Opening Words

When people come into the church, they do not come in like young, raw recruits into the military who are wanting to be shaped into a fighting force. Instead, they come into the church broken, torn, ripped up and in need of healing in their lives.

59 Eph Mending the Church 1

God has gifted the leaders of his church to equip the members of his church to do God's work. But what does it mean to equip the members of the Body.

When I first began discovering the truth of these great verses I had a certain image in my mind when I heard the word, "equipping." I thought of an army being fitted with a uniform, with rugged boots, a helmet, and weapons to fight. An army that is not equipped is not much of an army. I also thought of an army that has been equipped with special skills, everything from hand to hand combat techniques to communication skills that enable the different parts of the army to communicate with each other in real time action. These images would not be incorrect.

But there is a deeper meaning to the word "equip" that we must examine first. When I studied this verse in the Greek language I discovered that the word Paul used – katartismon – was a medical word that referred to doctors setting a broken bone. Now that is something to think about! Equipping is not just making a rugged young man strong and able to fight a war, equipping first healing something that is broken.

I continued searching and I saw one of the ways this word is used in the New Testament. In Mark 1:16-20 we find this story:

> As Jesus was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat **mending the nets**. Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

The word for mending is the same Greek word Paul used in Ephesians 4. We see James and John piecing their nets together that had been torn. Like the broken bone, we get a picture of something that needs to be put back together, in this case something that is torn or ripped needs to be mended.

I thought on these word pictures for some time and then it dawned on me – when people come into the church, they do not come in like young, raw recruits into the military who are wanting to be shaped into a fighting force. Instead, they come into the church broken, torn, ripped up and in need of healing and mending in their lives.

This should not surprise us – the world has a way of savaging people. The world has a way of breaking people. The world has a way of ripping people to pieces. To be sure, people are responsible and part of their brokenness is the bad choices they have made. And then a person comes to Christ. He senses the love of God. He finds forgiveness of sins. He enters the new life, but he or she torn and ripped in many places.

Sin rips us apart in three ways. It rips us apart mentally. Sin causes us not to think clearly. Sin causes confusion of the mind. Sin causes us not to think of God correctly, not to think of others correctly, not to think of ourselves correctly, and not to think of the world correctly. Sin brings bad information to us and causes mental confusion and deception. When we come to Christ, enough of the confusion is cleared away and healed so that we will embrace the way of salvation, but much mental and intellectual healing remains and part of the sanctification process that Christ wants us to embrace is the healing of our thought processes. God gives gifted leaders to help with this mental, this intellectually healing of our minds.

Sin rips us apart volitionally. By this, I mean that sin creates in us a stubbornness so that we do not want to do what is right, but we are strong willed in doing what is wrong. With some people, sin can affect their volition by causing them not to have much of a will at all. They are pushovers. They are an easy prey for sin. They don't know how to stand up for what is right. When people like this come to Christ there is a work of the Spirit that must be done on their wills. With some, the stubbornness must be broken down so that they learn how to be obedient to the Lord consistently rather than wanting their own way all the time. With others, the work of the Spirit is to strengthen their wills so they will have the strength to follow Christ and to stand for him. God gives gifted leaders to help with this volitional brokenness. He gives gifted leaders to heal the will of God's broken people.

Sin rips us apart emotionally. Oh, how we know this one! We all have or have had major emotional issues. This one may be more obvious than the others because we can hide the intellect and will a lot easier than one's emotions. We experience emotions of pain, fear, anger, loneliness, frustration, abandonment, unworthiness, unloveliness, and not being cared for. Sin causes emotional confusion in the hearts of every person. Then, a person with all kinds of emotional hang-ups comes to Christ. He finds release from many things that held him in emotional confusion. He experiences forgiveness and a sense of belonging, but not every emotional confusion is cleared up immediately. This person must walk the path of discipleship with Christ and learn to let Christ bring healing to the damaged emotions that have been ripped apart by sin. God gives gifted leaders to help with this emotional brokenness. He gives gifted leaders to heal the emotions of God's broken people.

Are you beginning to get a fuller picture of Ephesians 4:11-12? The equipping of the saints does not begin with a military boot camp experience where God's young, disciplined leaders are ready to learn how to become soldiers. For many it begins more like a hospital where people check in and they are given a room and where gifted, caring personnel set broken bones, so to speak in their hearts.

Our churches are full of people who need their spiritually broken bones healed and their spiritual nets mended. And that is why God gives gifted leaders. All of us are a mixture of intellectual, volitional, and emotional brokenness in need of having our nets mended.

As I think about this, I am reminded of the great passage in Luke 4 where Jesus began his ministry in Nazareth. He opened the scroll to the passage in Isaiah which said:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
> Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
> He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
> And recovery of sight to the blind,
> To set free those who are oppressed,
> To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

Look at how those people are described – the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. And Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to release the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set free the oppressed. As we do this evangelistically, we must also do this in the church. We must give good news to poor people, we must bring further release to captives, we must help people see the things of Christ more clearly, we must help to set God's people free. All this is equipping.

Let's think even more deeply about how this is done. God gave apostles to the Church to help to bring this healing. How do apostles do this? How do leaders of groups of churches or national leaders do this? Remember what apostles do? They lay foundations for local churches and then they connect those churches together. The foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul said, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than the foundation of Jesus Christ" in 1 Corinthians 3:11.

One of the things that people need is a strong foundation which is Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. People come to Christ for all sorts of reasons, but if a Christian is to grow up in the faith and become healthy, he must have a strong foundation in understanding who Jesus is and what he did for him on the cross when he paid the full price for all his sins and gained his right standing, his justification before God. That, my friends, is a strong foundation. When we realize that the work of Christ was so thorough, so complete and so powerful to forgive all our sins and that there is no longer any condemnation, then we will become healthier, happier, and holier Christians, and we will be able to get out of our hospital beds and then we will be able to enter a Christian boot camp, so to speak, so that we can be trained and equipped for spiritual warfare where we rescue the poor, the oppressed, the blind, and the captives. This is why God gave apostles to bring mending and equipping of the saints.

Let's move to the prophets. The risen, enthroned Christ gave prophets to mend and equip the church. Remember what prophets do? Prophets proclaim the word of God in such a way that it calls God's people to repentance and to a holy life. Prophets probe the deep things of God and prophets are used by God to probe into the secrets of men and women, not to condemn them, but to help deliver them from those things that hinder full healing and growth. Remember the verse in Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore, lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us." Prophets are courageous speakers with a heart for God and a heart for God's people. They are people who grieve over the sin of God's people and who want more than anything to bring God's people into full fellowship with the love of God. God has given prophets to the church to help God's people lay aside those sinful things that harm us and that keep us from full maturity. May God raise

up more prophets, like this, in our day, that the church might be mended and healed from the brokenness of sin.