

# Fit for Purpose

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if you remember a couple of Sundays ago, Owen John Campbell was here in the pulpit. Not to preach of course, not yet anyway.

He was here if you remember with his mum and his dad and Willie for his baptism. Not that he was greatly interested in what Willie was saying, for if you remember he had a really good look at us as we sat there looking at him.

So you wonder what he made of it. Now of course there's no way we will ever know that. But it is an interesting question. Did he see what I see standing here?

Flattery coming. An array of intelligent, eager people. Many of you whom I know well. Others whom I know but I couldn't guarantee to remember your name.

And many others. Some recently attending services and of course the folk who are just here for the first time. All of this I see from this privileged position.

[ 1 : 09 ] But what does the Lord see? Well the answer to that comes really as the heading for chapter 4 of Ephesians that we looked at earlier.

And please could we look at it again. Page 977. Chapter 4 heading is Unity in the Body of Christ. What does Christ see? He sees his body.

This part of it. And now this morning's reading and study is a continuation of what has turned out to be a rather irregular sequence of sermons from this letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus.

And since the time gap since the last sermon means that it's very unlikely that anyone remembers where we were, what we learned, probably a brief review would be in order.

The city in the church of Ephesus had a very special place in Paul's life. His preaching and his teaching ministry there in that city extended over a longer period than that in any other of the places to which he went on his missionary journeys.

[ 2 : 16 ] In fact if you want to read about it, not at the moment, then go to Acts chapters 19 and 20. And altogether there we are told he spent more than two years in and around the city.

Now around the city, for we read in Acts chapter 19 verse 10, Now of course Asia then meant something different from what it does today.

Asia then was the name of a Roman province on the Aegean Sea in the territory of modern Turkey. And almost certainly it was during this period, if not entirely by Paul's ministry, that the seven churches that are mentioned in the book of the Revelation were founded, as well as the church in Colossae.

Now not only did the gospel have a widespread impact in the province, it had an astonishing effect on the religious and economic life of the city of Ephesus.

Back to Acts 19. We read there that a number of those, now Christians, who had practiced magic arts, brought their books and burned them in the sight of all.

[ 3 : 35 ] And they counted the value of them and it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. And that, I calculate, is about two million pound worth in today's money. They burned their magic books to the value of two million pounds.

And then we read on, So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. And later the economy of the city was affected, when there was a downturn in the sale of the silver images of the so-called great goddess Diana, or Artemis of Ephesus.

If you are smart, you will know that her temple was one of the ancient wonders of the world. But people were turning away from her worship. People weren't coming and buying the shrines and going away and buying down to them somewhere else.

The tourist trade, if you like, and the religious tourist trade was melting away. And the result among the traders was a riot. And they whipped up the whole city and a crowd chanted outside the town

hall for more than two hours non-stop.

And when finally the city authorities restored order, Paul recognized that it would be a good time to move on to Greece, from where he later returned to speak to the elders of the church on his way to Jerusalem.

[ 4 : 56 ] Ephesus had a special place in his thoughts. He has a letter to the church in Corinth, and he's saying various greetings. And then he says, I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me.

And there are many adversaries. And then in a letter to one of his young companions, Timothy, he says to him, Remain at Ephesus, that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, not to devote themselves to myths, and endless genealogies which promote speculations, rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

Now, if a church which knew the ministry of an apostle for more than two years, and for which he had an ongoing and close concern and care, if such a church needed this letter, as we have opened before us this morning, then we need to pay attention to its teaching.

But we don't have an apostle right here. We don't have such wonderful teaching. We need to read and to learn from what Paul has given us.

And we need to thank God also that the Spirit moved Paul not only to write, but to have succeeding generations preserve this writing for us. The letter of Paul to the Ephesians.

[ 6 : 19 ] It has a similar pattern to those other letters that Paul wrote to the churches of the first century. The opening chapters are concerned with doctrine.

In other words, what we know and what we believe about God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what he's done for us in salvation. And then the closing section, it's not always halfway through, it can be of varied lengths, but the closing section is concerned with what is sometimes called practical theology.

In other words, the way in which we live out what we believe. We believe, we live it out in daily life, in the church, and in the world. And we are taught about that in this closing section.

And here, in Ephesians chapters 1, 2, and 3, we are reminded, among other things, of our Lord Jesus Christ, who have by his blood reconciled us to God and to each other.

chapter 2. And Paul concludes that first section, and you can see it just there before you, with a doxology, praising God for all that he has done.

[ 7 : 26 ] Let me read it. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Now, where chapters 1, 2, and 3, all that we had, it would still be a wonderful epistle. But here at this point, it's as if Paul, in his prison cell, draws a great deep breath, and he says to the man who's actually taking down his dictation, now, we continue.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord. Therefore, that's the point. all that we've been taught. What do we do about it? What are the consequences? What action do we take following from all of that?

I, therefore, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. It's as if to say, you've heard what Christ did for us.

Now, let's think of what we are to do to live for him. Back in chapter 2, you were dead in trespasses and sins following the course of this world.

[ 8 : 42 ] Walking in the course of this world, we could imagine it. Because here, at the beginning of chapter 4, is walk worthy of Christ's calling. You were walking in one direction, following the course of the world.

Now, we are turned round in Christ and we are walking in the other direction. And to do that, and to do it consistently, despite all the pressures on us, we need help.

Then and now. And the help that we have is that which Christ supplies to the church, the one body. And he does it, and here we begin, really, where our sermon begins today, verse 7.

We begin to learn that through grace gifts to each member of the body, Christ is supplying what we need. Verse 7. But, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

And to show that this is really what you would expect, Paul quotes from Psalm 68. You've got the verse there. When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

[ 9 : 55 ] And this psalm is celebrating the victory of God over his enemies. It's not clear when you read it whether a particular victory is in view, or just the whole victorious way in which God has dealt

with his enemies that is being pictured.

But, he is seeing God as a conqueror, riding in triumph with all the bounty of his victory on display. Just as would happen in a great Roman triumph when a general came from some of the far-flung corners of the empire having conquered yet another people, and he would bring prisoners, he would bring gifts, and he would distribute these gifts.

This was the great thing. And here is God as a conqueror, riding in triumph and distributing his gifts, graciously pouring out these gifts for his own people.

Now, in our case, since we have played no part in bringing about Christ's triumph, we were in the army, he did it alone, and he triumphed over sin and death which were forcing us down.

Because we had no part in his triumph over sin, nor in his resurrection, nor in his ascension. It is all of grace that he pours out these gifts. We do not deserve them, but he gives them to us.

[11:18] He freely pours them out upon us all. And upon each of us is what verse 7 is emphasizing. And he gives to them not for the pleasure of the recipient, nor for comfort, but for service.

Now, service is the word that is the better translation of the word ministry that you will find in verse 12. And these gifts come to each of us, it is emphasized.

Perhaps some will receive more than others, or it might appear so, but since each and all receive as Christ measures out, we can, none of us, have any room to boast of what we have, nor have any thought of despising or envying what anybody else has.

We have to be content with Christ's gift, receive it, and use it. To refuse to accept what Christ has assigned to us is tantamount to refusing to be in the church, to be part of the body.

Think of Paul's words to the church in Corinth on this same general theme. In 1 Corinthians 12, he says, The body of Christ does not consist of one member, but of many.

[12:34] Now, if the foot were to say, Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body. That would not make it any less a part of the body. And so he goes on in a similar vein.

You see, the foot cannot refuse to be a foot, or else it will atrophy and die, be cut off, be no use.

Peter, again, in similar vein, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, part of the same body, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

And so Paul begins to spell out these gifts. And the list that he gives us here, in verse 11, is just one of three such lists in Paul's letters.

If you want to look at the others in some detail, then it's Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, easy to remember. And in Romans 12, he mentions seven gifts.

And the thrust of the passage there is that whatever gift we receive, and we will all be different, we are to use the gift. That is really why he sets down that list in that letter to the Romans.

[13:46] In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, this time there are eight gifts named, but only one is repeated from Romans. Paul here is intent that we recognize the variety of gifts, yet all, I quote, empowered by the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

So we've got the same theme as we find here in Paul writing to the Ephesians. a gift from God to each one as God decides.

Now, in Ephesians chapter 4, where we are, the focus is on the fact that the gifts are all given by Christ for the benefit of the whole church. The words used to name the gifts might sound like titles given to what we might call officers in an organization.

But that is to miss the point. These are not jobs for those who pass exams or who are chosen by others to fulfill the function or otherwise in some way demonstrate their cleverness.

These are spiritual responsibilities and the spiritual endowment to exercise the responsibilities. That being so, the teaching that we have here is not just for those named, but for the whole church that we might all learn to recognize the gift of Christ in others and rejoice in it.

[15:16] And so the focus of our interest ought not to be on who or what is an apostle or a prophet or an evangelist or a pastor and teacher, but on the purpose for which Christ gave these gifts to us.

Verse 12, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ. To equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.

The saints, and you think, oh, not me, but in fact it is us in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 1, the introduction to this letter. Paul addresses himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God to the saints who are in Ephesus.

And it's the word throughout the New Testament that means the believers, those who are called out to be different from the world around because we now belong in Christ. Another one's to us. This letter is written and it's about us that verse 12 is speaking.

We are the saints at the throne. Now, the folk on the buses right round there would laugh probably, but God doesn't. That's his word for us. To us and for us then, Christ's gifts are given.

[16:32] Now, if we were able to look at a copy of the ancient Greek text of this letter and be able to read it, we would notice that rarely is there any punctuation.

In fact, in some copies of the text, the words are all run together and you have to work hard at deciding where one word begins and one word ends. But in a modern translation such as we do have, we expect capital letters and full stops and question marks and the rest of the usual literary apparatus including commas.

So, where do you put the comma or commas in verse 12 and what sense do you make of these words? Remember, originally no punctuation.

To equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ. Said quickly, it can mean a number of things. Now, in the authorised version, which some of us vaguely still remember, translated in 1611 for those that missed the point, they had two commas.

Two commas. Suggesting that there are three purposes in mind. God in Christ gave the apostles and so on to equip the saints, comma, for the work of ministry, comma, for building up the body of Christ.

[17:52] It's like three bullet points. A modern French translation that I have has got no commas. Nor has a modern English translation.

J.B. Phillips has this. Christ's gifts were made that Christians might be properly equipped for their service that the whole body might be built up. The implication is that the ministry, the service, which is in view, is not here feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, rescuing the vulnerable, seeking justice for the oppressed, all of which are, of course, necessary vital works of service in which we as Christians should be involved, the service here is related to God's Word, which is probably why the translators picked up ministry because it seems more of a God's Word, Bible Word.

The service here is related to God's Word. Now, the list of gifts in Romans and Corinthians include these works of what we might call practical service.

But here in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, all of the gifts are connected with the proclamation of the Gospel, which the apostles were involved in, and the exhortation, which is something that prophets were involved in, and the steady teaching of the Scriptures, which is what pastors and teachers are involved in.

Now, here's John Calvin's comment. if Christ appointed the ministry of the Word for the edification of his body, and it is in vain to expect that end to be accomplished in any other way.

[19:34] So, we mustn't imagine that the church should do this and that and the other and expect it to grow. The only way it grows is through the ministry of the Word, the service of the Word.

And that ministry of the Word is not narrowly limited to the few who occupy this pulpit, perhaps, but to those pastors and teachers at whatever level, if you like, in this building, whether they're teaching downstairs in the wine, Sunday by Sunday, or whether they're upstairs in the Bath Street halls, or in a small group in this building, or out in the community, wherever we find ourselves living.

Those that do occupy the pulpit, are involved in equipping the rest of us for the ministry of the Word. The ministry of the Word is our responsibility. And those who occupy the pulpit are equipping the rest of us for that work.

Equipping is a word that you do find elsewhere in the New Testament. It is used to describe the activity of the fishermen on the beach at Galilee when Jesus called them.

They were, we read, well, you know the word, mending their nets. But it's exactly the same word, they were equipping their nets. Mending them, getting them ready for the business of catching fish.

[20:53] Not just for the pleasure of it. It wasn't their hobby. They were equipping their nets, ready to catch fish. Now, these fishermen almost certainly mended, equipped their nets every working day of their lives.

For in all sorts of ways, as they used the nets, they would become damaged. And for us, also, being equipped by God's word is not something to be completed after so many years of a course or something at college.

It is a necessary ongoing process. For as long as we are in the world, the pressure and the contamination of the world affects us. So the preaching and the teaching is more than educational. It's more than simply the imparting of facts. It is to be transformational so that those who hear are changed in their lives by God's Spirit and His word.

And it's this transformational teaching ministry that Paul was engaged in in Ephesus, back to Acts chapter 19. We read there, he reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus for two years.

[ 22 : 05 ] Now, some ancient texts add the verse which suggests that his day, every day he taught that his day was from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Five hours in the hottest part of the day. And this room was for the regular congregation at Ephesus, not the Cornhill Bunch. And Calvin did the same for his time in Geneva, preaching daily over decades of years.

The result of Paul's two-year ministry in Ephesus is to be found in Acts chapter 19. Again, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Now, verse 12, we're still there, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Verse 12 sets out the immediate purpose of Christ's gifts, the service ministry to be rendered by the saints, to equip the saints for that regular and immediate service.

And verse 13 tells us that the ultimate purpose is the building up of Christ's body in the church. Verse 13, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

[ 23 : 32 ] Building up Christ's body. Now, we might well ask, how do you know when the building project is complete? Now, in the context of this building, literally, we might ask downstairs here, where there's a gentleman who knows these things, how do you know when a building is finished?

In the case of the house in which I live, it had to get a certificate of habitation. It was officially complete, and you could go and live in it. How do we know when the building project of a church is complete?

Meaning, the body of Christ's people. And the answer is, when we measure up to the full and complete stature of Christ himself. So, this is a project that is going to be ongoing, and in which the knowledge of the Son of God is not instantly acquired, but is something steadily attained.

Remember, it's not information, it's not facts about our Lord Jesus, it's in view, but a growing personal knowledge of him. Every day of our lives we encounter a range of people and philosophies, of course, who seek to turn us away from Christ.

And this is not just accidental. Notice in verse 14 how Paul talks about human cunning and craftiness and deceitful schemes. Read the whole verse. The equipping is 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.

[ 25 : 08 ] Day by day we are in danger of being tossed about and seduced by alternative ideas and wrong thinking. And so we come here to listen afresh to God's word and be steadied by it, ready to go again into the fray.

Speaking the truth in love, says the apostle. That's our business, to be out in the world, speaking the truth in love. And actually again, slightly better translation would be maintaining the truth.

In other words, saying it and saying it and saying it and never deviating from it. In love. Holding our course, if you want to think of another image.

Think of the captain of a ship who says to his helmsman, steady as she goes, hold your course. We are to hold our course, individually as believers and collectively as a congregation, when we are together.

So there we have verse 16. Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, where each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

[ 26 : 26 ] Joined and joint. these words are there. They might sound rather mechanical, but in the fact the word that Paul used is allied to the word for marriage.

We often talk about people being joined together in marriage. It's the word that's used in the marriage service. Joined then. So it's all about relationships with each other and with the Lord. For a body or a marriage to function as it should requires that each part is working properly. And that phrase brings us back to verse 7 where we began.

Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. To each. We are here collectively as the church, but we each have our part to play and each have our gift from Christ. Grace was given to each one of us. Writing to the Colossian church in a similar vein, Paul says, Christ is the head of the body and holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments and it grows as God nourishes it.

[ 27 : 36 ] Now, that's why I will be here again this evening and next week and the week after to be visibly part of Christ's body, to be freshly equipped for service in his body, to be reminded of the truth of the faith and to take another step toward maturity in Christ.

I'll be here. Will you be here? Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you have called us into your body.

You have saved us and made us part of your family. But we know, Father, that we're going out this front door shortly and back to face all the pressures of the world.

We pray, help us to remember your word. help us to be maintaining our speech about you. And help us to know that you will teach us again from your word.

That we might rejoice and be refreshed. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.