The sermon

Intro

A baseball pitcher aims for a no-hitter on every start. Even if they know a hitless season is unattainable.

Even if the hitless season is, in reality, unattainable, that doesn't stop them from seeking progress so that they give up less hits and strike more batters out.

Same with us. We aim for a sinless life, even if a sinless life is, in reality, unattainable. While we might fail in being sinless, we can make progress. We can love more and love better. We can sin less. Our doctrine can improve too. So we aim for perfect doctrine right?

That's part of what the five gifts of Ephesians 4:11 is all about. Gifted individuals equipping each of us so we all can minister to one another. So that together, we can grow in doctrine and be more like Jesus and sin less.

READ PASSAGE

BIG IDEA: Jesus gives spiritual gifts to build up the local church.

BIG QUESTION: Why believer to believer ministry?

Body

Point 1: Believer to believer ministry produces unity of belief (4:13)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,

"until" = the five gifts are given for a period of time to equip the saints *"until"* certain goals are reached. Gifted individuals equip the believers. The believers minister to one another. And good things happen.

The **first end goal** of the five gifts is **unity of belief**.

Paul's not saying that in a few years the unity of the Ephesian church will be at an acceptable level and then there will be no more need for apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers. The idea is perfect unity will never be attained in this age. So these five gifts last till Christ returns.

"unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" = oneness in doctrine/belief (the faith) and oneness in our knowledge of Jesus. The five gifts exist so that we'll believe the right things. It's unity in truth. Not unity in nothing.

"the faith" = a set of beliefs (*"the apostles' teaching"* – Acts 2:42). In Paul's day, the Ephesians were in a better place for doctrinal agreement than us. They had living, foundational apostles who had lived with Christ and were writing Scripture to go to for answers.

We have the same Holy Spirit. Same Bible. But we're clouded by centuries of Christian splintering. In the last 2,000 years, the true Christian church has diverted from aspects of *"the faith"* Paul speaks of. With the church splintering into so many denominations and non-denominational churches, the church doesn't hold a consensus in matters it once did. Baptism, for example (Eph 4:5).

The problem lies with us. Not with God. Not with the Bible. Somewhere someone drifted from the *"one baptism"* taught by Paul. That's why we have both believer and infant baptism today. Someone changed baptism and diverted from the biblical practice. Somewhere someone changed baptism.

How do we process unity in doctrine today?

1. The answer isn't minimizing doctrine.

Unity in truth. Not unity in nothing.

2. Be Bereans.

Hear people out. Where did they get it? Did they pull out what's in the Bible? Is it personal opinion? Is it mishandling of the Bible? Did they pull together everything the Bible teaches? Or did they leave something out?

3. The ideal is agreement.

In the past, Christians hashed it out until they came to agreement. In 313, disagreement emerged concerning the deity of Christ (Arius was the false teacher who claimed Jesus was a created being). Resolution began in 325 (Nicene Creed; revised in 381 at Constantinople) and resolved in 451 by the Council of Chalcedon, resulting in the Chalcedonian Creed, which affirmed the deity of Christ. That's 138 years of discussion before the conclusion!

My point is they kept discussing it until they came to agreement. That's the ideal. The deity of Christ was a big enough doctrine worth 138 years of discussion. The person of Christ was something the church had to agree on!

4. Allow people to be convinced in their own mind (Rom 14:5).

Paul allowed for disagreement about what to do with Old Covenant regulations. So disagreement on some doctrines doesn't sever unity.

5. Some doctrines are false and fall outside biblical Christianity and constitute something other than "the faith."

Errors like salvation by works, rejecting the deity of Christ, rejecting the inerrancy of the Bible.

6. Recognize where we do agree.

The things that make up true Christianity. Paul emphasized these in 4:5-6. One church. One Holy Spirit. One Lord, Jesus Christ. One faith. One baptism. One Father.

Point 2: Believer to believer ministry produces spiritual completeness (4:13)

The **second end goal** of the five gifts is **perfect character**.

"to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,"

Jesus gives gifts. To equip us to minister to one another. So that each of us can be complete spiritually. Lacking in nothing. Our goal. Something never perfectly realized in this life. Yet a goal we can get closer to.

"the stature of the fullness of Christ" is something we never attain to in this age. That's one reason why I believe apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are given until Christ returns.

"mature manhood" = spiritual completeness. Fully-formed Christian lives. Like a man is a fully formed human being. No longer a child. The work in progress has become complete.

The idea isn't isolated individual Christians. The idea is a community of believers united to one another making spiritual gains together.

"the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" = spiritual advancement to the level of Jesus' moral perfection. Obviously unattainable in this life. ***"stature"*** = height (Zacchaeus was small in stature) = moral advancement to the height Jesus possesses.

Both statements speak to the doctrine of sanctification. Spiritual progress. Spiritual maturity. Christlikeness. No area of life untouched by God's word and the Lordship of Jesus.

Ultimately unattainable, but we still go after it. Like a baseball pitcher aims for a no-hitter on every start, even if they know they won't have a hitless season. Unattainable doesn't mean we treat spiritual growth casually. Unattainable doesn't mean we remain content with little progress. The unattainable no-hit season doesn't mean the pitcher doesn't try to give up less hits and get more strike outs. The fact that we can't become sinless in this life doesn't mean we don't strive to sin less.

Application

If you're a Christian, you need the gifted individuals Jesus provides. You need these people to equip you to be a useful minister to other Christians. You need equipped Christians (non-leaders) to minister to you so that you can make spiritual progress. In God's design, the person next to you is supposed to be equipped to minister to you so you can become more like Jesus. Everyone plays a part in creating a culture of spiritual progress. Not just pastors/elders and teachers.

If you're a Christian, you need the church. In God's design, your spiritual advancement and opportunity to minister occurs in the local church.

Point 3: Believer to believer ministry enables you to withstand deception (4:14)

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. – 4:14

Jesus gave five gifts → to equip you → so that you could minister to one another → these gifts exist until unity of belief is reached → these five gifts exist until maturity/completeness/fullness is reached → so that God's people wouldn't be disturbed by false teachers.

Why is unity in correct doctrine critical? Why is spiritual progress critical? So that we can withstand false teachers.

Illustration

We don't want to stay children in our doctrine. We want to learn. We want to move beyond the basics: God loves me; Jesus died for me; I'm going to heaven. These are good. But these aren't enough to withstand the convoluted deceptions of Satan. We don't want to stay children in our character. We want our love for righteousness to grow. We want our hatred for sin to grow. Why? So that we aren't susceptible to false teachers who promote sin.

The illustration Paul uses is a ship at sea. When the wind and the waves rage, the ship goes wherever the wind and waves send it. No control. At the mercy of the elements. Taken wherever the elements send it.

The picture is a Christian who hasn't got a good grasp on the doctrines of the Christian faith, (like a sound knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ), a Christian who hasn't made gains in character, is susceptible to the sales pitch of false teachers. Under the spell of whatever the false teacher says. Like a ship at the mercy of the waves. Same with the local church. If we as a body haven't made gains in doctrine and character, we're at the mercy of false teachers.

If we know the truth well enough (doctrine), we can spot a lie. If we've got a spiritual sensitivity to sin, we can spot teachings that encourage sin.

The sort of false teachers Paul has in mind are deceivers. People who are trying to trick us.

"human cunning" = dice-playing = loaded dice in our day = trickery, hiding the truth.

"craftiness" = clever in how they go about their deceit and trickery. Skillful deception.

"deceitful schemes" = they have a method, plan, strategy and the plan is deceitful.

This picture is they have a plan. They hide their intent. And they're clever in their deceit.

Illustration: Mormonism

In my experience, can't say it's the same with every Mormon, but in my experience Mormons start off claiming to be Christians and highlighting commonality. Mormonism isn't a perversion of Christianity. There's much we share in common. You can lower your guard. Mormonism is a legitimate form of Christianity.

Once they've convinced you to lower your guard, then they move towards the need for Mormonism particularly. So we're not really in the same boat, because I need to become a Mormon. I need to leave my Christian church to get the full benefits of following Jesus. And that can only be done through the Mormon church. They hide things like God the Father was once a man who, through progression, achieved godhood. The Father wasn't always God. In fact, he was once a man. That's a different God.

Do you see what's happening? We're the same. Then we're not really the same. So you need to become a Mormon. This is deceit. Tell us we're different from the outset. Spell out the differences. Be black and white. Don't try to trick me into thinking that we're the same when that's not what you really believe.

What is a false teacher?

1. A false teacher is a non-Christian.

An unsaved person. You never find Paul referring to false teachers in a positive light. You never find Paul calling false teachers brethren.

There was a time when Paul confronted Peter for hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-14), but he didn't call Peter an unbeliever, a false teacher, or accuse Peter of preaching a different gospel. But in Galatians, Paul did talk about *"a different gospel"* (Gal 1:6) and *"false brothers secretly brought in"* (Gal 2:4).

2. A false teacher teaches a different gospel.

It's a different message altogether. Different Savior (often save yourself through our own works, the Mormon church, etc.). Different salvation (wealth not forgiveness of sins; admission to the celestial kingdom [Mormonism], the highest of three heavens, not the new heavens and new earth and not rescue from the wrath of God in hell). Calls for a response of something other than faith and repentance (join the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormon church).

3. A false teacher isn't someone who disagrees with you on about the millennium or election and predestination or infant baptism.

We practice believer baptism by immersion. But there are outstanding Christian teachers who teach infant baptism. I use counseling resources from authors who subscribe to infant baptism. I don't call them false teachers. I call them brothers. We believe in the same Bible, same Trinity, same Lord and Savior, same fall, same new birth/regeneration, same justification, same new heavens and new earth. We share the same gospel while differing on baptism. They're sound teachers not false teachers. Even if they disagree with me on baptism.

One of us is incorrect. But we're both recipients of the promises.

There are doctrines true, legitimate, Spirit-gifted Christian teachers disagree on.

Application: 20th/21st century false teachers

What might you encounter today? Jehovah's Witnesses. Mormons. "Christian" authors who promote sin by endorsing the LGBT agenda. I don't know where he's at today, but author/psychologist Jordan Peterson can use the same words you use, but understand those words in a very different way. You don't want to go to Jordan Peterson to learn about the Gospels. He has a hard time conceding that the events in the Bible actually happened.

False teachers redefine God. They redefine salvation. They redefine other doctrines. And they sanction sin.

Why the sermon? Why Sunday school? Why Sunday evening? ***"so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine."***

So you can say error. I'm not listening to you. So you can say different gospel. I'm not listening to you. So you can say promoting sin. I'm not listening to you.

We need to grow in Bible doctrine so we're not susceptible to false teachers. We need to grow in character so we'll have a sensitivity towards sin. Sound doctrine protects us from Satan's lies! Character protects us from hardening our hearts against God and being okay with sin.

Conclusion

So receive from gifted individuals. Make use of equipping opportunities. Tell me what you need. It could happen in a Sunday school class. It could happen in a weekend conference. It could happen in one on one discipleship. It doesn't have to be me. I might dispense someone else to help you. We're all called to minister to one another.

What I want you to get out of this is getting equipped is a good thing. **I want to you be asking questions like**…Where do I need to be equipped? What should I do to get equipped? How should I be ministering to the person sitting next to me or on the other side of the room? Where does our church need to be equipped? I want a church where equipping opportunities are provided and partaken of. A culture where every believer wants to be able to minister to other believers.

Non-Christian

We've learned this morning that God cares about spiritual progress. Which assumes there's something wrong with us. The problem is sin. The problem is we do life our own way, not God's way. The problem is our desires, the things we want, our goals, what we seek, are misguided because our hearts are corrupted by sin.

Jesus has acted to rescue us from sin on the cross. The Father sent the Son to die on the cross so that whoever believes could be forgiven of sin and have eternal life. Jesus promises, *"Whoever believes in me…Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water"* (John 7:38).

Jesus didn't stop there. He's given gifted men to the church so those who believe could be equipped to minister to other Christians. So that you can be united to other believers in sound doctrine. So that you can make spiritual progress. So that you can reject false gospels.

Are you aware of your sin? Do you see your need for Jesus? If so, turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Receive from him, learn from him, in the local church.