

Location: First Baptist Church, November 12, 2023
Title: Stopping Short
(Theme: God desires our fullness)
Text: Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." 9 (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) 11 He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Have you ever started a project, for instance, only to give up a little too soon? Then you realize sometime later that you would have made it if you had just gone on another step or two. The old saying that it is darkest just before the dawn can undoubtedly be applied here. I wonder how often we fall victim to our sense of discouragement and weariness only to miss the target by inches.

Nothing is sadder than seeing that happen in our experience as believers or with family and friends who stop short of the fullness of our relationship with Jesus. We go so far and miss the best God intends for us. We can't imagine that we will ever measure up or achieve the kind of life God wants, so we compromise and stop short of the goal.

Our reading today reminds us that every believer has received all the grace needed without exception. Every believer, including you and me, has been given varying gifts to use in fully completing their part in the body of Christ we call the church. The gifts that Christ gives to the church prepare us not only for a someday heaven but are to be used now since earthly life is also under his domain. We are gifted so that the whole body of believers may be blessed, not just a select few. Often, our biggest problem as the church is that some have given up too soon or stopped short of their full calling in God's kingdom. We are designed to mature together, preparing an entire body for Christ. No one is excluded from the call to live fully into the gifting God has given us. That's why we must discover and use our gifts, whatever they may be. That is God's plan for every believer, including you and me, to make up this wonderful body we call the bride of Christ.

The danger of stopping short in our goal of living fully in Christ should be evident to us all. We see everywhere evidence of what happens when some choose to hold back in their commitment to Christ and his church. It ends up hurting everyone. We see the suspension of ministries because people do not want to get involved because their personal lives are too busy. We see understaffed ministries everywhere where the mission of the church is compromised. Salvation for many has become a strictly private matter, and

somewhere along the way, we have forgotten what it means to live as a community of believers. Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. It is not true of everyone, of course, but it is true in enough people that the church today has great difficulty moving forward in a consistently effective way.

This is not a condemnation of anyone, but it reminds us that we must not stop short by refusing to grow in our faith experience and working that out daily. We must admonish and help each other along the path to spiritual maturity and living our faith to the fullest. Each part of that body of Christ must work properly, or the whole body suffers.

So today, perhaps you can speak a word of encouragement to someone who needs reminding of the importance of keeping on in their commitment to Christ. Or maybe you need to remind yourself that we are closer to that day of Christ's return than ever. The Lord speaks of his return as an unparalleled blessing for those busy serving him as he returns. Keep up the fight, keep on going, and realize the time is not much longer. May God help us each one to never stop short in God's call to serve. Amen.