

Building the Body of Christ

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:11-14

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Ephesians chapter 4 is our text for today, Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 through 14. I'll be reading from the Modern English Version. The word of the Lord: "*[Ephesians 4:11-14] He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so we may no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by craftiness with deceitful scheming.*" The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.

You're looking today at building the body of Christ in the ways that Christ has established and ordained to accomplish that. In 1992, a little boy was born in the Ukraine. He was born to a world champion martial artist and an aerobics competitor. At two years of age, this little boy named Richard moved to the state of Pennsylvania and there began his training. At the age of six, Richard was maxing out at 180 pounds on a standard bench press. It was during these young years that he earned the nickname "Little Hercules" perhaps you've heard of him. He earned his title "The World's Strongest Boy." At the age of eight, he was bench pressing 210 pounds. He would workout daily with his father doing up to 600 push-ups and sit-ups and 300 squats. He dedicated all of his time to training; He never played with friends, he was on a strict diet, he remembers times when his father would eat pizza and he would eat a head of lettuce to stay in his caloric goals for the day. He picked up a well known trainer and that trainer worked with him trying to honor the parents' wishes in the training of this boy and sometimes he would have to repeat intense exercises as punishment if he got something wrong. His trainer eventually quit, believing that this type of parenting was criminal and when he quit, Richard's father threatened to kill him. He was a violent man, he ended up beating and abusing his wife, as well.

Now, that might seem like a strange way to begin a sermon, telling that story of Little Hercules, this little body that at eight years of age could bench 210 pounds. But I begin with that because we need to be reminded that the body is meant to grow up together in a consistently maturing fashion and when we expect from the body what is not intended, we begin to abuse it. Much like when we begin to expect from others what is not intended, but rather simply what we want, we eventually abuse them to get what we want, whether it's intended or not. Paul is talking today to the Ephesians about the results in the body of Christ from these good gifts that God has given. And he notes here one particular class of gifts which center on teaching the word of God, delivering the word of God to the people of God. And, brothers and sisters, as we consider what it is to be the body of Christ in Burtonsville, as we think about our muscles, our reformed muscles, our Covenanter muscles, we have to be careful not to skip leg day because we must exercise all of our muscles. We may be Little Hercules, we may be Covenanter

Hercules. I always cringe when someone who is new to the faith or new to the reformed perspective on the faith starts coming out swinging, talking only and always about only Covenantalism. It makes me nervous and almost without fail they begin to burn out. They expect of the body what is not intended and they abuse it and the body breaks down.

We might be Little Hercules, we might be Covenantal Hercules, but are we a healthy, well rounded, appropriately developing body of Jesus Christ in Burtonsville, Maryland? Little Hercules, as he was called, was the result of presuming an unnatural end: "My son will be the strongest boy in the world" and then letting that unnatural goal decide unnatural means of child rearing and exercise and body development, rather than having a healthy natural goal: "My son should be strong, educated, socially able, spiritually trained, etc" then building a good life on those biblical goals. This man, Richard's father, nearly destroyed him. He destroyed his marriage, nearly destroyed his wife, nearly destroyed the life of the trainer, because he had unnatural goals in mind that the body was not meant to sustain and he had to turn to abuse to get it to happen.

Here, if we presume how the gifts should act in our midst, as we look at this text and consider the gifts that God gives and if we say "Yes, God has given us those gifts so that X, Y, and Z might happen," but we're not talking about X, Y, and Z, we're talking about A, B, and C, guess what we will start to turn to unnatural means. To try to force the body to do what we think it should do rather than joyfully watching Christ work in our midst and seeing what Christ will do in His body. If we presume how the gifts should act in our midst before we really consider what the God given goal of the gifts are, we will bend toward unhealthy, even abusive, expectations for the body of Christ, for one another. Even an unhealthy abuse of the gifts that we are given. So, we walk through Ephesians 4:11-14, reminding ourselves of the goal. What is the goal? The goal is to grow up. That's the goal. That is the intention of all the gifts that the resurrected Christ, the ascended Christ, has given to the church is that we might grow up in the Lord. So with that goal in mind, let us walk through this text.

First, in verse 11: "[\[Ephesians 4:11\]](#) *He gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers,*" First we see the gifts and the gifts being God's truth delivery system. These are the gifts that Christ has given to His body and I would note that the prophets came before Christ was incarnated in the space time continuum and so we see the eternal nature of Christ's resurrection and ascension. That even those Old Testament gifts in the covenant of grace were still in light of the promised Messiah and all that He would accomplish for His people. "*He gave some to be apostles.*" Who were these apostles? These were men who were ordained by Christ to go out. They had seen Christ post resurrection. They'd been commissioned directly by Him. They were given the gift of inspiration and they were given the message and they went out. What an honored post it was to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Tucked away here we have another lesson in trusting the providence of God. Remember when Judas took his rightful place and the apostles got nervous because they needed someone to replace him and they appointed someone to that office by that godly means of drawing straws. We've yet to have to turn to that in a congregational meeting, but who knows what desperate acts might-- what desperate times might call for desperate acts. And they named that one who would never be named again. And yet the apostle Paul is raised up as one untimely born to serve in that office of apostle for Christ's church. They preached the truth.

The same can be said of the prophets, the men of old who would be raised up sometimes for lengthy ministries, sometimes for a mere matter of days to preach the message of Christ, applying the law of God to the people of God. Then there were the evangelists and there's some-- a little bit of debate on whether these are simply the four evangelists that gave us the gospels or whether these were that first generation of missionaries that took the gospel to the far flung reaches of the earth or if these are

modern day missionaries and evangelists. I think most likely the answer to that is yes, it encompasses all of those. Even in our own presbytery, we recently ordained a man to missionary status in a congregation that is not within the RPCNA with the hopes that teaching and encouraging and ministering into a cross cultural, cross language, ministry and hoping to see them brought into the RPCNA. These are those who are breaking up fallow ground, who are taking the gospel to either new places or places in which the gospel has not been heard for quite some time.

And Paul ends his list here with "pastors and teachers" or more appropriately translated "shepherds and teachers." It's interesting that he is writing this to the church at Ephesus because remember in Acts 20 he says to the Ephesian elders: "[\[Acts 20:28\]](#) *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to the entire flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*" That's the same word, "shepherding the church of God," obviously the verb form but the same word that is used in Ephesians 4 to shepherd the church of God. Shepherds and teachers. And what is our job as shepherds and teachers? Our job is to take the food that has been given to us and to serve it up to you, Christ's sheep. We're not to be theologically breaking new ground or always coming up with some new message, some new thing that God's wanting to do, some new word that's flowing through us. Our prophesying is to be merely applying God's established word the canon of scripture to the people of God.

Now, one might think that "Well, this must be great." You know there aren't a lot, in fact Paul uses numerous times the word "some" in this verse, this must be a real honor and it is. But we have to ask how have God's people responded over the years to God's truth delivery system? Well, Christ says it best in Luke 11 verses 37 through 54. Let me read this whole passage for you: "[\[Luke 11:37-54\]](#) *As He spoke, a Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish. But inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give alms from what is within. And then all things are clean to you. Woe to you, Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb and pass over justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the prominent seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like unseen graves, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." One of the lawyers answered, "Teacher, by saying these things You insult us also." He said, "Woe to you also, you lawyers! For you load men with burdens difficult to carry, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. So you are witnesses and entirely approve the deeds of your fathers, because they killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the beginning of the world, may be required from this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required from this generation. Woe to you, lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." As He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to incite Him vehemently and angrily draw Him out concerning many things, lying in wait for Him and seeking to catch something out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him."*

How have the people of God responded over the years to God's truth delivery system? They have killed the messengers, they have persecuted the messengers, they have beat the messengers, and they have embraced Pharisaical legalism and abuse. There's no other way to say it. Praise God for His Holy Spirit that helps us to see the gifts of God for what they are: the gifts of God. That helps us to turn away from

the worldly abuses for those who would hold over us false standards of piety and righteousness and who would hold forth to us the living word. Who would give us the nourishment that God desires for us to have. Praise God for these men.

If you look back on your life and you think of those who had great impact on your spiritual walk with the Lord, faces will come to mind, don't they? Of men who gave their life to you and for you to give you the truth of God's word. And Heaven, with the passing of each one, Heaven grows sweeter. Pastor Miller up in Beaver Falls this week, after a lengthy battle with ALS, went on to be with the Lord. He died but he's more alive now and he's not on a ventilator and he's not in a wheelchair and he's not gasping for life. He's worshiping the Son. That Son to whom he pointed so many in his pulpit and in his seminary classes he is now seeing face to face. Praise God for these men who've given us the truth of God and fed us. Let us honor their legacy and their heritage by not turning back away to the abuses of the world but by clinging to the word of life. Clinging to the truth that they lay down their lives to deliver to us.

Well those are the gifts that God gives us. And then we have the gauge, how do we gauge what should be happening through these gifts? And we find a rudimentary structure of root and fruit: "[\[Ephesians 4:12\]](#) for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ." Now, there are not necessarily all the commas in the original that are in this English sentence and that should give us pause. You understand the use of commas hopefully you got that. I have a friend who wrote an entire book on commas and I told him "Your book gives me pause." "[\[Ephesians 4:12\]](#) for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, and for the building up of the body of Christ," the Matthew Henry commentary and others see that as three distinct works of first the apostles and prophets then evangelists then pastors and teachers. Others see it as a development. What's my job? What's the job of the elders as we feed and lead? It's to equip the saints. And what are we equipping you for? For the work of service and for the building up of the body of Christ. To perhaps answer which it is, I'll ask you this: Are you a vehicle meant for service or for show? Are you a vehicle for service or for show? Because when you equip a car, you equip it differently if it's for show then you do if it's for service.

I've known many vehicle owners of many different kinds of cars. I can think of one dear brother who is now with the Lord who every night in the winter time would go cover up his car in the garage. I think in the winter he'd even use an electric blanket sometimes to just keep his car nice and warm and tucked in in the car. You can go to a car show. I remember living in Carmel valley in California and going by Quail Lodge and seeing all of the cars out on the golf course. It was the only time of year they allowed driving by regular cars on the golf course. Thank you. And seeing the shine and the sparkle and all of the things added to those cars for show. Very rarely do you see a show car driving down the road. Why? Because it is putting needless miles on it, it's putting wear and tear on the engine. We might want to start the engine, let it rev let that really shake the room for a few minutes but then you shut it off. You don't want too much wear and tear. You want it to look good when everyone's looking. In fact, really for a show car the engine doesn't really even need to run it just needs to look good. I've seen some engines that have a better paint job than my 2000 Chevy Astro. They look, I have no idea if that engine runs or not, but boy does it look good. Brothers and sisters, are you for show or are you for service?

See when you start outfitting a car for service you start looking at things like, in some parts of the country, snow tires, remember those? Snow tires or four wheel drive and it's meant to really be four wheel drive. A winch on the front if you have difficult terrain to get over. You're not worried so much about the sparkle and the shine as you are being able to function and to be able to work. Brothers and sisters, the reformed faith is not for show, it's for service. And what is the purpose of the ministry of the

word in our midst? The purpose of the ministry of the word in our midst is not to shine you up every week so that you can sit. So that when people look at you they say "Wow! Look at them! They're just nice shiny sparkling Christians. That's-- I've never seen a Christian that old shine and sparkle that much." The purpose for the ministry of the word is service, to equip the saints for the work of service for the things that you are called to do. And as we exercise those gifts, we see the body of Christ built up.

That is the gauge and now for the guide. How can we tell if the saints are being equipped, if the work of service is being done, if the body of Christ is being built up? "[\[Ephesians 4:13\]](#) until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," Are we becoming more like Jesus? This is our guide: unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, being built into completeness, into maturity, as we measure ourselves against Christ. Not one another, not the church down the road, but against Christ. He is the one against whom we measure our stature. It is good to know that Christ has this in mind. That He did not merely die on the cross, was buried, rose again, ascended on high, in the hopes that it would accomplish something good in the lives of His people. But knowing that He would accomplish it. That He would give these good gifts to God's people so that they might be equipped. That they might serve the Lord. That they might build up the body of Christ knowing that we would be doing these things working toward a "[\[Ephesians 4:13\]](#) unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a complete man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

And we should shove away any cobwebs or seeping thoughts of eastern mysticism where all things are becoming one and soon there will not be any difference in anything. Why? Because Paul elsewhere, and we've read this in previous weeks, has given the fullness of this picture of the body of Christ. Christ is the head and there are hands and feet and elbows and forearms and kneecaps. That there are parts of the body of Christ that maintain their individual distinctiveness and yet function together as a body. That might be a question for application, how are we doing at Trinity on functioning as a body? How do we do on working together? Now we can answer that question but it's really answered when difficulties come, right? Do you love your wife? Don't answer that question when you have got a million dollars in the bank and all the cars are running and all the kids are fed and all the heinies are clean and all of that. That's-- "Of course I love my wife." But let you feel like you're gonna be late to work because there's been a blow out and she's feeding somebody else and you've gotta come over here and do this and all of this. Then do you love your wife? Do you feel that love? Do you live that love? Are you functioning together as man and wife on some impeccable level? Brothers and sisters, how do we function together as the body of Christ, as the family of God in this place? I believe we have recent experience to say that God is working and blessing because when there are difficult things before us and we exhibit love to one another we can know Christ is at work in our midst. That we are growing up into fullness, into maturity, in the body of Christ.

And so, then, what is that goal? That goal is to grow up: "[\[Ephesians 4:14\]](#) so we may no longer be children..." If you're a moderately emotional dad like me, you live in that pendulum swing of "Would you grow up?" and "Would you stop growing up so fast? Just stop it. I can't take it, it's happening too fast!" But, brothers and sisters, God has a goal in mind for me and you and it is maturity in Christ. And each day in a million different ways, some of which we see and understand and get and grasp and other ways we have no idea that He is working in the midst of those things, He is working to grow us up, to mature us so that we may no longer be children.

And how do we know that we're no longer children? Well, we're no longer "[\[Ephesians 4:14\]](#) ... tossed here and there by waves and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, by

craftiness with deceitful scheming." Brothers and sisters, as we grow in the Lord we become less and less offended in a way that totally uproots us for the day, or the week, or the month by the things that we hear around us, that we read on Facebook, that get tweeted to us on Twitter. We're not shocked by the nature of humanity around us. We're not overwhelmed by the fact that there's still sin in the world. We're not scandalized by the fact that some people would still prefer a guitar in worship and to sing hymns because we can remember-- we don't-- let's stop with the reformed amnesia. That we forget that yesterday we were there and today we're here and we're shocked that so many people are still there. That's like half a step behind where we are. Who are we? We were just there. We're not blown around, we're not tossed here and there, we understand that some doctrines and some practices are used in a way to deceive the flock, to even destroy the flock. We get that and we understand that and we labor, even war, against that. But we're not upended by it all the time. Why? Because we've grown up into maturity. We remember the days of our youth. We know what it has taken God to use to grow us up and to mature us in the faith. And we pray for our brothers and sisters around us that God doesn't have to use that in their life. That they'll find some other way, some less painful way, to mature them, to grow them.

When Christ went to the cross, when He was buried, when He was raised again, when He ascended on high, He didn't do so with a "I hope so" attitude. He did so with an "I know so" [attitude]. "I know that I will give these gifts to My people and that these gifts will have their perfect work. As God's truth is delivered to God's people, as it takes root and through it begins to grow, as they reach unity of faith and knowledge, they will grow up and they will mature and they will be ready for eternity in Heaven with Me, Jesus Christ, the true shepherd." See every single one of the men that fall's in each of the categories given in verse 11 failed on some level, was broken on some level, was distracted on some level. Indeed as we've read through the law, have we not read about Moses and Aaron? Who both disqualified themselves in certain respects because of failures they had in the life and ministry. Not that completely disqualified them, but distracted from the fullness of what could be could, what they could receive in their life in ministry. And that's true all down the line, down to the man who stands in front of you in this pulpit today. We are all imperfect reflections of your true shepherd, Jesus Christ. The only way I'm able to lay my head on my pillow at night and sleep at all is to know that my ministry is not my ministry it is the ministry of Jesus Christ. That should be the only way you can lay your head on your pillow at night, is to know that Jesus Christ is having a shepherding ministry among you. That He laid down His perfect life for the sheep.

See, I can give my life for you, I can lay it down in every way and fashion. But it will do you no redemptive good. Even if you come up to the pulpit right now and take my life from me, it will do you no good. The taking of Christ's life, the giving of His life, did you every good because He laid down His life for you. And to this day, through His truth delivery system, He nourishes you and feeds you. In the government of the church, He guides you and protects you and disciplines you. Through the preaching of the word, He continues that prophetic office giving you truth, reminding you of the ways of God, the way of life and warning you against the way of death.

God has given good gifts to His church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, [and] teachers. He's done so to give you that root and fruit of equipping you for service and for building up the body of Christ. He guides you in that by building you into unity of faith and knowledge, into a complete and mature person, measured against the stature, the fullness of Christ. And He does so that you might grow up, being no longer children tossed back and forth and scandalized by the craftiness and deceitful scheming of wicked men. Christ has done that. He's done all of that because He is the Good Shepherd. He is the true shepherd. He is the loving and sacrificing shepherd who laid down His life for sheep, who laid down His life for you.

Stand with me as we pray.