



# Faith Pulpit

## Ministry in the Local Church

The scriptural teaching concerning the mission of the body of Christ is most clearly given in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter 4. Mention has been made of this text often. Ephesians 4:11–12 reads: "And he [i.e., Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." A direct rendering of the Greek of 4:12 reads: "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service-ministry for the building up of the body of Christ." The Greek text makes it clear that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers to train the saints so that the saints would do the work of the ministry and so ultimately the body of Christ would be edified. God gave gifted leaders to the church to prepare God's people for work in His service. It is the saints who should do the work of ministering toward the building up of Christ's body.

It is clear, therefore, that the Lord's people have an appointed ministry or service, and that He has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip them for that service. Further, all translations agree that this service is the building up of the church and that this ministry is to continue until the church comes to maturity. Since this is so, what must be done to bring Christians to this place of effective witness?

First of all, each Christian must realize that the work of the ministry belongs to all Christians. It is not reserved for a few "professionals" who have special formal training or even for those who have been specially indoctrinated in the local church for some specific task. Instead, the believer must understand that each Christian has a task and needs to be trained. In effect, there is only one evangelist, preacher, missionary, and witness, and that is the Holy Spirit, and He indwells every believer (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Thus, the work of the ministry is every believer's responsibility.

Secondly, each Christian needs to be instructed in the Scriptures. He should know Christ's person and mission in history. He should know the reason for Christ's death, not only in the sphere of redemption but particularly in that of sanctification and the work of the Holy Spirit in his life and ministry. He should also know the significance of the resurrection as it relates to all men (1 Corinthians 15:20–22), as it relates to power for service (Ephesians 1:19–22), and as it relates to the hope for the future (2 Corinthians 4:14). Christ spent much time in His earthly ministry with only twelve men whom He had carefully chosen. He deliberately trained them in a real-life setting so that He could eventually send them out to function effectively in the ministry with the same resources available to them that He had.

In the third place, each Christian must understand that he is engaged in a spiritual warfare. Satan is a strong enemy, but Christ's power is stronger. It is worth noting in Ephesians 6 that the believer is told to be strong (v. 10) before he is told to stand (v. 11). But how is the saint to receive sufficient strength to stand? By realizing that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies, far above all principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:19–23), and that the very power of God is available to us through the indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 3:14–21). The Christian needs to know that he does not fight against flesh and blood but against "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2).

It is important, then, that the Christian not "give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). The armor Paul describes in Ephesians 6:13–17 is for protection. The sword (i.e., God's Word) is for actual battle. Each part of the spiritual armor tells us what the believer must have in his life if he is to be protected against Satan. But the sword is the believer's weapon for attacking Satan's strongholds and defeating him. The believer conquers as he understands, memorizes, and obeys the Word of God.

Fourth, each Christian must be encouraged to lead from weakness. He needs to lean on the Holy Spirit, not on methods. In evangelism, for example, getting a "decision" does not constitute success any more than not getting one constitutes failure. Jesus Himself did not get a positive response as evidenced in the case of the rich young ruler and the ignoble apostate, Judas. It is essential that the witnesser not try to overpower an unsaved person, but, instead, depend on the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

Fifth, each Christian must be joined in fellowship with other believers. Sharing their experiences, burdens, victories, defeats, weaknesses, faults, hopes, and aspirations comprises the law of love of which Paul speaks in Galatians 6. If a man is walking in the Spirit, he will not use his liberty in Christ for selfish purposes, but will allow the Spirit to work through him to assist others. Being independent of the law does not mean we are independent of each other, for we are brethren, saints of a common fellowship. This fellowship relates to material help as well as spiritual help. The spiritual aspect is in verses 1–5 but the material is in verses 6–10. There is a necessary "sowing to the Spirit" which implies spending time and money on things spiritual.

Sixth, each Christian should see his own life as a plan of God. That is, he should see his location as God's place for him and he should see his works as potentially productive. He should see the world as

one to be evangelized, and he should see the Holy Spirit as the means to the end of evangelism.

Seventh, each Christian should be himself as God has gifted him. He must learn to give himself to Christ as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1, 2). This is the all-important act of dedication without which it is impossible to know and do the will of God. He should learn to be controlled continuously by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18ff). He should learn to walk by faith (Galatians 2:20 ; Hebrews 11:6). This implies that there are no adequate criteria by which any Christian may measure his effectiveness. Success, as such, may simply be an illusion (1 Corinthians 4:1–5). Results, if any, as long as they are directed by the enabling Holy Spirit, are God's responsibility.

Eighth, each Christian should know that the one who abides in Christ will bring forth much fruit. Basic strategy for maximum Christian effectiveness is the abiding life according to John 15. The word "fruit" is used six times, and "abide" at least fifteen times, suggesting that the main point of the passage is fellowship, not sonship. To abide in Christ means to live in His Word and pray (v. 7), to obey His commandments (v. 10) and to keep our lives clean through His Word (vv. 3, 4).

To be a branch in the Vine means we are united to Christ and share His life. As we abide in Him, His life flows through us and produces the fruit. It is possible for the carnal Christian to produce "works" but only the spiritual Christian can bear fruit that lasts. Fruitful branches are purged or cleansed to make them even more fruitful. As the Christian moves from fruit to more fruit to much fruit, he glorifies God. The evidences of this abiding life are a sense of the Savior's love (v. 9), obedience to His Word (v. 10), answered prayer (v. 7), and joy (v. 11). When we abide in Him, we can be sure fruit is abounding, not because we see the fruit, but because we are abiding.

Methods of service are as numerous and diverse as those who use them. The task of the saints will be largely implemented not by organization, program, drives, or spectacular administration, but by a fresh infusion of the Holy Spirit. In a word, Christians will effectively serve when Christians become Christian!

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