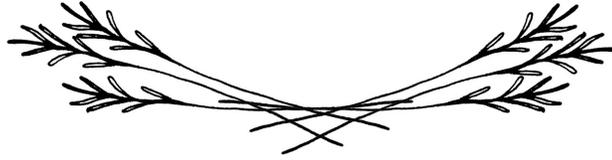


WEEK 12

# EQUIPPING THE SAINTS



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Many years ago, I made the decision to serve my country with the US Army National Guard. I was fresh out of high school. The country was in the midst of the Vietnam War. I learned many important things from military service that have provided me with a good foundation for life. The military has a tried and proven method of preparing people for going to war and battling the enemy. These include the necessity of good attitudes and individual preparation, fighting with the vitality of purpose, and winning the war. These goals of the army remind me of Paul and his commitment to train God's soldiers for winning the war in Ephesus.

The Apostle Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus on the "how to" for church unity. He stresses (a) the essential attitudes needed, (b) individual preparation, and (c) the vitality of purpose to be successful and win the war. Just as the Ephesians were in a spiritual war in the first century, we are still experiencing that same war today. As long as the Lord allows the earth to stand, we will always be fighting a war with Satan. Peter warned, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NKJV). How does he go about it? He seeks to destroy Christians individually and the Church collectively through pride, selfishness, and division. He uses these negative attitudes to diminish the effectiveness of the body, destroy a Christian's influence, and create division where he

can. No one is immune. This is why it is important for every Christian to study, pray, and be equipped for battle.

Honestly, Satan has succeeded in many places among many good spiritual people who let down their guard and are not equipped for the war. So how do we remedy this problem? Let's consider the advice given to the Church at Ephesus by the Apostle Paul.

### **The Essentiality of Attitude (Eph. 4:1-6)**

The Apostle Paul describes the necessity of certain attitudes for success in the war with Satan. This is one of the first things military training seeks to establish within each individual. We are a unit; we work together, serve a common cause, help each other go, fight, and win. Paul describes the beginning of this attitude as "I, therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to **walk worthy of the calling** with which you were called..." (Eph. 4:1).

The question is, as followers of Christ, how will you and I act or react in our Christian walk on a daily basis? How will we choose to respond to life's daily struggles, stresses, trials, and tribulations? How will we deal with others who may be full of controversy, criticism, ugliness, or just meanness, whether Christians or non-Christians? If I want to respond with a Christ-like disposition, I must take action to incorporate these certain attitudes as an essential part of my Christian life. If you haven't made an effort to put good attitudes in, they won't come out.

So what are these essential attitudes? Paul states that one is humility (a combination of lowliness and gentleness; v. 2). When we incorporate humility into our lives, it allows us to act in direct opposition to worldly or ungodly responses. The worldly response is fueled with pride, arrogance, and high mindedness. Regardless of

what you call these responses, the meaning is still the same. In other words, you can paint a tiger white, but he is still a tiger.

Secondly, Paul includes “patience” (v. 2). Perhaps the word “longsuffering” is more applicable. It conveys an attitude of more than patient endurance or putting up with people who have a difficult personality. It’s the idea of being long suffering with a hope for a good outcome as a result of your being Christ-like in your actions. Christ-like action is much more likely to bring about good results and cause spiritual growth in you and your brother.

A third essential attitude is that of “bearing with one another in love” (v. 2). Love is a positive action, not a negative reaction. As with any significant relationship, love allows it to be more than expected. Love is going the second and third mile in order to achieve winning the person over and accomplish God’s purpose, while we strive to be the Lord’s servant. It’s walking worthy of the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus Christ, while trying to be like Christ (Phil. 2:5).

One scholar states, “When we read of the story of Pentecost, the picture is one of a group, united in a confession of faith, and then empowered by the ‘Spirit’ of the risen Christ, now no longer present in His resurrection body, but present nevertheless in a new person form.”<sup>1</sup>

A fourth attitude is a “unification” theme and enhanced by the oneness concept. “There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and through all, and in you all” (vv. 4–6). Can you imagine a military unit going to battle without unity? Going to war without unity is welcoming disaster to the unit. Why would we expect the church—his body—to be successful without unity?

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<sup>1</sup> The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 11, Ephesians-Philemon, p. 684-5.

## **The Individuality of Equipping (Eph 4:11-12)**

Paul declares there are differing gifts among the members of the body, the Church. These gifts are given individually for the equipping of the Saints and the overall effectiveness of the Church. This is a continuous theme throughout the scriptures, always relevant. Just think if everyone in the military was trained to do the exact same job. It would be chaos in the making. I served first in a scout unit, attached to a tank unit. When the scout unit was eliminated, I was required to learn all of the different tasks associated with a tank: loader, driver, gunner, and tank commander.

The Christian life is similar. The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:14–30) depicts individuals using their talents (money, but symbolically representing our different abilities) in order to be productive for the Master. Paul told the church in Corinth about the body concept: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). He also states the need of using the body (members) and their gifts effectively for the benefit of the whole body (1 Cor. 12:27). Paul says similarly in Romans, “...so we, being many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them” (Rom. 12:5-6). He continues by describing the gifts. What we have learned?

- We are all part of the Church—the body of Christ—and we have been equipped with different gifts/talents. We need to identify these gifts and put them to use in his body, the Church. When we start using our talents for God, Christ, and his Church, God will help us develop other gifts/talents (Matt. 25:20-24). To fail to use them for God’s glory is to be like the one-talent man who was afraid and hid his master’s gift in the ground (v 24-30).

- And as Paul stated in (Eph 4:12), the body (the Church) is prepared “...for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ.”

### **The Vitality of Purpose**

The Apostle so beautifully describes the purpose of the gifts, but also goes on to describe, in detail, the vital purpose of those who have the gift of working within the church. These are the end results of a church working effectively:

- Becoming unified in faith and knowledge of the Son of God.
- Becoming a more perfect person, and obtaining a higher level of spiritual maturity. We will no longer be like children who are tossed to and fro by every doctrine that comes along.
- Learning to speak the truth in love and grow upward toward Christ.
- Individual members not only grow, but the Church also grows as a spiritual body: “... joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How does the Apostle Paul describe the way we should act as Christians?
2. Give three words to describe the essential attitudes needed for growth.
3. How would you describe the end result of a well-equipped Church?
4. What is the ultimate goal or purpose of a unified church?