

UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT

PART 9: EPHESIANS 4:11-16

As I was preparing this lesson I reflected again on my role as your teacher.

Specifically, I thought about what it is that motivates me to prepare a lesson each week and then teach for 30 to 40 minutes on a Sunday morning.

What is my motivation? Why do I do this? I came to the conclusion that it is because I believe that knowing and applying the word of God is vitally important in the life of a church.

And I am privileged to be a part of doing that.

So, I praise the Lord that He has given me this opportunity.

I think that we really need as a church and as individuals to know what God's word says.

Second Timothy 3:16 says, *"All Scripture is breathed out [inspired] by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof [verbal rebuke], for correction, and for training in righteousness, [and here is why this is so important --] that the man [or woman] of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."*

So, that is my biblical job description -- to help you to grow up, to mature in your Christian faith by understanding the principles contained in God's word.

Last week I shared with you my vision for this church and for this class over the next two years.

My prayer (my vision) is that revival will break out;

that we (as a class and as a church) will completely submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit's leading.

That is my prayer, whatever that looks like. Now, a big part of that is getting into God's word and listening to the scriptures and then applying them to our lives.

I can only do my part. I promise to do the best I can.

But then after that, I trust the Holy Spirit to take it from there and to do the rest.

This morning as we continue our study in the book of Ephesians we are going to cover just these six verses, Ephesians Chapter 4 and verses 11 through 16. To set the stage for this lesson we actually need to go back what we covered last time, to verses 7 and 8. These verses are key to understanding this whole section.

Paul says, *"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift"* (Ephesians 4:7).

As we come to v 11, he will start laying out, describing, what Christ's gift to the church is.

Jesus has given us this gift to be used to build up the body of Christ.

That is what we will be looking at this morning.

In v 8 that we looked at last time, Paul is quoting scripture, Psalm 68. He is picturing Jesus (applying Him to this verse) as our conquering King.

“Therefore, it says, ‘When He [Jesus] ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men’” (Ephesians 4:8).

Paul in his day pictures a conquering Roman general or emperor (whoever was leading the conquest).

As they conquered a place they would carry home with them the spoils of battle.

Behind the conquering general would be his army and many of those would possibly have been prisoners of war of the enemy that had been released.

So, Paul describes in a spiritual sense what Jesus has done for us, His church. He has won the victory.

We, His subjects, His servants, praise and glorify Him for the victory He has won for us.

King Jesus has not only saved us but He gives us, His people, His church, something good that we need, a gift.

So, let’s find out more about that beginning in v 11...

READ Ephesians 4:11-14

In these verses Paul identifies the gift Jesus has given to the church.

God has gifted men and women whom He has called to carry out specific roles within the body of believers.

Paul mentions four of these here in v 11: apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd-teachers (in the Greek shepherd and teacher are combined into one word).

Why did Jesus GIVE us these gifted individuals? The answer is provided in v 12, *“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”*

If you have the KJV it says, *“For the perfecting of the saints.”*

The Greek word is *katartismos* which is better translated as *“equipping.”*

The ESV, the NIV and the NASB all say, *“to equip”* or *“equipping.”*

The perfecting or the equipping of the saints is work done by the Holy Spirit.

[It is] not that we (saints) eventually attain sinless perfection.

When we think of perfecting, that is the thought that comes to our mind, that we attain some kind of sinless perfection at some point.

No. Rather, the idea is that we mature in our faith. That is what you need to see.

These gifts, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers were not given by Jesus in order to increase numbers of church members.

Now, that could be a bi-product as people see God at work in a church and they want to be a part of that.

We may attract people and our church may grow in numbers.

In my opinion, we in the church often become obsessed with numbers.

We tend to use numbers as a measure of success in any particular area.

We were just talking about golf scores. Those are numbers. The lower the score, the more successful you were, right?

We tend to do that with churches too. *“Oh, we had so many baptisms this year. That makes us more successful than last year.”*

But these gifts were not given for that, to grow the church in numbers, although that could happen.

And these gifts also were not given to entertain us with dynamic and interesting sermons and great music programs.

[There is] nothing wrong with that. Having those kinds of things can enhance our worship experience.

But that is not why these gifts were given.

And these gifts were not given so that certain staff members could then focus on going out and evangelizing the community for us.

“Well, they have the gift of evangelism, so let them handle that.” These gifted individuals equip US, the saints.

They equip us for what? V 12, for the work of ministry.

Now, how many of you all realize that you were called to the ministry?

This is why I say that we were called to the ministry -- Paul says, *“for building up the body of Christ.”*

We the saints, US, we do the work of ministry.

There are some paid ministers who do this as their vocation.

Most of us, however, if you were to get all the workers in this church and line them all up, paid and unpaid, the vast majority would be unpaid.

They would be volunteers. Most of the work that gets done in the church is done by unpaid people, right?

Not so much by the salaried staff. Now, they have their part that they play, but most of the work is done by us volunteers – [teachers, singers, musicians, workers in the nursery, etc.]

So, what does it really mean to *“equip the saints,”* what these people do for us?

V 13 expounds on this when it says, *“until we attain to the unity of the faith.”*

That is something Paul has been talking about a lot in Ephesians.

[They also lead us] to “*the knowledge of the Son of God.*”

In other words, knowing more about Jesus and what He has done and His work in our life.

These gifted individuals guide us toward spiritual maturity. Again, the KJV of v 13 says, “*unto a perfect man.*”

The ESV says, “*to mature manhood.*” The NASB says “*to a mature man.*” The NIV says we “*become mature.*”

Let me stop right there for a minute. “*Apostles...*” Are there any apostles still around today?

No. The apostles mentioned here in Ephesians refer to the original 12 or 13 who had direct contact with Jesus.

There is some debate about Judas Iscariot. Apparently, Matthias (who replaced Judas) had been one of the fringe followers of Jesus.

And then, of course, there is Paul who had the Damascus Road experience [where he encountered Jesus.] And then apparently Paul spent time alone with Jesus in Arabia (this is mentioned in Galatians 1:17).

There are those 13 that we know had direct contact with Jesus. So, they are not around today.

How about “*Prophets*”? Are they around today? No, not like they were in the Old Testament and like John the Baptist, right?

They are not like that.

[At this point in class we had an interesting 5-minute discussion about prophets. One class member stated that we need to beware of people who claim to be prophets. He gave an example of a church in Michigan that was led astray by a false prophet. We have to be careful that we are not swayed by people who claim to have some sort of “special” revelation or knowledge. Jim Jones was mentioned as one example of a so-called “prophet” who led his flock astray. The class member stated that he did not believe there are prophets today. His reason for this is that the prophets in the Old Testament proclaimed God’s message to the people at a time when they did not have God’s written word (like we do today). One of their primary functions was to foretell the coming of Christ. Now Jesus has come, those prophecies have been fulfilled. And the entire canon of scripture has been completed. We do not need prophets anymore. He also brought up Revelation 22:18 which says, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.” These are good points. My response was this: I think that there are certain individuals out there in our world today who ARE legitimate prophets of God. The book of Revelation mentions some prophets that will come along in the future and proclaim God’s message. With that being said, I think that these prophets of God are few and far between. They will stand up at key moments in history and state God’s truth. Generally, these prophets are not well liked just as the prophets in the Old Testament were not well liked. They tend to step on people’s toes and become the targets of people’s wrath. I believe that what the handful of God’s prophets today are doing is taking some of the current events and pointing us to the word of God where they see those prophecies being fulfilled in our very day. Rather than predict the future and offer new revelation, the prophets of God today are making new application of God’s truth (from His word) based on our times. We see a fractured world right now where a lot of events are happening that are almost unbelievable. There are all kinds of opportunities on social media for people to point to these events and say “This is what is going to happen.” But, in reality, they have no idea. They are false prophets! That is why we must stay grounded in God’s word so that we will not be led astray by these voices. Some false prophets

(like Jim Jones) started their ministry as legitimate Bible preachers and at some point, they went off the rails. We need to watchful for the many false prophets out there. And with the internet and social media, they have a platform like never before!]

How about evangelists? Do we have those around today? Yes.

They are the ones who have seven sermons and they preach them really well.

I was so amazed the first time I ever heard an evangelist preach.

“This is the greatest preacher I ever heard!” I found out later the reason they preach so well is that they preach the same sermons over and over again.

All kidding aside, evangelists have a gift from God that stirs people’s hearts and leads them to the Lord.

Some of them have big ministries (like Billy Graham) and some have moderate ministries.

But they all have the gift to draw people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

They have a special gift that God has given them.

What about the shepherd-teachers? Sometimes you will hear it referred to as pastor-teacher.

Michael (our pastor) and all of us teachers have the same role, which is to teach the word of God;

to read the scriptures and to break it out and to explain it.

Now, his is more of a preaching format and mine is more of a teaching format where we are a more interactive.

How do these gifted people lead us to unity, knowledge and maturity?

Well, Paul does not specifically lay it out in Ephesians.

You have to go to other places in his letters where he describes what these things look like.

He talks about, for example, *“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”* (2 Timothy 4:2).

He says, *“being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed”* (1 Timothy 4:6).

He says *“I pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith”* (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

I want to focus on the two essential elements that equip the saints (that Paul described in those passages I just read).

The first is the preaching and teaching of God’s word -- with sound doctrine. The second is prayer.

These are two things that we do here in the Level Ground Class. We unpack the scriptures.

We talk about and discuss that. We also have prayer at the end [of class]. We pray for each other.

Teaching the word and prayer will lead us, v 13 says, to being a unified body.

It tends to unify us. I have noticed that over the years.

As we pray for each other, we become more unified. *“Hey, how is so and so? How are you doing?”*

We become concerned about each other. And then, v 13 continues, it brings us to a deeper knowledge of Christ.

So, as we continue to practice what we learn from the word of God, we will, over time, become mature Christians.

Are you more mature (in your faith) now than you were when you first got saved? Hopefully yes.

How did that happen? By osmosis? [Certainly, the people you associate with can influence you to some degree.] We mature by doing the things we just said – living life, studying the word of God, learning some things, applying them to your life and seeing God at work.

Wow! And then your faith grows, right? Now you can share that with somebody else and their faith can grow as a result of your testimony.

The ultimate goal for all of us and what I have highlighted [in the Power Point presentation] at the end of v 13, is that we will attain *“to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

In other words, we become more and more like Jesus as our faith grows. That is the idea.

This is God’s desire for us. This is His vision for the church.

Do you want to know what God’s will for your life is? Ephesians 4:13.

I went ahead and highlighted that in my Bible because that is a pretty important passage.

There are several characteristics of a mature believer. I want you to do your own self-assessment.

I cannot tell you where you are at. Only you can do this as we go through these next few verses beginning in v 14.

The first mark of a mature believer is that you are *“no longer children, [being] tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine...”* One negative thing about children is that they do not know a whole lot.

They are easily manipulated. They are easily led astray. *“Carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*

If we spend time regularly reading and studying the Bible, learning what God’s word says, becoming knowledgeable about what God says, we are going to develop sound doctrine.

That is why it is important that you sit under a good Bible preacher and teacher.

We will know the heart of God, what He desires. We won't be spiritually ignorant.

We won't be led astray by all sorts of false doctrines floating around out there.

Who are the most susceptible people to cults? [Class responses included young children, young adults, the unsaved] Those who do not really know much.

They are an open book. They are easily manipulated and susceptible because they do not know any better.

People who are unchurched and who are *“searching for something [meaningful].”*

So then, the first mark of a mature believer is that they are in the word, they are growing, becoming more knowledgeable and they are not easily led astray.

The second mark of a mature believer is found in v 15...

READ Ephesians 4:15

Truth IS absolute and it comes from the word of God. [The Bible] is our basis of truth.

It is our standard. It is our foundation. So, we need to know God's word to the best of our ability.

By the way, there are all kinds of wonderful commentaries out there; good study Bible are available.

If you do not have one, get a good study Bible with good notes for your own personal study.

So then, truth is absolute. It comes from the word of God.

And so, we need to know it and be able to speak that truth – here it is – IN LOVE.

Love is the supreme characteristic of any believer. Read First Corinthians 13. That is what it says.

So, then, we are to speak the truth in love.

We say the right thing, yes, and we say it with the right attitude.

Not to hurt somebody, but to help them. That is a hard thing to do sometimes.

Our words can really hurt. That is not ever my intent.

But speaking the truth in love is a bi-product of becoming spiritually mature, becoming more like Christ.

That is what He did. Even when He was really chewing out a group (like the Pharisees), He was speaking the truth in love.

He wanted them to be saved. He did not want them going down the wrong path.

So, He spoke to them harshly. But Jesus loved them and He wanted them to change. Some of them did.

It says here that [we] *“grow up in every way into Him who is the Head [He is the Boss, our Lord, our Master], into Christ.”*

And then the third mark of a mature believer is found in v 16...

READ Ephesians 4:16

“The body” here speaks of the body as a whole and not just you as an individual.

A mature believer – this is what I think Paul is really nailing here in v 16 – serves in the body of Christ.

They are actively involved in some way in the local church.

Now, Paul uses a lot of great analogies. He uses the human body as an analogy for [the church] a lot of times.

The different parts of our bodies that work together and they are all part of one body.

I never really thought much about my hip until I had it replaced.

And then all of sudden it became a really important part of my body.

The same happens when you hurt your hand, or you hurt your arm (it is in a cast) or you get some kind of a head injury.

All these things that hurt, all of a sudden they become more important because you are focusing on them.

We have these different parts and none of them are unimportant.

They are all there for a reason and they all work together.

But then I thought about, as I was preparing this lesson, a different analogy.

And it really ties in to what he is saying in v 16, *“joined and held together... working properly.”*

[As an illustration I showed the class a photo of a jigsaw puzzle that my wife and I had been working on at home. The puzzle was almost finished. There were some 20 pieces sitting off to the side that were waiting to be placed into the puzzle.]

You have this jigsaw puzzle. Paul is talking about being joined together and working properly.

So, while each puzzle piece is different (which is a good thing), they are all important.

And they all have their place in the puzzle. When fitted together properly, they will form the picture that the puzzle maker intended.

We need to find our place in the service of the body of Christ and fit in. So, how do we do that?

We have new members in our church. They have come here.

How do I fit into this local body, First Baptist Rockwall? It starts with prayer and the Holy Spirit's leading.

But then you also talk to the people in that church. You find out what the needs are.

You know yourself. You know what you are gifted in. You know what your talents are.

Then you talk to the staff members and you get plugged in. I love it when people who are in my class suddenly go to serve somewhere else in the body.

I am never offended. I am happy because now they have their area that they are serving in. Some people sing in the choir.

Some people teach Bible studies [either on Sunday or] during the week. We all have different areas of ministry.

My brother-in-law, his area of ministry is to fix cars up for different church members who are financially strapped.

He is an auto mechanic and so he will work on their cars for them. That is his ministry.

That is his talent. So, be creative and find your place in the body of Christ.

Just to summarize all this, three marks of a mature believer: (1) Read and study and know and apply God's word.

(2) Speak the truth of God's word in love and witness to others.

(3) Involve ourself in spiritual service in the local church in some way.

So, the question to ask yourself in your own spiritual assessment is, *"How am I doing in these three areas? How well do I know and apply the Bible in my life? Am I openly sharing my faith with those that God leads across my path? Am I serving, functioning within the body of Christ? Maybe if you are honest with yourself you might say, "I am doing alright. I am doing good." Or "I need to work on this area or that area; maybe all three areas."*

This short passage here in Ephesians tells us what God wants from His church.

My goal as your teacher is not for you to leave here this morning confused or feeling guilty or angry.

My goal is simply to get you to think a little bit about what God's word says.

And then apply it. You work it out in your own life with the Lord.

We all have our own journey.

Our faith in Christ is what saved us. My soul is eternally secure no matter what I choose to do afterwards.

None of this [that we have talked about this morning is a condition of our salvation].

It is a result of our salvation. I just want you to be aware of what your Lord's vision for you and for His church (whether it be this church or any other local church) what that is.

Hebrews Chapter 12 says, *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We are in a race. And we have a goal.

That goal is to finish the race that has been set before us.

And the prize that we are after is Jesus, seeing the One who has authored our faith.

In the end, really it is all about Him.

So, let me close with this thought: During our race, to use this analogy, things may happen that we didn't plan for – sometimes unexpected things, disappointment, pain, even tragedy.

I think we could all give testimony of different things in our life.

It is all part of the race whether we like it or not.

But the word of God exhorts us to run the race with endurance. Don't be distracted by circumstances.

Focus on Jesus. Finish the course! The Lord has graciously provided us with what we need to finish and to finish well – these gifts that He has given us.

He has given us His Word. He has given us the Holy Spirit. He has surrounded us with gifted people.

As the end of his life drew near, the Apostle Paul told his friend Timothy, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth [because I did that] there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day [on the day that he enters into His presence], and not only to me but also to ALL who have loved His appearing”* (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

So, my exhortation for you as my class here, to all of you whom I love dearly... Finish the race!

Remember, you are NOT RUNNING ALONE. You have your brothers and sisters to help you along the way (all of us here).

And maybe, just maybe, motivated by love, you will be the one that helps somebody else. Maybe one of us.