

091108 – Eph 4.13

... 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. (Eph 4.13)

INTRODUCTION:

In vs 11-12, Paul points out that pastors and teachers are given for equipping the saints. Equipped saints do the work of ministry. And when the work of ministry is being done, the body of Christ is being built up.

There is no part of this cycle that can be ignored. Unequipped saints cannot do the work of the ministry. If the work of the ministry is not done, the body of Christ is not built up. If the body of Christ is not being built up, no equipping is taking place. And so goes the cycle.

Now the 1st word in vs 13 speaks volumes for us as Christians: until we all attain ...

UNTIL WE ALL ATTAIN:

Paul is calling his hearers to perseverance. Be equipped, do the work of the ministry, be building up of the body, and keep on doing it until the goal is reached.

The Need For And Importance Of Perseverance:

Perhaps you've seen the T-shirt that says "pain is the sign that weakness is leaving the body." We've all heard the saying "no pain, no gain." This is actually true when it comes to exercise. The development of muscle is actually the process of tearing down muscle tissue, so that it builds up again.

This is also true in the faith. But Christians often stop short of the place where real growth in the faith begins.

Look at the greatest times of your growth in the faith, those times at which you found your intimacy with God, your trust in God, your increase in holiness, your sense of God's presence, and your sense of the Spirit's comfort most take hold in you. Take a moment to think about it. Write it down.

Was it ever at a time when everything was normal? It has my personal experience and observation that that we never grow during times when everything is just going along like always. And the Scriptures seem to bear that out. Just read the Psalms!

There seem to be two conditions under which our faith really flourishes:

- The 1st is during times of great solitude. Solitude such as is brought on by the loss of a loved one, by abandonment by trusted friends, by some enforced solitude due to travel or a change in lifestyle (Aaron's time in the Marine Corps, particularly while he lacked for Christian friends), or perhaps even voluntary solitude, such as time away with just a Bible, notebook, pen, and God.
- The 2nd is during times of great trial. Trial can be brought on by personal loss. It can be during persecution. It can be during a time of physical hardship. It can be during a time of great stress – a disintegrating marriage, an unwarranted and personal attack, or a job

loss. It can again also be voluntary, by taking on a challenge or a task that anyone else would consider insane.

It's at times like these that we are most driven to look deep within and also look steadfastly up. We most recognize the need for God. As I've put it in the past concerning my own life, it's at times like these that God has driven me to my knees through hardship – so that I can learn to pray in faith again.

But – it's also at times like these that we are most tempted to believe that God has given up on us, or that we ought to give up on him.

So think about this: It's at such times that we are most likely to meet God, if we will meet the pain, the fear, the uncertain, the anxiety, the doubt. And it's at these times that we are most likely to shrink back and quit.

Jesus told the parable of the sower, in which he likens the effect of the gospel on various souls to the effect of seed sown in various kinds of soil. He says of the rocky soil:

The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.¹

Herein we find the need to be equipped, to serve, to build up the body of Christ **until we all attain**. We are most likely to shrink back at the very time we are most likely to grow.

How To Persevere:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude.²

¹ Mat 13.20–21

² Phi 3.7–15

How do we persevere? By rightly estimating the value of the moment relative to the value of eternity and by rightly estimating the value of the thing we may presently desire against the value of our salvation.

One of things that we try to teach our children is the value of waiting for something they desire. So we teach them to save money, or to work toward a goal. And many of us as adults have debt towering over our heads, because we wanted the thing of the moment, without considering the long-term consequences of incurring debt. In many cases, I imagine we can scarcely remember what purchase it was that put us over the edge – but we can remember the debt just fine – and on a monthly basis.

This same thing is true spiritually too. Pain, grief, anger, fear, desire, or even laziness of the moment often weigh more in our minds than they should.

We weigh the moment and we say: She's not worth the effort. He's just never going to change. He'll never love me like I want or need and she'll never respect me for who I am. So I'm going to lose my temper right now. I'm going to say hurtful things right now. I'm going to make him or her pay for the pain they have caused me.

Above all, we often don't believe that eternity really has sufficient value to justify bearing up under the moment. But Paul says: *I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Too often, we say: "I just can't do this any more. I can't bear this any more. I can't put up with this any more." And too often, what we're really saying is that we simply don't want to press on in being equipped, in serving, in building up the body of Christ. We're sick of the effort, we don't see the value of it, and so we give in, give up, and give over.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor 4.7–12)

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (16–18)

Sometimes there is no immediately apparent good reason to press on in your marriage, in your life, in your relationships, in your faith. Your husband, your wife may never change. You may never be healed. You may not keep your job. I don't know what the outcome will be.

But I do know this: if you don't persevere, you may also never meet God. *But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

What Does This Mean For Us?

- **Need for each other:** *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10.23–25)*
- I don't want to sound Zen or something, but **embrace the pain** in which you find yourself at this moment. Embrace fear, doubt, anxiety, frustration, anger. Embrace it as weakness and sin! It's not something to embrace and keep. Rather, we embrace it to then submit it to God. *I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12.9–10)*
- **JOY!** Note that the first elements of the fruit of the Spirit are such things as love, joy, peace, patience – all of which show a restedness in the grace of God. How great the father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure! It's the things to which Paul has referred in the 1st chapter of this book. It is the *surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. It is the *eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*. It's the pearl of great value. It is as the old hymn says:

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Family Ethics - Perseverance

Ephesians 4.13

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. Review

- 1.1. Equipped: qualified to perform a function, repaired in order to be serviceable again (Mat 4.21), trained by our teacher to be like our teacher (Luke 6.40).
 - 1.2. Serving: as Jesus served by dying (Mat 20.28), ordinary servanthood such as waiting on tables (Act 6.1 ff.), or generosity to other believers (Acts 11.29, 2Co 9.1 ff.).
 - 1.3. Growing: means looking more like Christ (Eph 4.13 and 15).
2. "Until ..."

2.1. Importance Of Perseverance

2.1.1. When has spiritual growth been most evident in your life?

2.1.2. When were you most likely to quit the faith? (Matthew 13.20–21)

2.2. How To Persevere (Philippians 3.7-15)

2.2.1. Rightly estimate the value of the moment relative to eternity

2.2.2. Rightly estimate the value of the thing we presently desire against the value of our salvation.

2.2.3. Do not grow weary in pressing on toward knowing Christ fully (see also 2 Corinthians 4.7-18).

3. Observations

3.1. We need each other to stay the path (Hebrews 10.23–25).

3.2. We need to "embrace the pain" as our weakness and depend on God's strength (2 Corinthians 12.9–10).

3.3. We need to remember and remind each other of the *eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*.

3.4. **JOY!**