

## Gifted: You Have Edifying Gifts!

A sermon based on Ephesians 4:11-16, ***“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> 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.***

***<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are you surprised? Here, already a month and a half into the new year, and our government still doesn't have a fully functioning budget. The levels of dysfunction on Capitol Hill feel like they're at an all-time high...like a bunch of immature toddlers, stomping their feet because they're not getting their way.

And at the heart of this immature dysfunction is the wall, right? Some see it as a waste of taxpayer dollars and as a harmful deterrent to immigration and to those seeking the American dream. To others, it seems like a no-brainer, let's build this wall to ensure the safety of our citizens. No matter what side you fall on, the point is clear...our leaders are not on the same page...at all.

Are you getting tired of hearing all about...the wall? Feel like we're beating a dead horse here? I mean, this is nothing like what we've been studying in the book of Nehemiah, coincidentally, the building of a wall...in Jerusalem. Everyone there, though, was on the same page, ready to work together towards the same goal, and what were the results? They rebuilt a wall 40 feet high, 8 feet thick, almost 2.5 miles in length...in 52 days. That's the way it's supposed to work.

Well friends, in a similar fashion, are you getting tired of hearing here all this talk about spiritual gifts? I hope not, but I can see how that might be happening. Every week, it's been God's given you spiritual gifts, God wants you to use your spiritual gifts. And just the other week, we saw how that did work with the early New Testament church, with God's people being committed to being the church and using their gifts in the church.

Yet, I'll admit, while we have that awesome picture of success, being hit with the same message over and over again can be a bit overbearing. So, let's spend some time this morning making sure we're on the same page when it comes to our spiritual gifts by talking about why we have them and how we will use them...our edifying gifts.

It starts with me, and my part. Paul says, ***“Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors (that's me) and teachers, to equip his people for works of service...”***

So, my role? God has made me your shepherd who feeds and protects the flock, as well as searches out the lost and straying. I'm your enabler, as I fill you up with the food of God's Word, preparing you with the energy you need to go and be God's people of service. I'm your encourager, your cheerleader, your number one fan...the one continually reminding you of the love of Christ – the ultimate motivating factor in using your gifts for works of service to God.

But it doesn't stop with me, does it? You're being prepared for service-work, which means you have a role and a goal, which Paul says is, ***“that the body of Christ may be built up.”*** Hopefully, for you, that harkens back a few weeks ago to when we talked about using our gifts as part of the body of Christ to build up the body of Christ. But Paul goes on, ***“that the body of Christ may be built up 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.”***

So, our goal is that 1) we reach unity in our knowing Christ and believing in him, 2) that we are becoming mature – spiritually mature – and seeking to help others reach maturity as well, and then 3) we reach the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Do you know what that means? Another way of saying it would be “until we reach Christ's stature,” which is what? Perfection, which you know isn't attainable here, but that doesn't stop us from striving towards that goal.

All three of those goals, do you see the connecting feature? God, who desires us to be on the same page, is looking for growth...growth in your, growth in your faith in Jesus, growth in the use of your gifts for Jesus as you use them to help others grow in the same way.

Is he seeing that?

Before we look at you, it would only be fair to hold me under the microscope...because, again, it starts with me. If my role is to equip you for works of service to God and his people here, have I don't that? What do you think?

Of course I haven't been perfect. Have I done all I could to help you to recognize your spiritual gifts and realize your potential in using them? No. Have I presented you with opportunities to use those gifts here? Not always. Have I encouraged you to grow in your maturity and your relationship with Jesus through staying regularly connected to the Means of Grace – the gospel in the Word and the Sacraments? Not as well as I could. Have I been content with a smaller percentage of our membership being serious about their faith lives – that is, spending the dedicated time studying God's Word and expressing that faith through their service work...have I been content with that because things here were still working? Unfortunately, yes, for too long. Being your enabler and encourager...I haven't always done the best. And I'm sorry.

But again, it doesn't stop with me. Time for your confession. Again, if God is looking for growth, is he seeing it with you?

Well, let's compare ourselves to Paul's stated goals. Reaching unity in knowing Christ and believing in him...I'd like to think we're on the same page there.

Becoming and being spiritually mature, and then seeking to help other reach that maturity as well. Is that how you would describe yourself, spiritually mature? Because to me, spiritual maturity is 1)

knowing what God wants (which being in his Word regularly helps us there) and 2) doing what God wants.

Now, of course, we don't have the time to pour over every aspect of your life, so maybe allow for just a couple of pointed questions. Is the Sunday sermon (and, as an extension, the rest of Sunday worship) all you're getting for the week in terms of spiritual nourishment. Is this the only time you're connected to God's Word? If it is, is that cutting it? Is that spiritually mature to God?

A few minutes ago, the choir sang, **"I want to walk as a child of the light, I want to follow Jesus."** We started out our worship by singing, **"I long to be like Jesus: meek, loving, lowly, mild."** In my prayer before worship, I ask God, "In everything I think, everything I say, everything I do, may I give glory to you." Is that what you're striving for...to walk as a child of the light, to be like Jesus, to give glory to God in everything? In everything...not just when you're here at church, but when you're out there as well, during the week. Or are those just words that come out of your mouth with absolutely no intent on actually doing what they say?

If you're recognizing your spiritual gifts and are being presented with opportunities to use them here, are you grabbing hold of those opportunities? Are you letting them pass by? Is that spiritual maturity?

Are you concerned about helping your fellow Christian to reach spiritual maturity? Or, when you see them doing something or hear them saying something you're pretty sure God wouldn't approve of, do you turn a blind eye? Do you support it? Do you join in?

Or, Paul's third stated goal...reaching the stature of Christ, which is, again, perfection. If you're having trouble being spiritually mature, you know you, as well I, have fallen far short. Is the growth God wants really there?

Why is that such a big deal? Well, Paul points out there is a dark side, yes, a real danger, in not growing up spiritually.

People who don't grow spiritually through diligent use of Word and sacrament remain infants, despite their chronological age. With no doctrinal base, they're helpless because they have nothing firm to hang on to. Paul likens them to people in a rowboat out on the high seas during a fierce gale. They're swept around **"by every wind of teaching."**

Or, to change the picture a bit, spiritually immature people are like unsophisticated buyers being "worked" by a slick salesperson. Because they don't know the product, they're taken in **"by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming."** Without knowing it, immature Christians may not be getting pure doctrine or correct teaching. They may be accepting spiritual snake oil from false teachers.

Is that you? Could that become you? You see, friends, all this, your spiritual gifts, your very life, God intends for all this to be edifying...designed to build up – and really, mature - the body of Christ. Are we there yet? Honestly, no.

So does that mean we are doomed to be thrown off the boat of God's family and drown eternally or to be won over completely by the salesperson of sin and unbelief with no refund? While we've earned that, and while the danger is very real and very much there, the answer is no...no, we're not doomed.

And it's because of Christ, again, the head of this body. The fullness, the perfection God wants us to grow towards and reach...Jesus had it. The spiritual maturity we lack, Jesus didn't. Everything he said and everything he did was in line with God's Word and did give glory to God.

Where God has made me your shepherd to build you up and I've failed at times, Jesus didn't. He's the Good Shepherd who laid down his perfect life on the altar of the cross in order to lift you and me out of the depths of hell. And his sacrifice – and the good news of his sacrifice – continues to feed us with what we need the most....forgiveness for our sinful failures to be at the level of maturity he wants.

And to guarantee our place, not just as part of his body here, but also as part of his eternal family, Jesus rose. Because Jesus lives again, even if we don't fully reach his stature and peak spiritual maturity (which we won't), we still have heaven. We will live with him forever.

Do you appreciate how incredible of a gift that is? I hope, I pray you do. Because it's only the grace of God that could take spiritually immature believers like us and make us part of the most perfect family there is. It's only through Jesus and his Word that real growth and improvement in this family here – in this church – can take place. Only connected to him will edification – the building of our own souls and the building up of each other – take place.

Which means we want to be maturing spiritually ourselves. And that's easy. Surround yourself with God's Word. Don't be content with buffet of God's Word offered here, but crave it and feast on it throughout the week!

It also means we want to be practicing spiritual maturity. Do you know what that looks like? Like if I know I'm in a place or in a situation...or if I'm watching or reading something that I know is going to be tempting me to sin and I'm not strong enough to say no, get away. Stay away!

Or, if what I'm about to do is going to give others the wrong impression, as in, not being a reflection of Jesus, don't do it. Walk as a light instead.

If what I'm doing isn't giving glory to God, stop it. Maybe even get someone else to hold me accountable if I can't control it myself.

And finally, I can use my spiritual maturity to help edify others – to help build them up in this family. If I hear someone who is saying something inappropriate, if I see someone doing something I know God wouldn't approve of, I will speak the truth in love (remember, sometimes, having to reprimand them, that's still love...it's tough love).

The use of those gifts is what builds this family up in love and, again, gives glory to Jesus, the head.

You know, here, we're not building a wall, but we are building up the body of Christ. We haven't always been, we aren't always on the same page when it comes to using our gifts in a spiritually mature way to love and edify each other. Thank God for Christ as the love head who forgives, though. But don't stop there. We won't. Let's be on the same page. Let's follow the lead of the head, our Light, Christ. Let's speak the truth in love. Let's love with our spiritual gifts. That's truly edifying! Amen.

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