

Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

“Category One: The Preparing Gifts Part Two”

Introduction

This morning, as promised, we are going to finish what we started last week.

Side Road?

So take out your outlines and let's finish last week's sermon.

By way of refreshing your memory let me remind you last week I suggested to you that the Bible loosely groups all twenty of the spiritual gifts into four broad categories: The four categories were: the preparing gifts, the verbal gifts, the non-verbal gifts and the sign gifts.

What I suggested was that Ephesians 4:11-13 form one cohesive thought that really captures what the Apostle Paul has to say about this first category of spiritual gifts. I've tried to condense Paul's thoughts into one long unfolding sentence that will help us to understand this first category of spiritual gifts.

The first part of our sentence was this:

1. Paul lists five equipping or preparing gifts.

There are the five gifts that we are calling the equipping gifts. Those five preparing or equipping gifts are: apostleship, prophecy, or proclamation, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching.

I should remind you that there are many in our congregation with these five gifts. We lack none of these five preparing gifts at FCC.

The second part of our one long unfolding sentence was

2. The five equipping gifts are to be used to prepare God's people for works of service.

The spiritual gifts that you have were given to you by God to be used in the service of God and other people. They weren't given to you for your glory or for you to use for your own benefit. They were given to you so that you as a part of the body of Christ might continue the work of Jesus here on the earth.

I also suggested that Jesus defined service on the night before he died when he, the precious, perfect Son of God took off his outer garments, wrapped a towel around his waist and took a bowl of water and washed the dirty, smelly feet of his disciples.

Those of us who have these equipping gifts need to be sure that we don't start thinking too highly of ourselves and the way to do that is to get down on your knees and wash some feet. If you think you're above washing feet then you've got a problem.

And if you don't deal with your problem, then the whole church will soon have a problem because a part of the job that God has given to you is to equip the rest of the church for gifts of service. If you're too good to wash feet, then it won't be long before the rest of the church starts feeling like it's too good to wash feet too. And a church that thinks it's too good to wash feet isn't being true to the Jesus that the Bible portrays.

Now let's finish the outline. Here's the next piece to our one long unfolding sentence.

3. The five equipping gifts are to be used to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Listen to all of verses 11 & 12 again.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Verses 11-12

Circle the last two words of that verse, “built up.” The Greek word that is translated as “built up” is “oikodomeo.” Oikodomeo is a compound word formed by joining together the two Greek words “oikos” meaning “house” and “domeo” meaning to build. The word literally means to build the house.

The word really is a word picture of a carpenter taking wood and stone and cutting and shaping and forming those raw products into a house where a family can live.

Paul is saying that you and I with our spiritual gifts are the raw building products out of which the Carpenter is building His house. You and I, each with our own spiritual gifts, are like the rafters and beams of a house. Each has an important and necessary role to play in the structure of a house. It is He who has joined and connected us together and it is He who has placed us where we are in that House. As we are being joined and connected together by Christ himself, we are being built up to become the house the family of God can live.

The Corinthians had forgotten that important lesson. In the Corinthian church people were exercising their spiritual gifts in ways that tore down the church. What had happened is that they had allowed the pecking order of the world to infiltrate the church and they were attempting to set up a ranking system for spiritual gifts. In the world certain skills are more valuable than others. For example, being the president of a company is more valuable than being the janitor of the same company. Bringing that pecking order mentality into the church they were trying to figure out which spiritual gift were more important and which gifts were of lesser importance. They were trying to set up a ranking system for spiritual gifts.

Whenever they sat down and started assigning rankings or importance to the spiritual gifts and surprise, surprise when I do that my spiritual gifts end up being more important than your spiritual gifts, and when you do it your spiritual gifts end up being more important than mine and we can't

agree. Not only that but apparently they had reached the point that they had even begun to say that certain gifts were so unimportant that the church could get along without them.

And their disagreements had turned into arguments and their arguments had turned into fights and their fights had caused the church to be divided up into factions or parties and instead of the church being built up by the exercise of spiritual gifts it was being torn down by them.

Paul's reminder here is that that was not how spiritual gifts were to be used. They were to be used to build up the house of God, not to tear it down.

The house of God is built up whenever I am focused on doing what Jesus has gifted me to do. The house of God is built up whenever I confess in real and practical ways that your spiritual gifts are as necessary to the structural integrity of the house as mine are. The house of God is built up whenever I respect and value your spiritual gifts. The house of God is built up whenever I exercise my gifts and allow you to exercise yours and maintain the connections between us.

The house of God is torn down whenever I start thinking that my spiritual gifts are more important than yours. The House of God is torn down whenever I start thinking that really we could get along without your spiritual gifts after all. The house of God is torn down whenever I fail to respect, value and confess my need of your spiritual gifts.

It is always so damaging when the people of God don't demonstrate respect and valuing of one another, when we act like and even say that we

can get along without one another. It is especially damaging with regards to this business of spiritual gifts.

Mark Twain told of being disturbed at all the discord he saw among God's creatures. He decided to experiment with the problem. He put a cat and a dog in a cage. He wrote that within an hour he had taught the cat and the dog to be friends. In another hour he added a rabbit and taught all three to be friends. Within several days he was able to add a fox, a goose, a squirrel, and some doves. Finally, he added a monkey to the mix. They all lived together affectionately.

I'm going to rephrase the next part of the story to make it apply to our discussion. Next he decided to experiment with spiritual gifts. In another cage he confined a person with the gift of administration, one with the gift of encouragement, one with the gift of tongues and one with the gift of mercy. He stayed away for two days and came home to record the results. Not a single specimen was left alive. Rather than building up the body of Christ, the spiritual gifts destroyed the body of Christ.

Those of you who have been blessed with these spiritual gifts of preparing are also charged with the responsibility of reminding us that all of the gifts are important and that all of the gifts are necessary if the house of God is to be built up. You are also responsible for correcting us whenever we allow the pecking order of the world to enter the Church.

You are to be models of how we can get along with and cooperate with other Christians who have been blessed with spiritual gifts different from your own. You are to model for us ways in which the body of Christ can be built up rather than torn down.

Now to our long unfolding sentence let's add one last piece.

4. The five equipping gifts are to be used to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until it reaches the full maturity of Christ.

Listen to 11, 12 and 13 again in their entirety.

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the fullness of Christ.” Verse 11-13

Take you pencil and draw a line underneath that last phrase,

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the fullness of Christ.”

The goal here for the giving of these five equipping gifts is that the whole church be prepared for works of service so that the body of Christ is built up and built up and built up until together we become the exact representation of the mature Jesus.

It's an old joke but a good one nevertheless. One woman says to another woman, "How is a man different from a savings bond?" goes the joke, "Men never mature, the savings bond will." Personally, I think that's a little harsh. In my experience, men adjust to the demands of increased

responsibility about as well as do most women.

But the point is that just as your physical body matures, the body of Christ is to also mature.

But and this is an important but, maturity in your physical body is a given. It happens whether or not you do anything to make it happen. Such is not the case within the body of Christ. We must intentionally move towards maturity and maturity means that the church more and more comes to look like Jesus.

We don't have a single picture of what Jesus looked like, except for Chapter 13 of 1st Corinthians. You can find out what Jesus looked like by reading verses 4-7 and substituting Jesus every time you come to the word, "love." Here's how it would read if you did that.

“Jesus is patient. Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy. Jesus does not boast. Jesus is not proud. Jesus is not rude. Jesus is not self-seeking.. Jesus is not easily angered. Jesus keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

If the body of Christ, the church was to be mature, attaining to the fullness of Christ, then you could read those same verses and substitute the word “church” for the word Jesus. Then the passage would read:

“The church is patient. The church is kind. The church does not envy. The church does not boast. The church is not proud.

The church is not rude. The church is not self-seeking.. The church is not easily angered. The church keeps no record of wrongs. The church does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. The church always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

That is what maturity in Christ looks like.

When Kevin was four years old, he said to his mother one day, "Mommy, I don't want to grow up. I want to always be your little boy." If that were a permanent desire, it would be unhealthy.

Regardless of how funny the jokes are, a lack of maturity is no laughing matter. We have excelled in almost every way imaginable as human beings, except in the one way that matters most. We have not learned to love as Jesus loved.

It a common complaint from non-believers that the church doesn't practice what it preaches which is another way of saying that we aren't acting like mature Christians. It is another way of saying that we don't love as Jesus loved.

Those of you who have the preparing or equipping gifts are to use those gifts to help the rest of us move towards maturity in Christ.

Conclusion

The famous actor Gregory Peck was once standing in line with a friend, waiting for a table in a crowded Los Angeles restaurant. They had been waiting for some time, the diners seemed to be taking their time eating and new tables weren't opening up very fast. They weren't even that close to the front of the line. Peck's friend became impatient, and he said to Gregory Peck, "Why don't you tell the maitre d' who you are?" Gregory Peck responded with great wisdom. "No," he said, "if you have to tell them who you are, then you aren't."

If we have to tell people that we are the body of Christ, then we have yet to reach maturity, we have yet to attain to the fullness of Christ.

That's why we need those of you with the preparing gifts.

St. Paul recognized that just as there is a maturing process in life, so is there a maturing process in faith. He wrote to the Corinthians on one occasion:

"I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as . . . infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready. Even now you are still not ready . . ." (1 Cor. 3:1-2)

On another occasion he wrote:

"Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking . . . but in thinking be adults. (1 Cor. 14:20)

And in I Corinthians 13, he writes,

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways."

This is the goal of the life of faith--that we might be "mature in Christ." Think about what that means--to *mature, attaining to the fullness of Christ.*