

Getting on the Same Page

A Victorious Church

Part 1

Ephesians 4:11-16

January 5th, 2008

Introduction

Over the next few weeks we are going to make sure that everyone is on the same page. At the beginning of my ministry here at Hardin, I had the privilege of attending a bible conference in Paducah at 1st Baptist Church. The renowned bible teacher, Ron Dunn, was bringing a message from Romans 12:1-2 and he made a statement that stuck with me. The statement was "the main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing". For some reason, from time to time, that statement began to show up in the preaching of my life. Before you knew it, many different members of this Church would say "don't forget, the main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing". Now nearly 25 years after that conference, it is one of the main phrases of our Church. There have been many different corporations in our country to rise to the highest levels of success because they have kept the main thing the main thing. They are known for certain things. For example, if I were to say McDonalds, you would think hamburgers and French fries. If I were to say General Motors, you would think of cars and trucks. If I were to say Pizza Hut, you would think pizza. If I were to say Subway, you would think of sandwiches. The question this morning is, when we think of HBC, what do we think of? Can I suggest to you that everything that we do at HBC revolves around the person of Jesus

Christ, and people? People who have been called out of sin into salvation are called saints in the Bible. But people who have not yet been called out of sin into salvation are called sinners. So if we were to ask what the main thing of HBC is, I think we could say it this way. We have been saying it for years, just not all of the time. HBC exists to 1st exalt the person of Jesus Christ. 2ndly, we exist to equip the saints of God for the ministry God has called them to. And 3rdly, we exist to evangelize sinners in this community who have not yet come to know Jesus Christ. So if we are going to keep the main thing the main thing here at Hardin, we must continually remind ourselves that we are here to exalt the Savior, equip the saints, and evangelize sinners. This means if you are new to our Church, everything that we do is going to revolve around 1 of those 3 things. We are either doing it to exalt Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the most preeminent person in the universe, or we are doing it to equip the saints of God to understand their ministry and how important it is to the body and community, or we are reaching out to other people with the message of Jesus Christ. In today's Scripture, we are going to look at what has become the theme paragraph of HBC.

But before we begin to exegete this passage, let me remind you that the Apostle Paul had a very distinct style when he wrote and preached. You can always tell a Pauline letter in Scripture by this. When he is writing to a Church he begins his writing by telling the believers of the great thing God has done for them in Christ. Then after telling the Church of the great thing, he then always finishes his writings by telling the believers who are in Christ what they should be doing for God since He has done for them what He has done in Christ. This means our actions as Christians should always reflect what we know God has done for us in Christ. My motivation for serving God should never be to do *this* for Him, and then believe He will do *this* for me. No, that is a work-based church, a work-based thought process. I do for God, not so that God will do something for me; I do for God because of what God has already done for me in Christ. That is being grace-based. I do not do because I have to; I do because I want to. That

is grace in my life. Now some of us sitting here this morning that did not come from a grace-based church, we came from a work-based church. There are some of us that did not come from a church that taught freedom in Christ and freedom in the Spirit, we have been raised in a legalistic setting. So that we can all get on the same page, if you are going to attend HBC here is what you need to know that Paul taught. For you see, in Ephesians chapters 1,2, and 3, as Paul begin to teach about the great thing God has done for us in Christ, the 1st thing he says is that God should be blessed. He should be blessed because He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. Then Paul begins to describe the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and our salvation. Then he begins to talk about the result of that salvation in our life and what it means. Paul teaches in the 1st 14 verses of Ephesians 1 that the 1st spiritual blessing we have in Christ is that God chose us before the foundation of the world, and that we should be holy and without blame before Him. If you are going to come to HBC you will hear this teaching a lot. You chose Christ because God chose you before the foundation of the world. Do not let anyone tell you that if you attend HBC (some people do not understand what we teach here) that Bro Ricky and HBC do not believe you have a real choice. You have a real choice. You just will not exercise that real choice in a right way until you come to understand that God has chosen you before the foundation of the world. You love Him because He 1st loved you. When He made that choice of you before the foundation of the world, Paul says that He predestined you to adoption.

^a ***Predestination*** is not a bad word; it is one of the most glorious words in Scripture. The word literally means he "blueprinted". It means that once He made His choice of us, He sat down with a blueprint and decided to blueprint us to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. Wow! In other words, when He gets through with us, we will be like Christ! Is that glorious, or is that glorious! Now why did He do this? Ephesians 1:6 says He did this to the praise of the glory of His grace. Wow...that is humbling. Some of you have been raised under a gospel that taught that God did everything He

did because He did not want you to die and go to hell, He wanted you to go to heaven, and you got the idea this was all about you. You got the idea that salvation is man-centered, therefore you think the Church should be you-centered. That is a lie. Ephesians chapter 1 does not say God chose you, and predestined you, and accepted you, so that you would not go to hell, and would go to heaven. The bible says He did this to the praise and glory of His grace. Do you understand that? Now a benefit of being chosen, and predestined, and accepted is you will go to heaven when you die, and not go to hell. But the purpose of that was not for you, it was for God. It was so that men would look at you and not brag on you, but give praise to His grace.

Then he tells us that in the Son we have been redeemed and forgiven, to the praise of His grace. You see, if you are going to come to Hardin, you will hear this teaching a lot. We will tell you and remind you that we do not serve a man-centered God; we serve a God-centered God. Think about being redeemed from the bondage of sin. This word means that God went into the slave market of life and He bought us with a great price, the blood of His Son. He actually went in there for the purpose of redeeming us, buying us out of, and then setting us free. But listen to this, He not only rescued us from a life of sin, but once He rescued us He actually forgave us of our sin! I know a lot of people that would assist you in being rescued from your situation, but once you have been rescued they will not forgive you, they will just keep reminding you of what you did. That is miserable. It is miserable to have someone aid you in your rescue, and then you being set free, and then from time to time, they just keep reminding you of who you used to be. Not our God! He not only redeemed you of sin, He has forgiven you of being a sinner. He does this to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Then the bible is going to teach in verse 13 and 14 that He not only chose us, predestined us, accepted us, redeemed us, forgave us, but He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit. Listen to me, you may be sitting here wondering if you could live the Christian life if you believed in Jesus, and

you think you cannot because every time you try to do something right, you eventually blow it. The difference is the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus, the 3rd person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit of God steps out of heaven into your life. He takes up residence in you. Why does God put the Holy Spirit in you? It is so that you will be to the praise of the glory of His grace. Do you get it? If you choose to come to Hardin, we are going to remind you from time to time that this is not about us, it is about Him.

Let me tell you what else He did. While Paul is talking about this great thing God has done for us in Christ, he then tells us that all of those who He chose, and predestined, and accepted, and redeemed, and forgave, and sealed with the Spirit, He then broke down the middle wall of partition that had separated Jews and Gentiles. For you see, for every one of us who have come to the cross, and have been forgiven of our sin, we have been made one in a new body, and that new body is the Church. It is not a nation of people anymore. It is the people of God, it is the Church, and in that Church God has broken down walls of partition. They are walls that have separated mankind in their past; economic walls, racial walls, cultural walls, and religious walls. He breaks those walls down and now He brings us together as one new people! The reason is so that we can carry out the agenda of the Kingdom of heaven. Listen to me, Hardin Baptist is the assembly of saints who meets together for one purpose, and that is to carry out the agenda of the Kingdom of heaven. That agenda is expressed in this way: exalt the Savior, equip the saints, and evangelize sinners. If you are meeting with us for any other purpose, you have missed the purpose of the meeting. We do not meet together or we do not do things unless it involves one of those 3 things. If we ever start holding other kinds of meetings we will start majoring on minors, instead of keeping the main thing the main thing. At HBC we desire to keep the main thing the main thing. Now we will read the Scriptures, I am reading out of the ESV but I may interchange some with the NKJV.

Scripture

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the (pastor/teachers)^{NKJV}, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Spiritual Gifts

In this 4th chapter, Paul is going to switch from talking about what God has done for us in Christ, to now telling us what we ought to be doing as a believer since we are in Christ. He begins chapter 4 by talking about the unity of the Church. He lists 7 different unifying factors. But then he switches gears and he begins to talk about the ascension of Christ and how when Christ ascended to heaven He gave gifts to men, not just any men, men and women of the Church. If each one of us sitting in a chair this morning have been to Calvary and have been born again by the blood of Christ, at the moment of your rebirth, God gifted you spiritually. Then, he begins to talk about the gifted men who have been given to the Church. He lists those gifted men. He calls them apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. When we read our English versions, it sounds like there are 5 gifted positions of leadership. In reality there are just 4. If you will look at your English translations, whether it is a NKJV or ESV, there is a little footnote after the word teachers. Every English translation that I study says in the footnote, that this last gift of leadership means pastor/teacher in the Greek. But because in English we have been translating it pastor and teacher, they all continue to translate it this way, but there are only 4 gifts. They are the gifts of ¹apostles, ²prophets,

³evangelists, and ⁴pastor/teachers. I want you to note this; you must believe this in 2008. Because of the ascension of Jesus back to the Father's right hand, at the moment of salvation, God is still gifting men to be leaders in the Church. He gives one man the gift to be an apostle, and He gives another the gift to be a prophet, and another the gift to be an evangelists, and another the gift to be a pastor/teacher. So we are going to start our sermon right here this morning and I am going to ask you to do something. If HBC is going to keep the main thing the main thing, it is important that the leadership of this Church to also keep the main thing the main thing.

Pastor/Teacher

Now, I am not an apostle, a prophet, or an evangelist. I do not believe because this is listed 4th that this is the least of the gifts, so I say humbly before God, I am a pastor/teacher. Now, for those of you who are new to HBC, so that we are on the same page, you need to understand this because people are always asking us why we do not have elders. Well, we do, except we do not call them elders, we call them pastors. In the Bible you will discover that pastor, elder, and bishop are all referring to the same responsibility. The Church did not have elders, and bishops, and pastors, as if those are 3 different offices. The Church had one office. The elder referred to the person holding the office of a bishop. The word b. **bishop** literally means "to be an overseer"; the one who oversees the work of the Church is the elder. Now if you were to describe the work of the elder as he oversees the Church, the word that the Bible uses is the word pastor, the word shepherd. So when you think about the pastor/teacher, you need to think that he is the elder who oversees the work of the Church, and when you look at how he does it, what should come to your mind is the work of a shepherd. So if you want to pray for Bro Ricky in 2008, you need to pray that Bro Ricky keeps the main thing the main thing! One of the 1st things I have to do is to always remember who I am to the Church. I am the shepherd. The responsibility the shepherd has to his congregation or flock is to lead, feed, and from time to time, he gets the stick out and

beats the big, bad wolves away, and he rescues the flock. So to pray for me, pray as I lead, as I feed, and as I rescue. You need to pray that I keep the main thing the main thing!

Now I want to say to you who are just coming into this church. This church, in the 25 years that I have been here, has the amazing ability to hold in high regard the man of God. If I can say this, I think it is one of the reasons that God has such an anointing on this church. This church, to a great degree, is unlike any church I have ever seen. When I am out in the community people will say, "I have never heard any of your people talk about you in a negative way in the community." Now I have to surmise that for people to come up and tell me that, those same people must be hearing other people talk in a negative light about the man of God in the pulpit, but not this church. The reason is because HBC believes that the gift of the leader has been given to this church by God. Therefore when you begin to criticize the gifted man that God has placed in the position of pastor over the flock, you are not just criticizing the gift, you are criticizing the giver of the gift. Do you think God is going to have an anointing on His Church when the people of God do not hold Him or the gifts in high regard? If you come into this church in 2008, I ask you to stay on the same page with us and that is to pray that our pastor/teacher keep the main thing the main thing. In his walk, we want to see him following the Lord so that we have confidence in following him. If I ever quit following God you will know it, it will show up really quickly. You want to know by my speech, by my talk, or whoever the man of God is, that he has been with Jesus during the week. I think you can tell when a man of God gets in the pulpit and he has been with man all week, or if he has been with God all week. So let us pray for the pastor/teacher.

Equipping the Saints

Now why is he here? Look what Scripture says; to equip the saints. I have to refute something. We do not have a problem with it here at HBC, but other people have a problem with it. You see nearly 25 years ago a 22 year

old kid sat before a search committee and they shared with him that he was the one to lead their church, but he would be following a man who had pastored that church for 17 years. There was some concern about the church of about 60 to 70 people possibly splitting. Now you do not need to split when you just have 60 or 70 coming amen? So they asked that young man, "What are you going to do to prevent a split?" The young man did not know what to say except, "We are going to build the church on the model that Paul lays out in Ephesians 4:11-16." For the past 25 years, HBC has been doing that, and we still have not split yet. Now I want to say to you that we have never changed our model. And with full humility, I want to say that when you get something right in the beginning, you do not have to change it. But what does happen is that it makes for boring church. Meaning for those of this church who have been here since I have been here, every time I open up this passage, they know that I am not going to say anything new. The reason is because we figured this thing out 25 years ago.

This week I tried to rework this point that I am going to make, and I got all of my commentaries out on Ephesians, and I tried to find new ways to express this same old thought and I did not find a one! The pastor/teacher's responsibility is simple; it is to equip the saints. Now unfortunately in 1611, (and I want to correct this thought in case there is someone here thinking this) when the King James translators translated the Bible into English, they made a mistake. Now hear me, there is not a mistake in the Word of God. I believe that the Word of God is inerrant and inspired by God. I do not believe though there has ever been a translation of the originals that is inerrant or infallible. Do you understand the difference? God did not inspire our 1611 translators of the Bible to translate Scripture as He inspired Paul, and James, and John, and Peter to write the Word of God. Sometimes translators have to make an interpretation just like I have to, and sometimes we miss it. In 1611 they translated "and he gave some churches pastor/teachers for the perfecting (equipping) of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the

body of Christ.” Now when you read it that way it says every church has been given a pastor/teacher to equip the saints, and to do the work of ministry, and to edify the body of Christ, (note the commas in between) and that is a good deal amen? You are paying a guy to come into the church and he is supposed to do 3 things. For hundreds of years in the Church, (especially our Baptist churches) we hired a man and suddenly discovered that church was about us coming to church to watch him preach. Then during the week we are to watch him and make sure he is doing all of the work of ministry. Then at the end of the week, we look at the Sunday school board and check out the baptisms, and we see if he is edifying the body of Christ. We have become armchair preachers. We come to church and if we are in agreement, and he calls the right plays, we say amen, glory hallelujah! But if he does not, we do the little talk show thing, we have our little holy huddles down at the Crossroads, and the 4 Seasons, and the Cracker Barrel. We think that since we gave on Sunday we have a right as a paying customer to critique! No, no, no...guys you helped put me through school to study the Greek language, and I want to tell you there should not be commas here in this passage. What this says is the main thing of the pastor/teacher is to equip the saints. He is equipping the saints for the work of ministry. There is ministry in a local body so that the body will edify itself, and grow up into Christ and into full maturity. Do you see that? It is the saints, not the pastor, who does the work of ministry. It is ministry, not the pastor, who edifies the body of Christ. We are missing it today in our churches! We are drawn to personalities, and we are drawn to styles, and we should not be. What we should be drawn to is a church that has a man of God who faithfully, in his preaching/teaching, in his shepherding the body, is actually equipping the saints! The reason is because as we sit under the ministry of that church, we are confident that as saints of God we will be so equipped that as we discover our gift and we will discover our place of ministry, and will get in there and rub shoulder to shoulder with someone. We will not just go to a place on Sunday morning, we will not just attend a place, but we will be part of the body of Christ, and will do real, meaningful ministry, not only in

the church but in the community. When we do, guess what will happen to that little, teeny-tiny body of 60 to 70 people? God just might bless it until one day it grows to 1300, 1400, or 1500 people! Who knows what He might do when those 1300 come together and each one share the load of ministry? It just might be God's will for that place to flourish to thousands and thousands! But not for numbers, not just so people will be saved from hell, not just so people will go to heaven when they die, but it is so that God will be glorified in the community, and the community will know there is a God! When people drive up and down the 4-lane highway we do not want them to see a building, we want them to see a people. You have to pray that the pastor/teacher keeps the main thing the main thing, and that is being the equipper.

This word ^c **equip** is primarily used 2 ways in the Bible. In the biblical world it was used to "get an army ready for war". One of the biggest mistakes we make in America is that we think we are living in peacetime. We are just pursuing our own little world, just doing our little thing, and we have forgotten that the greatest terrorist known to man is still on the loose. He is still walking to and fro upon the face of the earth, seeking who is may devour. We forget we are in a war; we are in a real war. He is sneaky and he is cunning, and he is deceitful, and he is scheming. He puts his little roadside bombs in your path. That roadside bomb may be another man or another woman. It may be a joint, may be a pill, may be a bottle of booze, or it may be the internet. The next thing you know he has bombed you. This morning in the church of God, we have homes that are being broken, marriages that are being destroyed, children being disobedient, and dads not walking under the control of God. It is because they are being sought by Satan. And we are hunkering down in our little holy huddles. We want to get another Sunday school pen, we want to memorize one more Scripture, or we want to discuss another doctrine rather than getting down there on the front lines in the trenches and fighting where it really counts, and that is out there in the community in the lives of real people! My responsibility, if I keep the main thing the main thing, it is to

make sure that when you come to church you see it (to a certain degree) as a spiritual boot camp, and sometimes it hurts to sit there and listen. Now you might criticize the man and his methods from time to time, but the only thing I ask you to desire is the results. The results are a church accomplishing its purpose in this community that has been ordained by God.

The 2nd way this word was used was to "get a ship ready to sail". This morning I was invited to go on a cruise with a family in this church, what gracious invitation! Now from what I have heard about cruise ships, you either love them or you hate them. I have never heard anyone say ah, it was ok. It was yuck, or wow, the best thing I have ever done! But here is one thing I have discovered about a cruise ship. It sounds like from the time you sign up until the time you get off, it is all about you.

I believe a lot of people come to HBC thinking this is a cruise ship. Who would not want to sail with the Lord Jesus Christ? That is why some of you are here; we are the best cruise ship in town. Can I say something to you? You will not make it in this church, you will not stick. I talk with some brothers quite often about all of the people that are coming through the doors of this church! There are times when we want to think that we have really failed them, but I have come to believe that we have not. I am starting to believe that they do not want the brand of the gospel we stand for here at HBC. You will not get pampered here at this church. When you have a real need we are going to try to rise up and meet that need, but I want to tell you that if you come to this church, it does not matter who you are in this community, or what side of the tracks you are from, this church is not ever going to be about you. This church is only going to be about Him! We are going to teach you your responsibility and your place in this body so that your life can revolve around Him, and quit revolving around you. We have too many people living in Murray, Benton, and Mayfield, KY or the surrounding communities, who really believe live is about them...no!

Now I know, it would be attractive to go to a place where it is all about you because sometimes I think my home is not all about me, I think it is all about the kids. And they are already grown and it is still about them. Sometimes I just throw a pity party at home and tell my wife that it seems like it is all about her...I will say can't it ever be about me? She will say no, you are the dad. I will say now that they are grown, can't it be about me? She will say no you are the husband. That is what we have to remember when we come to church. It is not about us, it is about Him.

Now watch this. If we painting a picture of a ship, then HBC is going to be a cargo ship. In the biblical world, a cargo ship was entrusted with precious cargo that had to be taken from one port to another because the people in that port needed what was on the ship. We need to remember at HBC that as a cargo ship we carry the precious cargo of Jesus Christ. We carry the good news of a God who loved us so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross, so that we, who were in sin, could be redeemed from sin. We have the good news the world needs to hear because the world believes God is mad at them! The world is trying to work their way to appease this mad God, and you and I know the truth. God is not mad anymore! He poured out His wrath on His Son at Calvary, and He has redeemed man from sin, and we have this good news that the world needs to hear. You see, when you are on a cruise ship you do not want to get where you are going, you just want to stay on the ship. But when you are a cargo ship, it is about making good time. It is about getting from one port to another as quickly as you can because the people in that port need what we have got! When will HBC recognize that this community needs what we have? We have Jesus! We meet together to carry the good news of Jesus to your neighbors, friends, and co-workers, and we have forgotten that. That is my responsibility as the pastor/teacher, so I ask you to pray for me that I keep the main thing the main thing, and that is to remind us that we are a cargo ship.

Next week we will talk about who I am here to equip and that is you, the saints, and why you as saints are here. Then what all of us being here together is going to accomplish.