

12. The purpose of ministries – Truth and love

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Whenever the work of God is going on well, satan will not stand without any interferences or distractions. He certainly is not going to step aside and tell you and cheer you, "Way to go. You are doing wonderful works for Jesus." If he cannot stop you with persecution, he, then, will make you lose focus of the purpose of the ministry you are involved in.

Two of the methods satan often utilizes are:

1) Making believers think that ministry is only for those who are called to be pastors, elders, deacons, and limited volunteers

2) Keeping believers in perpetual childish immature mindsets

We will talk about these more in detail today. To keep the portion of the Scripture we are going to study in context, we will start from v11 of chapter 4 of the Book of Ephesians.

A. EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS

Ephesians 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

Do you know how much trouble a little comma can cause? For example, someone who is younger than you tells you, "I am hungry." So you point the kitchen to him and reply, "Go eat, my child." Nothing wrong with that. But what if you did not have a comma there? It would be "Go eat my child." Not good.

Until 1903, King James Version Bible says v12 in this way:

Ephesians 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ – KJV

Did you notice the comma between the words "saints" and "for" in v12? It makes the sentence as if there are three purposes when it should be two.

The goal of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers is equipping the believers of Jesus Christ so that they can do the work of ministry – that is the first goal, and edification of the body of Christ – that is the second goal. But according to KJV, it sounds like it is the job of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers to equip the believers, and do the work of the ministry, and edify the believers. See the difference?

The church functions best when the pastor, elders, deacons, and the congregation work together in partnership toward a common goal for the glory of God.

You see, my job as the pastor of this church is to help you understand what God has for you in the Word of God clearly without any of human's inputs so that you can do the work of ministry of God and build up the body of Christ which is the church.

To some of you, this is a surprise. You are thinking, "What is the reason we pay you for? You are the one who is supposed to work in all the ministries." Not according to what the Bible says.

Remember what I said at the beginning of this morning's study? One of the methods satan uses is to make believers think that ministry is only for those who are called to be pastors, elders, deacons, and limited volunteers. Bingo!

In case you have any doubt, let's take a look at the original Greek word of "equipping". It is 'katartismos'. It means "complete furnishing". This word is used in surgery for setting a broken limb or for putting a joint back into its place. In politics it is used for bringing together opposing factions so that government can go on. By the way, that will be the day when a pig flies in America.

In the NT it also is used of mending nets in Mark 1:19, and of disciplining an offender until he is fit to take his place again within the fellowship of the church in Galatians 6:1. The basic idea of the word is that of putting a thing into the condition in which it ought to be.

B. FOUR SIGNS OF A BUILT-UP BODY OF CHRIST

How can we know if we're fulfilling God's purposes for the church? How can we tell if our local body is as "built up" as it should be? There would be four signs we can see.

1) Mature minds

Ephesians 4:13 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;

One of the prime examples of mature minds is the gentle pursuit of unity, not uniformity. There are people who think that everyone should do what they do, such as, using the same version of the Bible, believing in the same way in non-essential parts of theologies, even wearing the same type of clothing. That is uniformity and they are not mature Christians contrary to their own evaluation of themselves.

It is wonderful to have child like faith in Jesus Christ, but it is a really bad, bad thing to be childish and demand that everyone to do what he wants.

As I said many times before, I am not overly concerned about the differences in non-essential theologies and I consider them as personal preferences, but for the core belief in Christianity, I WILL NOT BUDGE.

Apostle Paul told us to be diligent in preserving our spiritual unity by treating one another with humility, gentleness, patience, loving tolerance, and bond of peace in v2-3. Christ is our peace with God and each other, and we live in His peace by recalling our unity and protecting it.

Remember the second method satan often employs is "keeping believers in perpetual childish immature mindsets." Satan will use it against our unity in Christ.

Yes, unity needs protection from selfish desires and seeing only our own needs. To safeguard unity, we need to work toward the greater good of others and train ourselves to look beyond the narrow selfish view of our own needs to the needs of Christ's church and the world He wants us to reach.

"The knowledge of the Son of God" in v13 is not only more complete scriptural knowledge but also experiential knowledge that comes through following Christ day

by day. Paul himself desired this kind of knowledge, as we see in his letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death

He wanted knowledge that went beyond what he could pack into his head, knowledge that would seep into his heart and flow out through his life in the form of obedience and service. That is a mature mind in Christ.

In case you think that you are spiritually mature, here are a few simple questions you can ask yourself to see if you are really mature in the Lord:

- Do I tithe to the church?

It is not giving your money to church. It is everything about trusting God with your finance. Tithing means 10% of your income, not \$10 a month. If you don't tithe for whatever the excuse you come up with, it only shows the lack of faith in God. You can not say that you are mature in the Lord while you don't have faith in Him.

- Do I fly off the handle easily?

If so, you are not mature in the Lord. You need to read and meditate upon 1 Corinthians 13 everyday.

- Do I gossip about others?

If so, you are not mature in the Lord. Gossip is gossip whether it is done in verbal or through email or any other means.

- Do I rather spend time in other carnal things than spending time with the Lord in prayers and reading of the Bible everyday?

If so, you are not mature in the Lord. Nobody including the Lord expects you to spend every awaken moment in prayers and reading the Bible, but if you read the Bible and prayer only once in a blue moon, your heart is far from the Lord and you are not mature in the Lord.

- Do I do what I learn from the Bible?

All the Bible knowledge and trivia in the world will not help you be mature in the Lord unless you live according to what you learn from God.

Some of you would say, "OK fine. I am not mature in the Lord, so what?" The Lord doesn't want you to remain immature. Listen to Him, turn your eyes upon Jesus.

2) Stability

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

The maturing Christian is not tossed about by every religious novelty that comes along. There are religious quacks waiting to kidnap God's children and get them into their false heretic churches or cults, but the maturing believer recognizes false doctrine and stays clear of it.

Since I got saved in 1987, I've seen so many winds of doctrines coming by to the Christendom. To name a few major heresies:

- The Word of Faith Movement
- Replacement Theology
- Holy Laughter
- Emergent Church Movement
- ChrIslam

I am sure that there are more. Do you know millions of naive and immature Christians flock from one heresy to another all the time, looking for the next excitement like a drug addict is looking for next high? These heresies are not laughable, they are down right demonic and unbiblical, but many people go for them, because they don't know the Word of God and choose to stay that way.

3) Truth in love

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--

There are many liberal churches in the world. They no longer teach the Word of God from their pulpits. They replace the purity of the Word of God with man-made myths, legends, and fancy stories. They talk about love without the truth from God's Word. They call the truth 'intolerant' or 'bigotry'. These churches' liberal heresies appeal to human's carnal minds so they win many immature people's hearts. They embrace anything and everything with so-called love. It is not real 'love', rather it is 'lust' and 'misguided inclusiveness.'

It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. God wants us to be neither abrasive nor timid. Rather, He wants us to show both strength and love.

It is a mark of maturity when we are able to share the truth with our fellow Christians, and do it in love.

4) Working together

Ephesians 4:16 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.

God is looking for a person who wants to be a team player, not a prima donna. The ministry God calls you to might already have a person or people. Team players are the ones that make things happen, not a prima donna. Acting as a prima donna not only nauseates the people around him or her because of one's pride, but also it makes God angry. Because He will not share His glory with anyone else.

An isolated Christian cannot minister to others, nor can others minister to him, and it is impossible for the gifts to be ministered either way.

So, then, spiritual unity is not something we manufacture. It is something we already have in Christ, and we must protect, develop and maintain it. Truth unites, but lies divide. Love unites, but selfishness divides.

C. APPLICATIONS

1) Speak the truth to one another in love.

2) Equip and edify one another with the Word of God that all of us may grow up to be more like Christ.