

EVERY MEMBER A MINISTER

Every member a minister, part 2 of 2
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 7/30/23, Matt Heerema

Turn with me to Ephesians 4.

Last week we took a look at one of the points of our ministry emphasis at Stonebrook: “every member a minister.” We have four points to this emphasis that is directing our ministry programs this year. They are:

- (By God’s grace and according to His calling and timing)
- **Every attender a believer:** each attender become a member of the body of Christ. Every event and program we put on aimed at this goal. Question: Are you loving and obeying Christ with your whole heart?
- **Every believer a member:** each regularly attending believer become a member of Stonebrook. Question: Are you devoted to the fellowship?
- **Every member a minister:** each member of Stonebrook an active minister. Question: are you lending your gift to build up the body?
- **Every minister thriving:** each minister abiding in Christ and equipped/encouraged through the every-member-one-another-ministry of the church. Question: are you walking in the Spirit, in the Gospel, and engaging the spiritual battle in joy and peace?

Last week we looked at the second point: “every believer a member”, how the scriptures call each believers to commit themselves to a local fellowship, a local congregation, and how we work that out here at Stonebrook through a membership process.

This week we’re going to look at the last two points: how every member of Jesus’s church should lend their gift to build up the body, and how they can thrive spiritually in doing so.

Spiritual thriving is found in pursuing our God-given work with the goal of helping the whole church grow in love and unity in mind.

WALK WORTHY OF THE CALLING YOU HAVE RECEIVED

Ephesians 4:1-6 (CSB)

1 Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—5

one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

What is this calling Paul is referring to? He previously referred to it. The calling to spiritual rebirth:

Ephesians 2:1; 4-5; 8-10 (CSB)

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!

8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—
9 not from **works**, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are his **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good **works**, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.

Hang on to this word “work” we’ll be referring to it a lot! Noticed that we are saved *not by work*, not by things we do, but we are saved *for work*. God makes us alive, because He loves us, and he has a mission for us, work for us to do.

Jesus uses the language of “The New Birth” in John 3. Hang on to this idea of being a spiritual new born.

Becoming a Christian is about moving from death to life! It’s not about being a nice person, joining a specific political philosophy, its not primarily about being nice, as Tim Keller used to say, its not about being nice, its about being new.

And this newness of life is the great calling Paul is referring to, the great gift we’ve been given, and we’re called to walk in a manner worthy. We’re called to walk “with all humility and gentleness and patience, bearing with one another” because of the new life we’ve received.

In chapter 4, Paul is pointing to a great vision: a unified church walking together in love and peace. What a great aspirational goal! No church is there yet. But what we’re going to see is that this is what life in the church is all about: working together toward that goal of love and unity. Motivated by this great gift of salvation Christ gave us, walking together as his children.

And how we get there: Paul walks out in the the rest of the passage.

First we see that Christ’s plan for building his church is by giving it leaders, whose job it is to train every believer in this great work.

CHRIST GAVE THE CHURCH LEADERS AS A GIFT, TO EQUIP THE THE CHURCH FOR THE WORK

Ephesians 4:7-12 (CSB)

7 Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 For it says: When he ascended on high, he took the captives captive; he gave gifts to people. 9 But what does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth? 10 The one who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things.

And what this is talking about is yet another image of Christ's saving work. It is the image of a King whose city comes under attack, so he stands up, gets down off his throne, goes out in battle, conquers the enemy, and comes back into town with the spoils of war, steps back up to his throne, and shares his riches with his city. This is talking about Christ's coming to earth, conquering sin and death, and rising from the grave and ascending into heaven to accomplish the salvation we just talked about...

11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ..

We'll see in a minute that every Christian is given a gift for ministry, and God has given the church some who are leaders to show Christians how to use their gifts, to train them for the work of ministry. Pastors aren't here to do all the ministry work, they're here to train every Christian for the work. They themselves are experienced workers, that's how they became leaders, and their work now is to train workers. And what is the work?

THE WORK TO DO: BECOME MATURE

Ephesians 4:13-15 (CSB)

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. 14 Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. 15 But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.

The Problem: Immaturity. Every Christian is born, spiritually, as an infant. The reason we need to engage in ministry, the work of ministry, is about all of us growing up, spiritually.

What does immaturity look like? **What is a baby like?** Tim Keller put it well in these categories. I'd like to basically just quote him because I've never heard it put better.

Not discerning

"Real babies can't discern between good food and poison. Spiritual babies can't tell good teaching from poisonous teaching. If you don't know your way around the Bible, if you are not theologically astute, you are a spiritual infant, in need of maturing. "

Self-centered

"Real babies are incredibly self-centered (contrast with "be humble and gentle and patient...They want what they want when they want it. You have to teach them to share and not grab. You have to train them that their desires are not the only desires there are. Spiritual babies are always thinking about themselves. If you're always getting your feelings hurt... always feeling conscious about how people are looking at you or thinking about me or treating you. Am I being treated rightly or not? It's not fair, I'm not being treated fairly. You can't take criticism, you can't admit where you've done wrong. You're concerned about your image, or how you look. You're a spiritual baby in need of growing up."

Unsteady

""Tossed back and forth" - Real babies have a short attention span. The only way you can get them to pay attention for about 10 seconds is if the object is lights, sparks, music, action, and then they're on to something else. They laugh, and then suddenly they're so upset, and then they're bored... they cannot keep their attention on things! Spiritually: if you come to church services and you get really convicted and you say "I'm going to change that" and then you don't follow through? You're a spiritual baby. Or if you're not able to just do your duty to God whether or not things are going well in your life, whether or not you are having good feelings, but you just do it, because you are steady, because you are enduring, because you are patient... If you constantly need God to intervene and come up with great new answers to prayer you're a spiritual baby."

Spiritually mature people:

"Are theologically wise and discerning, astute in the scripture. Not self-centered, thinking about yourself, serving other people, quick to admit where you are wrong, not always getting your feelings hurt. You're a person of steadiness, who is not up and down, when you make a decision you follow through, you know how to handle suffering, you know how to continue to be faithful and obedience and enduring, even when things don't go well."

Well that's convicting. We're all babies in need of maturing at some level, aren't we? Even Paul himself wrote this, "the WE will no longer be infants..." and boy if PAUL included himself in that imagery, what hope do I have?

Everyone in this room is or has been a spiritual infants, and all of us in many ways have maturing to do. None of us should feel uniquely offended or ashamed at Keller's descriptions. We should feel a desire to continue to grow...

Why should we be surprised or offended or ashamed at this idea being spiritually immature? We are not saved by our spiritual maturity. We've already talked about this. We are not saved by our work, we are saved by God's grace! And when we are saved, we are finally born as spiritual infants, in need of growth. We're all in that boat together. Don't be surprised when we encounter spiritual immaturity in other people, or in ourselves, but neither should stay there!

This motivates us to work toward maturity. How do we do that?

AS WE WORK TOGETHER, WE MATURE TOGETHER!

Ephesians 4:16 (CSB)

16 From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

"By the proper working of each individual part" - As each part does its work properly.

This word work is an interesting one, in greek: *energeian*, where we get our word "energy", used elsewhere for the concept of Spiritual Gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (CSB)

4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are different **activities**, but the same God **works** all of them in each person. 7 A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good:

Each person is given a gift, and activity, a work to do, by the Spirit, for the good of the whole body.

And this is how the body is designed to grow. This is how we are designed to grow into spiritual maturity, which by the way, is what we're here to do! "As each one does its work properly, the body builds itself up in love."

Every Christian is saved from death to live through rebirth as a spiritual infant, and given a gift by God to use in the church so that we can all work together to grow up in love, both in size and depth.

Notice here that spiritual maturity is a group project! Spiritual maturity is not achieved by working on yourself, it is achieved by working together with and in the body. By working toward unity, love, peace, Christlikeness.

And this is where spiritual thriving is found: pursuing our god-given work with the goal of love and unity in mind, and pursuing the maturing of the body together with our fellow brothers and sisters at all phases of their maturing process!

Beware: Pursuing our work with the goal of self-actualization and recognition and the praise and thanks of man is a trap, nothing will ever be enough for you, there will always be something wrong, something that went unnoticed, or unthanked. Work for God, not for man.

APPLICATION

This has a few implications for us today:

- Don't let yourself stay an infant! **Pursue maturity!**
- This requires that you **join together with the church** - don't just visit and take.
- **Find your place and your work** - there's lots to be done here, and many needs, and one of the primary ways you find out what the good work God has for you is by what the needs are in the church that you are able to meet. We have tons of opportunities at the moment!
- **Pursue unity.** You can't just be done with people and remain on the outs with them.

But in all this working, **remember the gospel:** we are not saved by our works. We are saved by God's grace. We are saved because we have a savior Jesus who stepped down from His place in perfect, complete maturity – and became a newborn infant – submitting himself to the growth process, living the perfect life, the only one every to perfectly follow through on the work God had for them – and died in our place, so that we could be raised from spiritual death into spiritual life as newborn infants, live and grow and work together with all our brothers and sisters for his glory, and eventually rise to eternal life of perfect complete maturity, enjoying God forever.