

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Read Eph 4.11-16.

The family of God, the body of Christ, the church, is to be **equipped**, **servicing**, and **growing**. If it is not, it is dying.

## **EQUIPPED:**

Jesus gave us, as a gift and as a demonstration of His grace and kindness, pastors and teachers. And the purpose of pastors and teachers is *for the equipping of the saints*. My primary function as a pastor is to equip you. Your primary purpose for being under a pastor is to be equipped.

What does it mean to be equipped? The word has the sense of the qualifications required to perform a function, or a repair to something to make it serviceable again.

For example, it's noted in Scripture that Jesus saw James and John in a boat with their father **mending** nets, just before he called them to follow him as fishers of men.<sup>1</sup> They were **preparing** by **repairing** the net, so that it could be used for **snaring** fish. One can't help thinking, then, that we must likewise be **prepared**, by having our souls **repaired** by the Holy Spirit, so that we can also serve by **snaring** souls for Jesus' sake.

Jesus tells the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: *A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*<sup>2</sup> And who is our teacher? And therefore, we should be equipped to emulate whom? That sermon is a kind of summary of what Christian training looks like.

- It's the heavenly mindedness of the beatitudes and the holy wisdom of building our house on the solid foundation of Jesus.
- It's the gracious generosity, the patience, and the faith of loving your enemies, and forgiving your abusers. It's knowing that God's pay-off on payday is bigger than any income for which one might hope here and now.

We can find yet another use of this word in the well known blessing found near the end of Hebrews:

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will ...*<sup>3</sup>

We believe in continuing education for doctors, for lawyers, for teachers, and for just about every profession in the world. Every carpenter is open for a better tool or a more efficient technique. Every soldier practices again and again, perfecting basic skills and learning new ones. There is no sport on earth that says: OK, you've learned the basic rules of chess,

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<sup>1</sup> Mat 4.21

<sup>2</sup> Luk 6.40

<sup>3</sup> Heb 13.20-21

football, or curling – so, you’re good to go! We can be no less diligent, and the reality of eternity calls us to be far more diligent. We are to be equipped to be like 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.*<sup>4</sup>

Are you being equipped? Does your knowledge of the truth stop with a child’s Sunday School understanding of some gospel stories, half-remembered and never applied? Are you being equipped? Or is your net so torn and tattered, that you couldn’t fish for a soul if the soul walked right up into your net for you? Are you being equipped?

Adult Christian formation, small groups, Bible studies, not to mention Christian materials of all sorts exist to help equip you. Are you engaged in the basic disciplines of the faith such as we see in Acts 2: the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, prayers, and the Lord’s Supper? Are you being equipped? Or are other things more important?

### **SERVING:**

Notice, second, that the saints are to be equipped for a purpose – *for the work of ministry or service*. The word for ministry or service is the word that we know as *deacon*.

- It’s what Jesus says of Himself, when He told His disciples that he came to serve by giving *his life as a ransom for many.*<sup>5</sup> There’s your primary model for service.
- When Jesus offers the disciples the secret of success and greatness in leadership, he says this: *The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*<sup>6</sup>
- It’s the humble service of waiting on tables in Acts 6.1.
- It’s the generous contribution to the brothers and sisters during a time of financial hardship about which Paul writes.<sup>7</sup>
- It’s the title that Paul bears with pride: “Servant of Christ” and “faithful minister in the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

It has been said that Christians in North America are some of the fattest in the world. We have greater resources for being equipped in religion than nearly any other place on earth. Christian TV, Christian radio, Christian books, Christian tapes, DVDs, CDs, Christian lecturers and seminars, Christian schools, Christian colleges, Christian seminaries, Christian law schools, Christian jewelry, Christian tableware.

With all these resources, North Americans should be far more godly, faithful, sacrificial, Christ-like – in a word – equipped than anyone else in the world, right? One would think that we would see less poverty, less crime, less divorce, less greed, less materialism, less

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<sup>4</sup> Eph 4.13

<sup>5</sup> Mat 20.28

<sup>6</sup> Mat 23.11–12

<sup>7</sup> see Act 11.29, Rom 15.25, 2Co 9.1 ff.

<sup>8</sup> 2Co 11.23, Eph 6.21

depression, less fear, less sexual perversion, less of every kind of the world's ills that any other place.

It should be true. But the reality is far different. We are no less absorbed in personal comfort than any other part of the world. And it's because we are no less absorbed in fitting into the world quite nicely than any other part of the world.

We are to be equipped *for the work of ministry*. We will have a need in the next months in some aspects of Christian education. We have folks in the congregation, who can no longer come to church. They need to be visited. We have the food pantry. We have jobless people. We have a choir that needs voices. There are souls all around us dying for want of the gospel.

There are people starving for friendship. We have an evangelistic play we're working on. We have missions opportunities, both local and foreign. There are folks walking in harmful ways that need to hear the truth spoken in love from you. There are relationships struggling, because they think that they are the only ones who struggle. Are you serving?

Let me put this more clearly. The clergy are not in the service industry. You are.

### **GROWING:**

What's the purpose of all this? It's *for building up the body of Christ*.<sup>9</sup>

First, just absorb that phrase: the "body of Christ." Do you want to see Jesus? We should find Him in our midst! I don't mean this in some kind of loopy-goopy, ethereal way. Jesus, in His literal body, sits at the right hand of the Father, reigning over creation. But we are so much a part of Him by faith that it's as if He's still walking the earth. His goals should be our goals, His character should be our character, His priorities ours, His love ours, His passion ours.

This is what Paul means when he says we are *to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head* (15). The world should be able to look at St. John's and say: "Oh, it's those Jesus guys again. It's those Christ-followers, those *Christians*." Everyone should know that we are His disciples: *By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*.<sup>10</sup>

We are equipped, and we serve, for the building up of the body. The word literally does mean a building, but Paul is passionate about the figurative sense of this word. He tells the Corinthians, *you are God's field, God's building*.<sup>11</sup> I would argue that Paul is not speaking to the Corinthians about the body of Christ in some generic sense, but he's speaking concretely of the Corinthians.

And think about what a simple church growth model this is. Paul struggled with competing models of church growth in his day too. The Corinthians wanted the splash, power, and

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<sup>9</sup> Eph 4.12

<sup>10</sup> Joh 13.35

<sup>11</sup> 1Co 3.9

glamour of God's presence, without doing the work. And so he tells them: *Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*<sup>12</sup>

And back to Ephesians:

*You are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*<sup>13</sup>

We are a building whose architect is the Father, whose contractor is the Son, and whose carpentry is the Holy Spirit's.

The body is being built up and growing, because it is 1) being equipped and, 2) serving. Paul comes full circle in his argument in vs 16.

*Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*<sup>14</sup>

We learn what it means to be like Jesus as we're equipped. We serve like Jesus serves. And then we find that we're growing up to be just like Jesus.

And every part, every member, each one of us, contributes to the working of this body. Is St. John's not growing to your satisfaction? Then the question is, are you being equipped and serving? When each part is working properly, we will grow up and build each other up in love. But when some are not participating, we all are injured.

How would it be if your liver decided, just for today, to take a vacation? Or your big toe on your right foot? Maybe the left hemisphere of your brain just doesn't feel like it today? Your tongue decides it's just had enough and wanders off for a few hours. So it is for St. John's and for Christ's body when one or another of you decides that being equipped, serving, and building up just aren't worth the effort.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS:**

Note 2 key things here. First, all this can only happen in community. This family, of which you are a part, is not some club for occasional meetings. The family of Christ is the most important family of which you can be a part. It's more important than political or sports affiliations, economic strata, and even your blood family. Your soul and eternity depend on this family and no other.

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<sup>12</sup> 1Co 14.12

<sup>13</sup> Eph 2.19-22

<sup>14</sup> Eph 4.15-16

As the Lord put it: *Who is My mother and who are My brothers? ... whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.*<sup>15</sup>

This is the community where these things should be happening, right here, at St. John's. I've heard it said many times, that one doesn't have to be part of a church to be a Christian. I'm not sure that Paul would agree with that nonsense. According to what we see here, where else is equipping, serving, and growing to take place?

Second, this is an impossible task. It's contrary to intuition or personal inclination. My family I'm stuck with. You, on the other hand ...?

But Jesus Christ is asking us to do no less than He Himself has done. He stepped into a very broken world, the blind leading the blind, scattered as sheep without a shepherd. He found us unlovely and unloving, unwashed and bitter – and loving our condition. And out of love, he washed us, bound our wounds, bought us out of slavery, and then gave us the same family name.

The story of the good Samaritan is nothing but a type of his own work for us. Except that his expenditure wasn't a few shekels, but his own death for us.

St. John's – we cannot obey the call to walk in a worthy manner – the calling to which we have been called – unless we have first listened to the Master's voice.

Equipped, serving, growing. St. John's – are you committed to this vision? Are you really committed to knowing Jesus Christ, both as Savior and as master? And are you, St. John's, really committed to making Him known – firstly right here in our own midst in “authentic community?” That's the question and that's the church growth plan.

### **Family Ethics - Growth**

Ephesians 4.12-16

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

#### 1. Equipping

1.1. Meaning qualified to perform a function, or repaired in order to be serviceable

again. See *mending* of nets in Mat 4.21.

1.2. To be fully trained by our teacher to be like our teacher (Luke 6.40).

1.3. Christian “continuing education,” learning to be more like Christ.

#### 2. Serving

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<sup>15</sup> Mat 12.48-50

2.1. Equipped for the purpose of serving.

2.2. Jesus described his own ministry as that of a servant (Mat 20.28), serving by dying.

2.3. Other examples include waiting on tables (Act 6.1 ff.), generosity to other believers (Acts 11.29, 2Co 9.1 ff.).

### 3. Growing

3.1. "Body of Christ" = gathering of believers

3.2. Growing up and building up means looking more like Christ.

3.3. Note the cycle: learning to be like Christ, serving like Christ serves, growing up to be like Christ.

3.4. Every part must participate.

### 4. Observations

4.1. Can only happen in the community of the church

4.2. Can only happen if we are truly Christ's