

Equipping of the Saints

Realizing Equipped Saints

Introduction

The last time I presented the lesson we looked at equipping the saints from Ephesians 4:11-16. I'm interested in pursuing what this equipping might look like in practice. The passage gives us the purpose and objective of equipping the saints. It also tells us why we are to be equipped. And it tells us the result of implementing this equipping.

Let's refresh our memory

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV)

Vss 11,12

And He Himself (Jesus) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some [shepherds (ESV)] and teachers, ¹² [to equip] the saints for the work of [service (NASB)], for [building up (ESV)] the body of Christ,

So, Jesus gave us leaders to equip us for — *what purpose, the work of service, we are to be providing a service! what service?* for building up the body of Christ.

What's the objective? — Vs 13

¹³ *[until (ESV)] we all [attain (ESV)] to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,*

This equipping is to continue until we all attain to

1. the unity of the faith.
2. the knowledge of the Son of God,
(And keep this point in mind because much of the 1st part of what we'll see this morning squarely addresses this point, the knowledge of the Son of God).
3. to [become mature (NIV)], to the [whole measure (NIV)] of the fullness of Christ;

Why are we to be equipped? — Vs 14

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 [schemes (ESV)],*

This brings to mind Paul's warning to the Colossians in...

Colossians 2:8 (ESV)

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Are philosophies dangerous and human traditions dangerous? Evidently they are. Because philosophies can take us captive. They can be deceitful according to human traditions.

And this equipping of the saints in Ephesians 4:11-16 is specifically intended to guard the saints from this very threat.

What's the result of implementing this equipping? — Vs 15,16

¹⁵ *but, speaking the truth in love, [we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (ESV)]* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, joined and [held (ESV)] together by what every joint supplies, [when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (ESV)]*

One thing we know about this equipping is that it involves speaking the truth. But truth is to be spoken from love. To mature is to "grow up." And we are to grow up into Christ. As Paul instructed: Imitate me as I imitate Christ, (1 Corinthians 11:1). The whole body, joined and held together (that's unity). Growth comes from implementing this equipping of the saints, when each person is working properly in love.

But what the passage doesn't tell us is what this equipping is, what lessons are taught. What should our leaders be teaching us? What do we need to be learning to equip us for the service that Jesus has for us to do?

And this is what I would like for us to begin to explore today.

So, what might equipping the saints look like?

Looking at some of the Apostles' teachings let's try to get an idea at what this may be. Taking my cues from the scripture, here are some ideas of what I think should be included in the equipping of the saints. It's not exhaustive nor necessarily authoritative, but hopefully it will give us a good starting point for building a curriculum for equipping the saints.

Beginning with Paul in the same letter, Ephesians, two chapters before his mentioning the equipping of the saints, Paul in telling the Jewish and Gentile believers that Gentiles too are now part of the family of God, says,

In Ephesians 2:17-22 (ESV)

*And [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**, ²⁰ **built on the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the **cornerstone**, ²¹ in whom the **whole structure**, being **joined together**, grows into **a holy temple in the Lord**. ²² In him you also are being **built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit**.*

Look at verses 19 & 20, ..."members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"

The household of God is built. It has a foundation. The foundation is the apostles, prophets and Jesus Himself being the cornerstone of that foundation.

Notice verse 21, the household of God is referenced as "the whole structure." And see if this doesn't sound familiar: "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple..."

Ephesians 4:16, (In equipping the saints) ...the whole body, joined and [held (ESV)] together... makes the body grow... (There's a connection between these two passages)

And in Ephesians 2:22, In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Look at these terms: *Household of God, structure, foundation, cornerstone, built, holy temple, dwelling place*

Paul is using building construction terms to express our individual grow, and the growth of the church — through the equipping of the saints. *The household of God, **built** on the foundation...*

So, let's follow his lead. And be thinking, how is this metaphor relevant to equipping the saints. And let me suggest that the metaphor is a blueprint, a design plan, a model, or template for building God's house, Jesus' church. A plan for us to follow.

Paul directs us to the "building" metaphor

In Ephesians 2:19,20, identifying **the foundation** as the "apostles and prophets," and Jesus as the "**cornerstone**."

So, when a construction company builds a large superstructure they don't just lay the foundation upon the soil. And they don't just dig down a little bit and lay the foundation upon clay. They search for bedrock upon which to lay the foundation. They look for...

The Rock

Jesus asked his apostles who they thought He was, recorded in...

Matthew 16:16-18 (NIV)

*Simon Peter **answered**, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for **this (what's this? Peter's answer) for this** was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on **this (what's this? Peter's answer) rock I will build my church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it...*

Peter's **confession** identifies Jesus as the Messiah/the Christ, the Son of God.

And Jesus says, "*I will build My church*" on this truth. Paul tells us to lay hold of eternal life (*the good confession, that we confessed*) in 1 Timothy and that even Jesus before Pontius Pilot made **the good confession**.

1 Timothy 6:12-13 (ESV)

*Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made **the good confession** in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, **who in his testimony** before Pontius Pilate **made the good confession**,*

The account of Jesus before Pontius Pilate is found in:

John 18:33-37 (ESV)

*So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?"³⁶ Jesus answered, "**My kingdom** is not of this world. If **my kingdom** were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But **my kingdom** is not from the world."³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "**So you are a king?**" Jesus answered, "You say that **I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.**"*

Jesus says, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth." In this context with Pontius Pilate, Jesus came to bear witness (ie testify), then, to *what* truth? Pilate had asked him if he was a king. Jesus then made multiple references about "**my**" **kingdom**, implying that He was a King. Pilate responds, "So you are a King."

The most important truth on which all of Christianity lies is: Jesus IS the Christ (ie the anointed King), the Son of God. And not that Simon Bar Jonah's name was changed to Peter! Who would make **that** "the rock" on which all of Christianity rests?!

Paul will later call Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords in 1 Tim 6:15 as does John in Revelation 17:14.

By the way, if the Rock is the truth that Jesus IS the Messiah/the Christ, the Son of God then that means that the Rock IS Jesus! Jesus is the Rock that the foundation lies on.

However, not only is Jesus the Rock on which the foundation of Christianity lies, but He is also the next building construction term...

The Chief Cornerstone

According to NewStudio Architecture regarding Architectural Cornerstones:

In relation to architecture, a cornerstone is traditionally the first stone laid for a structure, with all other stones laid in reference. A cornerstone marks the geographical location by orienting a building in a specific direction...

In Ephesians 2:19,20, Paul says,

*... **you are... members of the household of God,**²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,***

Jesus IS the cornerstone that He lays in building His church.

There is a familiar verse from the Psalms, there's even a song about it. Perhaps you've heard of it...

*This is the day that the LORD has made
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

You've heard it, we've sung it. Here is the context of that verse.

The Psalmist says in the 118th Psalm, verses 21-24 (ESV)

*I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*

²² *The **stone** that the builders rejected
has become **the cornerstone**.*

²³ *This is the LORD'S doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.*

²⁴ *This is the day that the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Did you know that that verse was in reference to Jesus building His church? When Jesus became the cornerstone!

There are other scriptures that identify Jesus as the cornerstone:

- Luke 20 - In the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, beginning in verse 9, Jesus says,...

An owner of a vineyard let out his vineyard to tenants then he goes away for a long while. When the time came he sent a servant to the tenants so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. This happened three times...

And in Luke 20:13-18 (ESV), Jesus continues:

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" ¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written:

"'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?" ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

- Another reference is found in Acts 4 - Peter is arrested in Jerusalem and he preaches to the High Priest and his family! They asked Him to explain Himself...

Acts 4:11-12 (ESV)

*This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the **cornerstone**. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Peter reveals the consequences of Jesus being the cornerstone... no other name... given by which we must be saved.

Years later Peter will reference Jesus once again as the stone, but this time as the living stone and he references Christians in the likeness of living stones being built... using that building metaphor for the maturing of Christians...

1 Peter 2:4-10 (NIV)

As you come to him, **the living Stone** —rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—⁵ you also, **like living stones**, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For in Scripture it says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious **cornerstone**,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.”*

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
*“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”*

⁸ and,

*“A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.⁹ But you are "**a chosen people**", a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.¹⁰ **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.***

These first two steps in the building construction metaphor are ALL about Jesus. This metaphor is directly related to the equipping of the saints. Jesus built His church on the rock, the truth, that He is the Messiah of the old testament and the Christ of the new testament and that He is the Son of God. And Jesus is the cornerstone, the stone laid on the Rock that orients and gives direction to the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The leaders that Jesus gave the church are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith **and of the knowledge of the Son of God**, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (Ephesians 4:12-13 (ESV))

Perhaps Peter helps us understand what our service might be:

*"You also **like living stones**, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5)*

That's our lesson for this morning. In part 2 we will continue examining the building metaphor by looking at some of the foundation laid down by the apostles and prophets. We will also discover, I believe, that we are to build on top of that foundation. What are we to build? Whatever we build Paul cautions us to "take heed how you build."