2-3-19

Ephesians 4:11-13

Last time we began looking at some of the gifts that Christ gave to the church. He gives these gifts to individuals and, in turn, these individuals use these God-given gifts for the upbuilding of the church. The ultimate purpose in building up the church is to bring glory to God.

Here in verse 11, Paul lists four gifts Christ gave to the church. So far, we’ve looked at apostles and prophets. These were given to the early church to get them established and to ensure proper doctrine. These also showed how to deal with the heresies that began creeping into the new church almost immediately. As we are told in chapter 2 verse 20, these formed the foundation of the church, with Christ as the corner stone.

Part of the ministry of the apostles was to write scripture and this is where the New Testament comes from. Coupled with the Old Testament, the Bible forms the written foundation of the church. It is the Bible we turn to for answers to all the doctrinal and spiritual questions we have. Because we have the Bible, these gifts of apostle and prophet are no longer given as they were in the early church.

This brings us to the next gift that Christ provided for the church: evangelists. Very basically speaking, evangelists tell people the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let’s look into the word “evangelist” a little bit. Our word is forged from Greek, Latin, and middle English. Contained within evangelist is the word “angel”. Angel means messenger or refers to one who brings news. The prefix “ev” originates from a word meaning “good”. Hence, we end up with “good news”, which is the same meaning as “Gospel”. So, the evangel, is the Gospel, which is the Good News.

This brings us back to evangelists as being people who spread the Gospel. Incidentally, this also applies to “evangelical” or “evangelical Christian”; this would be a person who follows Jesus Christ and believes in the good news. It also implies someone who would spread the Gospel because followers of Jesus have been commanded by Him to do so. Unfortunately, the designation “evangelical” has been redefined in several different ways by our society so we must be very careful when we use the word in conversation; be sure you know the other person’s definition.

I think we are all familiar with the great commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28; We are told to go and make disciples of all the nations: In other words, we are to evangelize. According to this, we are all evangelists; so, what is Paul talking about here in verse 11? It is the gift of evangelism. Some people have a special calling to spread the Gospel. Their personalities make them good at it and they have a deep desire for it. They have a longing to share the Gospel.

Missionaries are a special form of evangelist, they want to go to a specific people group, spend time with them, and bring them to Christ. Usually in the process, they help the people to a better life all around. Those with the gift of being an evangelist just want to spread the Gospel anywhere they can. It can be in their own town or in another country. The vital importance to the church is obvious.

In the early church, the apostles or church planters would come through and get a church started. There would be people in that church gifted with evangelism who would go throughout their town, spreading the good news. As a result, the church would grow, and souls would be won to Christ.

This gift still exists today and is still very much needed. It is easy to recognize that Billy Graham had the gift of being an evangelist. There are others like him today that draw great crowds and preach the Gospel. But there are many more gifted evangelists who work on a much smaller scale. Much of their work is done one-on-one. All these gifted people are needed in the body of Christ; all for the glory of God.

The last group Paul mentions is “pastors and teachers”. While there is some discussion, it is pretty clear that “pastors and teachers” is one gift or, perhaps, package. It is necessary for a pastor to teach; that is part of the calling. Having said that, it is possible (and common) to have the gift of “teaching” by itself. This is a very necessary gift for any church body.

This is the only place in the New Testament where the word “pastor” is used to indicate a church office. The word itself relates to shepherding and we are very used to being metaphorically referred to as sheep in the Bible. Consider sheep for a moment: They are not that bright, they tend to follow the crowd or simply wonder off and get lost, they will fall into holes and can’t get out, they are relatively defenseless, and need to be fed. If we honestly look at ourselves, it is no wonder that we are thought of as sheep.

Sheep need a shepherd, and that is the basic job of a pastor. This, however, puts the pastor in a bit of a quandary, because, he too, is a sheep. We must all bear in mind that the true shepherd is Jesus Christ and that any man who is a pastor is simply being used by Christ for His purposes. Obviously, the gift of pastor/teacher is still very much with us today.

The pastor gift is the ability to have care for Christ’s people as a *shepherd* cares for a flock; not as a hired hand. One of the primary responsibilities of a shepherd is to feed his sheep; and so it is with a pastor. This is where teaching comes in. It is a metaphorical feeding on a solid diet of Scripture. As the LORD God laments in Hosea 4:6

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

In this passage in Hosea, God lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of the priests for not teaching the people from the Scriptures. This is something the priests were called to do and so it is with pastors. Christians need to know the Bible, there are too many false teachings now in the world and without a solid foundation in the word of God, we will be destroyed.

Now, it is important to see, that Paul does not bring out the gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor and teacher in order to put them on a pedestal or to put them above other Christians. In fact, he makes clear in verse 12 that they are to be the servants of servants.

for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ

These gifts are given to people who are in turn given to the church for the equipping of the saints. When the Bible speaks of saints, it is referring to all Christians, not some special group of Christians who work extra hard. Jesus appointed the apostles to build the early church, the prophets to sustain the early church, the evangelist to bring you into the church, and every pastor who has ever stood before you, to equip you.

You are the saints and you are called to the work of service. You are the ones who are called to work daily in the world by serving others in Christ, and thereby building the body of Christ. The gifts Paul listed in verse 11 are merely support for you.

Each and every Christian has at least one gift given to them by God. In the New Testament, there are five lists of gifts; within these lists are more than twenty different gifts. The lists themselves have different gifts and they are listed in no particular order. What this points to is that these lists are not exhaustive. You may very well have a gift that isn’t listed. There are simply too many to write down.

The important thing to know about your gift is that it follows a very specific pattern. The gift will be for service. It is very important to understand that. Just as Jesus came to serve, His followers are to serve and any gifts we have will be service gifts. The service will be for the building up of the body of Christ, which is the church; and ultimately, it will be for the glory of God.

If you know what your gift is, use it; whatever you do, don’t bury your talent. If you don’t know what your gift is, seek it earnestly without becoming frustrated. This can be difficult: we must balance diligent search with prayerfully waiting on the Lord. Be assured that He will reveal what He has for you at the perfect time and not a moment sooner.

Verse 13 goes into the goal of building up 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.

All of our work, all of our service, is working toward what we read here in verse 13. Notice also, how these goals work toward fulfilling God’s plan that Paul revealed back in verse 1:10; *the summing up of all things in Christ*.

So, the saints are to be equipped to do the work of service. And this service is for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, which is the church. Verse 13 tells us how long we continue this work: In a nutshell, until Jesus comes back. Incidentally, this also means that none of us are ever to retire from Christian service as long as we draw breath.

The first goal is to attain to the unity of the faith. The faith is Christianity, faith in Jesus. Paul told us earlier in chapter 4 that unity is a gift of the Spirit that we have already received. But here we are told to attain to it; that means work toward it and continue to work toward it. This is one of the “already, but not yet” occurrences so common with Christ. We already have that unity because we are bound together by the Holy Spirit. This is truth, this is reality. But at the same time, we are fallen human-beings in a fallen would; we don’t have to look very far to find discord in the church. For this reason, we are called to work toward unity, knowing that it won’t be perfected until God establishes the new heavens and the new earth.

It is the same with the Son of God. We know Him; He is revealed to us in Scripture; the Holy Spirit gives us a clearer understanding of Him the more we seek to know Him. At the same time, our understanding of Him will have to remain incomplete until we receive our glorified minds. Still, we strive to know Him better, which helps bring unity to the church, which helps build the church, which is the body of Christ.

We come to the little phrase “*to a mature man*”. Without doubt, each of us needs to work toward Christian maturity. But this is different. The word translated “man” here is not the usual New Testament word that means people in general; it refers to an adult male. To understand this, we must keep in mind the context. This is all revolving around the idea of the church being the body while Jesus Himself is the head. Our head, Jesus, is Himself complete and mature; we, His body, is not. The man referred to here is Christ and His body needs to mature. This is all part of the service work of the saints.

The point we are heading for is the last part of verse 13, “*the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*.” Our measure, our finish line, the point at which we have achieved our goal, is when we have reached the fullness of Christ. We will have achieved that when our unity is perfect, our knowledge of Christ is complete, and we are mature in Christ.

It is obvious that we will never reach this goal during our lifetime, but we are promised that it will be reached at the end of time. The natural thought for us is that since we can’t reach it in our lifetime and that it is coming anyway, why should we work for it? A couple of reasons: This is the way God has ordained things to work out; by our service, His plans will be established. Somehow, in God’s grace, we will be rewarded for this service in the life to come. And very importantly, this is what Jesus has commanded us to do. Jesus told us that if we love Him, we will follow His commands.

If we dwell on what Christ did for us, if we dwell on how much He loves us, how can we help but show our love for Him by obeying His commands? Something to dwell on.

Prayer

Almighty God, how wonderful that You have allowed us to be part of Your plan; how awesome the task of building the body of Christ to maturity. You have placed this in our hands, yet You have not left us alone to complete. You have provided us with gifts; You have equipped us with what we need to do the work You have for us.

We pray now, as Your church, that You would strengthen the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of our lives and in this part of Your body. May we be enriched in using the gifts You have given to each one of us. Give us opportunity to use what You have provided for Your church and for Your glory.

Be with this congregation, this part of Your body; guide us and use us as You see fit. May Your Holy Spirit keep us unified in truth, to lift up Jesus Christ as the only true Saviour, and to bring You glory.

It is in the name of Jesus we pray

Amen