

Walk Worthy

“Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

EPHESIANS 4:1-5:21

LESSON 5 – EQUIPPING THE SAINTS – EPH. 4:12

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Ephesians 4:11-12

- ▶ Eph. 4:11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...
- ▶ In our lesson last Sunday we took a look at Ephesians 4:11, seeing that God has given free gifts of His grace to the Church. These spiritual gifts, given corporately to the whole Body include the Apostles, Prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. We took the time to learn about each of these offices in the church and what they contribute to the structure of the church.
- ▶ Today we will move on the verse 12 and see why these men have been given to the church.

Gifts Given to the Church

- ▶ Why has God given these gifts?
- ▶ The short answer is indeed contained in Eph 4:12 – Christ has given these men to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” But what exactly does that mean?
- ▶ We will take the next 3 lessons to break this statement apart and learn what each phrase means and when we are done, we will, I hope, have a new understanding and appreciation for the true work of the ministry and those who lead us in the worship of God.

Church Growth

- ▶ Let us begin then by the first task of those who shepherd our souls. They have been given: For the Equipping of the Saints
- ▶ There is a difference between church growth and church expansion. Many today are clamoring after church expansion, thinking that to add numbers and budget expenditures is growth. That is simply not true. Jesus tells us that He will build His Church. As He does so, He works according to the plans He has detailed in Scripture. These next verses give us a very detailed look at how He builds His Church.

Church Growth

- ▶ Church growth occurs when the people (believers in the local body) grow spiritually and bear good fruit.
- ▶ Expansion deals with quantity. Growth deals with quality. We cannot afford to confuse the two. Too often a church expands and thinks this is growth while the body is sick and dying, imbibing false doctrine and spiritual errors, being led by men who focus on meeting felt needs instead of obeying the Bible.
- ▶ We should never target demographics for the sake of expansion. In fact the only demographic we are commanded to reach is the lost. Any further break down, any further categorization, is foolish and sinful!

Equipping the Saints

- ▶ We see then that the first step in true church growth occurs as those who lead the church and minister before God fulfill their role by equipping the saints. To equip here means to set a broken bone, and refers to a restoration original condition, to make complete, mature, and perfect. (See 1 Thess. 1:2-7 and 1 Peter 5:3-4).
- ▶ What does it mean then practically for the elders of the church to equip the saints?
- ▶ Individual members of the Body are equipped as they “become complete.”
- ▶ We also see that the church is equipped corporately as a whole local body.

Equipping the Saints

- ▶ Individual members of the Body are equipped as they “become complete.” And Paul tells us that this is defined as being “of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace” (2 Cor. 13:11).
- ▶ Further Hebrews 13:20-21 tells us that God, as the Great Shepherd of the sheep, will “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”
- ▶ The goal then of equipping saints is that they be mature, complete, and perfect in their faith. Will we ever be perfect while in this fallen world? No. But we are to ever be pressing toward that mark knowing that when Christ appears we will be like Him!

Equipping the Saints

- ▶ We also see that the church is equipped corporately as a whole local body. 1 Corinthians 1:10 tells us that Paul's desire for the church was unity. "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."
- ▶ So growth involves maturity on a personal level and that works its way out in unity on the corporate level. And as we studied last week, the true basis for unity is the truth of God's Word as we are fed and led by sound doctrine!

The Word of God

- ▶ So what tools are to be used by those who shepherd our souls so that we might be brought to maturity and unity? There are several tools given and used by men and by God to equip us and fit us for Christian living. Today we will look at 4 of them.
- ▶ The first and probably most obvious tool used to equip the saints is the Word of God. Key verses that demonstrate this for us are found in 2 Tim. 3:16-17 and Acts 6:4. There the Word of God itself says to us: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
- ▶ “...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Prayer and the Word

- ▶ The calling and work of the pastor-teacher, following the examples of the Apostles and elders in the New Testament church, is to first be given to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This is our primary focus! For only in fulfilling this mandate are we able to effectively equip the church.
- ▶ This is true because in prayer we learn the mind of God and in the ministry of the Word we use the only infallible, inerrant, and inspired tool that we have been given for equipping the saints.

All Scripture

- ▶ All Scripture is God breathed. And all Scripture – ALL SCRIPTURE – is profitable for doctrine (what we believe), for reproof (confronting sin and error), for correction (turning us from our sin and to truth), and for instruction in righteousness (step by step practical ways to live what is right and true). We see then that without the sound and consistent preaching of the Word of God no church can hope to truly grow, mature, or bear fruit! Worship starts and ends with the Word of God.
- ▶ It is no wonder by the way that the churches that face the greatest expansion are often those with the lowest view of Scripture. Those ministers, so called, who preach to men about men a man centered religiosity draw great crowds. But large numbers never equates automatically to growth, maturity, or the presence of sound doctrine!

Prayer

- ▶ The second tool given for the equipping of the saints was mentioned there along with the ministry of the Word – it is prayer. A church lives or dies by its prayer life. As Leonard Ravenhill said quite boldly, “a preacher that is not praying is playing and a people that are not praying are straying!” Prayer is the life blood of the church – communion with her Savior.
- ▶ Colossians 4:12-13 says: “Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.”
- ▶ Paul notes and makes mention of Epaphras, specifically as he prays earnestly for the church. And for what does he pray? That the church be perfect, mature, and complete in the will of God. Do we pray for church growth – for maturity and depth?

Prayer

- ▶ Many churches it is said have a great outreach and impact, and it is stated that they are 3 miles wide but only an inch deep. Jesus is not nearly so concerned with breadth as He is depth! For throughout the New Testament He was encouraging depth and often when He did teach deep truths He Himself saw “disciples” forsake Him quickly.
- ▶ Prayer is a tool that we must be using if the church is to grow. A church that does not pray will not grow, in fact. Just as people who do not breathe will die! Prayer is in truth spiritual breathing! It is necessary for life. How can we abide in Christ if we are not communing with Him often and intimately? Pastors then must lead by example and they must insist that if the church does nothing else, it prays!

Tests and Trials

- ▶ The third tool, used by God for equipping us, is not very popular! Then again, neither is the Word or prayer judging by the focus of most churches around us today. But the minister must be familiar with this tool so that he can show the saints how God uses it. It is the tool of tests and trials.
- ▶ These serve to purge us. To try us and to prove our faith. How can we know the quality of our faith unless it is tried? And pastors must be able to help us bear up under these trials and they must point us to the Divine purposes in the trials. James did this. He wrote in his epistle: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Joy in Trials?

- ▶ We must be taught to take joy in trials, for that is not usually our natural response, is it? But here it is in the Word of God, we are told to count it all joy when our faith is tried. This test will produce patience and patience matures us! There is maturity again. There is growth.
- ▶ You see, over and over we keep hearing this word “complete.” To be equipped is to be made complete, to be made mature. And what was one of the obstacles to discernment that we have to learn to overcome? Immaturity. That is why we need to realize that true church growth is not about numbers, but about being made complete.
- ▶ Church growth is not about how many people are coming to church. It is about how those who are there are living their daily lives. If they are being brought to maturity then the church is growing, no matter how large or how small it is.

Suffering

- ▶ And the fourth tool used to equip the saints is even less popular, I assure you, for it is the tool used in the hand of God to break and humble us. It is the tool of suffering. Okay. Now I have gone too far, haven't I? How is it that suffering equips us for anything? But listen to the Scriptures: "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." – 1 Peter 5:10
- ▶ "...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..." – Phil 3:10
- ▶ "...who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ." - 2 Cor 1:4-5

Suffering

- ▶ Too many believers today are being taught and believing the lie that suffering is always a direct result of sin. The televangelists tell us that if we are suffering it is because we are sinning, lacking in faith, or under the curse of self-deceit. They are adamant about the fact that a strong, faithful Christian never suffers. THAT is a LIE and a DOCTRINE of DEMONS!
- ▶ Jesus said Himself that when we followed Him we WOULD SUFFER. The Bible tells us over and over again that a sovereign God uses suffering to grow us and make us complete. If you do not suffer, you are not saved!
- ▶ It is true, too, though, that at times God will allow suffering as a result of sin. But if our suffering is our own doing it will be accompanied by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. If suffering is a tool used by God for equipping, we will experience peace and comfort while in the midst of the trouble.
- ▶ In this “tool box” then we find God equipping us through testing and suffering. But it is left to the gifted men (Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers) to equip the body with the Word (Apostles and Prophets) and through Prayer.

True Church Growth

- ▶ Let us look then at several right ways and several wrong ways to facilitate true church growth by the equipping of the saints. Compare:
- ▶ Programs vs. Maturity
- ▶ The Church is an organism, not an organization. Sadly though, many churches are “programmed” to the point that the Spirit could leave and the work would still go on without Him. People would not even realize His absence. A multitude of programs for believers of all ages does not substitute for spiritual maturity.

True Church Growth

- ▶ Entertainment vs. Worship
- ▶ Where is the focus? Entertainment focuses on us. Worship focuses on God. In Hosea 4:6 we are told that God's people perish for lack of knowledge not lack of programs, meetings, special music, or crowd pleasing sermons! Lack of the knowledge of God and His Word. Entertainment is a cheap substitute that many churches have settled for. You see, the worship of a holy God can offend a person when they are confronted with their sinfulness and told that there is nothing they can do on their own to remedy their sin or selfish lives. Entertainment never offends. It simply amuses to death.

True Church Growth

- ▶ Large vs. Small
- ▶ It was wisely said that too often ministers focus on the empty seats instead of the filled ones!! That says it all, doesn't it? Where is our focus?
- ▶ A young preacher once complained to Charles H. Spurgeon about his small congregation. He just knew he could do more good for the kingdom if only more people could be exposed to his ministry. Spurgeon replied, "Well, maybe it is as large as you'd like to give account for in the day of judgment!"
- ▶ Well said! It is not about numbers, it is about maturity and bearing fruit.

Conclusion

- ▶ Simply put, we must equip and be equipped by learning the truth, applying truth, and living the truth.
- ▶ For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you...Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. – 2 Peter 1:12-13, 15
- ▶ Next Week – Lesson 6 – The Work of Ministry – Eph. 4:12(b)