

# (Ephesians) Equipping of the Saints

by Brian Brodersen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and diversity within the body of Christ, and the role of the gifts of the Spirit in empowering believers to serve God and live a life of obedience.*

**Duration:** 53:58

**Scripture:** Acts 2:33, Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:7, Ephesians 4:11-12

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Spiritual Gifts"

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## Description

In this sermon on Ephesians 4, the speaker emphasizes the transition from doctrinal teachings to practical instructions in the epistle. The importance of unity within the body of Christ is highlighted, with a reminder to avoid division over non-essential matters. The speaker appreciates the simplicity of Pastor Chuck's ministry, which made it accessible for everyone to participate and serve. The role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor teachers is discussed, emphasizing that their purpose is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

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## Transcript

If you'd like to open your Bible now this evening to Ephesians, the fourth chapter, as we have come to chapter four, as we mentioned in a previous study, we come now to the practical aspect of this epistle to the Ephesians. The first three chapters, as we pointed out, being primarily doctrinal. And now Paul has come to give us the practical instructions that proceed from our relationship with the Lord, the kind of lifestyle that we're to be living.

And we looked last time at the priority that he places on unity within the body of Christ. And we talked at length last week about how we need to be careful not to be divided over non-essential matters, and we must endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And so we brought our study to verse six last week.

So we pick up this evening in verse seven. And so Paul says, but to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. So in the previous six verses, he's talking about us in a collective sense.

He's talking about all of us and he's calling us to have unity among ourselves. So here in verse seven, Paul turns from all of us to each of us. And so from the unity to the diversity of the church.

So within the church of Jesus Christ, we have unity with diversity. I want to quote to you from John Stott's commentary. I wouldn't normally jump right into a study with a lengthy quote, but this is so appropriate, I think, for where we want to go with the study tonight.

Let me share with you what John Stott said regarding verse seven. He said here, Paul deliberately qualifies what he has just written about the church's unity. Although there is only one body, one faith and one family, this unity is not to be construed as a lifeless or colorless uniformity.

We are not to imagine that every Christian is an exact replica of every other, as if we had all been mass produced in some celestial factory. On the contrary, the unity of the church, far from being boringly monotonous, is exciting in its diversity. This is not just because of our different cultures, temperaments and personalities, but because of the different gifts which Christ distributes for the enrichment of our common life.

And so I thought those were appropriate words. There's diversity within the body of Christ, but it's the same body and it's the same Lord who is working, although he works in different ways in each of our lives. So we're not to be like we've come off of an assembly line, we're not to be clones of one another.

We are allowed by God to maintain our individuality and the conformity in our lives is not to one another or to some human model, but the conformity is to Jesus Christ himself. And so he takes our various personalities and backgrounds and then the gifts he gives us. And with this marvelous diversity, he maintains unity and there is just a beautiful.

Picture and a tremendous blessing through everyone making a contribution to what God is doing in the overall picture of his body, and that's something that I think we need to really realize. And one of the things that's happened along the course of church history is people have lost sight of the fact that there's diversity and many times you would find in certain denominational structures or different movements, you would find everybody, you know, just being the same, everybody dressing the same, everybody using the same kind of terminology, everybody acting the same way. And that defeats the purpose of the individual personalities that God wants to work through.

But we all sometimes have that temptation to want to be someone other than who God made us to be, don't we? And so sometimes it's easy to sort of, you know, conform to somebody else, and we do see that occurring, but we have to realize that that's not God's ideal. God made you. He allowed you to grow up under certain circumstances.

He has given you certain experiences. You come from a certain cultural background and all of those things, adding to that the supernatural gifts of the spirit God wants to use to bring about, as I said a moment ago, just a beautiful manifestation of his spirit among people. So it's important that we realize that diversity is God's plan within the unity.

And so to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now, the grace here is not saving grace. Of course, saving grace is given to each one of us.

That's why we're saved and that's why we're here. And that's why Paul could write to the Ephesians, because to them, saving grace was given. But he's not talking about saving grace here.

What he's talking about is serving grace. And there's a distinction between those two things. There's grace that saves us.

And then there's grace that's supplied to empower us to serve God. You see, each saved person is also called to serve. We're not called to merely be saved.

Some people, that's their that's their concept of the Christian life. I'm saved and that's all there is to it. And that's great.

That's wonderful. I'm not going to hell anymore. And, you know, just go on and live my life just sort of according to my own plan and what I'd like to do with it and just know that in the end, everything will be OK.

That's not God's plan. God planned to save us and then to put us into service. And so just as he supplied grace for us to be saved, he supplies grace for us to serve him.

God supplies each of us with the grace and the grace is manifested through various gifts that he's given to us. And so he quotes now from the Old Testament, from Psalm 68, verse 18. Therefore, he says when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

So he's going to talk about the gifts now and he goes back and he shows from a passage in the Psalms that God was going to do this all along. He was going to pour out the spirit and he was going to provide his people with the various gifts of the spirit. Now, if you were to go back and look at Psalm 68, verse 18, you will find that Paul has slightly altered the verse for we read in the psalm.

When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and he received gifts among men. That's what we read in Psalm 68. Some people thought, well, what happened? Paul's he's misquoting the verse.

And so some have seen a problem in this. But in actuality, Paul is probably more accurate in his citation than our English translators were in their translation for the word that's translated back in Psalm 68 received could be translated brought, which is the same idea that Paul uses it with here. Brought gifts to men.

And in Paul's day, there was the the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures. And then there were a number of paraphrases of the scriptures known as targums. And when the apostles would quote from the Old Testament, they would often quote from the Septuagint or from the targums.

And the quotation of Paul here is in line with the Aramaic and the Syriac targum of the day. So, as I said, it's actually probably the English translators that have made the mistake, not the apostle Paul. The idea in the psalm was that there would be gifts that were given to men.

So that's just a little side note for those who are finding fault with the scriptures in some way. Notice that there isn't really a problem. So now this he ascended.

What does it mean? But that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth, he who descended is also the one who ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. So he ascended. What does it mean that he first of all descended to the lower parts of the earth now? What is Paul referring to here? It would seem, and I think most would agree, that Paul is referring to Christ's descent into the grave and then his resurrection up from the grave.

And as he rose up from the grave, he led captivity captive and he gave gifts to men. Some think that that is a bit bizarre, and so they go for a more naturalistic interpretation. Actually, the NIV itself sort of interprets the verse rather than translates it.

Let me read to you the NIV of the ninth verse. What does he ascended mean, except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. So the NIV here sort of interprets the verse as referring to Jesus coming from heaven to earth, and it could refer to that.

Some say it's just talking about his humiliation in the incarnation and then ultimately his exaltation. But it seems from the text and from what most commentators would say is that this is the reference to the Lord descending into Sheol or Hades, the the grave. And they're proclaiming liberty to those captives, opening the prison to those who are bound, as Isaiah's prophecy declared, and then leading them up to heaven and then pouring out the gifts of the spirit.

You remember on the day of Pentecost when the gifts of the spirit were poured out and the people were gathered around and they said, you know, what's happening here? What does this mean? And so Peter began preaching to them and he talked to them about Jesus, whom God exalted to his right hand. And then he concluded his message by saying, and this which you see is that which he is poured out. And so it was the gifts having led captivity captive.

And now he's back in the presence of God and he pours out his spirit and he gives the gifts of the spirit to men at that time. And so verse 11, this is where we want to concentrate, and he himself gave some to be. So he's going to now go ahead and speak to us about the gifts here.

Christ himself giving the gifts. Now, the gifts listed here are different from most of those gifts listed in Romans 12, first Corinthians 12 and first Peter four. Those are the main passages where we have various listings of the gifts of the spirit.

But these are to a large degree different than those other listings. Those other gifts that are listed are, for the most part, gifts bestowed upon believers. If you look at the list of gifts in, let's say, first Corinthians 12 to one is given the word of wisdom to another, the word of knowledge to another prophecy to another healing and so forth.

Those are gifts that are bestowed upon believers. But here in Ephesians four, 11 gifted believers are bestowed upon the church. You see, the gifts are gifts not to the individual believer, but their gifts from Christ to the church.

And then he goes on to list those gifts that Christ has given to the church. So those other gifts in Romans or first Corinthians or first Peter are viewed primarily from the standpoint of the local church. Individual Christians receive those gifts and they minister to one another in the context of the local fellowship that they belong to.

Now, the gifts here in Ephesians four. These are viewed from the standpoint of the universal church. And again, these are gifted.

Believers that Christ gives to the church so the church can become all that it is intended to be by the Lord. And so here are the gifts that Christ has given. He's given some apostles, some prophets, some evangelist and some pastors and teachers.

So these are the gifts that Christ has given to his church collectively, to the overall body of Christ. He's given apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And it's through the ministry of apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers that Christ is seeking to bring his church to that place of maturity.

That's the goal that he is wanting to bring about through the gifted servants that he has appointed for the church. The gift of the apostles and prophets, they seem to be linked together here. The apostles and prophets were those men that were originally appointed by the Lord to lay the foundation of the church back in the 20th verse of the second chapter of this epistle, Paul speaks of the apostles and prophets as having laid the foundation of the church there.

He said, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. So the ministry of the apostles and prophets was a foundational ministry. Now, there is a primary and a secondary aspect to.

These particular ministries, there's a primary aspect found in the New Testament to the apostles and prophets, and then there's a secondary application as well. We want to talk about both, but let's talk first about the primary. The primary were the apostles that Jesus appointed and their close associates.

So the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The original apostles, Peter, James, John, Matthew, Simon, Judas, not Judas Iscariot, of course, James the less Thaddeus. These these men that are listed, these are the primary apostles known commonly as the twelve.

Then, of course, Judas betrayed the Lord. And I believe that although Peter and the guys cast lots and a lot fell upon the bias, I believe that the Lord intended for Paul to take that position. So I would include Paul in the list of the twelve apostles.

But then the prophets were their associates. We find that the apostles are associated with men like Barnabas, Timothy, Luke, Mark. These are the men who would have been the prophets in Acts 13, verse one.

We read in the church in Antioch, there were certain prophets and teachers. And Paul is listed as well as Barnabas, as well as a number of others. So there, Barnabas is referred to as a prophet.

So we know that he was definitely part of that category. So the apostles and prophets, they were the ones who had the task of laying the foundation for the Church of Jesus Christ. And once the foundation was laid, there was no need for them to pass on their ministry to successors.

There's no such thing biblically as what is known as apostolic succession. That the apostles laid hands on certain others and passed on their authority to them, you don't find that in the scripture anywhere. You see what the apostles and prophets did was they laid the foundation through their preaching ministries, but mainly through the inspired writings that they sent to the churches, the inspired writings that remained with us to this very day.

So when somebody asked the question today, do we still have apostles and prophets in the church? The answer would be no, not apostles and prophets in the primary sense of the original apostles who were appointed by Jesus and their associates that we would refer to as prophets. We do not any longer have men with that same kind of calling or gifting. There's no one today that has that same kind of authority to, let's say, sit down and pen another chapter to the Bible.

That all ended with the death of the last apostle, but their ministry is perpetuated, it's carried on through the written record in the New Testament. So we do have the ministry of the apostles and prophets still among us today, but it's among us in written form and then, of course, applied by the Holy Spirit to our lives. But there is a secondary gift of apostle and prophet.

The word apostle means one who is sent, but as you look to the scripture, there were definitely those that were handpicked by the Lord Jesus to become. What you might call the original apostles, actually, you can look at it this way. God, the father had one apostle, Jesus Christ, according to the author of Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the apostle and high priest of our confession.

God, the son, Jesus Christ had 12 apostles and they're listed for us. God, the Holy Spirit now has a multitude of apostles. For from the time of the apostles death, the apostles of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has still been raising up and sending people out into the great harvest to bring the truth of Jesus Christ.

So apostles in a secondary sense are still among us, but they do not wield the kind of authority that the apostles of Jesus Christ carried with them. But yet we still do recognize that there are men that are definitely sent by God to particular places at particular times with a certain amount of authority and gifting to establish the works of God in various places. So missionary church planters would be apostles in a secondary sense.

You think of someone like William Carey, for example, who left his home in England and spent the rest of his life in India translating the scriptures into the language of the people and spreading the gospel throughout India. Or you think of a man like Hudson Taylor, who did a similar thing without the translating aspect, but left his home and went to live among the Chinese people. And there are planted thousands of churches among the Chinese people, or we might think of someone like David Jones, who went to Madagascar and brought the gospel to a country that not really had the gospel prior to that.

Or to C.T. Studd, who took the gospel to some of the African countries, or maybe a person like A.B. Simpson, who back in the eighteen hundreds was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance movement, which was responsible for establishing churches all over the world. And then, of course, today we have people who are apostles, people who have been sent by God to a specific place with a specific calling to bring the gospel to those people. I like to think of our friend over in Hungary, Greg Opín, as the apostle to the Hungarians.

He was sent by the Lord to Hungary 10 years ago, thought he might spend. Well, it's been 11 years ago now, thought he might spend a year or two there just ministering, but now it's become his life's work. And as we look at the number of churches that are growing and developing, as I look at that, I see that he's had a hand in the spreading of the work there and been involved in the various churches that are being planted.

And we see similar things going on in different parts of the world. I think of somebody like a man named George Markey in the Ukraine. And again, about 10 years ago, he took his family and packed up, moved to Kiev, Ukraine, and everybody told me is absolutely crazy to do it.

I think he had eight kids or the mission field with eight kids. You got to be a little bit nuts. But it took a guy just a little bit crazy like George, and he went and now God's doing a great work and many churches are rising up.

And, you know, here again, we see sort of an apostolic thing. God is sending someone. But it's apostolic in a secondary sense, and then there would be a prophetic gift in the secondary sense as well.

And what you would find with the prophets would be that they are those with the ability to powerfully expound and apply the word of God to theirs and future generations. So I want you to understand this, it's important to understand this, there there are still apostles and prophets in the church today, but not in the same sense that there was in the beginning, not in the same sense of the original twelve and their associates who laid the foundation of the church. And we need to be clear about that because there are those today going about saying, I'm an apostle, this here, this brother over here, he's a prophet.

We've got the fivefold ministry. And now, listen, we're going to tell you a new revelation that hasn't been written in the word of God. And our word has just as much authority as the written word.

So listen to what we're saying. That is not biblical, and people who are doing that are they're out to lunch, they're not apostles and prophets, as a matter of fact, if you ever meet somebody who tells you they're an apostle or prophet, I would disregard anything they had to say beyond that, because the people who are really the apostles and prophets today, they're never going to tell you they're not thinking in those terms, they're just humbly serving God and God's doing things. And others can look on and say, you know, as I just did with Greg Opim or, you know, if you met Greg, he would never do some stuff.

Yes, I'm the apostle to the Hungarians. I just wanted you to make sure you understood that. So it's important to understand this, but then we don't want to miss the fact that there are.

Because, you know, because of the abusive thing that goes on, particularly in charismatic circles, we don't want to just completely throw everything out and and fail to recognize that there are certain people today that have an apostolic calling and a prophetic calling in a secondary sense. And so we do have prophets today. We have had prophets among us in the history of the church just to go back not too far in history, but to go back to someone like Charles Spurgeon.

Charles Spurgeon was a prophetic voice. He spoke prophetically. Now, we wouldn't take the Metropolitan Tabernacle and try to attack it on the end of the Bible and say, you know, this is part of the Bible now.

But we do recognize, as we would, you know, sit down and read through the sermons, we recognize that God is speaking. God anointed him. You would find that in someone like a Campbell Morgan.

G. Campbell Morgan, a similar sort of a thing or an A.W. Tozer or a Martin Lloyd-Jones. Martin Lloyd-Jones is one of my favorite authors, I read some of his sermons that he preached back in, you know, sometimes the 30s, you know, read some sermons from the 50s. And my goodness, he's speaking to this minute.

He's speaking to us today. There's that prophetic element. There's that that that God given ability to expound the scriptures and then to apply them not only to the current situation, but as I said, sometimes to future generations as well.

And that's what we see with some of the men that I've mentioned here more on a more current note, someone like a J. Vernon McGee, someone like Pastor Chuck himself. There's a prophetic gifting there, but you notice we call him Pastor Chuck. We don't call him Prophet Chuck.

See, he would never stand up and say, I'm a prophet, listen to me, but we recognize because God is speaking. Through him and God has spoken through him to many people to this current generation, and I'm certain that if the Lord tarries, God will be speaking through him to future generations as well, just as he speaks to us today through some of the different men that I just mentioned. And so.

These are the gifts that Christ has given apostles and prophets and then evangelist. Evangelist, evangelist are those who have been gifted to preach the gospel. To preach the gospel, to get the message of Christ and his salvation clearly out to people so people can respond to that message and God has given evangelist and you look at, again, the history of the church and you find that there were those men, there have been many men who have been great expositors of the word and so forth, but they haven't necessarily had that evangelistic impact.

But then others, they have not only the ability to expound the scripture, but there's an evangelistic element where many people through their ministries have come to Christ against Spurgeon would be a good example of that. Or around Spurgeon's time, you had someone like D.L. Moody, who would have been another person who was gifted. God gave him to the church as an evangelist, and he went all over the world, not ministering to any one church in particular, not any local fellowship necessarily, but ministering among all the churches.

And as he would go, all the churches would come together and support what he was doing and, you know, encourage people to reach out and bring a friend and so forth. And so the gospel would be spread in that way through an evangelist and a more modern example, and one that is probably the most well-known evangelist in the 20th century would be Billy Graham. And once again, you see with Billy Graham, he doesn't belong to any one denomination or any one segment of the church or any one local fellowship, per se, but he sort of just belongs to the whole body of Christ.

God gave him as a gift to the whole body of Christ, and so he's gone out and in his evangelistic endeavors, he's seen Christians gathered together from all different backgrounds and all different walks in support of the effort to get the gospel out. And so Christ has given some to be evangelist, but it doesn't have to be a mass evangelism. He has also given some to evangelize on a smaller scale, but yet just as effectively.

And sometimes I think when we think of an evangelist, we only think in terms of mass evangelism, stadium evangelism. But thank God for those who are evangelist, who just minister on the smaller levels of, you know, going out sometimes and just, you know, conversing with people out in the public square or being a real influence on the job and really, you know, being able to communicate the gospel to such an extent that people are getting converted. Or people that, you know, come to smaller settings, not necessarily the stadium sort of evangelism, but just, you know, the smaller settings where the gospel is clearly preached.

And so God has given some to be evangelist, and then he's given some pastors and teachers. So let's go back and just for a moment, let's just for the sake of getting the clear picture here, disregard everything I said about the secondary aspect of apostles and prophets. But let's just talk about the primary aspect of apostles and prophets.

Their ministry, as I said, remember, is perpetuated to us through the pages of the New Testament. And so now what God does is he gets evangelist pastors and teachers to take what the apostles and prophets have passed on to us in the written word and to now bring that written word to people so that they can do the evangelist be saved, did the pastors and teachers be built up in their faith. So as I as I mentioned, that

secondary apostle and prophet there, in a sense, evangelist and pastors and teachers as well, but the only distinction is they're called to a certain place, perhaps, and in some cases they're called to a larger sphere of ministry with a prophetic kind of ministry.

But this is the picture we have, the apostles and prophets. Being the foundation layers. They laid the foundation of the church, they wrote the New Testament for us, and now God has faithfully preserved the scriptures and brought them down through successive generations and he gives now evangelist pastors and teachers to take the written word, the foundational ministry of the apostles and prophets, and now to bring it to the people of God so that we can become the people that God wants us to be.

So the pastors and teachers are those who shepherd the word pastor means to shepherd. They are those who take care of the flock and a vital part of pastoring is teaching. Some see a distinction here that there are two different ministries being spoken of, but actually it seems from the original that it's just one one particular gift that's being spoken of here for anyone who is a pastor must of necessity be a teacher because you cannot feed the flock unless you can teach, because that's how the flock is fed.

Now, some do argue that you can be a teacher without being a pastor, but I wouldn't want to sit under a teacher who's not a pastor because a person who just spews out information. Well, I can I can read a book and get that you see, the pastoral part is the is the living part, it's the connecting, it's the touching, it's the it's the ministry. And those two things, I think, do go hand in hand together.

And so I believe that it's one particular gift here, not to pastors and teachers, those who care for God's people, those who pray for them, those who personally minister to them through biblical counsel and advice and and who teach them as well, who expound to them the scriptures. So this is what Christ is given. Now, I want you to notice.

Why he's given apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor teachers to the church, look at verse 12, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up or edifying of the body of Christ, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry. Now, this 12th verse, if you have an older translation of the Bible, you'll notice something that there is a comma after for the equipping of the saints. So it seems that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given a threefold responsibility and that comma.

Brought about or lent itself to a tremendous misunderstanding of ministry for a long, long, long, long time, that comma should have never been there. The first man to sort of publicly state that. Stated that it was the fatal comma, that's how he referred to it, it was the fatal comma because it gave the wrong picture of what the task of the minister was and what it basically did was put all ministry in the hands of what you might call the clergy.

That's what that fatal comma did. That's why it was fatal, because instead of the whole body of Christ serving the Lord, it was reduced to just a handful of people doing the service and everybody else just sort of spectating. That's why he called it the fatal comma.

He was right. So with that comma there, here's what it seems to say that he gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for number one, the equipping of the saints. Number two, for the work of the ministry.

Number three, for the edifying of the body of Christ. So the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, first of all, equip the saints. Secondly, they do the work of the ministry.

Thirdly, they edify the body of Christ. Everybody else sits around and watches. That's the that's the conclusion of the fatal comma.

But you see, that comma never should have been there. Some people believe it was put there intentionally by the hierarchy to let people know that you just sit down and relax, we'll take care of it all. I don't know if that was true or not, but there was no basis for it in the original.

And here's what it actually says. He himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastor teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry. You see, the work of the ministry belongs to the saints.

It doesn't belong to an elite group of leaders. It doesn't belong to a special class. But how the church has been cursed by that for ages and not only in those churches where it's clearly that way, but in churches that would deny any sort of distinction between the clergy and the laity, there's still been that mentality that's crept in.

You see, it's the job of the evangelist, the pastor, the teacher to equip the saints. So that they can do the ministry. There is so much ministry to be done, if just one or a few are trying to do it, it's never going to be done.

But you see, God has a ministry for each and every believer. You remember, we're talking about grace for serving. God has a gift for each and every one, but to each one of us, grace, a gift was given to each one of us, not just to a select few, not just to some, but to each one of us.

Grace was given. Let me quote you again from John Stott, quoted to him at the beginning, quoted from him at the beginning. But listen to what he said.

This is this is good as well. The traditional model of the church is that of the pyramid with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in compacted ranks of inferiority or the bus in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation or passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him. That's the traditional model of the church.

The New Testament concept of the church and the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands and successfully squashes all lay initiatives, but of one who helps and encourages all God's people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts instead of monopolizing all ministry himself. He actually multiplies ministry. You see, that's what it's talking about here.

That's the responsibility of those who have been given by God as gifts to the church of evangelist, of pastor, teacher. Our job is to equip the saints so they can do the work of the ministry. And the word ministry can be translated service.

So to equip the saints for works of service, God has some work for you to do. He has some ministry. He has some active service that he wants you to perform.

And so when you come here to be taught from the pulpit, you're coming here not to spectate, but to receive strength and insight and understanding. So you can take that and then go out and apply it in the specific ministry that God has called you to. And also to exercise those gifts right here among ourselves as we gather together, as we've talked about before.

You see, church has too often been reduced to primarily spectating. Billy Graham said years ago that the church was much like a football game. You had 22 men on the field.

Doing all the work and 80,000 in the stands observing. And that has been the case so often in churches. And sometimes it's been the fault of the leadership because they've hoarded ministry and they've not wanted to release it and had the wrong idea that, you know, that was their job.

And other times it's been the fault of of the people who have just said, oh, well, you know, let them do it. That's what they get paid for anyway. But God has a ministry for each one of us.

And you come here to be equipped for those works of service so that you can, in turn, build up the body of Christ through those opportunities that God brings to you. Do you realize that that is something that God wants every one of us to understand the ministry belongs to all of us, not just to a few of us, but it belongs to all of us. This is our ministry.

It's not my ministry or someone else's ministry. It's our ministry. It's the sphere of ministry that God has called us to.

And so our responsibility, then, is to be seeking the Lord and asking God to direct us into those works of service that he has for us as we are making ourselves available and as we are submitting ourselves to the ministry of the pastors and teachers and evangelists and being equipped. You see, that's what's happening, equipping. Equipping the saints for works of ministry, I hope you're getting equipped as you're coming here.

That's that's what we're desiring. That's what we want to see happen, that you catch the vision. And, you know, one thing that I I've said this many times in different contexts, but I'll say it here.

One thing I really appreciated about this ministry when I was a younger man, I'm still young, but I was younger. At least everybody tells me I'm still young. But one of the things I appreciated as I sat and would listen to Pastor Chuck, I appreciated the simplicity with which everything was done.

And through that. There was there was the sense that that I could do that, I could be involved in this thing. And, you know, there was never the impression given that I couldn't be involved or in order to be involved, I had to go off.

And first of all, you know, get X amount of years of education or qualifications or that sort of thing. And that to me has been, I think, the great legacy of Pastor Chuck in many ways that he has he has made ministry available. You know, honestly, in church history, there haven't been.

Many men who have raised up. Men equal to them in stature. During their lifetimes, and that's why great ministries of the past, usually once the once the you know, the leader passed off the scene, the ministry just sort of crumbled.

Many people have asked, you know, Pastor Chuck, well, who is your successor going to be and who are you going to pass the ministry on to? And quite often the response is that Chuck has many successors and he's passed the ministry on to many different people. And young men that grew up in this church years ago are now out pastoring churches and doing basically the same thing that Pastor Chuck is doing. But.

It all came about because there was this vision to equip the saints to do the work of ministry and the equipping comes through taking what the apostles and prophets gave us the scriptures and using the gifts of pastoring and teaching and evangelism and communicating those things so that we're being equipped. So the body of Christ can be built up. And that's what we want to keep doing, we want to keep equipping, we want to keep seeing the body of Christ build up because.

The goal. The goal is not going to be reached. Until Christ returns for his church, so we never come to a place where we say, OK.

We've reached our quota. We don't want to see any more saved here. We don't want to equip anybody else.

We've equipped so many people that, you know, we're done equipping. Somebody else has got to do it now. We'll never come to that place.

We are to keep on with this until the Lord Jesus returns. That's this is what we're to be doing. And listen, in verse 13, we'll close with this tonight.

He says, 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. You see, this is the goal that Christ has, that ultimately we collectively would. Experience that unity of the faith.

That we would become mature, notice. And of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, the word perfect means mature and then to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, three things that Christ is wanting to accomplish. He's wanted to see unity, maturity and likeness to himself among his people.

And that's what it's all about. That's what we're doing. That's the goal of.

Equipping. That the church would be built up, that it would be unified. That it would be mature, that it would be like Christ and that it would glorify him.

Until he returns and to that end, he gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. So that everyone could be equipped to perform those works of service as we close tonight, if you are not sure about the works of service that God has for you, two things. Number one, of course, is pray and ask the Lord to show you.

And number two is step out. And see what the Lord will do. You hear maybe of a need and you just say, well, Lord, I'll take a step.

Maybe you could use me to meet that need. And, you know, sometimes I think, you know, people think of ministry and they think, OK, I've got to get into the ministry and they think of it more in its full grown sense than in its infancy sort of stages.

You know, we begin in the ministry with small things. And as Jesus said, as we're faithful in the small things, the Lord gives us greater things. So, you know, maybe you've been sitting saying, OK, I feel like I want to be in the ministry and and I wonder if Pastor Chuck's going to go on vacation.

Maybe I could fill the pulpit for him on a Sunday morning. You know, that that's not where you're going to start. Instead, think in terms of, oh, look here in the Bolton Servants Heart Ministry going over and helping clean somebody's yard this week.

Wow, that's a place to start. You see, ministry develops. It's progressive.

You start with small things. And as you do those things faithfully, the Lord then increases your responsibility and he gives you more things to do and he develops your gifts as you grow. And maybe God's given you a gift to teach.

But you know what? You won't begin teaching a group of 500 people. You'll begin teaching a group of five and be faithful to those five. And as you are faithful to those five, then God will multiply them.

You see, it's just a matter of getting started, taking a step of faith. And we have so many different opportunities. That's one beautiful thing about a church this size.

There's endless opportunities to serve the Lord. We have Sunday school ministry with needs always. We have outreach to the poor.

We have street evangelism. We have the various things right here involved in the sanctuary with ushering and helping people get their cars parked and those kinds of things. And you think, oh, well, you know, parking cars.

What's that got to do with the kingdom of God? Well, you know what? You're helping people get their car parked so they can get in here and get equipped. To serve the Lord. And so there's nothing that's below us.

There's nothing that's too small. There's nothing that's there's nothing insignificant that you could do for Christ. Jesus said, if you give a cup of cold water in his name, you will receive a reward.

There's nothing insignificant. And so pray about what God might have you do, what service he would have you to get started in. And then as you hear of opportunities, you see opportunities.

Just take that step of faith and get involved and watch that as you step out, God will open doors and he will develop and he will give you direction and clarity as time goes on in the ministry that he has for you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you, Lord, that each and every one of us have received a measure of faith, a measure of grace, grace for service.

And Lord, may we discover those ministries that you have for us as we wait upon you. Thank you, Lord, for your word and your servants that equip us through your word. And Lord, may we.

May we be doing those things. That lead to unity, into maturity and to Christ likeness. May we keep doing them until you come to receive us to yourself.

For Jesus' sake, work this in us, we pray. Amen.

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