

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 6/26/94 PM
Ephesians 4:11 "The Spiritual Gift of Evangelism"

Intro: What is our mission as a church? Jesus told us in the Great Commission. We see it nearly every week in our bulletin. Our mission is disciple-making. Our Lord told us to go into the world and make disciples. But it's easy to get off track.

I heard an illustration while in Chicago last month that jolted me by its implication. Dann Spader, the director of Sonlife Ministries, was conducting a seminar on "Growing a Healthy Church." He's also a pilot, and he made this observation, "If I am flying an airplane, and I start flying off course by one degree, it seems like no big deal at first. It's only one degree! As a pilot I start looking out the window and pull the nose of the plane just a little off of the intended destination. Just a minor problem, right? After flying only one degree off course for 60 miles, when I try to land I will miss the runway by 6 miles. Anybody want to fly with me?!"

The point is this. It only takes a subtle shift in the church, so slight it's undetected, and the church misses the destination by miles. I fear that has happened in many churches in the USA, churches that once were doing a great work for Christ, but lost sight of their mission, and today are as dead as a morgue. It could happen to us, too. Subtly, unsuspectingly, gradually, we could take our eyes off of our God-given flight plan, our mandate, and miss the mark.

Speaking pointedly, when a church loses its commitment to evangelism and discipleship, it soon grows cold and lifeless. God has given the Body one particular spiritual gift which, by design, keeps the church on target. We're going to explore that gift tonight--the Gift of Evangelism.

Review: Current Series on "Spiritual Gifts"

The ministry of the church involves both "sowing" the Word, and "showing" the Word. Both "talking" and "walking." The NT presents two categories of spiritual gifts. There are speaking gifts, and serving gifts (sign gifts are a third, which we will consider in a couple of weeks). Both are vital if the church is to stay on target.

Tonight: The Gift of Evangelism (Ephesians 4:11)

Ephesians 4:11 "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists..."

Let's make a few observations about spiritual gifts from Ephesians 4.

1. The Giver of Spiritual Gifts is Jesus Christ (7).

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Also, in v 11, "And HE (Christ) gave some..."

2. Every Christian has benefited from this Gift (7).

"But unto EVERY ONE OF US."

3. Spiritual gifts are grace gifts.

John Stott comments on grace (Ephesians, 155), "'Saving grace,' the grace which saves sinners, is given to all believe; but what might be termed 'service grace,'

the grace which equips God's people to serve, is given in differing degrees according to the measure of Christ's gift (verse 7)."

4. The Basis for Spiritual Gifts is the Work of Christ (8-10).

"When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." The ascension of Christ is part of the Work of Christ. The work of Christ was to redeem a people for Himself, through His perfect life, death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of His Spirit at Pentecost. We benefit from His Work.

5. The gifts Paul mentions in v 11 are particular, gifted individuals. There are four speaking gifts. "And He gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers." Paul's list is not exhaustive. He mentions four gifts in Ephesians, seven in Romans 12, and at least nine in I Corinthians 12.

6. Christ gave the church four gifted individuals for a very specific reason. What is it, according to Ephesians 4:12? "To equip the saints to do the work of the ministry so that the church will be edified." These are equipping gifts.

Now, let's focus on the "evangelist," the person with the gift of evangelism. Who is this person? What is this gift?

The greek word for evangelist is "euangelistas." It's interesting that the greek word for gospel is "euangelion." They are closely related words. An evangelist is a person who communicates the gospel.

Isn't that what a pastor does? Yes. A pastor-teacher makes the gospel known to those who are already Christians. An evangelist makes the gospel known where it had not previously been heard (Hodge, 225). William Hendricksen identifies an evangelist as a "traveling missionary." In this sense, a missionary who takes the gospel to Turkey is an evangelist.

So, an evangelist is one who shares the good news of Jesus Christ. But according to v 12 an evangelist is also one who equips the rest of the saints so that they too will do the work of the ministry by sharing the good news with their own lips.

Some say that the derivation of the word "evangelist" comes from "Soap Sellers". These men used to market the soap after they had made it. They would go downtown, find a dirty guy, haul him out on the street corner, and wash him. Then they would say, "That's what my product can do." So those who preached the gospel were called "soap sellers" because they were cleaning up the insides of people. God gave the church "evangelists".

But what did evangelists do in the early church? You'll look in vain for a job description in the NT. Apparently evangelists contributed to the church in three ways:

1. They shared the gospel personally.
2. They taught and trained other Christians to share the gospel.
3. They were instrumental in planting new churches.

Surprisingly, the noun "evangelist" appears only three times in the NT. One is Eph 4:11. It is also used in Acts 21:8 where Luke described Philip as "the evangelist". You remember Philip. Philip was one of the 7 men chosen by the apostles in Acts 6 to oversee the ministry of caring for the widows in the church at Jerusalem. This same Philip was also instrumental in the spread of the gospel. In Acts 8:5 we're told that

Philip preached the gospel in the city of Samaria, and a large number believed in Jesus (note that Philip did not simply read a text of Scripture, tell 10 stories, and give an invitation, like many contemporary evangelists. Verse 12 says that he preached the truths concerning the kingdom of God, and of the name of Christ). Following this public ministry, Philip shared the gospel one-on-one with an influential man from Ethiopia, a treasurer to the queen. Philip led him to the Lord, and baptized him (Acts 8:38).

The third use of term "evangelist" is found in II Timothy 4:5. Paul charged Timothy, "do the work of an evangelist." Paul wrote this letter to encourage timid Timothy. He challenged him in II Tim 1:6 to "stir up the gift of God which is in thee by the laying on of my hands." Evidently, Timothy possessed the gift of evangelism. But Timothy had fearfully shyed away from using his gift. He had clammed up. So Paul exhorted him in 1:8, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. . ."

Who is an evangelist, and what does an evangelist do? He is a person who makes Christ known to those who do not know Christ. He also is a person who mobilizes others in the church to reach out to the lost.

I hesitate to use the term "evangelist". It's a good term, a biblical term. But as soon as I say the word, a picture comes to our minds. To us, an evangelist is somebody who travels from church to church holding "revival" meetings. And if an "evangelist" is popular enough, he speaks in community-wide crusades, and broadcasts his services on TV.

Thank God for "evangelists"! But friends we don't have to be Billy Grahams to share our faith with others. And you may possess the gift of evangelism and never possess the official title "evangelist". What is the gift of evangelism?

DEFINITION: (lengthy, but helpful definition) "The gift of proclaiming the Good News of salvation effectively so that people respond to the claims of Christ in conversion and discipleship."

How can I know if I have the gift of evangelism? Ask yourself these two questions (note: these questions are have a more pragmatic basis than a scriptural basis):

1. Do I have a strong burden to share my faith with others?
2. Am I seeing results? Are people believing in Christ?

Is there really a need for the gift of evangelism? No doubt, there is, but why? The gift of evangelism reminds the church that there is a world out there, a world full of lost people, a world that needs to hear the good news about Christ.

Think about it: (profound!) **There's no need to evangelize believers! Do you believe that? Sure you do--once saved, always saved. Then why do we so often think of the church building as a place to "get saved". It wasn't that way in the early church. They didn't wait for the world to come to the church. They went to the world!

Some of you are avid hunters. If we went to your house right now, you'd show us the guns, the trophies of game on the wall, the hunting dogs out behind the house.

Question--How does a hunter get his game? Does he wait for the animals to come to him? No way! He goes to them. And he goes prepared.

Statistics: Reliable sources estimate that about 44% of U.S. adults are unchurched, neither belonging to a church nor visiting one in the last 6 months, except for holidays, weddings, or funerals. Surprisingly, according to this 1988 Gallup survey, 58% of unchurched adults said they're open to joining a church if they found the right one. Yet in the past year only 38% were invited to one.

Let me review some familiar statistics with you. Within a 15 minute drive of WBC, there are 32,500 people. There are roughly 100 "churches" in this area (of all stripes and flavor). That may sound like a lot. But according to high estimates, there are only 11,775 people with any type of church affiliation. That means that there are 20,725 without church affiliation. That means 2 out of every 3 people do not attend church.

Questions: How many people on your street do not know the Lord? According to nationwide stats, half of them probably don't attend church, let alone know Jesus Christ as Savior. What are you doing to reach those without Christ who live in this community? Are you praying specifically for your unsaved neighbors?

The knife blade goes dull gradually. So does our burden for the lost. When we lose sight of our mission, when our focus is off only one degree, we soon miss the mark.

The church doesn't exist for itself. We exist, first, to bring glory to God. And second, to edify believers. So that thirdly, we can evangelize the lost.

A couple of weeks ago, I was talking with medical missionary Barry White. He used a medical image to portray the condition of the American church. If I were to draw a picture of the Body of Christ as it exists today, it would have a great big head, and a tiny, shrivled up body in desperate need of exercise.

Evangelism is exercise. All of us are responsible to be involved in evangelism. And God has given His Church special gifted individuals to keep the nose of the plane pointed in the right direction.

Some of you are gifted in the area of evangelism. We need you to use your gifts. You model evangelism for us. You show us how to do evangelism. You motivate us to reach out to our lost neighbors.

Conclusion:

If God is to be glorified in WBC, each of us must exercise our spiritual gift. If the members of WBC are to be built up (edified), it will necessitate each of us using our God-given gifts. And if we are going to see unsaved people from the community reached with the gospel, disciplined, and brought into the church, then each of us must see ourselves as ministers of the new covenant. Each of us must be willing to get involved in the ministry of the church. Each of us must be willing to use our spiritual gift. Are you willing to make that commitment?

Closing Chorus: "I Am Willing Lord"