

Furnishing The Temple

Scripture Text: Ephesians 4:11–16

Introduction

Last week, we looked at Good Hope Baptist's mission statement which says, "*At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work.*" The main parts of that statement are Sharing, Loving, Discerning, and Equipping. We want Good Hope to be a church that is sharing the Gospel, loving one another as Christ told us, discerning what God desires for us to do, and equipping each other to do His work. Today, we will focus primarily on the equipping part of our mission statement. What that part of the statement means is we want God's church here at Good Hope to be helping one other become the disciples we need to be to do God's work. We do this by teaching God's truth, by encouraging one another, and by correcting one another in sincere love. Basically, our mission is to be disciples of Jesus Christ who help others become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Making disciples is much like building a house. You do not build a house without work, time, and investment in it. It also takes work, time and investment to "build" disciples. Last week I mentioned the building of Solomon's Temple, which was a symbol of God's presence among His people. We learned from the passage last week that the Church is God's Temple today. The Church is where God dwells, but His new Temple is not complete. God is still building it and He is using us to accomplish His work. Today, we will consider the idea of furnishing the Temple. Like Solomon's Temple in the Old Testament, he did not just build the supporting structure. He also furnished it. He provided all sorts of impressive items to furnish the Temple area. The inside of the Temple was paneled with cedar, floored with cypress, and inlaid with gold throughout. It was decorated with artistic ornamentation, floral designs with cherubim, flowers, and palm trees. The Church is also furnished with many impressive, and necessary, items.

Who God Furnishes the Temple

The first thing to consider is who God uses to furnish His Temple. We learned last week that through Jesus Christ, we are no longer strangers to God, but we are fellow citizens in His kingdom. No one is born into God's kingdom or into His family, but through Christ, we become naturalized citizens and adopted children with the same privileges and rights (Ephesians 2:19). God is building His new Temple with such people and He is using them to furnish the Temple. Just before this passage, Paul mentioned that God gave grace to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift to us (Ephesians 4:7). The gifts God gave to the Church are certainly spiritual gifts, but those are not the gifts Paul was specifically mentioning here. Look at the verses below.

Ephesians 4:11–12 ¹¹ *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,* ¹² *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

I think it is significant to point out first that this section about Jesus' gifts to the Church are within the context of Jesus ascending into heaven after His resurrection. Jesus left His disciples to return to His Father in heaven, but He did not leave them powerless or alone. He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the other Helper, to empower the Church to accomplish the mission Jesus gave her. So, verses eleven through sixteen are one long sentence about what Jesus gave to the Church in order to build His body up in His absence. Most people probably think of the spiritual gifts when they talk about the gifts God gives us. God certainly does give certain spiritual gifts to His people, the Church, in order to build up the Church (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12-14); however, that is not what Paul meant here. These verses describe more about certain people God gives to the Church. That does not mean these people are not *gifted*, but the focus seems to be on the individuals, not the gifts. God furnishes His new Temple with people!

The apostles and prophets were foundational to the Church, in that God used them to spread the Gospel and to start the Church. God used the evangelists to also share the Gospel and plant churches in various regions of the world. Shepherds are the elders or pastors of the churches who feed God's sheep and nurture them with God's Word. The "teachers" may be another designation for shepherds, denoting their primary function of teaching the Church, or they could be a separate group responsible for teaching God's Word. These specific individuals have at least one thing in common — their primary mission is to minister the Word of God to God's people. There is a teaching aspect to their function. Their teaching was not meant to be their own desires or opinions, but rather to be centered on Christ. If one's teaching to the Church is centered on anything other than Jesus Christ and His Word, it is a false teaching and should be ignored.

Christ gave these church leaders to the Church for a purpose. They were not given to the Church to exalt themselves or to make a name for themselves. God gave these leaders in order to equip the rest of the congregation. What is the purpose of this equipping? These leaders to the Church are to teach God's Word and to care for God's people so that the rest of the Church can use their spiritual gifts in order to do the work of ministry. This is where many people go wrong. Many Christians think that it is the pastor's job to do ministry, but that is not what this passage says. The pastor's job is to equip the church he is leading so that the rest of the church can do the ministry. God gives all Christians spiritual gifts that should be used to minister to one another. All of God's people are ministers of God who serve the Church with their gifts. In fact, church growth is dependent upon each member's gifted ministry. Discipleship is equipping each one for ministry and it includes you. What are your gifts? Are you using them?

Why God Furnishes the Temple

Now that we have answered the "who" question to this passage, we should understand the "why". Why does God give these gifts to His "saints"? The obvious answer is to build up the Church. God gives gifts to the Church, whether spiritual gifts or people who are spiritually gifted, to build up the Church. God's gifts are not to exalt anyone, but Christ. Christ also gives gifts to His Church in order to bring unity to His body. We see in this passage the unifying reason God equips us and uses us to build up His Church.

Ephesians 4:13–14 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,* ¹⁴ *so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

God wants His children to be one and to be mature. Those two things are not exclusive. Our spiritual maturity is linked to our unity as a people of God. Our spiritual growth continues until we all attain the unity of the faith. This growth is not dependent on our physical age. You can be physically mature but still be a babe in Christ. Spiritual growth continues until we mature in the fullness of Christ, until we become like our Savior. This involves discipleship. The same is true for physical children. Children grow into adults. They will physically become adults, but without the proper discipline and training they will not mature into stable, fully functioning adults. There are adults who look like grown-ups but are really big children who never matured. God does not want us to be like that, either physically or spiritually. God intends for every follower of Jesus Christ to grow into a fully mature child of God. That is why God gives “gifts” to the Church. That is why He gives leaders to a church in order to teach sound doctrine. That is why He gives spiritual gifts to each of us in order to help the whole Church grow in spiritual maturity.

God cares for us and wants what is best for us. He wants us to become strong in our faith. If we do not grow in our faith from a steady diet of God’s Word, then we would be spiritually weak. Those who follow Jesus need to grow up from spiritual children into fully grown Christians in order to gain spiritual strength and stability. A lack of knowledge of the truths of Christian doctrine makes the Church like gullible children who can be tossed helplessly by the waves of false doctrine and the deceitful schemes of false teachers. Without proper training and discipleship, God’s people would be tossed to and fro by these waves of deceit. Without sound doctrine that is based on the Word of God and upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, the Church would be left to the winds of false teaching. God does not intend to leave us carelessly tossed and carried by human deceit. God loves us too much to do that. He intends for us to grow into fully functioning children of God. The next section speaks about how God desires to accomplish this.

How God Furnishes the Temple

So, we have the “who” and the “why” to God furnishing His new Temple. Now, let us consider the “how”. We sort of have this question answered in that God gives gifts to the Church in order to build her up and to make His disciples mature. But, how do His saints go about “the work of ministry”? How do God’s saints go about the ministry of helping one another mature and become one in Christ? Part of this is teaching sound doctrine that is based on the Word of God, but there is more. Look at the next couple of verses.

Ephesians 4:15–16 ¹⁵ *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,* ¹⁶ *from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

This passage says the Church is to grow into the likeness of its head, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the measure by which spiritual growth is to be compared. Christ is the source as well as the goal of the Church's spiritual growth. Jesus is both the cornerstone upon whom the whole Church is built and the means through whom the whole Church is joined together. Paul uses the body metaphor to describe the Church's maturity. Every member of the Church is viewed as a limb in Christ's body and plays a crucial role in this growth. Growth is made possible by all Christians using their spiritual gifts that Jesus has given them. Those gifts are given to nurture unity within the whole body. When all members of a church are using their specific spiritual gifts out of love, the body is building itself up. God uses us to stimulate growth by *lovingly serving one another*.

One way this is accomplished is by speaking the truth in love. This phrase can literally be translated as "truthing in love." We must be faithful to tell the truth and we must faithfully tell it with love. When a church faithfully speaks the truth in love, it will have relationships where people build up and benefit one another. Our love for one another is linked to God's love for us. Paul wrote earlier in this letter that he wanted the church "to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). If we really know God's love for us, if we really are filled with it, it will compel us to really love one another. This does not mean loving one another by mere words, but in service to one another. Anyone can say, "I love you." It is quite another thing to serve one another in love, to show someone loving acts of service. Loving one another and doing good works for one another is, after all, a reason Christ saved us. Earlier in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote the following:

Ephesians 2:10 ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Every follower of Jesus Christ is His workmanship. Every follower of Jesus Christ is re-created and born again to do good works. Jesus builds us up and enables us to grow in Him so that He can use us to build up His Church. This may sound like doing works of compassion, which is important and we should do. Paul, however, described some of these good works in the rest of chapter four. He exhorted the church to "put on the new self" in Christ, meaning to not act like our former selves before we knew Jesus. We are to speak truth to one another and stop lying to one another. We are also supposed to control our anger. It is not wrong to be angry with someone, but it is sinful to go on being angry or to have bitterness towards another person. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Also, do honest work and share what you have with each other. Be kind to one another and forgive one another just as Jesus has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:24-32). These are good works that Paul mentioned in the rest of this chapter. These are good works we can do to build the Church up in love. Are you building up the Church in love?

Conclusion

In closing, this passage reveals several things about God building and furnishing His new Temple, the Church. This passage tells us that God gives certain gifts to the Church in order to equip her to do the work of ministry. God desires for every follower of

Christ to be a minister in His Church. God desires for every follower of Christ to grow in maturity so that he or she will be like His Son, Jesus Christ, and will not be tossed by the waves and wind of false doctrine. God also desires for every follower of Christ to help grow the Church by genuinely loving one another and caring for one another. That is God's plan for building and furnishing His Temple.

Where are you in the Temple of God? Has God placed you in His Temple? Is God cutting you and smoothing you out as a stone fit to be placed where He desires? Are you growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ, through Bible study, daily prayer, and regular fellowship with other believers? If you are growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ, are you helping other "living stones" in God's Temple to become more like the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ? If you are a disciple of Christ, then Jesus has commissioned you to help make disciples in His Church. That is your mission. That is your ministry. Are you even in the Temple of God? Do you know Jesus as your Savior? Have you confessed Him as your Lord? If not, that is the first step of discipleship — to become a disciple of Christ. May we all become disciples who are making disciples of Jesus Christ. To God be the glory. Amen!