

A Gifted Church

Ephesians 4:11 -1 3

INTRODUCTION

- A. One day, Confucius was asked by one of his disciples about the ingredients of good government.
1. Confucius replied: "Sufficient food, sufficient weapons, and the confidence of the common people."
 2. "But," asked the disciple, "Suppose you had no choice but to dispense with one of those three, which would you forego?" "Weapons," said Confucius.
 3. His disciple persisted: "Suppose you were then forced to dispense with one of the two that are left, which would you forego?" Replied Confucius, "Food. For from of old, hunger has been the lot of all men, but a people that no longer trusts its rulers is lost indeed."
- B. A loss of confidence in leadership is nothing new.
1. Moses faced such a crisis.
 - a. "When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him'" (Ex. 32:1).
 - b. And, Aaron makes a golden calf for the people, because they no longer have confidence in Moses.
 2. Even Jesus faced such a crisis.
 - a. In John 6, Jesus had taught some rather unpopular things about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and we read, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (Jn. 6:66).
 - b. The disciples seem to have even struggled with their trust in Jesus — After the resurrection, we read, the disciples saw Jesus and worshiped "but some doubted" (Mt. 28:17). It seems that even at this late date the disciples wondered whether or not Jesus was who he claimed to be.
- C. From reading Ephesians, it appears that there was some type of "leadership crisis" taking place in that church, and it seems that the crisis was dividing the Christians in Ephesus.
1. Paul spends a great amount of time in this context dealing with the unity of the church.
 - a. He encourages the church to be united: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (v. 3).
 - b. Paul then gives the basis of Christian unity: "There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one god and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (vv. 4-6).
 2. Paul seems to have envisioned what the readers of this passage might have thought: "OK, Paul, there's supposed to be unity in the body; if that's the case, why do some Christians have different abilities than I have?"
 - a. Paul proceeds immediately from the discussion of unity to the discussion of spiritual gifts.
 - 1) It seems that the problems with unity in Ephesus could have been caused by spiritual gifts.
 - 2) It may have been that those without gifts thought they were inferior to those with gifts.
 - a) Yet, it seems more probable from the context that those with spiritual gifts thought they were better than the Christians without them.
 - b) It does appear as though this was causing something of a "leadership crisis" in Ephesus.
 - b. Paul deals with the proper use of spiritual gifts in our passage this morning. We'll notice
GIFTED PEOPLE & GIFTED PURPOSE.

GIFTED PEOPLE, v. 11

- A. Notice how Paul begins this discussion in verse 7: “To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”
1. Different spiritual gifts are here referred to as “grace.”
 - a. We typically think of “grace” as God’s unmerited favor to sinners — the forgiveness God offers in spite of sinfulness.
 - b. I’m not so sure that that definition of “unmerited favor” is so far off even here—we don’t deserve the spiritual gifts that God gives us, but he gives them to us in spite of our own unworthiness.
 2. These gifts have been given as “Christ apportioned it.”
 - a. Spiritual gifts have been given as God as chosen.
 - 1) “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11).
 - 2) “God also testified to it [salvation] by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:4).
 - b. It is important that Christ decided how to give these gifts.
 - 1) That says I don’t have reason to feel inferior to those with different gifts.
 - a) If someone has a gift that I want but don’t have, I have no reason either to envy him or her or to feel inferior to him or her.
 - b) God, in his infinite wisdom, knew that wasn’t the best gift for me.
 - 2) That also says that I have no reason to boast over the gifts I do have. I can’t say, “Boy, am I ever talented!” No, it’s God who made me talented.
- B. Paul then enumerates what the spiritual gifts are in v. 11: Christ “gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.”
1. Some were given the role of apostles.
 - a. The term “apostle” literally means “one who is sent on a mission”: New Testament apostles were sent on a mission by Christ to be witnesses of him.
 - b. We get the idea from what Paul says about his own apostleship that apostles were specially chosen by Christ.
 - 1) On the road to Damascus, the Lord said to Paul, “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you” (Acts 26:16).
 - 2) “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1).
 2. Some were given the role of prophets.
 - a. Prophets were primarily spokesmen for God, a function they fulfilled in the Old Testament and continued in the church.
 - b. We know that prophets were active in the New Testament era; e.g., “In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1).
 3. Some were given the role of evangelists.
 - a. The term “evangelists” literally refers to a herald of good news or glad tidings.
 - b. Thus, evangelists would be those who share the message of Jesus. Philip was one such evangelist.
 - 1) “Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip, the evangelist, one of the Seven” (Acts 21 :8).
 - 2) “Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there” (Acts 8:5).
 4. Some were given the role of pastors and teachers.
 - a. I don’t want to get really technical in Greek grammar; let it suffice to say that according to Greek grammar “pastor” and “teacher” refer to the same office — many scholars prefer the translation “teaching pastors.”

- b. The word “pastor” means “shepherd.”
 - 1) This is the only place in the New Testament the noun occurs to refer to a church office; at other times the word is used for literal shepherds and it is used for Jesus as the shepherd of his people.
 - 2) The verb form of this noun is used throughout the New Testament.
 - a) The term, more often than not, refers literally to shepherds caring for their sheep.
 - b) In three instances, the word is used metaphorically to refer to care in the church.
 - i. This is the word used where Jesus tells Peter, “Take care of my sheep” (Jn. 21 :16).
 - ii. In two cases, the word is applied to the work of elders:
 - i) To the Ephesian elders, Paul said, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).
 - ii) Peter singled out elders and wrote, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers” (1 Pet. 5:2).
 - iii) The only conclusion I know to reach is that elders are the pastors of Eph. 4, and nearly every biblical scholars agrees that in early Christianity elders and pastors were synonymous terms.
 - c. These pastors were teachers.
 - 1) An elder must be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).
 - 2) He must be able to teach so that he can “refute those who oppose” sound doctrine (Tit. 1:9).
5. If you notice carefully, there are four offices of the church mentioned here.
- a. Two were temporary offices (apostles and prophets) and two were permanent offices (evangelists and teaching pastors).
 - b. I really think that the two permanent offices replaced the two temporary offices:
 - 1) Evangelists replaced the apostles in that the evangelists are now the missionaries and heralds of the gospel to those who are lost, a role once filled by the apostles.
 - 2) Teaching pastors have replaced the prophets as those who speak the word of God to the congregation.
6. Even though apostles and prophets are no longer active in the church and have been replaced by permanent offices, the work the apostles and prophets performed still benefit the church.
- a. This morning, we are studying from the words of an apostle — these words still benefit us. Not everything in the New Testament was written by apostles, but much of the New Testament was written by other Spirit-inspired men — prophets — and their words benefit us, too.
 - b. Why did Christ give some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be teaching pastors? Paul tells us:

GIFTED PURPOSE, vv. 12-13

- A. Christ gave these offices in the church for two reasons: to prepare God’s people for works of service and so that the body of Christ might be built up, v. 12.
 - 1. I know the KJV gives three reasons: “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
 - 2. However, Greek grammar suggests that the perfecting (equipping) of the saints ought to go with “for the work of ministry”--there would then be two purposes, rather than three.
- B. Leaders in the church are to prepare God’s people for works of service.
 - 1. “Equipping” was a technical medical term used for the setting of broken bones; it signifies the proper putting together of something.
 - 2. Thus, the leaders of the church are to make sure that individual Christians are using their talents to serve.

- a. Each of us has a variety of talents which can be tapped.
 - 1) You know Mt. 25:15 quite well: “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.”
 - 2) Each of us has different abilities.
 - a) 1 Cor. 12:8-11.
 - b) The contexts is obviously spiritual gifts which are no longer active in the church , but I think there’s a principle which applies — just as there were different miraculous gifts, there are different non-miraculous gifts.
 - b. The leaders in the church need to make sure that we are using are talents to the best of our ability, and to help us do so.
 - c. Thomas Monaghan is founder, president, and CEO of Domino’s Pizza.
 - 1) From 1970 to 1985, Domino’s grew from a small debt-ridden chain to the second largest pizza company in America.
 - 2) When asked to account for the phenomenal growth of the company, Monaghan explained, “I programmed everything for growth.” And how did he plan for growth? “Every day we develop people — the key to growth is developing people.”
 - 3) Not special cheese, not a tasty crust, not fast delivery schedules, but people!
 - d. Paul’s making the same point here about the church: the key to growth in the church is developing people to use their skills to serve.
- C. Leaders in the church are to help build up the body of Christ.
- 1. The KJV and most other translations say “edify” here; the word edify in Greek is literally “build a structure.” The image is obviously of the church being strengthened, being built up.
 - 2. How do leaders help in the building up of the church?
 - a. Evangelists obviously help build the church numerically — they are the ones calling men to repentance.
 - b. Teaching pastors build the church in faith.
 - 1) As teachers — whether they are also pastors or not — proclaim God’s Word to the congregation, faith grows in the brethren.
 - 2) Pastors build the church in faith — not just through their teaching role — but through pastoring.
 - a) They’re the ones watching the souls of the Christians in their charge — “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account” (Heb. 13:17).
 - b) They’re the ones who prevent error from entering the congregation in their charge — An elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Tit. 1:9).
- D. This edification is to occur “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ,” v. 13.
- 1. We are to reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.
 - a. Unity, as we’ve already mentioned, as been a special concern in this section — We must “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (4:3).
 - b. We’re to have unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God — Let us strive for such unity.
 - 2. We’re also to become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
 - a. We must be constantly seeking maturity in our faith.
 - 1) “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).
 - 2) Paul held up the Thessalonians as an example of growth — “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing” (2 Thess. 1:3).

- b. When Nicholas I became Tsar of Russia, he attempted to shut off his country from all dealings with the outside world. A historian summarized the results of the Tsar's attitude this way:
 - 1) Russians were forbidden to travel abroad. Nicholas referred to the Moscow University as a 'den of wolves,' and restricted the number of students to three hundred.
 - 2) Censors struck out of papers such phrases as "forces of nature" and "movements of minds."
 - 3) Nicholas himself was enraged at finding the word "progress" used in a report of one of his ministers and demanded its deletion from all future official documents.
- c. Let us not be like the Tsar in our Christian lives, but let us always be striving for progress, striving for growth! Are you growing as a Christian? Do you need to come this morning and begin growing in Christ'?