

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Equipping Gifts and Body Life

by Dan Trygg

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... ¹¹ And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the true-knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the maturity which belongs to the fullness of Christ... ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, Christ, ¹⁶ out-from Whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:7,11-13,15-16

In our introduction to the topic of spiritual gifts, in Romans 12, we saw that the emphasis there was that **each person in Christ has been given a “measure of faith”**, an allotment or apportionment that is like the various limbs or parts of a body, ...in this case the Body of Christ. **We have gifts, that differ according to the grace given to us. We are to function in the particular capacity God has granted to us. We are members together comprising the Body of Christ**, and in that sense **we are also members one of another**. Our function, our grace-gifting and faith apportionment, is meant to help and support one another, as well as the larger Body of Christ. **Our lives and service are meant to be interdependent**. We were introduced to seven types of giftings there: prophecy, practical-hands-on-service, teaching, inviting-people-alongside (to comfort, encourage, exhort or help in some way), giving, ones “standing before” (possibly to lead or to serve), and mercy-that-acts. Paul encouraged us to use our gifts with integrity and zeal.

In Ephesians 4, once again Paul brings up the subject of spiritual gifts. Here, **he again clearly asserts that to each one of us in Christ “grace was given” (4:7). It is clear in the context that the grace he is referring to here has to do with spiritual gifts**. Paul had already used this same language to refer to himself, his gifting, calling and function in the Body of Christ (3:1-9), and in the next verse in chapter 4, Paul specifically says “He gave gifts to people” (an allusion to Psalm 68:18), and then, a couple of verses later, begins his listing of the spiritual gifts he wants to focus on in this context. So, **again in Ephesians 4 we find Paul clearly telling us that we already have been given a grace-gifting**. It came to us freely. We didn't have to earn it. It is not based upon merit. It is part of our salvation package.

He will come back to the larger Body of Christ in a moment, but, first, **he wants to help us understand that some of the gifts are given by Christ to the Body for the purpose of fitting us all out for the ministry work we are to do**. Although there are five nouns mentioned here, the structure of the Greek syntax combines the last two function-names together. So, the Greek says: On the one hand He (Jesus) gave the apostles, ...on another hand the prophets, ...on another hand the evangelists, ...but also the shepherds-and-teachers...”. We had seen prophets and teachers listed before, in Romans 12. So, what is new is that there are also giftings referred to as apostles, evangelists and shepherd-teachers. **Apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd-teachers have a unique role in the Body of Christ. They are given to “equip the saints for work of service”**.

This “work of service” is then given more focus. **This “work of service” is for “building up the Body of Christ”**. The goal is not just to serve people, or do good deeds, as beneficial and commendable that may be. The goal of our service is to “build up the Body of Christ.” Then there is even a *more directed focus*: **there are three things in Paul's mind that he sees are the objectives of the “work of service” that we all are supposed to be working toward: “until we all might attain to” (1.) a unity of the faith; (2.) a true-knowledge of Jesus; and (3.) a mature spiritual personage, i.e., to become like Jesus. OUR job is to MATURE EVERYBODY in the Body of Christ!**

It is NOT the job of those who are the equippers to mature everyone else! That is often the expectation in many churches, but this is NOT what Paul is saying here. **The apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd-teachers are to prepare US all, ...you and me..., to do the work of MATURING EVERYBODY in the Body**. The assumption in our Western culture is that teaching information will bring about maturity. It does not work! **Knowing what is true or right is not sufficient to motivate people to live by what they know**. That is called “association psychology”, and it has been discredited as too simplistic. Yet, **in many ways, we are still operating as if we believe that teaching information was all that was necessary to produce spiritual growth**.

In order to understand how WE are to be involved in maturing EVERYONE, we have to look ahead to verses 15 and 16. “Truthing in love, we might grow in every way into Him who is the Head (the Source, Origin, ...the one who brings others to completion), out from Whom ALL THE BODY, being-fitted-together and knitted-together through every ligament of support/supply according to the inworking in measure of each individual part produces the

growth of the Body unto the building-up of itself in love.” According to these verses, we are *all* involved in this process. We are *all* doing the work of building up *each other*, which in turn builds up the whole Body of Christ.

What is it that these “equipping gifts” do? ...and how is that related to US doing this work of building up the Body of Christ? Let’s work through each of these gifts, in light of this larger context, to see if we can understand their role in this larger picture of Body life.

An apostle is someone who has been personally called, selected and sent out by Christ to be a representative for Him. It helps to see the distinction between a messenger, who only delivers a message, and an apostle. An apostle is operating in place of the one who sent him or her. The word “apostle” means a “sent one”. In the examples we have in the NT, apostles traveled about proclaiming the gospel, but **they were especially effective at starting new communities of believers.** Their ministries were often accompanied by miraculous signs (2 Cor. 12:12). They would stay for a while, but then they would leave others in oversight, and they would move on. They often would return to check on the health of the group, and address problems or commend successes. **An apostle would initiate and oversee healthy Body life. He or she would establish a healthy pattern of meeting together for the people.**

A prophet is someone who receives a communication from God for another person, or for the group. This message may come to them in a variety of ways, ...through dreams, visions, or a revelation or word from the Lord. **Their responsibility is to accurately describe and convey what it was that they saw, heard or received from God.** Historically, they often were sent to call people back to the Lord, or to confront some sin. According to 1 Corinthians 14:3, **a prophet speaks to people for their edification, encouragement and consolation.** Often, a prophet will be shown the secrets of peoples’ heart, and their messages will be especially personal and convicting, if they are being called to account by the prophet. **Prophets have been used to call others out for special tasks, or to give personal direction.**

An evangelist is one who goes about proclaiming the good news, and have an unusual ability to lead others to follow Christ. More than that, however, **their passion and example can keep the others fired up about sharing their faith.** Oftentimes, their frequent stories of their experiences will reduce the fear in the minds of others, and will encourage them in stepping out to share Jesus with others. **On a practical level, an evangelist will always be adding new people to the group, or expanding the outreach, and will add excitement and vibrance to the meetings.**

Because of the structure of the Greek, **a shepherd-teacher is meant to be a combination of two giftings or functions.** We need to get away from thinking in terms of “pastor”, because a pastor has so many religious and hierarchical-leadership connotations that would have been foreign to the people of the first century. **A shepherd was a role that most people were familiar with. They were men who watched over and cared for their flock of sheep.** They were not demanding, bullying, or harsh, ...or the sheep would run from them. **They were there to serve their sheep, and keep them safe, nourished and secure.** All elders were supposed to “shepherd the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1,2; Acts 20:17,20) and were to be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 3:7-9). One of the key responsibilities of a shepherd was to provide healthy grazing for the sheep. **In the application of this metaphor, it was understood that “healthy spiritual food” was equivalent to “sound and healthy teaching”** (e.g., Acts 6:2,4). Some people were gifted by God with these skills. There are also some who are gifted to care for a group of people, but are lacking in the teaching area. There are others who are gifted teachers, but they lack the ability to care for and lead a group through everyday life. **A shepherd-teacher has both the qualities of being able to provide oversight and care, along with being able to provide healthy teaching.**

Let’s go back to verse 12 to see if we can gain some more insight into what these “equipping gifts” are to do. Part of our problem here is that we have too narrow of a perception of the word that is translated as “equip” in this verse. **The Greek word here, *katartismos*, means “to fit-out according to”.** It is used in a wide variety of ways:

(1.) It is used to describe the process of mending, healing, repair, and maintaining soundness and health (e.g., Matt. 4:21; Mk. 1:19 of mending fishing nets; or Gal. 6:1 where someone needs to be “restored” after being ensnared in sin);

(2.) It is used to describe the training, equipping process that a disciple undergoes in relation to his/her teacher (e.g., Lk. 6:40);

(3.) It is used to describe the adaptation, preparation, or “shaping” of parts so that they will fit together neatly, or will be more effective in their use (e.g., Heb. 10:5; 11:3; 13:21);

(4.) It is used to describe the process of fitting things together, as in the construction of a joint, or the dressing of stones to be placed together. (We see this idea reflected in Ephesians 4:16 – “fitted-together”); and,

(5.) It is often translated as “be made complete” or “perfected”. This does not imply sinlessness, but the fulfillment of the above ideas, ...i.e., “preparedness”. (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:9,11; 1 Pet. 5:10.).

The function of the “equipping gifts” here is that they help us to be prepared to do the work we are all called to do, ...to grow our own walks deeper in Christ, and by the leading of the Spirit, expressing truth to one another in love so that we all might be healed, supported, strengthened, and motivated to grow and mature and to step up to engage others in their own growth process. **It is the work of the Body to build up the Body. These gifts prepare us for that work, and they call us to walk in love and to be responsible stewards of the grace-gifting of God that is within us.**