

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS
EPHESIANS 4:11-13

In 1851 Queen Victoria of Great Britain, through the influence of her husband, Albert, opened the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. The event was held in Hyde Park in London, and people streamed to the exhibit from England and from around the world.

One of the major influences of the time was steam-driven power; so at the Exhibit there were steam plows, a steam organ, and even a steam canon. But the invention that won the prize for the Exhibit was made of 7000 parts — pulleys, bells, whistles, and gears. “Gears that meshed with other gears that hummed in harmony and whirled in perfect synchronization. It was a sight to behold. Interestingly, it accomplished nothing.” [Swindoll, *Rise and Shine*.]

When you are building a machine or a house or a business or a church — it’s easy to forget why you are constructing what you are constructing. And when you do that, you will inevitably start doing some wasteful, or even worse, wrong things.

At times, in all the busy-ness in the life of the church, we forget what God’s plan for the church is. *We* have a plan; *we* know what we want to do. But is that what God’s plan and purpose is for the church?

One of the core values GBC has is that “we believe in every member ministry.” Every member of the church body is a minister, gifted by God and equipped by the church to serve in the church for the glory of God. And that truth is found in the passage before us this morning, **Ephesians 4:11-13**. If I can give you the theme of this passage in a few words, it is this —

GOD’S PLAN IS FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE TO SERVE HIS CHURCH SO ALL THE CHURCH BECOMES MATURE.

The church is a place where God’s people gather to exercise their gifts towards each other for the benefit of each other. It’s where relationships are built and in the context of those relationships, all the members are trained and then they use their spiritual gifts with each other so that the church body is built and matured. The church is the place where we purposefully equip and prepare people to serve.

This morning we are fleshing out our theme for the year: “Equip the Saints.” What does that mean and what is God’s plan for us to do that?

*In this passage, we find **six provisions** for equipping and being equipped to help the church become mature.*

1. The **CONTEXT** of Equipping (v. 1)
2. The **ATTITUDE** of Equippers (vv. 2-3)
3. The **GRACE** for Equippers (vv. 4-10)
4. The **GIFTS** for Equippers (v. 11)
5. The **PURPOSE** of Equipping (v. 12)
6. The **GOAL** of Equipping (v. 13)

1. The **CONTEXT** of Equipping (v. 1)

- Ephesians is divided into two large sections:
 - ✓ Ephesians 1-3 contains the indicatives — the realities — of our spiritual condition (1:3ff; 2:4ff, 13ff)
 - ✓ Ephesians 4-6 contains the imperatives (40x) for our spiritual condition (4:25ff; 5:1, 18, 25)
 - ✓ The verse that sets the pattern for these imperatives is 4:1 (it is not an imperative, but has that force) — *I...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling...*
- What does it mean to **walk worthy** of our calling (salvation)? The word has two basic meanings:
 - ✓ Corresponding to, matching, equivalent (as in math) — like a coordinating or matching outfit
 - ✓ In balance with — as in scales so that what is weighed matches the standard
 - ✓ Used in relation to spiritual life, it means a life that is consistent with Christ and His calling. There is equivalence between the manner of our lives and the purpose of our salvation. The conduct of our lives is in keeping with our name “Christian.”
 - ✓ That does not mean we are saved by merit or deed; our worthy acts are acts of faith, believing that God will empower us by His Spirit to produce spiritual fruit (Gal. 5:22ff).
 - ✓ When Paul talks about **your calling** he means the purpose for which God saved us — the effective summons by God to salvation (1:18; 4:4) In Ephesians, it has two specific purposes —
 - *Personal holiness* — The reason God called and chose individuals was so that they might be holy and pure in His presence (2:10).
 - *Corporate unity* — vv. 3-6 particularly emphasize the purpose of unity in the Body. We are called not only to fellowship with God, but fellowship with one another (2:16). To live worthy of our calling is to live a life matching the reality of our calling to unity with one another.
- So when we talk about the context of equipping, we mean the theological background is that God has done this miraculous work of saving sinners, adopting them, and progressively transforming them.
 - ✓ To have worthiness as our “context” means that “equippers” should be those who are obviously and increasingly living in accordance with salvation. They are obviously being changed.
 - ✓ To have worthiness as our “context” also means that our work is helping people live worthy of their name/reputation as Christians. We help people experience salvation as more than “fire insurance.”

2. The **ATTITUDE** of Equippers (vv. 2-3)

- These verses identify three inward attitudes of those who will live worthy (and be involved in equipping and being equipped) — these should be goals in the equipping process:

- ✓ **Humility** — Being humble doesn't mean that you don't think of yourself at all, but that you think of yourself rightly (Rom. 12:3); your self-examination is accurate and God-honoring. A humble person is also more interested in attending to the interests of others than himself (Phil. 2:3ff).
- ✓ **Gentleness** — the word is sometimes translated "meek." It means "power under control." It is dragster under the control of a deft hand on the clutch and steering wheel. In Biblical terms, it is a believer under the power and control of the Holy Spirit — quietly submitting to direction of God. A gentle person is willing to suffer injury instead of inflicting it. He is like our King (Mt. 21:5).
- ✓ **Patience** — refers to "a long holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or passion." A patient man is steadfast — not giving in, enduring even when there is a long delay (1 Thess. 5:14).
- These verses also identify two outward evidences of those who live worthy (and be involved in equipping and being equipped) — these also should be goals in equipping:
 - ✓ **Showing tolerance in love** — to "endure" and "put up" with difficult behavior. It is not "blessing" sinful actions, but it is being kind, non-retaliatory, and affectionate when others sin against us. We do that because we love the other and are always acting with their best in mind...
 - ✓ **Preserving the unity of the Spirit** — This verse doesn't mean that we make ourselves unified. This verse means that we *are* unified (Jn. 17:21) and we are always laboring to protect that unity.
 - A husband and wife *are* one flesh; they are unified. Sometimes they don't act unified. They need to do things that reflect they are one. (What will communicate you are one w/ your wife?)
 - We can act in a way that unity is either damaged or protected. **Worthy walkers** protect unity.
 - [Have you noticed how often the NT emphasizes unity? This letter? Cf. 2:11 - 3:7; 4:4-6, 11, 12.]
- Put these five characteristics together and what you have is a commitment to pursue inward characteristics that will benefit others in our relationships with them. So the fundamental work of ministry is to preserve the unity that God has given us by making every believer mature in Christ (v. 13). And we are all involved in that process.

3. The **GRACE** for Equippers (vv. 4-10)

- Verses 4-6 reveal some of the ways we are one (unified, v. 3).
- Verse 7 contains the key statement for this section — **to each one of us grace was given...**
 - ✓ This grace is not a reference to the grace that saved us at salvation (2:8-9).
 - ✓ Grace is actually "*the* grace" — it is a particular kind of grace — a grace that enables or equips believers for ministry — He is primarily speaking of spiritual gifts.
 - ✓ Notice that this is a gift for everyone — each one — Paul is speaking not only of the church as a whole, but each individual believer receives this gift of "sustaining grace."
 - "No one misses out on Christ's bounty." [O'Brien]
 - The world divides itself up into the "haves" and "have nots." The temptation is to make the same kind of division among believers and churches — don't.

- Every believer has the same salvation and the same Spirit and the same gift of grace to sustain them in life and ministry — cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.
- All the gifts God gives (either the grace of spiritual gifts or the gift of daily grace), will enable us to fulfill His calling for us — weak, inadequate people enabled to shepherd other weak, inadequate people.
 - ✓ God’s grace equips one thirsty sinner to show another thirsty sinner where the Water of Life is.
 - ✓ You and I have been called to preserve the unity of the church. And we (individually) are graced by God with the necessary tools to fulfill that task.
 - ✓ Wherever God has called you to serve Him in His church, He will sustain you with His infinite grace and spiritual gifts to accomplish that task. He will give you daily what you need.

“We have proved beyond any doubt that He means what He says — His grace is sufficient, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. We pray that if any, anywhere are fearing that the cost of discipleship is too great, that they may be given a glimpse into that treasure in heaven promised to all who [obey].” [Elisabeth Elliot, shortly after her husband Jim was martyred.]

4. The GIFTS for Equippers (v. 11) — how will we equip everyone to serve?

- Paul identifies four gifts that God has given to the church for the purpose of protecting unity (v. 3)
 - ✓ **apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers** refer to *both* the gifts and the people.
 - ✓ God not only gives gifts of grace to the people of the church, but He gives gifted *people* to the church. He not only gives functions, but He gives relationships. These gifts function in relationships within the context of the body.
 - ✓ Paul is also emphatic — “*He*, he gave...” — i.e., the ascended (sovereign and authoritative) Christ of v. 10 gave these gifts through the Spirit. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:7, 11.
- These four spiritual gifts (people) fall into two categories:
 - ✓ Foundational gifts — **apostles** and **prophets**. These were the gifts and men that established the church; their work is now complete and their gifts have ceased (cf. 2:20).
 - ✓ Permanent gifts — **evangelists** and **pastor-teachers** — these were gifts that brought people into the church and equipped people once in the church. These are still available and essential:
 - The word **evangelist** appears only a few times (Acts 21:8 — Philip; 2 Tim. 4:5 — Timothy).
 - ... But the concept of evangelism is very common — and it simply means “to declare the good news” and it was used here of those who announced the news of the gospel.
 - ... The gospel is quite simple — Acts 13:38-39 — forgiveness of sins and restoration to God
 - Not only did God give evangelists, but He also gave **pastor-teachers** —
 - ... The question is whether this refers to two gifts (pastors *and* teachers) or one (pastor-teachers)

... Godly men have held both but it seems most likely that this is one gift — all the other gifts have the article in front of them, except **teachers** — so teachers is probably to be considered as a unified gift with **pastors** — “teaching shepherds.”

... The emphasis here is that those who lead the flock do it with tenderness and with the Word of God — **teachers** = 1 Tim. 3:2; also, Tt. 1:9; an example is in 2 Tim. 2:24-26.

... The foundational role of someone with this gift is to open the Word of God and explain it.

Foundation of all ministry is teaching: 4:15-16; 5:18ff; 6:4; Col. 1:28; 3:16; Hb. 3:12f; 10:24f.

- As you think about evangelists and pastor-teachers (and all the other gifts, Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12), recognize:
 - ✓ **God is using people** — He is gifting frail men with spiritual gifts to accomplish his purposes. These *people* are gifts to us in the church (aren't you thankful for the evangelist in your life, and those who open and explain the Word of God to you?).
 - ✓ **God is using all the people** in the body with one of these gifts or with others — every member has at least one spiritual gift (**Rom. 12:6** — *since we have gifts...*). The gift was given to be used.
 - ✓ **God's ministry is not complicated.** (*It's hard, but not complicated.*) Ministry is the combination of exposing and explaining the gospel to unbelievers and then training believers with the Word of God. We want to do it creatively and with energy and passion, but we never will depart from these basic tools — gospel and Word.
 - ✓ I like doing home fix-it projects, and I've acquired a few tools — saws and sanders and drills and screwdrivers of all sizes and grinders and nail punches and wrenches... But give me a hammer and screwdriver and I have what I need most of the time. Most things are not too complicated. GBC is founded on the work of the gospel and the Word of God, mediated through gifted people.

5. The **PURPOSE** of Equipping (v. 12)

- What is important in this chapter is not only what gifts are given, but *why they are given*. What is the end?
- Watch the prepositions in this verse — **for** (2x, indicating purpose) and **to** (indicating goal): they are progressive — the pastor-teachers equip, the equipped serve, and the body is built.
- Those with the gifts of evangelist or pastor-teacher **equip**; the word was used in various ways —
 - ✓ It was used of a medical doctor setting a bone and fishermen mending nets
 - ✓ It was also used of military and naval preparations for battle
 - ✓ It was used of correction and healing relationships in the church body (**Gal. 6:1**)
 - ✓ It was used of a teacher training a student (Lk. 6:40)
 - ✓ It was used of a home having everything it needs to function well — it's complete
 - ✓ In this verse the body is taught, *and* the body is prepared for any need that might arise.
- The emphasis is that the task of elders and pastors is not to do all the ministry, but to equip and prepare others so that they can do the ministry. Paul is correcting the idea that elders do all the work of ministry:

- ✓ “The perfect pastor preaches exactly fifteen minutes. He condemns sin, but never embarrasses anyone. He works from 8 a.m. until midnight and is also the church janitor. He makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, drives a new car/ and gives \$50 a week to the poor. He is 28 years old and has been preaching for 25 years, and is wonderfully gentle and handsome. He loves to work with teenagers and spends countless hours with senior citizens. He makes fifteen calls daily on church families/ shut-ins and hospital patients, and he is always in the office when needed. That's the perfect pastor.” That man doesn't exist! He needs help. (We have a fully engaged church @ GBC.)
- ✓ That's why we have GBI and AWANA and CBCD and preaching and home groups and Faith Fit and Entrusted and... — we're preparing people for the ministry of serving others.
- ✓ At GBC, we spend much time teaching — not to fill heads with info, but to equip to serve, because everyone is either equipping or being equipped (and most of us are in both roles).
- ✓ Our culture has developed a “do it for me” attitude; sitting on the couch, we want others to care for our needs... That can develop too readily in the church, and it's devastating. A healthy church is not the church with frenetically busy pastors and elders, but with elders who are investing in the lives of others so they can be equipped to serve — and the whole body is then working.

“The goal of the Christian ministry is quite simple...are we making and nurturing genuine disciples of Christ? The church always tends towards institutionalism and secularization. The focus shifts to preserving traditional programs and structures, and the goal of discipleship is lost. The mandate of disciple-making provides the touchstone for whether our church is engaging in Christ's mission. Are we making genuine disciples of Jesus Christ?” [The Trellis and the Vine, 14.]

- ✓ We say “everyone is a counselor” — the only question is whether or not our counsel is biblical and helpful. In the same way, everyone is equipping someone or being equipped — the only question is whether or not the equipping being done is biblical and helpful.

- **for the work of service** = “the deeds of deaconing...” the tasks one does in helping others. Implications:

- ✓ **Every member is a minister.** The NT knows nothing of people who watch but don't engage, who attend but don't participate. There are no sidelines in the church. Everyone is on the field.

“All Christians are in ministry.” [Ray Stedman]

“Spiritual service is the work of every Christian, every saint of God. Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry.” [MacArthur]

Some are more prominent and some are less prominent, but everyone is serving (1 Cor. 12:20ff)

- ✓ **The work is work, but it's also a joy.** Like a child after labor; joy in labor (Heb. 12:3; Phil. 2:19ff)
- ✓ **The work of service is in building people, not buildings.** Service is speaking Word of God into the lives of people. It is so easy to be task-oriented. God has created the church for us to be people-oriented.

It's about relationships. Last week @ State of the Church we talked about buildings and parking lots; don't misunderstand — those are merely necessary tools and infrastructure needed to accomplish our goals. When we are fund raising and building and expanding, it is always only with the goal and purpose of caring for more people more effectively.

- ✓ Ministry and relationships are the privilege of every believer in the church body. If you are a 10-year-old or 87-year-old believer, God has you in the body to serve someone else with your gift...
- ✓ This isn't a program, but a mindset and attitude — "I have the HS and Scripture...I can serve"

"In spite of our inadequacies, in spite of our lack of full maturity, the Lord desires to use us in the lives of others. The help we provide others will not be perfect, in the same way that the help we receive from them will not be perfect. Regardless, we [are created as a body] for each other." [Wilkins]

- Sometimes we do this effectively; sometimes not as effectively. Priority is that we are always working.
- You and I were created to do all these things with one another. What one thing can you do this week to help equip someone to serve in the church, or to serve as someone who is equipped?

6. The **GOAL** of Equipping (v. 13)

- The result of people using gifts is that the church of Christ is **built up** (v. 12c).
- When we say, "built up," we're talking about spiritual progress and maturity (v. 13).
 - ✓ **Building up** points to a process (development). It's a construction term; it doesn't happen instantly, but takes time and follows a procedure. The goal is to increasingly add to the building to complete it.
 - ✓ Note the emphasis on the word (and similar words in this section): Eph. 2:21; 4:12, 16, 29.
 - ✓ He also reveals the "artist's rendering" of the proposed building (what it should look like):
 - **Unity** (v. 13) — **all** are acting unified with one another (fulfilling v. 3)
 - **Maturity** (v. 13) — having a knowledge of God fitting of **men** (adulthood) and **fullness of Christ**
 - **Not like children** (v. 14), which in this verse means not unstable and prone to deception
 - **Growing up in all aspects...[to] Christ** (v. 15) — every part of our lives looks like Christ
 - **Whole body...properly working...building up of itself in love** — everyone works (every member ministry) and everyone is built so the corporate effect is corporate maturity and love.
- When every member functions as a part of the body the way God intended, the whole body benefits. And when a member doesn't function, then the whole body suffers (you know what this is like physically).

CONCLUSION: There are **many implications** that flow from these truths —

- ✓ **This will influence the way we structure ministry** — people over programs; every member ministry; substance over style
- ✓ **Every believer always has a function** in the church (maybe not a job title, but a function).

- ✓ **Building and preserving relationships will always be a priority.** We will work hard to preserve unity because God gave it to us (v. 3). We keep that unity by pursuing reconciliation and encouraging fellowship and service of one another.
- ✓ **Everyone needs someone.** No matter how mature anyone is, he has not attained perfection and he still needs the ministry of others to help him.
- ✓ **Never make assumptions about the inability of someone to change** — it may be that God has placed you in his life for the very purpose of helping him change.
- ✓ **Always work.** Always look for and take opportunities to cultivate relationships so that you will have opportunity to stimulate others to maturity in Christ.
- ✓ **Stimulating others to maturity is not optional.** It's for all of us. Just like a mother feeds and changes a newborn baby every believer works to help others mature in Christ.

The church is not a place for “professionals” or even for “entertainment.” It is a place where all God’s people gather to exercise their gifts towards each other for the benefit of each other.

It’s tempting to say, “I’m not needed in the church; I have nothing to contribute.” But the opposite is true. You not only have something to contribute to the care of others in the Body, but it is necessary for you to function in the Body. We need you. We need you equipping, being equipped, and serving one another.

BENEDICTION: **Ephesians 3:20-21**