

SERVING THE TRUTH THAT EQUIPS

EPHESIANS 4:11-16

PASTOR JON DAIELLO

INTRODUCTION

As we pick back up in Ephesians tonight, we'll be in chapter 4:11-16. As your turning there, let's pause for a moment and look at where we've come to and what lies ahead. Previously in this letter, Paul and Timothy have laid out the wonderful truth of the Gospel, teaching us the important and deep theology of God and his plan. Last week, Pastor Russ highlighted the importance of unity in the body immediately before the text we'll look at tonight. And as we move further into this letter to the Ephesians, we'll see Paul dive into the details of the new life and what transformation looks like on the outside. He's going to lay out expectations for believers to leave sin behind and pursue righteous living.

So, what is it moves this letter from these marvelous truths before our passage to a transformed life after our passage? What is it that that gives each and every saint what they need to live a life in unity with the body, transformed by grace? What does God provide you, so that you are able to serve together in unity alongside other believers for his glory?

These are some of the questions that we will think through in our text tonight. Let's take a look as our passage tonight in Ephesians 4:11-16:

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:11–16 (ESV)

ESTABLISHING THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD (v11-12)

THE MINISTRY IS GIVEN

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... —
Ephesians 4:11*

Our text tonight opens with the gift of several types of roles or gifting of people who serve in the church.

First, we see the “*apostles*”. They are people who were specially commissioned messengers of Jesus, by Jesus himself. Apostles were critical in the foundation of the church as we can see in Acts. Their work to lay the foundation of the church is done and so their role has come to an end. How grateful I am that God has preserved the words of these apostles so we can benefit from their ministry even now, here, in this message.

Second, we see “*prophets*”, these are people who proclaimed the words of God. In the Ephesians’ day, this would not have been thought of as a fortune teller or someone who predicts the future (though that did happen from time to time). The normal hearing of this label is someone who declares the truth for God with boldness and authority.

Next, is “*evangelists*” who announce and proclaim good news. Commonly, this spreader of good news wasn’t religious in nature, but rather someone who travelled from town to town spreading good news about the Roman empire. In our context, Paul uses this word in a more specific way as someone who brings the Gospel, by proclaiming, sharing, and spreading the good news of Jesus.

Lastly, we get the pairing of “*shepherds and teachers*”. Some commentators treat these as a single role, or package of gifts that a person might have. It may be ok to do that, but reading through the text it seems natural in this list to flow as two separate gifting. Now, some translations use the word “*pastor*” instead of “*shepherd*”, and that’s ok. In the ESV we see the word “*shepherds*” which should bring images of people who take care of sheep or goats. These would have been lowly, dirty and smelly people whose job was to look out for a flock of animals under their care. Teachers on the other hand is a bit more specific to the idea of instruction. A teacher would have provided practical information to train and grow. Often we see these gifts together, but not always. Shepherds will do teaching in the midst of their work, but not all teachers will shepherd.

Now, there’s more to this list than just five random “*gifts*”. This passage echoes Paul’s other lists of gifts¹ in the New Testament, but our text here in Ephesians a bit unique. All five of these “*gifts*” to the church are people who handle and proclaim God’s truth. Just as God gave Christ himself as THE Word (John 1:1), Jesus gave these as wonderful gifts to the church body to bring of the Word of God.

Do you view your elders, teachers, counselors and disciplers like this...as a precious gift from Jesus? Do you genuinely come and seek to hear, to soak in the truth from them? Or, are they no better than our political and governmental leaders, viewed as failures and a nuisance to be voted out of office? Paul reminds us, that these people are gifts to you, from Christ...do you approach them that way? More importantly, do you listen with the goal that Paul shows us in the next verse? Let’s read on...

THE PURPOSE OF THE MINISTRY

Paul continues with the reason these people have been given to us...

¹ 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12

*...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
— Ephesians 4:12 (ESV)*

These people who sacrifice and serve to speak the truth of God's word is for YOU, the believer, the "saint". Paul opens this letter, addressing it to: "To the saints who are in Ephesus...". When Paul uses the word "saint", he's simply speaking of believers, those people who believe that Jesus has died for their sin and was brought back to life again...and now those people live to please him as their king and only way to be saved. These saints are the people of God.

Don't miss what Paul is pointing out to the saints...these five ministries work for a clear purpose: to make the saints ready to serve. These individuals are to speak the word so that the saints (you and me) will have what we need to work in the the body. Paul used the word equip, to provide what is needed to do a particular job. The idea is make us adequate and capable to work, to **do**. When you sit under the preaching and teaching of the Bible, it's not to be an academic pursuit, to collect information and tickle your brain cells. No. It's training to give you what you need to serve others and do it well.

Once upon a time, I spent four years earning my bachelor's degree in Graphic Design. Four years of my life dedicated to training to become a designer. I learned the fundamentals of design, principles that govern visual perception, theory about how color works and relates together, and the various types of media and how they interact with the expression of design work. Imagine for a moment that I had gone for more training and gotten my master's degree in design, another 3 years of learning and work. Now, what if I did all of that, got the end of a masters degree and never used it. I decided to pursue a career in...a different field. While that might be disappointing, but it's not unheard of. But, let's say I spent those 7 years investing in understanding design, never intending to use those skills...I simply showed up, listened to the lectures, studied the material all just to accumulate knowledge. Isn't that messed up? But, that's exactly how we treat the work of these ministries that bring the Word of God when we don't approach and listen with the intent to be equipped by it for serving together.

God has put these people in your life to give you what you need to work and serve God in various ways, "the work on ministry". This isn't just the formal, super-spiritual ministry (e.g. being a pastor), it's just simply the idea of ministering to people. It's finding ways to serve and build up those around you. That means labor, effort and sacrifice. It's humble and menial work. This is service.

Now, three times in our short passage, the word "body" is used. That's almost half of the times it's used throughout the whole letter. Why? Well, we see that the purpose of this work by the saints is to build up the body of Christ ...the church. The goal of this ministry, this service, and work is building each other up. Here at Clearcreek, this is the purpose of our preaching, of our Bible education, of flock gatherings, of discipleship together...it's to equip you, the believer, to grow up...to be given what you need to serve and build the body around you.

THE MINISTRY WORKS (v13-16)

And, there's a vision in this building up. It is heading somewhere as we make progress together in it, Paul continues with some qualities that can be seen.

THE GOAL

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...
— Ephesians 4:13

The New Living Translation puts it this way... *"This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."*

Unity as saints has been a common theme throughout this letter. We have seen that the bond we have together in Christ is stronger than the cultural, racial, generational, familial, social, economic and political divides that are common in this world. A steady diet of Scripture, of the Bible, by the selfless service of prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers is intended to produce a spiritual unity and common bond founded on *who* Jesus is and *what* he has done as believers work in ministry together. And, this is an ongoing work...week after week, day after day, hour after hour...continuing on as the "growing up" happens.

Our unity is founded in knowing God's son...Jesus Christ as the one who saves us and rules over us. Paul puts it this way so we realize it's necessary to know Jesus as God. We must know Jesus as God first...so we may have faith in him. And, when saints come together around the regular preaching of this truth and serve because of it...guess what happens: we are unified. I love the one author wrote it: *"...we believe just as though we were all one person..."*² What a picture of the gospel. What an opportunity for the world to see the glory of God on display. A whole body of people, living and acting opposite of everything they would expect in the world, causing the world to wonder, and to ask...what's wrong with you? But, it's not just a select few who are privileged to grow. Notice Paul says, "we all". Each and every believing saint is expected to do this.

As we are equipped by hearing the truth and put it to work serving together as one body, we grow up. We mature. We go from unstable babies to firmly grounded adults that look more and more like Christ. This means work on our part. We will be required to give things up, to sacrifice. You cannot attend one Sunday a week to hear a single sermon and do nothing else...hoping that maturity will come. Notice that the work of these five ministries is giving saints what *they* need to *work in ministry* together. And, as we, the saints, work in ministry together we grow, we mature. This is a simple fact of life. When we learn, we need a chance to put it into practice. The more we put it into practice, the better we understand it. The better we understand it...the more skilled we are in it. And that's growth.

When my wife and I first got married, I needed a desk to work at. But, desks were expensive...and I had a just received a circular saw as a wedding gift. ☺ So, I went to the hardware store and bought some 2x3s and a cheap piece MDF panel. It was my first wood-working project. I built a desk. It was dreadful. However, years later after doing more and more projects, I have grown up. I am able to create far more beautiful and stable things. They might actually pass as "well-crafted". It's taken many projects and a community of people that also love woodworking to teach me. No, I haven't become Norm Abrams, but I have grown...and I continue to grow as I work at it. This is our life together as believers. We grow in our knowledge *of* and faith *in* Jesus together, serving together, maturing together...being equipped...and putting it to work.

THE DANGER

Now, if we don't grow there are dangers. Let's read on in verse 14...

² Lexicon of New Testament Louw-Nida

...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
— Ephesians 4:14

Growth and maturity come from the ministry of the word in our lives and putting it to work to build up the body. As we do this we leave behind childishness. Yes. We are childish and this childishness has severe dangers. Paul uses the analogy of being tossed around like a ship in a storm. He is warning the recipients of his letter about these great dangers if they don't cling dearly to the word. How many saints are caught up in the latest political divide, or consumed with the biggest cultural challenges in their country, or spending massive amounts of their time and energy away from service for God's kingdom? How many saints suffer from a high degree of anxiety and depression, struggling with stability...and yet flood their minds with things far from the word of God?

Sadly, the temptation is to attend church with a check-list mindset. So called "saints" don't engage deeply with the word as taught. They don't yearn to take in more of it. They don't seek to be shaped by it. They don't look to it to be equipped. That is the opposite of growth...a staleness...apathy and carelessness over time. It's childish. We know from other New Testament passages that each person is given gifts *of* and *by* the spirit to *serve*.³ So, as a saint there are no excuses to be given.

While this danger may loom large, Paul has already given us the antidote. Being rooted in and focused on the Christ-centered teaching and preaching provides a solid foundation that keeps us from being tossed, disturbed, and deceived. It's what keeps us firmly planted, rather than being carried, moved along, pushed, and driven by these worldly, but often oh so enticing, schemes. When storms of culture blow...our faith in Jesus as God and King, our focus on him, and his work on our behalf to save us will be the sea walls that guard against instability in our lives.

The elders and various teachers at Clearcreek work hard to study and bring the truth of God's Word regularly. Discipleship is offered and encouraged to help you better understand and apply these truths. So, are you growing up? How do you guard against the instability of childishness? Praise God for those who are regularly working at it, and brining the word to us.

THE GROWING

Now, it's not just the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherd and teachers who are responsible to speak the word...it's all of us saints. See how Paul addresses this in our last two verses...

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. — Ephesians 4:15-16

The saints in Ephesus were to grow up together while repeating and reflecting the truth that was being proclaimed to them. Paul saw the importance of the body of Christ regularly and continually talking about God's truth to each

³ Rom 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12

other as they labor together while growing up. It's no different for us today. That means, that each of us needs to hear the truth of God's word proclaimed and be actively in it with each other as well.

The "truth" Paul is referring to is the same as what's found back in 1:13, "...In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation..." Paul is grounding this entire letter in the truth of the Gospel. Together we are to be firmly rooted in the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done, while "we" all continue to grow. We are to be completely transformed, in every way, into Christ, our head. As we engage with the Word we are actively taking what we hear and putting it to work in shaping and molding us. We work with it to round off our sharp and sinful corners, transforming us more into Christ's image.

Prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers...counselors...disciplers...don't take these verses lightly. You have a responsibility to bring the truth of Jesus into the lives of those in the body, helping them to see how God's truth impacts their lives. Likewise, all saints, all believers, you, have a responsibility to echo and lovingly talk to each other about that truth. And we do this relying the power of Christ our "head".

But why would we do this? Where is this all going? Unity is not lost in these verses, in fact unity is where we have been headed all along. Paul is showing the Ephesians that the intent behind the new testament church body is to grow together, building itself up. Notice Paul's analogy: a body; held together at the joints; growing together *when each part functions properly*. You see the church is made up of people, of saints. It's not simply an organization, or some legal 501c3 document, or hierarchical structure or worse...a building. You my dear saints are *the church*, "the body".⁴ As we all work together as one body putting into practice what we hear, in unity, we will all grow. What a marvelous and wonderful image of a group of people, working together in harmony, for the benefit and growth of each other, sacrificially serving on behalf of our king Jesus Christ, equipped by him to do this work.

CONCLUSION

As we close our time tonight, let's challenge ourselves on a few things:

ARE YOU THANKFUL?

We are blessed with many people who serve here at Clearcreek. Many people who pour their time and energy into serving in the various ways as they have been gifted and equipped. I am SO thankful for all of your work. It has been a means of God's Grace in my life. At times, I have lost sight of how special, unique, and Biblical it is. Your functioning in the body is exactly what Paul has in mind here. Thank you for living out the Gospel in the ways you serve. Seriously...thank you!

But thanking you from the pulpit isn't where this should end. All of you who attend...when was the last time you stopped to think about the many ways you are served on a daily basis by those other joints around you? Are you grateful for it? Do you see the blessing it is to you? Do you see how you have grown because of it? Have you expressed genuine appreciation and gratefulness to them and to Christ for that work?

HOW ARE YOU LISTENING?

As you are hearing the Word preached, taught, and spoken to you, how do you approach and engage it? Is it merely collecting more facts? Has it become merely information? Are you taking in the word with the intent to put it to work for the body? Do you work at it, to study, understand, memorize and grow in God's truth with the goal of

⁴ Eph. 1:22

service and unity? Do you desire to work and labor for the building up of the body, because of God's word being ministered to you?

IS SERVICE YOUR RESPONSE?

First of all, are you a joint in the body? Have you made Christ Lord of your life, finding hope and salvation in him? If you are waiting, I encourage you to do it now. Don't wait...God is calling you to repent and come to him!

As believers, we have seen the "oneness" that we are to have in the body together. Have you joined together with our church in membership? You know, many opportunities to serve are limited if you're not a member committed to our body.

Do you serve in unity in the body, or are there other competing, distracting interests? Are you working "properly" in the body? Do you see yourself as personally responsible for acting within and as part of "the church", or do you view the church as external to you...and the responsibility is not yours?

Has God gifted you with one of these gifts? Are you actively, laboring and participating in the growth of the body (spiritually and physically)? Are you using what you have learned in the Word to equip you to serve? Do you know what God has given you a desire for, or explored what you're capable to do? Have you tried different ways of serving to know where your gifting is? Are you using those gifts to serve others in the body? Because, all saints (or believers) have been given gifts (Rom 12)...gifts that are to be used. And, what fill your conversations with others...is it the truth in love?

Let's take in the truth of the gospel. Let's learn from it. Let's serve. Let's lovingly speak it to each other. Let's grow together.