

Ephesians 4:12-13 "Serve With the Gifts You've Been Given By God"

For the last few weeks we've looked at the gifts in verse 11 which God has given to His Church. We saw how the apostles were a select group of men who were used of God to be foundational to the N.T. Church, with Christ as the very cornerstone, as they were primarily responsible for giving us the very word of God which we have as the N.T. Scriptures.

We also saw how the prophets are men and women who have the gift of prophecy and speak the revelations or illuminations which God continues to share with His people. However, these illuminations from God are merely conveyed in the prophets own words and therefore do not carry the weight and authority of Scripture, which is why we are commanded to test these prophecies in light of Scripture.

The evangelist is a person who is gifted to take the gospel out to people in a way where he goes forth with joy in this task and with the boldness he receives from the Holy Spirit as he is led in that task. The evangelists' ministry is also proven with the fruit of that ministry where people are led to Christ.

The Pastor/teacher is one who is called by God to shepherd the flock of Christ. He feeds, cares for and leads the flock in a way where they are protected from false teaching while at the same time they are nourished on the word of God as he teaches and instructs without compromise so that they might be encouraged in their faith.

The list in Ephesians 4:11 is not meant to be exhaustive. It is a list of gifts which are primarily instructive in nature as they deal with God's written word and the exercise thereof. We have other gifts of the Holy Spirit spoken of in Romans 12, and 1Cor.12-14, and they are all given by God with the express purpose of being used in the body of Christ by His people.

But we must not forget that the giving of gifts by the Holy Spirit is really the grace given by God as He gives people to the Church whom He gifts. The gift cannot work unless the person gifted gives. And this is the point Paul is making in our text as he continues to state why these gifts are given.

EPH 4:12-13 "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity

in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The NAS version puts it this way: "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

What we see here is that these gifts which God gives have a purpose. And the purpose is to equip or *prepare the saints for works of service*. One well-known author makes the observation: "Somehow, somewhere, an idea emerged and became very popular in the Christian community; so popular in fact, that it has now become almost an iron-clad tradition. It is that the ministry of the Church is to be done by the paid, professional, theologically-trained clergy....."

..... According to this view, the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits of ministry, in terms of preaching, counseling, comfort, and those other things that we seek to provide in the Church. But the reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The Church is to be a mobilized army." (R.C. Sproul)

The leadership of the Church is responsible for equipping the body, who in turn begins to equip others. This is known as discipleship. We equip each other as we encourage each other with the gifts God has given us.

But only as each is using his or her gifts will we be able to equip others. And only as these gifts are being utilized according to the word of God can we equip in a way that is beneficial. To use any gift without love and truth is to misuse the gifts, according to 1Cor.13, and instead of equipping the saints, the saints are actually hindered in their ability to grow and serve effectively.

But even if the gifts are being utilized biblically it is still the responsibility of the body to desire to be equipped as they submit to the ministry of the word and the gifts which would enable them to be encouraged in their faith.

And this is why Paul emphasizes that this equipping is not like going to class and being filled with lots of knowledge; it's meant to be practiced. This equipping of the saints is for works of service according to verse 12.

When any of us are trained for a new job there is a process that takes place where you're taught certain things related to that job as you observe and learn. But, I've never met an employer who went through the training process with someone who didn't expect that individual to begin doing the work they were trained for.

And Paul is essentially saying the same thing. We're all being trained by God as He gifts people in the body to utilize their gifts so we can learn from them and observe their lives and their practices so that we in turn can begin doing the same things.

Someone with the gift of teaching, for example, is able to show what the word of God is saying and then in turn how that word applies to everyday life. Someone might wonder how becoming biblically literate has anything to do with real life.

And yet, it is only as we learn what the word says of who our God is and what He has done for us that life begins to make any sense. As we begin to see how awesome our God is, in light of the fact that He is Creator, we begin to understand that we don't need to fear if He can handle difficulties in our lives.

As we study and learn of the salvation we have in Christ we begin to approach life with a new sense of purpose and direction knowing that this world is not our home and as we carry out this pilgrimage in this world we have great opportunities to be used by God to tell others that they don't have to spend eternity separated from their Creator.

And so, the teacher has a great responsibility to teach about God and His work of redemption found in Christ. But those being taught have a great responsibility to learn these things and then in turn to teach others. This is why I said last week that you don't necessarily need the gift of teaching to be a teacher. You need only be a good student who can direct people to the truth, which we're all called to do.

But to do works of service we need to be willing to work as we learn and grow in our faith, just like that employee who, at some point in his training, is going to have to do the job without the aid of an instructor being right by his side. And yes, that employee will make mistakes, but in the process of having a hands-on approach he will learn through those experiences and become proficient in his task.

It's the same with the body of Christ. Yes, we are being trained by the word of God, and we are being trained by the example of others who are gifted in certain areas. But as we glean from them there comes a point where we step out and begin doing certain tasks as God has gifted us.

And yes, we will make mistakes, and we may not have all the answers, or we may not be able to share the gospel just like the evangelist, but there will come a time as we actually begin doing these things that we will become proficient in areas of service we may not have been willing to do in the past.

And over time you will begin to discover that you really are able to do things you never imagined. There's no greater joy for a Pastor than to have someone in the congregation come up to him and say, 'you know, I'm beginning to understand certain things in the word that made no sense in the past.' Or, 'the Lord has really impressed on me that I should be serving in this particular capacity.'

That's a sign that learning is going on, that gifts are being used, that equipping is taking place. But you don't have to be a Pastor to hear that. You can be a housewife and find that you can be equipping other mothers in a way that encourages them in their faith as it relates to their family.

And if you're faithful to encourage others with your gifts, don't be surprised if you hear some mom come up to you and say, 'you know I'm beginning to understand certain things of raising children in the Lord that made no sense in the past, or 'the Lord has impressed on me that I should be serving with other moms to help them in their task.'

That could take place as you minister in the home or as you help out in the nursery or instructing the little ones during their church time. There are lots of ways to do works of service in the body of Christ. But the operative word Paul uses is service.

The word service in the Greek is *diakonia* and it means service or ministry. It's where we get our English word deacon. The idea here is that the works we do for Christ are works which are actually ministry. In fact, in the KJV and the NKJV, the word used there is ministry instead of service.

If you've got the gift of exhortation and you come alongside someone who's going through a difficult time and you lovingly explain how God is not going to abandon them and you exhort

them to seek the Lord and to understand that His word and promises are sure, you have just done ministry.

You see, in this way we are all ministers of the grace of God. And what this does is to take away the mystique from the one we have come to expect to do ministry, the Pastor. After all, he's the "minister" isn't he? Yes, and he needs to be ministering with his gifts. But, the Pastor is not ministering properly if he's not encouraging and equipping the saints to be ministering with their gifts as well.

But, what is the point of ministering with our gifts in the body of Christ? Is it just to be busy doing something religious? Is it just doing because we're supposed to be doing something? No. The point of doing works of service or ministering one to another is for the building up of the body of Christ.

When we think of building up we should also think in terms of what the opposite of that would be, which is tearing down. Building up takes a concerted effort to construct carefully so that what is built will last. Tearing down takes very little effort at all.

I used to build aluminum pool cages. And it would take an average of four to five days to fully construct one. A lot of planning went into the designing of this structure and then the actual work itself.

But, often times we would have to go in and tear down an existing pool cage which was falling apart or in disrepair to make room for the new one. With two or three guys we could completely tear down a pool cage in about two to three hours. And the fun part was taking hammers and just beating the beams until they came apart. Tearing down is easy, but in the process it's destructive.

I've heard it said over the years that some people have the gift of discouragement. And in making light of that we know how people can easily come across that way when they don't seem to take the time to build up. They don't seem to take the time and effort to try to encourage anyone. If they have something to say it's negative and anything but edifying.

Building up the body of Christ takes work. That's why Paul uses the terminology, "works of service, or ministry". But it doesn't have to be a drudgery, it can be a work of love as we see our role in being there for each other. And I guess that's the hard part,

because often times it's just easier to consider ourselves instead of others.

Maybe we've just got too much going on in our own lives to be involved with building up others in the body. I've had people say to me, 'Drew if you've got too much going on in your life to where you can't build up the body, maybe you've got too much going on.'

Life is a process of prioritizing. And we certainly don't want to neglect our families or our health, but we certainly don't want to neglect the privilege our Lord and Savior has given each one of us, which is to build each other up for works of service so that the work of the gospel can go forward and the kingdom of Christ extended.

How we do that is part of prioritizing time and schedules and considering one another as more important than ourselves. But it also includes considering how each one of us can use the gifts God has given us and then simply making the time to do it.

There are so many opportunities to minister to people today, both inside and outside the body of Christ. But unless we understand the importance of building up the body first, we will never be equipped to reach out effectively to those outside the church. Paul understood this. And this is why he spent so much time trying to equip the saints all over the known world of his day.

1CO 12:7 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

The common good Paul speaks of here is the good of the body of Christ. And so the Spirit of God spends a great deal of time gifting Christians in the body of Christ so that the common good of that particular body is met and enhanced as each is exercising his or her gifts.

And as we are all using our gifts the body will be encouraged. And as we encourage each other we will be built up strong to take care of each other as well as reaching out beyond ourselves to meet the needs of the world; the greatest need being Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on their behalf.

1TH 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."

Paul assumes that the Thessalonians are encouraging and building each other up. But he never assumes they or we could be doing

enough of that. And so, we must always be encouraging each other toward love and good deeds as we come alongside each other with our gifts as we give those gifts away in the love of Christ.

ROM 12:7-11 "If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. 9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 ***Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*** 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

As you use your gift then others in the body will be encouraged to use their gifts, and we all benefit, including myself. Some think that the Pastor doesn't need the encouragement found in the gifts of others in the body. That could not be further from the truth. No one is above needing each other in the body.

Well, how long do we do this? How long do we build each other up? Well, Paul answers this question in our text as he continues.

EPH 4:13 "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

If Christians are honest with each other, they will never be able to set a date in this world as to when this will happen. I've actually had people tell me that they attained full maturity attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ in a way where they actually reached perfection in this world.

And though these people might claim to be Christians, that attitude is cultic and dangerous. They will take passages out of context and arrive at the conclusion that one can attain perfection in this world.

MAT 5:48 "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Does anyone think that we could be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, in the sense that we are personally without any imperfection?

Of course not. The passage in Matthew is addressing our need to love each other without hypocrisy as the Pharisees were prone to do. Jesus says, if you want to really show your love and holiness then be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The word perfect in the Greek, by the way, is *teleios* and it means (1) brought to its end, finished, (2) wanting nothing necessary to completeness.

It can be seen clearer in another passage where Jesus says, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
(MAT 19:21)

No one could conceivably think that Jesus literally meant that if you simply sell everything and give to the poor that you will be perfect. The same Greek word is used here and its implication is that if you want to find yourself complete, not needing anything else to have a place in heaven, then follow Christ by faith as you trust Him alone for eternal life. And as you do, you will find yourself willing to do whatever He asks, even forsaking all for Him.

Our completeness or perfection is not found in ourselves. It's found in Christ who is truly perfect and whose righteousness has been put to our account by faith in Him alone. And so we could say, be "complete" even as your heavenly Father is "complete".

There is nothing to be added to God. He is complete in Himself. Likewise, we Christians are complete in Christ. And yet that completion works in us in a way where each day we are becoming more conformed into the image and likeness of Christ in this world, so that people may see Jesus in us.

As our text in Eph.4:13 says, we should be attaining to the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Our unity is not found in simply a common knowledge but a common relationship. If our knowledge of Christ does not translate to a relationship which desires to follow Christ and encourage each other to do the same then our knowledge is lacking. Peter brings this out in his second epistle.

2PE 1:1-3 "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

Knowing Christ is not simply knowing about Him. It is an intimate union where we live in His life by faith and follow the One who has given us life. But as we follow Him and learn more of Him our relationship with Him grows and what we find is that it affects every aspect of our lives.

That's what Peter meant when he said that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

As we live life for Christ, His life will be made manifest in us to His glory. And in the process we will find ourselves maturing, growing stronger, less prone to wander from the ways of the Lord.

This too, Paul brings out in our text when he says that "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become *mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

This word for mature in the Greek is the exact same word that Jesus used in MAT 19:2, "If you want to be *perfect*, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Maturity is one of the goals in the Christian walk as it is in real life. No adult wants to be accused of being immature; babyish. And in the same way no Christian wants to be immature in his or her faith all of their life.

We want to grow up in our faith. We want to be able to be useful in Christ's kingdom. And as we all mature we want to be effective in a way where we can become reliable as servants who can be used by our Lord as we look to Him for our strength.

But to become mature we need to know the means by which this process takes place. One of the means is what Peter speaks of in his first letter in 1Pet.2:2, "Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...."

But, as we come back to our text we see that Paul describes this maturity in Christ as we grow in our relationship with our Lord as "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

This language is similar to what Paul says in the beginning of this letter.

EPH 1:22-23 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

The fullness is what we experience as we seek Him diligently and walk in the Spirit. This fullness will always translate itself into faith and obedience, because this fullness is the very essence of the life we have in Christ who does all things to honor the Father.

This measure of the fullness of Christ is another way of saying how Jesus is the measure of how we should be living to the glory of God. Not only is He the fullness in our life, by His grace, He is the standard. In fact, the word measure in the Greek is *metron* and it's a word describing an instrument for measuring, or something like a measuring rod or ruler.

And so, in this sense, we do have a measure to look to; a measure which is in fact perfect. Though we will not attain unto perfection experientially in this world, may we seek to walk in a way that imitates the life of Christ who did all things perfectly. His was a life of looking to the Father in dependence. Should we do anything less?

His was a life of service to honor the Father. Should we do anything less? His was a life of extending love and compassion. Should we do anything less? And of course His was a life of loving the sheep and caring for their every need. We must not do anything less as we encourage each other attaining unto the unity of the faith.

Nothing highlights unity more than when each member in the body is working together with the gifts God has given us as we come together with the common goal of glorifying Christ through the work He's given each of us.

That's the fullness we can live in. That's the abundant life as we bring glory to the One who has given us eternal life. May we build each other up and encourage each other as we help each other become the kind of servants Christ wants us to be; with Him being the perfect standard and servant.

Paul sums it up this way when he wrote to the church in Colossae.

COL 2:6-7 "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."