

Equipping of the Saints

Realizing Equipped Saints, Part 2

Introduction

Recently we looked at Del Tackett's, "Seven Threats of Our Time" series, where we learned that God has possibly turned our culture over to a "depraved mind" as described in Romans 1:18 and following. And we wondered, how do we engage a culture who has lost its collective mind. We learned that we must be aware of what's happening in our time so that we could understand the times in which we live and then possibly, with God's help, know what to do and how to engage our culture.

We began studying the passage where the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus has given us leadership to equip us for works of service specifically to guard against these threats from our culture. He says it this way in...

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

Vss 11,12

And He Himself (ie. 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,

Jesus gave us leaders to equip us for to be of service, and our service will build up the body of Christ.

Vs 13

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

Why are we to be equipped? One major reason is to protect us from our culture.

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)],

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)]

As we mentioned before, 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?

So, what might equipping the saints look like?

We looked at Paul's teaching in Ephesians just two chapters before his mentioning the equipping of the saints, in that same letter. 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.*

We noticed Paul using building construction terms like: *structure, foundation, cornerstone, built, holy temple, dwelling place, Household of God*

Paul directs us to the "building" metaphor

He applied these terms to express the growth of the church in Ephesians 2:19,20, identifying **the foundation** as the "apostles and prophets," and Jesus as the "**cornerstone**."

And as was mentioned in our 2nd scripture reading in...

1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV),

"For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ",

we learn that you lay a foundation and therefore, a foundation is laid upon something.

Jesus, Himself, tells us that we can build our house upon the rock, which He says is a, "wise," thing to do because, He says, the house will not fall since it was founded on the rock. Or we can build our house upon the sand which He says is a, "foolish," thing to do because the house will fall and it will be a great fall (Matthew 7:24-28).

So, The Rock,

Jesus identifies as Peter's confession, in Matthew 16:16-18, that Jesus is the Messiah/the Christ and that He is the Son of God. The Rock upon which, "I will build My church." vs 18.

It's the same confession that we make today when we are baptized into Christ.

Previously we talked about Jesus being the rock upon which the foundation of Christianity is laid. If you want to learn more about that, the sermon recording and notes are on the Education page of our website in the *Sermon & Notes* section. The sermon & notes from May 5th, 2024, entitled "Realizing Equipped Saints."

However, we noted, 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 upon the Rock in building His church.

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))

In part 2 we continue by examining the Foundation

by looking at some of the apostles' and prophets' writings. We will also discover, I believe, that we are to build on top of that foundation. What are we to build? We will cover that in our next Sunday morning lesson. But, whatever we build, Paul cautions us to "take heed how you build." (1 Corinthians 3:12-16)

But, right now, let's inspect the Foundation

Paul tells us it is the Apostles and Prophets that lay down the foundation. (Ephesians 2:20)

- Now understanding that scripture is not of private interpretation, as Peter says in,

2 Peter 1:20-21 (ESV), says,

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

We have men who spoke from God, Peter says, carried along by the Holy Spirit. It wasn't the will of the apostles and prophets that they spoke. Whatever they spoke was from God.

Jesus, who, Hebrews 3:1 tells us, is also an apostle, "the apostle (and high priest) of our confession," says, he only spoke what the Father told him. Remember? Jesus says in,

John 12:49-50 (ESV)

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.”

So, what does it mean when Paul says [we] are..., ²⁰ **built** on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2:19,20? Well, one idea is that we can find the foundation of Christianity written about in the writings of the apostles and prophets as they were carried by the Holy Spirit. Now this is very interesting because we might expect to find the foundations of Christianity in the writings of the apostles, but here we are specifically told that we can find the foundations of Christ in the prophets also! That means we can find the foundations of Christianity in the Old Testament too! Just as, with Jim's studies that he presented where we learned about Christ in the Old Testament. We are "Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

- Note that the foundation is aligned to the cornerstone (ie Jesus)

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 gives the foundation its direction, its alignment and while the cornerstone is a very special piece in the foundation, it is also a piece OF the foundation. So we can find Jesus in all aspects of the foundational construction of the church. The foundation can be found in his teachings in the gospels too. That's why Paul will tell the Corinthians in

1 Corinthians 3:11 (ESV)

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which IS Jesus Christ.

So, Jesus Christ IS the foundation too. He is the Rock, the cornerstone and the foundation.

Jesus, as a human, one of his own creation, is the only human who has ever lived, who could accurately say, in all honesty, "It's all about me."

As we continue to look at the foundation of the apostles and prophets we especially want to keep in perspective that we are trying to determine what content in their writings would be what the leaders of the church, including the writings of the apostles and prophets as part of that leadership, that equips the saints.

So that it can be true for us today also, BTW, when Paul tells us, "And he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, shepherds and teachers to equip the saints...". We ARE led and equipped by the apostles and prophets, today too! Through their writings.

Next note that the Gospel has beginner and mature material

This is a topic that the scripture mentions that I haven't really seen mentioned in bible class material. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's thought to be too insignificant a point, or too incidental or of no consequence. As if, it doesn't matter whether or not you know the Bible has basic principles teachings and teachings for the mature in Christ. Or, maybe I just haven't seen enough bible class materials, but...

Peter, the writer of Hebrews, and Paul all mention that there is "milk" for infants and "solid food (or meat some translations say)" for the mature in Christ.

- Peter, in his 1st letter is encouraging Christians at a time when the Christian persecutions have begun. People were suffering for their faith. He told them that this testing would show the genuineness of their faith and that they may obtain the outcome of their faith, the salvation of their souls. He exhorted them to be holy because God is holy and he quoted from Leviticus (11:44) where God said, "Be holy for I am holy." He reminded them that they were born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable.

He says in,

1 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Peter has just told them to, *Put away all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander*. Paul will tell the Corinthians that their jealousy and strife were signs that they were immature Christians, as we will see soon. Peter dealing with his readers having those characteristics tells them to be...

- like *newborn infants*. Newborn infants need milk, they cannot digest solid food.
 - long for pure spiritual milk, not the adulterated stuff. No commentaries, get straight from the word nourishment. It is necessary as new Christians to get spiritual nourishment from the "pure spiritual milk" so that we may grow up, notice it says, into salvation.
- Paul says when he first came to Corinth that he had to limit what he could teach them and had to teach them as worldly, not spiritual, people because they weren't ready to receive his message, in

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (ESV)

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

In fact, to the Romans, Paul will say there is a difference between spiritual and fleshly (or worldly) people and that not only are fleshly minded people hostile to, and do not submit to God, but he says, and I emphasize, **THEY CANNOT SUBMIT** to God. It seems worldly people cannot discern spiritual things, in...

Romans 8:5-8 (ESV), Paul says

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; **indeed, it cannot.** ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

- We must be fed on the "pure spiritual milk" of the word and be grounded in the basic principles BEFORE we can digest the "solid food" for the mature in Christ. The writer of Hebrews also makes that case in a chastisement to his readers in...

Hebrews 5:11-14 (ESV)

*About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again **the basic principles** of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,¹³ for **everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness**, since he is a child.¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

So what are the "elementary principles/milk" and what is "solid food"?

Hebrews identifies six elementary (foundational) doctrines

Hebrews 6:1-3 (ESV)

*Therefore let us leave **the elementary doctrine of Christ** and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of **faith** toward God,² and of instruction about [baptisms], the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.³ And this we will do if God permits.*

The Hebrew writer calls these six topics **foundational** when he is exhorting his readers to move on from the elementary doctrines, he says, "not laying again a foundation of..." and then lists the six topics. Doing a topical study on these six then is a good place to start to start laying the foundation of your spiritual house.

Notice how often the building metaphor is used in learning about Christ and his church.

Laying the foundation involves studying Jesus' human & spiritual ancestry

Paul gives what I call a synopsis of the Gospel he preached in his letter to the Romans.

When we say his gospel, of course, what is meant there is **Paul's presentation of the gospel of Christ**, since he does, in every translation I checked, refer to the gospel he preached as "**my gospel**" in,

Romans 2:16 (ESV)

*on that day when, according to **my gospel**, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

He mentions Jesus' human ancestry being the son of David and his spiritual ancestry being the Son of God.

Paul starts the letter in chapter one talking about the: 1) The gospel of God, 2) promised beforehand through **the prophets** IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES (here we have mentioned the foundation about Christ can be found in the Old Testament) 3) concerning God's Son, descended from David, according to the flesh 4) and declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,... (Romans 1:1-4)

Paul's gospel contains "milk" and also contains "solid food"

(He mentions all six of the elementary doctrines identified in Hebrews in his letter to the Romans)

1. Repentance [from dead works], Romans 2:4
2. (An obedient) Faith [toward God], Romans 1:5;
And Abraham's faith in Romans 4:1-25
3. [Instruction about] Baptism[s], Romans 6:1-10
4. [Laying on of hands], Romans 1:11,
When he talks about his desire to "impart to [the Romans] some spiritual gift"
5. Resurrection [from] the dead, Romans 1:4
6. Eternal Judgment, Romans 2:1-8

Paul's introduces us in the 1st chapter of Romans, his gospel, to "solid food" also, he says in verse 17: *"for in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed."* Hebrews tells us that if we only know the "milk" then we are unacquainted with **the doctrine of righteousness**. Righteousness is "solid food" for the mature. (Hebrews 5:13,14)

Laying the foundation involves moving on to maturity feeding on "solid food."

As we'll see tonight, The doctrine of righteousness identifies our "justification" and how we become "righteous."

Remember what we're doing here is looking how we can equip the saints and we're using this instruction of the building metaphor we've found in the scriptures to guide us on this quest.

And we are...

Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)

... 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.