

The Church: How Jesus Builds It #6 - Being Equipped for Ministry

by Bob Hoekstra

We are equipped for ministry through leadership gifts, one another relationships, and the Lord equipping us through His Word, ultimately to be like Jesus Christ.

Duration: 38:03

Scripture: Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Ministry Equipping", "Spiritual Humility"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of humility in ministry. He explains that we are unable to produce anything that makes ministry effective on our own, but our sufficiency comes from God. The New Covenant, which is based on grace, provides all that we need for ministry, including spiritual life, fruit, transformation, and effectiveness. The speaker also highlights the role of God in equipping us for ministry, emphasizing that it is ultimately a work of God on us and through us. The sermon concludes with a benedictory prayer from Hebrews 13:20-21, expressing the desire for God to make us complete in every good work to do His will.

Transcript

Ephesians chapter 4, this is our sixth and last study in the series, The Church and How Jesus Builds It. We'll be studying concerning being equipped for ministry. Our previous two studies looked at ministry to the church and ministry to the world.

And we saw that those are the two basic aspects of making disciples. And remember, the very purpose of the church is to make disciples. That's why we're here.

The two issues involved, ministering to the church, ministering to the world. Ministry to the world, that's witness and evangelism that brings people to the Lord. Ministry to the church, that's edification that strengthens us and builds us up in the Lord.

Now, how are we equipped for those ministries? The Lord wants us to minister to the church and to the world. But how are we equipped to be able to do it? How is it that we are increasingly prepared to serve the Lord in ministry as he has called us to do? Well, the first issue in Ephesians 4 shows that we are equipped in church life. That is, in life together in Christ's body, the church.

And this involves leadership gifts and one another relationships. Ephesians 4, verses 11 through 16, in many ways, we might say is the classic passage on being equipped for ministry. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

That we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of man in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. But speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4, verse 11 speaks of the leadership gifts that are given to the church of Jesus Christ and notice what they are to be doing.

These lives are given to the church, verse 12, for the equipping of the saints. Now that word saints, that really is not a term for just a select few who through some kind of doing or not doing or character or reputation are elevated to a higher status than the rest of God's people. Saints is just one more synonymous term for disciple or believer or Christian.

And the Lord has provided for the equipping of the saints. God is a way to equip all of us to minister in his name. Now this word equipping is a very interesting one too.

It could be translated perfecting of the saints or preparing of the saints or outfitting the saints. It also could be translated the repairing of the saints, or at least that's its use often in the first century. This word was used for the repairing of fishing nets that were broken and needed to be mended, put back together so they'd be whole, so they could carry on the purpose for which they were given.

And also this word was used for the repairing of broken limbs, the setting of broken bones. Now let's face it, all these things are part of our equipping. We need God to do all of that in our lives that we might be equipped to serve him appropriately.

The equipping of the saints, the leaders of the church are to give themselves to this task. What are the saints to be equipped for? Verse 12, for the work of ministry. It is the will of God that all of us, every believer, every Christian, be involved in ministry, ministering to the world, ministering to the church, ministering unto the Lord.

The equipping of the saints, every Christian, every believer is to be increasingly equipped to increasingly minister and serve. Now the end result of this is the edification of the body, end of verse 12. For the edifying of the body of Christ.

God wants to equip all of us to serve and minister that the body might be built up, strengthened, developed to be what he wants it to be. Now while we're being equipped for ministry, the Lord is aiming at unity, maturity, and Christ-likeness in our equipping, and that's in verse 13. Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man, that is a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Unity, maturity, and Christ-likeness God wants to develop as we are being equipped. First the unity. It's called the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Those are the two matters that unify us as described here. The faith is to be a unifying impact upon our lives. Not talking now about faith, but the faith.

Faith is our trust and dependence in God and what he's said and what he's done. This is the unity of the faith. The faith is the content of the truth of the Word of God in which we put our faith.

And the faith is to unify us. As you and I, as we all get into the Word of God, the truth we find there, we are to hear, believe, receive, and walk in, and it is to unify us. All of us believing this same truth.

But even more than that, it's the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God. As we get into the truth of the faith, we find it's really all about Jesus Christ who is the truth. And as we get to know him, the knowledge of the Son of God, as we get to know the Son of God, develop a relationship with him, that unifies us.

We're all getting to know the same Lord. We're all getting to know the head of the body of which we are members. And the truth of the faith and the knowing of the Lord Jesus unifies us that we might function as a unit, as a body.

That's part of our equipping. And then maturity. The Lord wants us to be maturing.

A perfect man, it's called here, it could be translated a mature man. The Lord does not want us to be what is described in verse 14. That we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of man in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

It's almost a staggering thought to consider. And yet this verse provokes the thought that there are people perhaps right now in the religious world that are sitting around in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. They're plotting out ways to get people pulled aside to follow them instead of Jesus.

A new twist, a new corruption, a new distortion of the Word of God to get people following them, oh, they'll use the name of the Lord, but it's the trickery of man as this verse describes. And in all of that, they come up with winds of doctrine and they blow into town. They blow into Toronto and before you know it, everyone's on the floor laughing.

Winds of doctrine. The Lord wants us mature. He doesn't want us blown about by everything that comes our way.

We're no longer to be children. Nothing wrong with being a babe in Christ when you're born again and a child as you're beginning to grow, but we're to no longer be children. Not to remain in spiritual immaturity.

Children are so easily influenced. In my mind right now is precious granddaughter Samantha, our oldest. I mean, Carissa, our oldest and Samantha, our youngest.

These gals, six years and a year and a half. What a joy they are. The great thing is you tell them about the Lord and our almost seven-year-old now, she can't hear enough.

And last night I was with my wife on the phone to Hungary where Matt's pastoring in West Green and her little 18-month-old say, Alleluia. Well, that's glorious. Good time to be learning that, you know.

May all her life, she realized that's the best word to be using. Praise the Lord. Alleluia.

Praise the Lord. Kids can be influenced easily for good or bad. And so often in the church world, there are immature spiritual children.

They're being influenced badly. They're blown about by every wind of doctrine. What is the Lord's remedy? Growing up, growing up, get grounded, be mature.

So when frivolous, fleshly, self-centered things blow through town, we aren't caught up in them and blown away. It's part of our equipping. Really, this all relates to Christ's likeness, the fullness of Christ, to His stature, verse 13.

And verse 15 speaks more of that, the fullness of Christ's stature, growing into it. But speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ. Growing up to be like Jesus Christ.

He is truth. He is love. Growing in such realities as we minister them to one another.

Being equipped thereby for service. And then verse 16, all of this takes place as we've looked at in depth before. In the head and the body relationship, Christ, the head, the whole body drawing what we need from Him, ministering it to one another in relationships and seeing the body grow and mature.

This is being equipped in church life. How do we get equipped to minister right in church life? It's just basic to what God has called us to be and to do. Now, of course, in that, we'll see that God designs the Word strategically in the center.

That is the Lord speaking to us. The Lord equips us by His Word to minister to Him. 2 Timothy chapter 3 speaks of this.

2 Timothy 3, equipped by the Word, being equipped to serve by the Lord, the head speaking to us, the body. 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17, all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, that is for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Again, God has provided for us to be equipped to minister.

God's inspired Word is able to make our lives complete, whole, mature, and thoroughly equipped, completely outfitted and prepared for every good work, that is for every form of service that He has called us to. God wants to use His Word to prepare us to serve. As the Word of God allows the head, the Lord Jesus, to speak to us through His Word, He will be giving us doctrine, that is teaching.

He'll be teaching us what is right, what is wrong, who He is, what He's done. But also in the verse 16, His Word reproving us, telling us at times when we're off His path, wandering. But not just reproving, correcting us.

The Lord, the head, correcting through the Word, getting us back on His path. But not just getting us on His path, but instructing us in righteousness, moving us on down that path of discipleship. The Word of God is doing that, and while it's doing that, the result is this, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Being equipped by the Word. That same issue arises in Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20, verse 32, more equipping by the Word.

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. One of the great characteristics of the Word of God is it's the Word of His grace. It's His Word describing and offering His grace.

And His Word of grace, His Word and the grace it unfolds, is seen here doing two things. One, giving us an eternal inheritance. That is bringing to us the gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, letting us know Christ died for our sins on the cross.

He paid that debt. He was raised victoriously over sin and death in the resurrection, and then ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. The gospel of His grace giving us that eternal inheritance in heaven when we believe on the name of the Lord Jesus.

And praise God for His grace that saves and gives new life eternal. But there's a second matter here, and it has to do with our subject in this study. The Word of His grace, which is able to build you up.

The Word of His grace is not only able to give us salvation, eternal life, and an inheritance forever in heaven. It's able to work now. The same grace that saved our souls is the grace available to equip us for service.

The Word of His grace, which is able to build you up. God's grace at work through His Word in our lives, doing what we can't do for ourselves, changing us, making us useful in His hands, preparing us for ministry. Yes, we're equipped in church life with the head ministering to the body and all of us one to another.

But that means we'll be equipped by the Word. Here in the Word, the head, Jesus Christ speaking to His church, His body. Another way to look at this, and the scriptures speak precisely of this, is we are equipped by coming to Jesus.

Colossians 1 and 1 Peter 2 speak of this reality. Colossians 1 first. Colossians 1 28, Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect, that is mature, fully outfitted in Christ Jesus.

Our message is Jesus Christ. That's the heart of our message. And the proclamation of this message of Jesus Christ enables lives to hear the truth and hear Him who is the truth, understand Him, believe in Him, draw from Him, grow in Him.

That is, be presented perfect in Him, that is mature and whole. Again, Colossians 1 28, let's read the first part of the verse and the last part. Him we preach, to what end? That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

The message that fully matures the saints, that fully equips us, is the message of Jesus Christ. Yes, the world needs to hear of Jesus to get saved. You and I who know the Lord need to hear of Him to be equipped and matured, knowing who He is, what He's done, what He offers, what He has provided.

Colossians 2 9 and 10, tell us why this works that way. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are, present tense right now, complete in Him. In and of ourselves, you and I, we are not complete, we are not outfitted, equipped on our own.

But in Him we are complete, present tense, already accomplished, ongoing reality. In Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Everything God has for your life and mine is found in Jesus Christ.

And in Him, which is where we now live, in Him we are complete. Drawing on our own resources, incompleteness. Drawing on Jesus Christ and what He offers us in Him, we are complete.

We find completeness of life, wholeness of life, maturity of life. We get fully equipped by coming to the Lord Jesus for all that we need for life and ministry. Equipped by coming to Jesus.

In 1 Peter 2, that phrase actually appears. 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter 2 verses 4 through 6. Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up. There it is, the process of equipping.

Are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Why does it work this way? Verse 6, therefore it is also contained in scripture. Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame.

It would be a shameful thing if we would go through the Christian life here on earth and not be equipped to minister the way the Lord intended. Well, if we believe in Him, the choice cornerstone, he who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame. If we believe that He can and will equip us for ministry, we won't be ashamed.

We will be equipped. How? Coming to Him. That's what these two previous verses speak of.

Notice verse 4, coming to Him as to a living stone. Then verse 5, you also, as living stones, are being built up. That's the simple process, the simple procedure of spiritual equipping for ministry.

It involves essentially coming to Jesus. Just like we first came to Him for forgiveness, eternal life, salvation, heaven forever with Him, now day by day we come to Him for all that we need to be equipped to minister and serve. Coming to Him, coming to Him in the Word, coming to Him in prayer, coming to Him with our hopes, our needs, our challenges, our visions.

Coming to Him, we are being built up. When we come to the Lord Jesus, it's like coming to a living stone. Interesting metaphor, isn't it? It's so unusual.

Stone seems so hard and lifeless. And living, breathing, feeling, well, it's a wonderful glimpse of the Lord Jesus in one phrase. Jesus is like a stone.

He's solid. He's strong. He's reliable.

He's certain. He'll be there again and again and again. He's the eternal rock of our salvation.

But He's not just strong and firm and reliable and there. He's living. He's tender, compassionate, gentle, responsive, caring, loving.

He's a living stone. Well, we need to be like that. We need to be like rocks, not like quicksand, you know.

We need to see reliability and consistency, faithfulness, strength from God built into our lives. But we need to be living stones, not harsh and cold and just, hey, I'm steady and reliable. Yeah, but you're so cold.

No, living stones, alive in all of that stability. Tender, gentle, caring, loving, compassionate, relating, living stones. In other words, like Jesus.

The picture here is this. If we keep coming to Jesus, who is a living stone, we also as living stones are being built up. It's the process of being equipped to minister as Jesus ministered, being made more and more like Christ, that we might serve in His name as He served when He was upon this earth.

Coming to Jesus, it's amazingly simple. We say, how do you get equipped to serve the Lord? Well, keep coming to Him day by day, issue by issue, day in and day out. Coming to Him, verse 5, you are being built up.

How could God make it more simple or accessible to us? We don't have to go off somewhere and accomplish something or get some degree or certification by someone. Come to Him. If the members of the body keep coming to the head, He will equip them and build them up to be like Him.

After all, that's the ultimate way to minister. Like Jesus Christ would. One other way to say all of this, this is all talking about being equipped by the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3, verses 5 and 6. 2 Corinthians 3, 5 and 6. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit. Why is that important? For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Here's God's word on how to have a life receiving, life giving ministry.

Speaks of the Holy Spirit imparting God's absolute sufficiency in place of our total insufficiency. Verse 5 starts off with a humbling word, but it's good to be humble because God gives grace to the humble. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, verse 5, to think of anything as being from ourselves.

You and I, we are unable to produce anything that makes ministry effective. But just because we can't produce any of it doesn't mean we can't find all that we need to make ministry effective. We can't produce it, but our sufficiency is from God.

The Lord imparts his fully sufficient resources for ministry to us and in us and through us. That's the Lord's way, and this is a work of the Spirit. Verse 6, God who also made us sufficient, that is as we're drawing on his sufficiency, made us sufficient as ministers, servants of the new covenant.

The old covenant was law, letters, rules, regulations that you try to live up to by your own best effort. The new covenant is grace, God providing what man could not produce, spiritual life, spiritual fruit, spiritual transformation and ministry. The new covenant of grace we serve under, it's not of the letter, it's not just rules and regulations, it's not just do's and don'ts, it's of the Spirit.

It involves the Holy Spirit of God at work. This is so important and the reason is given. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

The Lord wants us to be in ministry, but he wants it to be life-giving ministry, not religious death to people. There are many people in the religious church world who say they're in ministry, but it's by the letter and it kills people. It discourages, wipes them out or gives them pride and self-sufficiency.

All of that is spiritual deadness. We want to minister, but by the Spirit, depending on the Holy Spirit, confessing we can't do it of ourselves, but we don't have to. We have the Lord in us, Christ in us, the hope

of glory and the Holy Spirit there to give us his life to share with people.

Being equipped for ministry by the work of the Holy Spirit. In conclusion, there is a wonderful benedictory prayer toward the end of Hebrews in chapter 13. Hebrews 13 verses 20 and 21.

This is the end of side 8. To listen to the rest of the message, please turn the tape over now. In conclusion, there is a wonderful benedictory prayer toward the end of Hebrews in chapter 13. Hebrews 13 verses 20 and 21.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, the new covenant of grace, make you complete in every good work to do his will. Working in you what is well pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 20 is all about the Lord God Almighty. Who he is and some of the things he's done to define exactly who we're talking about here, the true and living God. Verse 20.

Now may the God of peace now jump to verse 21 to see what is to happen here. Make you complete in every good work to do his will. Let's look at that again.

Verse 20. Now may the God of peace, verse 21, make you complete in every good work to do his will. See, here's the thing about being equipped to minister in the body of Christ.

Ultimately, it's a work of God on us, in us, and through us. In the world, man has to equip himself to serve in the realm of man. In the kingdom of heaven, God will equip us.

Yes, he'll use us as his instruments in equipping one another, but the ultimate issue is this. Are we looking to God to equip us for ministry? If we aren't, we're looking too low. We're looking in the wrong direction.

We're not looking where all the sufficient resources are contained. This Hebrews 13 benedictory prayer is a prayer that God himself would complete us in every good work to do his will. Interesting word, that word complete us.

It's the same exact word translated in Ephesians 4.12, equip us. Complete us, equip us, both are good translations. But it's exactly the same word that we started out looking at, the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry.

Bottom line, it's a work of God. Oh, what a great prayer this is to pray for one another. Pray that God would equip us.

Yes, use the leaders he has chosen. Use the means, but God to be the one behind it and in and through all of it. Equipping us in every good work to do his will.

In other words, equipping us to fulfill all of the ministry he has called us to. How will he do it? Working in us, it says. Working in you, God working in his people.

The work of God to equip the saints is not just an outside external pressure coming to bear. It's God working inside where he does live now. We are the temple of the spirit of God, Christ in us, the hope of glory.

This is so exciting. God living in us to equip us for the ministry he has for us. Could we ask for any more than that? Nothing could measure up to this.

Nothing can replace it. Equipping us by working in us. And how does he do that? Look at the end of the verse 21, through Jesus Christ, using the provisions of Christ, who is our head, using the guidance of Christ, the son of God, who is our head of the body of Christ.

Equipped for every good work. Yes, equipping is to take place in church life, in Christ's body, involving leadership gifts and one another relationships. Yes, that will involve being equipped by the word with the head speaking to us through the word.

And certainly that means we're equipped for ministry by coming to Jesus. And he then shares his fullness with us as we seek him. And yes, it involves being equipped by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit imparting God's absolute sufficiency in place of our total insufficiency.

What are all these words saying to us? We can increasingly be prepared to serve God. God has provided a gloriously effective way for you and me to minister with impact and fruit. If we'll just ask him, seek him, let him equip us more and more.

In just a moment, let's knit our hearts together in prayer. A prayer of commitment, committing, commending our lives into the hands of the Lord, entrusting our lives to this process of equipping. Really in prayer together, coming to Jesus about this whole matter.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we come to you, the head of the church. We thank you so much for all the means that you have provided for our equipping.

We thank you that it's not us trying to change ourselves, but it's you at work on us, in us, between us, among us and right through our lives. We praise you for that, Lord. We thank you for that, Lord.

What hope it gives us, what expectation that we can serve you effectively. Lord, equip us, we pray, to be your servants. We want to minister to the world and to the church and unto you.

And we're entrusting ourselves into your hands. Lord Jesus, draw us, teach us by your spirit day by day to come to you, the living stone, that we as living stones might be built up, equipped for a spiritual household of spiritual ministry, the building up of the body of Christ. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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