I exhort you brethren, that you all agree, and there is no divisions among you, but you all be made complete in the same mind

The equipping of every believer results in the unity of all believers

For there to be true unity there must be true knowledge

A real understanding of the truths of Scripture

To that end God has given four basic tools for the equipping of the saints

These are spiritual means because the flesh cannot equip or make anyone complete

The most important tool for the equipping of the saints is the Bible

The Word of God

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man or woman of God may be adequate, (here's that word again) equipped for every good work

True discipleship is centered around the Word of God

The duty of pastors and teachers is to first feed themselves

Then to feed others

And impart to others the desire to feed themselves

In the Book of the Acts how did the apostles occupy themselves

Acts chapter 6 - the apostles speaking - We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word

The example of the apostles

Leads us to the second key element in equipping the saints

All discipleship must involve prayer

I have listed it second

But prayer is just as essential as the Word in equipping the saints

Familiarity with the Word of God without prayer leads to prideful knowledge

Ever been in a study with someone who knows it all

They have every answer and they don't want to hear what others have to say

It doesn't take a genius to realize they are filled with pride

That comes from lots of study which is good

Not nearly enough prayer – which is bad

The main goal of equipping is leading others from sin to obedience

And of course the worse sin of all

The sin that came before and generated all other sin is pride

If you neglect prayer you are neglecting a cornerstone of the Christian life

The next two tools God uses may surprise you a little

The other two main tools God uses for equipping the saints

Are testing and suffering

Testing and suffering refine the believer to a greater holiness

James says – consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect work in you; that you may be perfect and complete (complete means equipped) lacking nothing

When you respond to testing with faith

Your spiritual muscles grow stronger

And your effective service for Him is broadened

The apostle Peter says this about suffering

After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you

Some of us don't want to hear this but

Knowing and following Christ involves not only being raised with Him

But also sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings

We are to help each other in the Word we are to pray for each other

We are to work together in service

But the sending of trials and sufferings are entirely from God

To be used for His purposes

And He gives them to all His saints – all His saints

Rom 8:28 states - We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those that love God, to those who are the called according to His purposes

We tend to put our human perspective on that verse

And we look for the silver lining behind each cloud

But what that verse really is trying to tell us is the same thing Peter said

After you have suffered a little while, God will perfect, confirm strengthen and establish you

God uses the events in your life to work together for your eternal spiritual good

Don't overlook the importance of trials in the forming of Christian character

Remember we are not to cause each other suffering

We are to comfort one another in our sufferings

And we need to be careful

So that we don't leave God out of the rough times

And blame every hard time we have on the world or Satan
It makes it almost impossible for God to work on your character
When your eyes are always on the enemy

I want to finish with this

Spiritual growth doesn't always involve learning something new

Our most important growth

Comes from our beginning to live the truth we already know

But have not fully applied

Peter wrote – **I shall always be ready to remind you of these things**

(now listen) – even though you already know them

The truths of the Bible can never be over-stressed – or too often repeated

The battle with our unredeemed flesh causes us to need reminders

When you are struggling spiritually often the best thing you can do

Is to go back to the basics and revisit the eternal truths

As believer become equipped they are to engage in works of service

It is not the gifted men and women whom God has given to the church

Who are responsible for works of service

No pastor or group of elders no matter how talented

Can do everything there is to do in a church

The purpose of the pastor and elders

Is to equip others to meet the needs of the church

Now this is not some one way street

The leaders don't equip and watch others serve – it doesn't work that way

Leaders help serve and the body of Christ helps equip the body of Christ

Christ's basic design for His church

Is to equip the saints so that the saints can serve each other effectively

Now listen this is important

The entire church should be involved in being equipped or equipping others

And the entire church should be involved in works of service

So often the church is just like the way Bud Wilkinson described football

22 men desperately in need of rest being watched by 50,000 people desperately in need of exercise

Christ does not intend for there to be “sideline Christians”

All of us sitting here today are to be actively involved in being equipped equipping and serving the body of Christ

As believer are equipped and begin to serve they will become built up

Equipping by evangelists pastors and teachers leading to proper service

Always results in the building up of the body of Christ

The word translated “building up” refers to the building of a house

And was commonly used to signify any type of construction

The body is built up physically as more believers are added

But in this passage Paul also means built up spiritually

The maturing of the church is directly tied to learning the Holy Scriptures and obeying them

Just as babies desire milk so believers should desire spiritual nourishment

From the Word of God

And that spiritual nourishment should result in obedience

Which leads to service which brings about maturity

We have looked at the Progression

Now the Purpose of God’s divine pattern for the building of His church

READ 13-15

The building up of the redeemed involves a two-fold objective

God’s first purpose is the unity of faith

Faith here does not refer to saving faith but to the whole counsel of God

Christ’s spiritual target is a unity of Christian doctrine

As the church at Corinth so clearly illustrates

Disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity

Now we are never going to agree on some wide ranging issues

There are Arminians and Calvinists and there it is

But we shouldn’t let it split us

We can have unity among Charismatics and fundamentalists

Presbyterians and Methodists

What we can never and should never achieve is unity with those

Who do not agree on who Christ is – and the way to salvation

Its like that old saying goes – in the essentials unity – in all else charity

Now listen

Unity comes from the knowledge of the Word of God

Obedience to the knowledge we have

And commitment to serve the body as Christ leads

We need to get into the Bible every day

Do what it says and commit ourselves to Christ and to each other

If we live like that we will achieve the unbreakable bond of unity

The second purpose of Christ's pattern for building the church

Is attaining to the knowledge of the Son of God

This is not salvation knowledge – every believer has that

The word Paul used means “full, complete and accurate knowledge”

Remember Paul's great desire – **that I may know Him**

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would attain to the “**knowledge of Him**”

You can sum up the whole purpose of the Bible with just one phrase

Get to know Jesus

On the one hand getting to know Jesus is simple

On the other it will take you the rest of your life

You see Growing in knowledge of Jesus is an ongoing lifelong process

When it comes to Christ there is always more to know

Our knowledge will only be complete when we see Him face to face

The third purpose of Christ's pattern for building the church

Is to bring every believer to maturity

Of course this is spiritual maturity

God's great desire for the church

Is that every believer become just like His Son

That is the definition of spiritual maturity

That is precisely what will happen when we get to heaven

But right now in this life we are called to walk as Christ walked

Jesus walked in continual fellowship with and obedience to the Father

To Jesus this walk was completely natural

It was an earthly continuation of the relationship He always enjoyed

For us this walk will only come through a life of study prayer and obedience

Fourth following Christ's pattern for His church will result in sound doctrine

Never has there been such a need for sound doctrine as there is today

The pulpits the airwaves are flooded with those preaching with a purpose

And their purpose is not to exalt Christ but to exalt self or exact money

And most of those enticed by their message are baby saints

Immature Christians are in danger of being carried away

By every new fad or novel interpretation of Scripture that comes along

Because they are not anchored in truth

They are enticed by every strange doctrine that seems appealing

They are always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth

Sound doctrine keeps us from being misled by every message

Delivered by someone claiming to be speaking for Jesus

And there are a lot of speakers just like that out there

The word we like to use is discernment – sound doctrine builds discernment

The final result of Christ's pattern for His church will be loving testimony

It is easy to interpret this little statement – speaking the truth in love

As an open door to say anything to anyone – as long as you do it in love

What it really means is that

We are to tell others the truth about Christ with love

The spiritually equipped church whose members

Are sound in doctrine and mature in living

Is a church that will reach out in love and proclaim the Gospel

John Bunyan said of the church – When all their garments are white the world will count them His

Heinrich Heine said – You show me the redeemed life, and I might be inclined to believe in your Redeemer

The authentic life that speaks the Gospel in love is incredibly convincing

We have looked at the Progression and the Purpose of God's divine pattern For the building and function of His church

Now let's look at the power for Christ's divine pattern

The power for being equipped and matured into loving authentic Gospel proclaimers Is not within believers nor does it come from their leaders

The body of Christ functions as it should because of Christ's power

When you think of what organ you might be in the body

Believe me when I tell you

The one you are not is the muscle – all of the power is from God

But that doesn't mean you are not important

Vs 16 – Christ from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by that which 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

Let me give you a modern translation of that verse

Christ's power flows through the church, and every member needs to do their part, because when we all work together, then we will be built up in love

Ever hear this before – God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life

What you may not have understood is this

God's plan is to use you in the lives of others

Particularly in the lives of your fellow church members

And when you are not working properly

Something is amiss in the body and it is not growing as Christ desires

Let me close with a few questions

Where are you in the passage we just looked at

Are you walking in obedience to the truth you know

Are you equipped

Are you helping to equip others

Are you serving

Are you getting to know Jesus better day by day

Are you a Gospel proclaimer

If you answered no to any of these questions

Then the final question is

What are you going to do about it