

Book of Ephesians Bible Study Lesson 13

Ephesians 4:11-16

Building the Body of Christ, the Church

Introduction

(Piper) The aim or our ministry, the Churches ministry, with God's given grace and gifts, is to become a Body of Christ that is unified in faith-belief; unified in biblical knowledge-theology; that grows more and more into the kind of unified person that Christ is. The aim of the ministry is not just that individuals be built up, but that the Body take on a personality like Christ's, and a strength like Christ's, and love like Christ's, and a spirit like Christ's. We have much to learn here as Americans we are utterly devoted to personal individual fulfillment and satisfaction.

(MacArthur) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made a rather shocking statement. He said, "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Now that really puts the standard up there. Our Lord asked of the Jews' perfection, God wills that we be perfect. God's desire since the fall of man was to call out a redeemed-saved people to be perfect. The perfection of the saints then, is the redemptive-saving plan of God from eternity past.

There are three kinds of perfection that the Bible talks about. The first one is what we call positional perfection. We are perfect in Christ before God. In 1 Corinthians 2:6 Paul says, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." Here he makes reference to believers. When we believed in Christ, when we received Him, positionally before God through salvation, we became, in God's eyes, perfected in Christ.

In Hebrews 10:14, the writer says, "For by one offering He-Christ has perfected forever them that are His." We are made perfect when we believed in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. When sin is paid for and removed, as a barrier between us and God, in Christ we are made perfect.

Second kind of perfection is the ultimate perfection. This is something that we haven't yet experienced, but we will experience it in the future. In Hebrews 12:23 it refers to "the church of the firstborn-Christ who are enrolled in heaven, to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." What it means is saints who have been taken to heaven.

Paul in Philippians 3:12 talks about his death and resurrection, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." He is looking toward his ultimate perfection when he's like Christ. So there's a positional perfection, which is ours now, we don't need to worry about that, its

done. There is an ultimate perfection, which is ours in the future, which we can't do anything about until we get out of this world.

There's a third area of perfection called experiential perfection. This is the practical day-to-day life of the believer. This is the emphasis the apostle Paul wants to make in Ephesians Chapter 4. In verse 12 the reason that there are evangelists and teaching pastors, as there were apostles and prophets during the establishment of Christ's new church (witnesses of Christ's resurrection), is for the perfecting of the saints. These men positionally cannot make us perfect, only Christ can do that. These men can't make us ultimately perfect, only God can do that. But we are called to bring the saints to a practical kind of perfection.

Our purpose is not to fill a building. God didn't say that He's given some evangelists and teaching-pastors to fill the building. It was to bring them to maturity in Christ. The biblical concept of an evangelist is the same as the teaching-pastor. He has the same responsibility. The only difference is he went to areas where Christ was not named (like a missionary).

A young man came to Charles Spurgeon one time and said, "I have a complaint. My congregation is too small." Spurgeon said, "Well perhaps they are as large as you'd like to give account for on the Day of Judgment." We are not responsible for how many, we are responsible for what kind. Its not about providing programs, the greatest social programs as possible, or to make sure the saints are entertained. The task we have is simply stated: ***equip the saints***.

The Progression of God's Pattern

Equipping the Saints:

(MacArthur) The word equipping (Katartismos) basically refers to that which is fit, is restored to its original condition, or is made complete. The word was often used as a medical term for the setting of bones. The writer of Hebrews used the term in his closing prayer: "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight" (Heb. 13:20-21) (Also 2 Cor. 13:11). It is essential to note that this equipping, completely, or perfecting of the saints is attainable here on earth. Paul uses this same word to refer to spiritually strong believers who are to do for fellow believers who have fallen into sin. The text strongly teaches that the ministry of equipping is the work of leading Christians from sin to obedience.

God has given four basic tools for the spiritual equipping of the saints. These are spiritual means, because the flesh cannot make anyone perfect (Gal. 3:3).

- 1.** The first and most important is His Word, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The pastor-teacher is to feed himself, to feed his people, and to lead them to feed themselves on the Word of God.
 - 2.** The Apostles' example who gave themselves continually to teaching the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:4), indicates that the second tool of equipping is prayer. The pastor-teacher is responsible to prepare himself and to lead his people to prepare themselves in prayer.
- 3 and 4.** Testing and suffering. These are primary, purging experiences by which the believer is refined to greater holiness. James 1:2-4 tells us to "consider it all joy . . . when we encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result," he goes on to say, "that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." When we respond to God's testing in trust and continued obedience, spiritual muscles are strengthened and effective service for Him is broadened. Peter uses the word 'suffering' near the close of his first letter: "And after you have suffered for 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" (1 Pet. 5:10). Knowing and following Christ in the deepest sense not only involves being raised with Him but also sharing in "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Paul rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ's sake. God "comforts us in all our afflictions, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:4-5). The sending of tests and suffering are entirely God's operation, and He gives them to His saints according to His loving and sovereign will.

Even the most biblical and efficient of church organizations will not produce spiritual maturity without the leadership of God's gifted ministers who are continually in prayer and in His Word. The greatest need of the church has always been spiritual maturity rather than organizational restructuring.

The surest road to a church's spiritual stagnation, to the pastor's burnout, or to both is for the pastor to become so engulfed in activities and programs that he has too little time for prayer and study of God's Word.

Service:

Paul's language indicates that it is not the gifted men in verse 11 who have the most direct responsibility to do the work of service. No pastor, or even a large group of pastors, can do everything a church needs to do. The pastor's purpose in God's plan is not to try to meet all the needs himself but to equip the people given into his care to share in serving. God's basic design for the church is for the equipping to be done so that the saints can serve each other effectively.

The entire church is to be aggressively involved in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 4:10-11). When the leaders are faithful in prayer and in teaching the Word, the people will be properly equipped and rightly motivated to do the work of service.

Building Up:

Building up (Oikodome) literally refers to the building up of a house, it was used figuratively of any sort of construction. It is the spiritual edification and development of the church of which Paul is speaking here. The body is built up externally through evangelism as more believers are added, but the emphasis here is on its being built up internally as all believers are nurtured to fruitful service through the Word. The maturity of the church is tied to learning of the obedience to the holy revelation of Scripture.

The Purpose of God's Pattern

(MacArthur) The building up of the redeemed involves a two-fold ultimate objective which Paul identifies as the “unity of the faith” and “the knowledge of the Son of God”, out of which flow spiritual maturity, sound doctrine, and loving testimony.

Some commentators advocate the view that such an ultimate objective is only attainable at glorification (when Christ takes His Church up to heaven), believing that Paul is describing our final heavenly unity and knowledge. But that idea does not fit the context, because the apostle is not describing the final work of Christ on behalf of the church in heaven, but the work of gifted men in the church on earth. These results could only apply to the church in its earthly dimension.

Unity of the Faith:

As in verse 5, the word faith here does not refer to the act of belief or of obedience but to the body of Christian truth, to Christian doctrine. The faith is the content of the gospel in its most complete form. As the church at Corinth so clearly illustrates, disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity. When believers are properly taught, when they faithfully do the work of service, and when the body is thereby built up in spiritual maturity, unity of the faith is an inevitable result. Oneness in fellowship is impossible unless it is built on the foundation of commonly believed truth. The solution to the divisions in Corinth was for everyone to hold the same understanding and opinions and to speak the same truths (1 Cor. 1:10). There can never be unity in the church apart from doctrinal integrity.

Knowledge of the Son of God:

Paul is not talking about salvation knowledge but about the deep knowledge (epignosis), full knowledge that is correct and accurate through a

relationship with Christ that comes only from prayer and faithful study of and obedience to God's Word. After many years of devoted apostleship Paul still could say, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, . . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings . . . Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8-10,12). Growing in the deeper knowledge of the Son of God is a life-long process that will not be complete until we see our Lord face-to-face. That is the knowing of which Jesus spoke when He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them" (John 10:27). He was not speaking of knowing their identities but of knowing them intimately, and that is the way He wants His people also to know Him.

Spiritual Maturity:

God's great desire for His church is that every believer, without exception, come to be like His Son (Rom. 8:29), manifesting the character qualities of the One who is the only measure of the full-grown, perfect, mature man. The church in the world is Jesus Christ in the world, because the church is now the fullness of His incarnate Body in the world (Eph. 1:23). We are to radiate and reflect Christ's perfections. We are to "walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6; Col. 4:12), and He walked in complete and continual fellowship with and obedience to His Father. As we grow into deeper fellowship with Christ, the process of divine sanctification (being set apart for Him) through His Holy Spirit changes us more and more into His image, from one level of glory to the next.

Sound Doctrine:

Young and immature Christians are in constant danger of falling prey to every new religious fad or novel interpretation of Scripture that comes along. Because they are not anchored in God's truth, they are subject to every sort of counterfeit truth—humanistic, cultic, pagan, demonic, or whatever. The New Testament is abounding with warnings against this danger (Acts 20:30-31; Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Cor. 11:3-4; Gal. 1:6-7; 3:1; Col. 2:4-8; 1 Tim. 4:1, 6-7; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; 3:6-9; 4:3; Heb. 13:9; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 2:19, 26).

In the history of the Church no group of believers has fallen into more misleading in the name of Christians than has much of the church today. The cause of this spiritual plight is not hard to find. In many places the Body of Christ has not been built up in sound doctrine or in faithful obedience. Consequently, there is little doctrinal solidarity (unity of the faith) and little spiritual maturity

(knowledge of the Son of God . . . to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ).

Authentic Loving Testimony:

Speaking the truth (*aletheuo*), which means to speak, deal, or act truthfully. The verb refers to being true in the widest sense and is hard to translate into English. Yet in Galatians 4:16 it seems to especially emphasize preaching the gospel truth. Since the reference in Galatians is the only other use of the verb in the New Testament, it seems safe to say that the emphasis in Ephesians 4 is also on the preaching of the truth. Authentic, mature believers whose lives are marked by love will not be victims of false teaching but will be living authentically and proclaiming the true gospel to a deceived and deceiving world.

The spiritually equipped church, whose members are sound in doctrine and mature in their thinking and living, is a church that will reach out in love to proclaim the saving gospel. God does not give us knowledge, understanding, gifts, and maturity to keep but to share. He does not equip us to stagnate but to serve. We are not gifted and edified in order to be complacent and self-satisfied but in order to do the Lord's work of service in building up and expanding the Body of Christ. In love is the attitude in which we evangelize.

John Bunyan said of Christians, "When all their garments are white the world will count them His," and the skeptical German poet Heinrich Heine said to Christians, "You show me your redeemed life and I might be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." The authentic life that speaks the gospel with a spirit of loving sacrifice will be eminently convincing.

The mature man, the person who is growing up to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ, is consistent in having sufficient wisdom to understand God's truth and effectively present it to others; and only he has the continual humility and grace to present it in love and in power. The combination of truth and love counteracts the two great threats to powerful ministry---lack of truth and lack of compassion. The loving, authentic testimony of Christians assists believers in growing into the very likeness of Jesus Christ.

Christ is the source of power for all functions in His Church. Human beings are declared officially dead when the EKG is flat, signifying brain death. As the brain is the control center of physical life, so the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of life and power to His Body, the Church.

To grow into His likeness is to be completely subject to His controlling power, obedient to His every thought and expression of will. It is to personify Paul's prayers "For to me, to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21) and "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

The Power for God's Pattern

(MacArthur) The power for being equipped and matured into lovingly authentic evangelists is not in believers themselves, in their leaders, or in church structure. The Body receives its authority, direction, and power as it grows “up in all aspects into . . . Christ, from whom the whole body is fitted and held together.” These words are meant to express that the close, tight, compacted correlation of function in the Body as an organism is the result of Christ’s power. That does not negate the efforts of believers, as proved by the phrases “by that which every joint supplies and according to the proper working of each individual part.” Each of these phrases is extremely significant in conveying truth about the function of the Body. Christ holds the Body together and makes it function. That is to say, the joints are points of contrast, the joining together or union where the spiritual supply, resources, and gifts of the Holy Spirit as from one member to another, providing the flow of ministry that produces growth.

The proper working of each individual part recalls the importance of each believer’s gift. Christ is the source of the life and power and growth of the Church, which He facilitates through each believer’s gifts and mutual ministry in joints touching other believers. The power in the Church flows from the Lord through individual believers and relationships between believers.

Where His people have close relationship of genuine spiritual ministry, God works; and where they are not intimate with each other and not faithful with their gifts, He cannot work. He does not look for creativity, ingenuity, or cleverness but for **willing and loving obedience**. The physical body functions properly only as each member in union with every other member responds to the direction of the head to do exactly what it was designed to do.

Conclusion

(MacArthur) The sum of all that these truths affirm is that every individual believer is to stay close to Jesus Christ, faithfully using their spiritual gift in close contact with every believer he touches, and that through such commitment and ministry the Lord’s power will flow for the building up of the Body in love.

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