

Intro: Ephesians theme: “All Things Together Under Christ”

The ultimate reconciliation of God has begun in the Church through Jesus, the Christ. Having been brought from condemnation into sonship through His blood, He is now reconciling us to each other as the Holy Spirit transforms the way that we see the world and see ourselves through the Gospel of grace. When Paul left Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 20:17-38, he exhorted the elders to remain true to the Word of grace, for many false teachers would arise to try and steer them away from the truth. The same is true in our age today. There are many half-truths and cultural teachers that will try to deceive and draw away the followers of Christ to ruin and destruction. For its defense and care God has given specific gifted persons to the Church in order to keep us centered on and anchored to His revealed Word, so that when these winds of changing doctrine come we can stand sure and immovable upon the Rock of Truth, the revealed Word of God.

I am convinced that many of the problems that we face today in our culture is owing to the fact that Christians do not functionally believe the Word of God and experience its authority in the midst of interpersonal, relational, and supernatural community the way that the Scriptures exhort us to. Psychological issues, marriages collapsing, self-loathing, uncontrolled lusts, financial breakdown, loneliness, addictions, fears, anxieties – an epidemic of emotional and psychological brokenness – are symptoms of an organic flaw in the way that we experience life in Christ.

Most of us view life in Christ as an independent function of personal liberty. We got to church on Sunday for the worship service and call it good. A smaller group may add a Bible study or a class during the week where there is very little actual interpersonal service. Now, please don't understand me to say that I don't appreciate or count it as very valuable to worship corporately together and to hear the proclaimed Word. That is one of the things that I do! However, if listening to the Word and going to class is all that there is in our living life together, then we have missed the design of the church given to us by God. We need to be applying the Truth to our lives – together. We need to be exhorting and encouraging each other daily to see Jesus, to know Him as revealed in the Word, to come under His authority and protection in the way that view others and view ourselves, as the Father brings all things together under Him.

This is why home groups and small groups are not merely important for the life of Christians, but are vital and necessary. It is only in these small interpersonal and intimate settings that our self-deceptions and our sins become clear. You can hide in the large gathering of Sunday morning, but it's the small group where the Word is being served in an interpersonal setting of service that the Holy Spirit uses to challenge, encourage, and transform His people.

Now, when I say home groups I am implying home groups that are centered on and submissive to the revealed Word of God as the authority of Truth and the revealer of how we are to be believing, thinking, and behaving. Proper orthodoxy leads to proper orthopraxy (right believing leads to right living). Are we too quick, as believers, to turn to secular psychology to heal our woes? What does a secular counselor do, anyway? Don't they 1) listen in an interpersonal setting, 2) gather in groups with others who struggle in a similar fashion for support, and 3) dole out medication. Now, apart from the medication (which may be necessary) aren't the first two what the church is organically built up to do together!! Before running to counselors, do we lay ourselves bare before our brothers and sisters in a setting where the Word of Christ can exhort us, encourage us, and build us up? I am convinced that if we are to be brought together in reconciliation, with great emotional and psychological healing in the Church, then it will be due to the fact that we are serving each other on an interpersonal level, with the power of the Word of God, together, and that this is the way that the Body of Christ has been created to function. And this is the goal of which I, and others among you, have been gifted to see happen: to retool your lives with the Word of God in order that you may serve one another and raise each other up in the holiness of the Gospel, the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, until we come of age together – into the image of Jesus Christ.

1. God Has Given Some to Retool His People with the Word

"equipping" from *καταρτισμον* (prepare, perfect, set in order, *hapax legomena*)

- It is a word that implies bringing something together so that it functions as it is made to function. Those gifted with these ministries of the Word are to prepare the saints for service and for the construction of the body of Christ. They are give them the tools, guide them in the work, direct the construction according to the way of the Lord

These gifts of equipping are all related to the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ

Apostle:	emissary of Jesus to bring His message accurately
Prophet:	the application of God's revealed Word to current situation
Evangelist:	the proclamation and appeal of the Gospel , i.e. Jesus
Pastor-Teacher:	the care, nurture, and feeding of the flock to know and walk in-line with the revealed Gospel of Christ, through His revealed Word

“Apostle” is set apart from the following three in the language (*μειν* article) indicating that as a gift it has been completed with the original apostles and no longer exists. The other three all describe differing functions of the same purpose: the proclamation, teaching, and application of the Word (Gospel).

Say something about our culture’s teachings on "knowledge" (uncertainty and mystery as valuable vs. certainty and knowledge). Experience reigns over reason, self-determined “truth” is more viable than exclusive truth; “spirituality” is good, “right” is not; the journey is what is important, not the destination; humility is defined as not taking a stand; the mystery of the Real is so big that we cannot know it and therefore shouldn’t proclaim it as authoritative for ourselves or for others

Calvin states to the “emerging” Christians in his day: “but they contend that it is a matter of rash presumption for us to claim an undoubted knowledge of God’s will. Now I would concede that point to them only if we took upon ourselves to subject God’s incomprehensible plan to our slender understanding. But when we simply say with Paul: ‘we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is from God...’ by whose teaching ‘we know the gifts bestowed on us by God’ [1 Cor 2:12], how can they yelp against us without abusively assaulting the Holy Spirit? But if it is a dreadful sacrilege to accuse the revelation given by the Spirit either of falsehood or uncertainty or ambiguity, how do we transgress in declaring its certainty?”

Chesterton also wrote that we suffer “humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition...and settled upon the organ of conviction, where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.”

The fact is that Paul definitely understood that God was not *exhaustively or comprehensively* fathomable (Rom 11:33-36). However, this did not keep him from exhorting his fellow Jews about their “zeal without knowledge” and for his prayers that the saints would “know the love of Christ” (Eph 3:19) and be built up in the “knowledge of the Son of God.” Just because God is not comprehensively known does not imply that God cannot be known at all. Since He has revealed Himself (assuming that God can communicate in human language and make Himself known) we can know something concerning Him and about ourselves.

We must place ourselves under the authority of the Truth *that has been revealed by God*, not merely discovered by us. We can know God and things about God because He has revealed Himself to us by His own volition and power “with full conviction” (1 Thess 1:5) by His very Spirit, the Holy One.

"of the saints" - the preparation worked by those gifted in these four ways are for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Not for the world, but for the saints (2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1)

Bob Deffinbaugh: “Evangelists proclaim the gospel defined by the apostles and prophets. They are the obstetricians of the faith. And pastor-teachers are the pediatricians. All Christian ministry is dependent upon the operation of these gifts.”

Learn to see your leaders, those gifted in the Word, as for your good, as bringing to you the most treasured thing: the very Word of God. If you are gifted in one of these equipping gifts, then use it with the fearful awe of the truth that you are handling the Word of God for the welfare of the Fiancee of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The church needs people who, in listening to their pastor, listen for the message of Christ, and pastors who, in laboring among the people, look for the image of Christ. Only when pastor and people thus keep their eyes on Christ will their mutual relations keep healthy, profitable and pleasing to almighty God.” ~John Stott

2. God’s Word is for the Raising Up of the Church in Service

"for the work of service"

Are you asking: “What is my gifting?” Here’s a better question: “Where can I serve with joy?” How can I carry my brother’s burden? What promise from Scripture does my sister need to see to meet her anxiety and fear right now? How has my friend lost sight of the gospel?

These are the questions that matter. Trying to fit your “gift” into a list or a temperament analysis will do you no good. The gifts are used for serving each other. That is the goal, so get busy in reaching the goal and take heart knowing that God is among you and has given you ALL the resources and strength in His revelation of Himself in His Word by His powerful Holy Spirit.

Gifts are used for serving each other in the ways following and the purposes listed in the following verses.

"for the building up (noun, construction) of the body of Christ"

Jesus is the Master Architect, the Chief Contractor, the Owner, the Boss
He is the one who has the right to prescribe in what manner His Church is to be built up. His Word is the blueprint and His Spirit gives the resources for the building up of the Church into full maturity.

If we are being built up in "the faith", do we define this faith by Scripture alone or by what our culture says that faith should look like?

If we are being built up in the knowledge of the Son of God, do we permit the Son of God to define Himself by revealing Himself through His Word, or do we define who we think the Son of God *should* be?

If we are being built up into the fullness of the Christ, are looking into His Word for our understanding of His fullness, or are we presuming that His fullness is dictated by our wisdom?

3. The Church is Raised Up in Service for the Renown of Christ

“until we all might arrive”

God is bringing all things together under Christ

this term, “arrive” is often used in secular sources to the attainment of an inheritance
There is a destination to our journey, it is not merely about the journey or the conversation or the wandering. The difference between Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and the movement today of the emergent church is that Bunyan’s pilgrim was heading to Zion.

I have come from the City of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and I am going to the City of Zion. ~Christian (*Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan)

He had a destination toward which he strove and struggled and toiled. The emergent church has no destination, just a wandering meandering journey, which isn’t really progressive at all since there is no true progress.

"knowledge" is from *ἐπιγνωσις* and indicates a knowledge gained from inspection and particular attention paid to the object known.

Implies *content* of faith gained from inspection of the Real Object. It is seeing Jesus as He has been *revealed* by God in truth and accuracy.

Our culture likes spirituality, but not actual content of faith. One musician said, “In the music world, it is really cool to search for God. It’s not cool to find Him.”

“full stature” literally has to do with “coming of age”

again the focus is on the arrival, the destination, the completion of the time and its finality of arrival. The gifts of the Word are only needed until the Church “comes of age” and is wedded to its Bridegroom, Jesus. The purpose and desire of your pastor-teachers are to present us all before Christ on that day as having come of age.

4. So What?

- The blueprint of God bringing all things together under Christ is for the retooling of all the saints by those gifted in the Word.
 - We are all “retooled” by submitting to God’s revelation of Himself
 - This “retooling” is having our minds and spirits brought under the Headship of Jesus so that we serve one another in joy
 - The gifts of “equipping” are given so that we all would be under Christ and obediently and joyfully serving together with one purpose: the glory of the Christ, the head of the body.
- Jesus Christ is knowable because He has been revealed in history and shown to us by the Scriptures which are breathed by God and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.
 - We chase after knowing God through His revelation of Himself.
 - We submit our understanding of God to His revelation of Himself
 - This is our goal in the Church! Unified faith in the knowledge of the Son of God! This knowledge, gained from careful inspection of seeing Jesus raises us up into the stature of maturity. We come of age in the Kingdom together by knowing our Lord Jesus Christ, the One whom the Father is bringing all things together under.
- Are we structured this way?
 - Am I being changed by the Word of God through the Spirit of God in a deeper knowledge of the Son of God?
 - Am I being brought together with my brothers and sisters under the ministry of the Word? Are we “coming of age” together, being made blameless and holy in our presentation as the Bride of Christ? Are we growing in our knowledge (heart knowledge) of the Son of God?
 - Do we find our New Humanity in this Body of Christ or in the “healings” of the world? Am I being laid bare before my brothers and sisters and being brought together under Jesus?
- Home Groups
 - Am I involved with other believers often so that my whole life is coming into contact with their whole lives?
 - Are we encouraging one another with the Gospel? (1 Thess 5:11; Heb 3:13)
 - Are we exhorting one another daily, taking sin seriously (Heb 3:12-13), confessing our sins to each other? (James 5:16)
 - Are we bearing up each others’ burdens? (Gal 6:2)

Conclusion:

Hebrews 3:12-14 gives a great snapshot of what we are to be working and serving in each others’ lives:

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Notice that this word of God does not say, “Take care, *pastors*, lest there be...” It says, “Take care, *brothers*,...exhort *one another* every day.” Christ gives pastors to the church, pastors equip the saints for service, and you, O saints, serve each other with the exhortation of faith in Jesus through the revelation of the Word. In this manner you become God’s agents of preservation and holiness in the lives of each other, protecting each other from the hardening effects of sin and self-deception and unbelief. Take this statement to heart in all of its severity: *YOU* are responsible for the perseverance and holiness of your brothers and sisters. So, bear one another’s burdens, listen with compassion and love. Exhort one another with the truth,

encouraging in weakness and calling to repentance when the pride of sin is present. Do these things (and others) daily! This is how the Body of Christ is designed to function and it is the way in which we are all brought together under Christ into full maturity, the coming of age where Christ is imaged in us and glorified in all the earth. To God alone be the glory for the great things He has done! He is worthy of our praise, our service, our lives!