Opening Words

All of us are called to be witnesses. All of us can do the work of evangelism. We don't need the gift of evangelism to share the Gospel. God never intended for that to be the understanding of the church.

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The Church is to be like an army. The Church is also to be like a hospital. Some of God's leaders like the army metaphor. They probably have a leadership gift. Some of God's people like the hospital metaphor. They probably have the gift of mercy. I think the best way to bring these together is to think of the church as an army hospital.

Hello everyone and welcome to our broadcast today where we will continue to explore the relationship of the gifts described in Ephesians 4:11 with the need for mending and healing that he speaks about in Ephesians 4:12. We looked in our previous broadcast at how sin rips us apart like a net being ripped apart. Sin breaks us down like bones that have been shattered. But we also have seen that the purpose of Christ giving gifted leaders is so that they might use those gifts to bring about this mending and healing in the lives of God's people.

What love Christ has for us! The risen, glorified Christ looked upon us in our sin, in our poverty, in our captivity, in our brokenness and in our blindness and gave gifted people to help us out of this terrible condition brought on by our sin and by the sin of others. This is what the Church is for.

We looked in our previous broadcast at how God uses apostles and prophets to help bring about the mending process in our hearts. Let's look at the other gifts. Christ gave evangelists to mend, heal, and equip the church. This one might be a little tougher than the others in understanding how evangelists equip the body because when we think of evangelists we think of work done outside the church and not inside the church. But evangelists are to equip the church, according to this passage, and the way they do that is by helping us learn how we can share our faith with others.

All of us are called to be witnesses. All of us can do the work of evangelism. We don't need the gift of evangelism to share the Gospel. God never intended for that to be the understanding of the church. No, God wants the evangelists, those who are fruitful and effective in this work to equip us to share our faith. Here is the sorrow and hurt for many of us – loved ones who do not yet embrace Christ. We sorrow over them and long for them to come to Christ. But our witness can bring them to Christ.

Evangelists heal the hurt of our hearts by showing us how to do two things. First, they help us learn how to share our story of how Christ has changed us. People love stories. Some people can argue with the claims of Christ, but they have a much harder time arguing with someone's personal testimony. An evangelist can equip us to share our story. He can show us how to share what our life was like without Christ, how Christ met our deep needs, and what our life is now like with Christ. It's really, pretty simple. Second, an evangelist, can equip us to explain how one can come into a relationship with God. He can equip us to share the plan of salvation and how a person can be reconciled with God.

We move now to the gift of pastors and teachers, remembering that some separate the two and some see them as two sides of one coin – pastoring or shepherding needs good teaching and good teaching must have a shepherding side to it.

Christ has given pastor-teachers to heal the church. The Bible compares us to sheep, and we must be led, we must be protected, and we must be fed. In this series of messages, I have emphasized how sin has ripped us apart, but the process of sanctification is to put the pieces of our lives together. I have shared with you before one of my favorite verses on this. It comes from Psalm 86:11 which says, "Teach me Your way, O Lord. I will walk in Your truth. Unite my heart to fear Your name."

I love that picture – unite my heart. My heart is broken and scattered into many pieces, but David asks God to bring the broken pieces together. He asks God to unite his heart into wholeness so that he will not be distracted by sin and will have a heart that walks in obedience, love, and the fear of God.

Pastoring is part of that process. Being a pastor is a lot more than counting noses and nickels as some say – counting the number of people attending and what the offering is. Pastoring is caring for people who have been wounded by life, wounded by their sin, and who carry their wounds with them into the Christian life. When they met Christ, something deep within them resonated and they embraced him. But as they found his love and forgiveness and entered a relationship with him, they carried many of their wounds into the new life. There is a need for pastors to mend and heal such brokenness through care, counseling, and teaching the word of God.

Remember, part of this gift is the gift of teaching. It is not just the gift of pastoring, but it is the gift of pastors who teach and people must learn the truth of God's word so that they will learn to think accurately about God, about themselves, about their sin, about their problems, and about life. Remember Paul's great admonition in Romans 12:2? "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." The transformation of our lives takes place as our mind thinks less like the world and more like God. The risen, glorified Christ gives gifted leaders to bring healing and mending to the body of Christ.

Notice what happens when these gifts are operational and God's people are restored, God's people then become equipped for works of service. People come into the army hospital, so to speak, to be healed, but they are not discharged to civilian life. They are sent back into the battle because the world is full of people just like them who need the grace of Jesus Christ.

Imagine what this looks like when a church functions this way. Imagine a church where people have a solid foundation of knowing who Christ is and what he has done for them because of the work of apostles. Imagine a church were people are being cleaned out and strengthened and encouraged by a prophetic work in their lives. Imagine a church where the people are equipped to share their story and how a person comes into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Imagine a church where people are shepherded and fed with good food. They are equipped and ready to help others build a strong foundation. They are equipped and ready to help others deal with sin issues. They are

equipped and ready to help others share their faith. They are equipped and ready to feed others. They, as the passage says, are building up the body of Christ.

What a picture of the Church! What a glorious picture of what God intends. This is something the Church must strive for. We have some churches that are great in laying foundations. They teach people who Christ is and what he came to do for them. We praise God for them but they must build upon that strong foundation. Remember Ephesians 2:20? God wants a temple, not just a foundation, but a temple. Churches must go beyond the starting point and build upon the starting point of Christ.

We have some churches that are good about living a holy life. We certainly need more of that in our time. But they must go beyond examining themselves and reach out to others.

We have some churches that are great in evangelism. We praise God for them. They must become great in pastoring and caring for the members and helping them to grow up fully into Christ.

We have some churches that are great in providing pastoral care and teaching. We praise God for them. They must become great in reaching out to new people.

How long do we do this? How long do we continue to make sure that foundation is strong, the sin is confessed, the gospel is shared, and people are cared for and fed? The next verse tells us. Listen to Ephesians 4:13.

> until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Paul uses three images in verse 13 that gives us a time limit on how long we persist in building up the church. The first image is one of wholeness. We are to do these things until we attain to the unity of the faith. Remember the verse about our heart being united to fear God? How God brings the broken pieces of our heart back into unity so that we will with a whole heart fear Him? This is the same picture we have here. The Church is composed of people who are broken and that is why we have churches with problems. But God is piecing the church together and we are part of his bringing the church together. We are to do this until we attain to this wholeness.

The second image he uses is a relational one. We are to build up the body until we attain to the knowledge of the Son God. We are to do this until we know him as he knows us.

The third image he uses is a growing up image. We are to build up the body until the church reaches full maturity, until it attains to the fullness of Christ.

We will talk about these more in the following broadcasts. But today would you join me in worship and prayer to God?

“Father, we are amazed at your love and plan for us. Thank you that you love us enough to give gifts to help us grow so that we don’t stay where we are but grow up and become this glorious church that you intended all along. We thank you Father for our churches today. Father, none of them are perfect, but you love them all and we want to love them all, also, and do our part in building them

up in every way until we attain to these levels of maturity and fullness that you desire for each of them. And we pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

Thank you for praying that with me. I hope you are encouraged by this picture of what the church is to be. We know that not one church measures up to this ideal, but it will someday. My desire is that you and I will be great encouragers in our imperfect churches, and that we will hold out the vision of what God wants for his church. I know that if you and I do that, God will be pleased, his people will be blessed, and we will have great joy.