

Equipping of the Saints

Realizing Equipped Saints, Part 3

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)

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

Which directed us to investigate this "building metaphor."

Jesus is the Rock on which the foundation rests

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).

Which is 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.

Jesus is also: The Chief Cornerstone

The cornerstone orients and gives direction to the foundation

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.

In part 2 we began examining the Foundation

by looking at some of the apostles' and prophets' writings. Because 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. 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.

Here we are specifically told that we can find the foundations of Christ in the prophets! That means we can find the foundations of Christianity in the Old Testament too!

Jesus as the chief cornerstone 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.

Next we noted that the Gospel has beginner and mature material

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, tells his readers 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.

- 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, (see Romans 8:5-8)

- 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.*

Laying the foundation involves studying Jesus' human & spiritual ancestry

Paul in his letter to the Romans makes reference to the gospel as "my gospel." And, of course, what is meant there is **Paul's presentation of the gospel of Christ**. As he does in...

Romans 2:16 (ESV)

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

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 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)

Now, in part 3, before we go on

I'd like to ask, "What makes something "milk" and something "solid food"?"

Why does the bible make a distinction between milk & solid food? It seems today we don't even notice that it even mentions this point.

Paul and the writer of Hebrews plainly tells us that they couldn't discuss certain things with their audience because they were "dull", Heb 5:11, says and Paul says the Corinthians weren't ready for his message so he fed them "milk." Paul makes a distinction between "fleshly" and "spiritual" people.

Some information in the scripture isn't suitable for fleshly people. Perhaps they wouldn't be able to appreciate the message and we might be casting our pearls before swine as Jesus says in the sermon on the mount:

Matthew 7:6 (ESV)

"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you."

Let me suggest to you, and this is my opinion, what the difference is between a teaching that is a basic principle, "milk" and "solid food" for the mature.

When instructing an infant (or juvenile) a small child they don't have the capacity for much logic. They aren't emotionally mature, they are immature and can't fathom many times the seriousness or consequences of their actions. So, we instruct them with true basic commands that do not rely on logic but on a command.

When a child asks "why" they can't appreciate a deep logical response. Not understanding they continue to ask, "why", until we finally have to end the discussion with: "because I said so." Another way of saying that is, "because it's a command" or biblically speaking we could say, as is said in the Old Testament, "Thus says the Lord." ... and tell me that isn't God saying, "because I said so!" That's why basic principles are needed, for the immature.

For the mature, and Hebrews tells us HOW we mature in

Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)

*But solid food is for the mature, for those **who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.***

It's through practicing the basic principles and living our lives through faith in the word and DOING what it says that we learn and mature in Christ.

For the mature, God can give us logic, he can let us in on his motivation for doing what he did and does.

If we have matured by constantly practicing the basic principles then we won't be confused into thinking that his motivation for saving us replaces what basic principles we must do to be saved.

An example:

Baptism is a basic principle. That's not my opinion, Hebrews tells me so, in Hebrews 6:2. Acts 2:38, and other scripture that says it's necessary for salvation. Why? God responds in essence, "Because I said so." No other rationale given, unless you count, "and wash away your sins." (Acts 22:16)

Baptism is also "solid food." In Romans 6:1-10, Paul tells us that baptism isn't just getting wet. It's not an outward sign of an inward... whatever. In baptism, Paul says, "don't you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" He goes on to say by baptism we have died with Jesus, in vs 6 he says we were crucified with him. We were buried with him, vs 4, for if we've been united with him in a death like his, we certainly shall be united with him in a resurrection like his vs5.

Laying the foundation involves moving on

to maturity feeding on "solid food."

Certainly, our study of Romans and Hebrews turned out to be really meaty. Jim's study on Jesus in the old testament and the angel of the Lord we're very meaty

I'm not saying I have all the answers as to what needs to be taught to equip us for the service Jesus wants us to do. We all need to be involved in this process. We can not expect God to send people our way if weren't not going to service their needs and equip them to serve also. We don't do service because, frankly I believe, we don't know what to do.

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.

I do know this whole equipping begins with building a foundation, a complete foundation. So that we can begin to build on it. No one is going to think we're very good architects or contractors or builders if all we do is plow down foundations. We need to learn how to build on top of that one foundation that is Jesus Christ. We need to learn how to build holy temples. We need to learn how to be a holy temple to the Lord, who lives in us.

So, I'm asking all of us to put some effort into thinking about this building project. To committing to being part of this building project. When we study, study with a mind of looking for clues to building holy temples.

I'm thinking Del Tackett has made some headway here. I believe his "Truth Project" and "Engagement Project" are structures to build on top of the foundation that is Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV), And we are...

... 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.