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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, March 26, 2017

Ephesians 4:11-13 “Equipping Lay People for Ministry”

Intro. Who can name the ministers of Swift Creek Baptist Church? Would you say Steve Felker and Drew Cheatham? Perhaps you are aware of two other ordained ministers who are members of our church: Bob Minor and Jack Moody. Yet the fact is, according to Scripture, *all* of God’s people are to minister for the Lord. We see that truth in our text today.

On this anniversary of the founding of Swift Creek Baptist Church, I want to challenge each of us to understand and follow the teaching of my Scripture text. Doing so will strength the ministry of our church and ensure a healthy future for our church. This text gives a better understanding of how the church is to function. I hope you will be challenged to be not just a spectator, but to be an active participant in the life of the church.

Let me give a little background to our text. Paul is speaking about the gifts of our ascended Lord in vv.7-11, including gifted leaders for the church. We are going to see what Drew and I are to do, along with the help of other gifted leaders, and we will see what each member of the congregation should do as well.

So let’s see first of all:

I. GIFTED LEADERS ARE TO EQUIP THE SAINTS

I will first focus on certain God-called, God-enabled leaders of the church, and what we are to do.

A. The List of Gifted Leaders – Paul says in v.11, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” The noun “apostle” means “a sent one.” They received New Testament truth directly from God (3:5). These specially-called spokesmen for God were missionaries in a particular sense in that they had to see the risen Lord and be sent by Him. Thus, I do not believe that office still exists today. Thankfully we have the writings of some of the apostles preserved for us in the New Testament.

The New Testament prophets were those who received revelation from God and proclaimed that revelation, especially to benefit believers. The New Testament had not been written, and this office was certainly needed at that time. Their work was to lay the foundation for the Church, as you can see in Eph. 2:20.

Evangelists have a special gift in proclaiming the gospel and leading people to accept Christ as Savior. An evangelist will also train and motivate others to win people to Christ. Evangelism is essential to the growth of the Church, and the church needs evangelists. Many churches today no longer use the evangelist, and that is unfortunate.

A rule in Greek grammar shows that the word “teacher” is just a further description of the word “pastor,” thus, Paul has in mind a pastor-teacher. A person occupying this office was both to shepherd¹ the flock of God, and to instruct them in divine truth. The pastor is to lead the flock and feed the flock. We will see another important task of pastors in just a moment.

¹ Shepherding is the idea in the word “pastor.”

The members of the church are to recognize these offices of gifted leaders, and pray for them, support them, and benefit from their ministries.

Now let's consider together:

B. The Work of Gifted Leaders – Paul says in v.12 that these leaders were given, “for the equipping of the saints... for ministry.” The word translated “equipping” is used in Mt. 4:21 of mending nets. The word means to make complete, to qualify for usefulness. In Luke 6:40 it refers to a student learning what his teacher knows, and becoming more and more like his teacher. I like the following quote from *Transformational Church*, “Leadership is the stewardship to help others exercise their gifts, not just an opportunity for me to exercise my gifts.”²

We should be able to see from these verses that the pastors are to equip God's people to do the ministry of the Lord, and not to try to do everything themselves.

How are we to equip God's people for ministry? Well, consider with me:

C. The Tool of Gifted Leaders – What do all the leaders in v.11 have in common? They all preach and teach the Word of God. That tells me that one primary way we are to equip the saints for ministry is by teaching the Word of God. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says that the Word of God “is profitable for teaching... and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be...thoroughly equipped for doing good works.” There we see that one of the best ways I can equip you for the good work of serving God is to teach you the Word of God.

For example, in order to equip you to share your faith, we have to teach from God's Word what the gospel is and how to share it. There are many biblical principles and examples that will equip us to be witnesses for Christ.

So gifted leaders are to equip the saints for ministry. Next we see from our text that:

II. THE SAINTS ARE TO MINISTER FOR THE LORD

Who are the “saints”? Look back at 1:1. Paul was writing this letter “To the saints who are in Ephesus.” Clearly, he is writing to the whole church at Ephesus. Paul refers to the saints some 37 times in his epistles. So he is not talking about a special class of Christians, but *all* Christians. All Christians are saints in the sense that all have been set apart from sin and unto the service of God.

Notice in v.12 the purpose for this equipping of the saints by gifted leaders, “for the work of ministry....” Yes, it is God's will that you *work* for Him. Do you see that? We are not talking about just coming to church, sitting down, and becoming a spectator while the professionals and others minister. There is a place for actively listening while others minister to us. But there is more. You are to do a “work of ministry,” or a “work of service” at other times. God expects every believer to be involved in some form of Christian service. Yet in the average church 20% do the work, while others observe and are ministered unto. That is not God's will for His church. In our church about 50% of our active members are involved in at least one ministry, but only 21% of our resident members are involved. We can and should do better. We are all to do a work of service to build up the body of Christ.

Now let's see what all is involved in becoming a working servant in this church.

² Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2010), p. ____.

A. You Need to Identify Your Talents and Gifts – Paul says in v.7, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” In 1 Cor. 12:7-10 Paul talks and about spiritual gifts, and he lists some of them. Then in v.11 he says, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.” Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. That supports the concept of the universal priesthood of believers. Spiritual gifts are God-given enablements to help the people of God serve Him in one or more ways. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:10, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Note that spiritual gifts are given as an act of grace, and not bestowed by merit. You receive one or more gifts the moment you are born again, just as you receive talents that are genetically transmitted from the time of your conception.

Peter identifies two basic categories of spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4:11, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies....” Do you have a speaking gift, such as teaching, exhorting, comforting, counseling, leading, or so forth? We have some leadership positions that are vacant. Or are you gifted to serve? You offer support services, or you have the gift of mercy to help those in need. I have noticed that Bill and Peggy Dick have the gift of service. So you need to identify your spiritual gift.

I believe you typically should also use your natural-born talents to serve the Lord, such as musical talents.

Do you know what your spiritual gift is? If not, you need to find out. Look at the list of gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Then you need to recognize it as a gift from God.

B. You Need to Be Equipped for Ministry – The leaders can offer training and mentoring, but you have to participate. Just actively participating in Sunday School and in the preaching and teaching of God’s Word is a first step. Stetzer and Rainer say, “Worship serves to connect us with Christ and equip us for ministry.”³ But you also need to attend the training classes that we will offer. The Church Health Team has been talking about the importance of offering more discipleship and training opportunities. In the past I have offered witness training, deacon training, committee chairperson training, and a number of other training opportunities. Drew will offer training opportunities as well. Make sure you are taking advantage of the training opportunities we give.

Yet equipping for ministry also involves being mentored. We learn best as an apprentice. For example, if you are called and gifted to teach, you need to become an assistant teacher or substitute teacher for one of our good teachers in this church. Learn from them, and also learn by doing.

Along the same line, another way you are equipped for ministry is by hearing testimonies and stories from people involved in ministry. We often learn by example. Paul said in Php. 3:17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” I hope to incorporate more ministry testimonies in our worship services, and small group leaders can do the same.

Are you willing to be equipped and trained for ministry?

C. You Need to Get Involved in a Ministry – You are not here just to be served. You are here to serve others. It may be the ministry of music and worship. It may be the teaching ministry or the visitation ministry or the prayer ministry of the church. God may want you to get involved

³ Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2010), p. ____.

in the nursery, children's, youth, Special Ed., Women's or Senior Adult ministry. We have committees that carry out various ministries. One is our usher ministry. We need more ushers! Our VBS ministry is so important. Talk to my wife Cheryl if you are interested in serving in VBS. Those qualified should serve in our deacon ministry. We barely have enough at the current time. I'm thankful for those who of you who have agreed to be involved in our outreach ministry, such as the police officer dinner.

We have lost our full-time Music and Worship Pastor, and it may be a few months before we find even an interim. That means that all who have singing and musical ability need to chip in and help carry on this vital ministry in this church. I or someone else will help train you. If we spread out the responsibilities to enough people, we can carry on a good music and worship ministry. I'm thankful for those of you who have already said you would help.

Finally, as we equip you for ministry:

III. WE SHOULD ALL WORK TOWARD COMMON GOALS

Look at v.13, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [or fully mature] man..." The word translated "come" (*katantao*) means to arrive at a destination. Who goes on a trip without having a destination? Well we need to know what our spiritual destination is as individual believers and as a church. What is our goal? As we equip the saints for ministry, and as you minister for the Lord, we need to have common goals that we are all striving for. If we do not have the same goals, we will certainly not achieve them, and we are not going to be going in the same direction. Instead, we will be going in different directions and little will be accomplished.

So what are some of the Biblical goals we should have as we minister for the Lord?

A. We Should Build Up the Body of Christ – Paul says in the last of v.12, "for the edifying of the body of Christ." Of course, he is talking about the Church, and I will give special focus on the local church. It is important for us to understand the meaning of the word edification. The verb form of that word simply means to build up. When God's people are involved in serving Christ, this results in the building up of Christ's body. That should also be our goal. Each gifted believer should be eager to use their gift, not for his own glory and benefit, but for the benefit of the entire body.

There are two aspects of this building up of the body of Christ. When the saints are serving, using their spiritual gifts, there will typically be numerical growth. God wants churches to grow. He wants His kingdom to grow. What are you doing to help our church grow, and reach more people for Christ? But based on what follows, the primary focus of Paul seems to be upon the spiritual growth of individual Christians. After all, if we are growing spiritually, we will also have numerical growth as well.

This also means that we should be careful to do nothing to tear down the Body of Christ. Paul said in Rom. 14:20, "Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food."

I found it very interesting to learn the literal meaning of the word translated in our text "edifying". Its literal meaning is "To build a house." We can learn something about how the body of Christ is built up by how we build a house. You know that when you build a house it takes many different workers. It takes carpenters, bricklayers, roofers, plumbers, electricians, and many other talents. And you know, not all are gifted in soul winning, not all can edify the church by a wonderful voice, not all have the gift of teaching. But each Christian can contribute to the

strengthening of the body of Christ in some way. It takes all of God's people to build a church to the glory of God.

B. We Should Strive for Unity of the Faith - Paul says in v.13, "till we all come to the unity of the faith...." Unity is one aspect of spiritual maturity; division is a sign of spiritual immaturity.⁴ As we mature, we put away childish, self-centered squabbles, and we become a united people of God.

Notice one basis for our unity, which is "the faith." "Faith" has the definite article. It is the shared understanding of the great truths revealed in the Scriptures. Look how this is expressed in vv.2-6, "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." One essential aspect of our unity is being unified in our common faith. That requires teaching basic doctrine.

On this anniversary Sunday will you make a commitment to do your part to preserve the unity of the church, and not do anything to divide this church? We need to emphasize our doctrinal unity that unites us and minimize personal convictions and preferences that divide us!

C. We Should Attain the Full Knowledge of the Son of God – That's what Paul also says in v.13. The Greek word (*epignosis*) refers to a full, experiential knowledge. So this knowledge is not a mere intellectual apprehension, but it also includes a personal knowledge of Christ that is gained through experience.

The purpose of this knowledge of Christ is not just to gain information, but to experience transformation into the full likeness of Jesus Christ, as we see in the last of v.13.

Even so, your goal as a Christian should be to attain a full, experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. Are you there yet? Have you arrived? How well do you know Christ? Is He someone you have just heard about, or do you fully know Him? Well your goal should be to really get to know Jesus on a deep and intimate level. There is so much to know about Jesus. Back in 3:8 Paul talked about "unsearchable riches of Christ." You need to know His character. You need to know His will. You need to know His passion to reach the lost (Luke 19:10), and share that passion.

D. We Should Become Like Jesus - In the last of v.13 Paul says that we are all are to come "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." This purpose is also stated in Romans 8:29, that God "did predestinate [us] to be conformed to the image of his Son...." What God wants is that you and I may grow up to become responsible, well-adjusted, loving and strong human beings like Jesus Christ! Christ is the standard we are to measure our spiritual progress by.

Think of the time when you were a child. You looked up to mom and dad. There was a time when you wanted to be like them. Then as your grew, you came closer and closer to attaining their stature. First, you reached your mom's height. Then, the guys looked forward to the day when you reached or surpassed the height of your father.

⁴ Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:1, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ."

So how are you doing in measuring up to Christ? Have you grown to the point that you have come anywhere close to having the love of Christ? Do you have the compassion of Christ for the lost and hurting? Do you overcome temptation the way Christ did? Have you grown in your knowledge of Scripture, like Christ knew the Scriptures? Jesus Christ constitutes the gauge of His people's spiritual growth. Don't compare yourselves to other Christians. Compare yourself to Jesus Christ! That not only gives you a good target, but it will help you avoid spiritual pride. Who among us actually measures up to Christ?

Conclusion: These challenging goals cannot be accomplished only by the work of pastors. It should be evident from our text that God intends for these goals to be accomplished with the help of an army of God's people.

In baseball, the pitcher should not try to strike everyone out because he will wear himself out, and it is impossible. The pitcher needs to remember that there are 8 other men who can field a ball and help the pitcher get the batter out. Without team effort they are certain to lose the game. The pastor, without the great help of his laymen, will either wear himself out, or fall short of fulfilling God's work, or more likely, both. [Illus.#C-1060].

The saints of God in this church and in all our churches must realize our responsibility to God. This church will never fulfill God's will without your help. As plain as I know how I have shown you that every born again child of God should be active in some form of Christian service. God demands it and you must decide this day whether or not you will obey His voice and commit yourself to serve Him. Are you spectator or a participant? Are you a worker, or a watcher? Are you a contributor, or a complainer? Every member of this church needs to do their part to help this church. Remember, God gave pastors and others "for the purpose of equipping the saints unto a work of service unto the building up of the body of Christ." It's God's way. Let's do it His way!

Sources: W.A. Criswell, *Ephesians: an Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians and Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967); John MacArthur, Jr., *Study Notes on Ephesians 4:7-16* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1989); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); E. K. Simpson, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Lehman Strauss, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957)-p.175 only; Curtis Vaughan, *A Study Guide Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 6/14/92); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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