

Equipping the Saints For the Work of Ministry

The Necessity of Equipping the Saints – Part 1

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Try to imagine how well a clock or a watch built by a master craftsman would work if even one internal component were missing – just one small gear.
 - A. More than likely, the timepiece wouldn't function at all.
 1. It might be adorned with jewels, or made from the most precious metals such as gold or silver, but if one internal component is missing it would be useless as a timepiece.
 - B. Over the next few weeks – a total of 5 lessons to be exact – I want us to take a close look at ways we can become more involved in what the apostle Paul calls, "*The work of ministry.*"
 1. In fact, let's begin by looking at the passage that will serve as the basis for this brief series of lessons.
 2. It's found in the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:7-16** – *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave*

gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

- C. In this passage from **Ephesians chapter four**, we are told that Christ has given "gifts" to the church.

1. Specifically, these gifts are "*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.*"
2. Some of these gifts were temporary in nature.
 - a. Gifts that were temporary in nature would include apostles and prophets.
 - b. Why are they temporary in nature? Simply because their work relates to establishing the foundation of the Lord's church.
 - c. **Ephesians 2:19-22** – *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*
 - d. The apostle Paul made it clear that the saints at Ephesus and the church there was the work of God that is built on the foundation which was laid by the apostles and prophets.
 - e. That foundation upon which the church was built is none other than the teachings of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone.

- f. However, once the foundational teachings about the nature, purpose and deity of Jesus Christ had been laid, the work of the apostles and prophets was completed.
 - g. Therefore, the gift of apostles and prophets to the Lord's church was temporary – once their work was completed, there would no longer be a need for apostles and prophets.
3. However, the apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians chapter four**, that other "gifts" are permanent.
- a. These gifts include evangelists, pastors, and teachers.
 - b. The reason why evangelists, pastors (or elders) and teachers are permanent gifts is simply because their work continues indefinitely.
 - c. Their work includes building upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets.
 - d. **1 Corinthians 3:9-11** – *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

D. The apostle Paul not only tells us that evangelists, pastors and teachers are gifts to the church, there is also a very definite purpose for these gifts.

1. This purpose is actually two-fold. Evangelists, pastors and teachers are given to the church:

a. *"For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry..."*

(Ephesians 4:12a)

b. *"For the edifying of the body of Christ..."* **(Ephesians 4:12b)**

2. *"Equipping the saints for the work of ministry"* is a vitally important function of those who serve as evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

a. In fact, we could even say this one of the main reasons we assemble together.

b. Titus, a young preacher, was instructed by Paul time and again to work toward this end:

(1). **Titus 3:1** – *"Remind them... to be ready for every good work."*

(2). **Titus 3:8** – *"...these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works."*

(3). **Titus 3:14** – *"And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."*

3. As an evangelist, or minister of the gospel of Christ I certainly have a responsibility in the area of evangelism in preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ – as the apostle Paul told Timothy: *"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."* **(2 Timothy 4:5)**
4. However, to *"fulfill my ministry"* I need to be thinking in terms beyond my own personal work as an evangelist – beyond merely preaching and teaching the gospel of Christ.
5. I must also give considerable thought and attention to how I can be *"equipping the saints [YOU] for the work of ministry."*

II. Therefore, in this lesson and in the one to follow, I want to begin this series of studies by pointing out the NECESSITY for *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry."*

A. To do this, we're going to do three things.

1. First, we want to understand the need for a diversity of talents and abilities in the body of Christ.

2. Second, we want to understand the contribution these talents and abilities make toward the proper functioning of the Lord's church.
3. And finally, we want to provide some direction on what we, as a local congregation of the Lord's church, can do to facilitate *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry."*

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by asking this question:
 - A. Why is it so important that we understand the necessity for "equipping the saints for the work of ministry?"
 1. I think we can all agree that unless we truly understand and appreciate the NECESSITY of *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry"* we won't have the motivation we need to accomplish that task.
 2. So, why is *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry"* necessary.
 - B. The answer to that question is found in a promise Jesus made to His disciples at Caesarea Philippi: *"I will build My church"* (**Matthew 16:18**)
 1. We understand that this promise pertains to the "establishment" of the Lord's church.
 2. However, I think we would all agree that the Lord is STILL building (expanding, enlarging) His church throughout the world.

- a. Since the scriptures speak of Jesus as the "*head*" of the body, the church (**Ephesians 1:22-23**), we should certainly not be surprised to see that He is very much involved in the "expansion" of the church even today!
3. In fact, in nearly every example of conversion recorded in the book of Acts, the Lord worked in some way to create the opportunity for the person to hear the gospel.
 - a. The Lord waited until thousands of devout Jews were gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost before the Spirit was poured out on the apostles and they began preaching the first gospel sermon. **(Acts 2)**
 - b. Philip was sent toward Gaza where he would meet the Ethiopian eunuch and preach the gospel to him. **(Acts 8:26-28)**
 - c. The Lord saw to it that Saul would end up in the city of Damascus where Ananias lived, so that Ananias could preach to Saul and explain to him that he had been chosen by God to preach the gospel of Christ. **(Acts 9:10-18)**
 - d. The Lord also providentially brought together the apostle Peter and a Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius who, along with his household, would have an opportunity to hear the gospel from Peter. **(Acts 10)**

- e. The Lord brought about the evangelization of Europe (beginning with the conversion of Lydia and the Philippian jailor) after the "Macedonian Call" led Paul and his companions to cross the Aegean Sea and enter Europe. **(Acts 16)**
4. Over and over again we can see the wonderful providence of God at work in bringing the gospel of Christ to men and women throughout the world.
 5. Although, these examples are in keeping with the miraculous events surrounding the establishment of the Lord's church, I believe they illustrate a principle that is just as valid for us today.
 - a. The Lord knows the hearts of all men, and still seeks those who are seeking Him.
 - b. He has promised that those who "*hunger and thirst for righteousness*" will somehow be "*filled.*" **(Matthew 5:6)**
 6. And this is where the providence of God comes in. I'm a strong believer in the providence of God – of God providentially working to bring about salvation to those who are earnestly seeking it.
 - a. I firmly believe if someone, somewhere, is seeking to do God's will (like the examples we see in the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and Lydia), then I'm convinced the Lord will give the

one seeking an opportunity to come across one who is prepared to do the teaching.

7. Perhaps this is why Paul viewed those who taught others the gospel as "God's fellow-workers" (**1 Corinthians 3:5-9**)
 - a. They are simply servants through whom the Lord extends the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ.
 - b. In the final analysis, it is God who gives the increase.
8. Therefore, I believe the Lord is just as involved in the "expansion" of His church as He was in its "establishment."
 - a. And because of this, the Lord is able do much through His providential workings in the affairs of men.
9. BUT – and here's the catch – the Lord's providential working is dependent upon our willingness to be prepared and available for the work of service.
 - a. We are the tools God uses to carry out His work of reaching men and women with the gospel of Christ.
 - b. Or, as the apostle Paul put it: **Romans 10:14-15** – *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How*

*beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

C. Therefore, in answering the question, why is "*equipping the saints for the work of ministry*" necessary?

1. The answer is simply that the Lord depends on workers or laborers in His vineyard to bring in the harvest of lost and dying souls.
2. **Matthew 9:37-38** – As Jesus told His disciples: "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.*"

II. But let me suggest another reason why "*equipping the saints for the work of ministry*" is absolutely essential.

A. There are numerous examples in the Scriptures where the Lord opened doors for those who were prepared to serve.

1. For example, the Lord opened a door for Paul at Ephesus.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 16:5-9** – speaking of his own personal plans, Paul wrote: *Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). 6 And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you,*

if the Lord permits. 8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost.

9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

2. The Lord opened another door for Paul at Troas – although Paul moved on to Macedonia to find his fellow-worker Titus.
 - a. **2 Corinthians 2:12-13** – *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.*

B. I think it's safe to say the Lord opened these doors because there were men like Paul who were prepared to be used by the Lord.

1. If we want the Lord to open doors of opportunity for us as an individual, or for us as a congregation, we must be prepared.
2. In fact, the apostle Paul told Timothy that to be useful to the Master, we must be prepared for every good work.
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:20-21** – *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter ["iniquity" v.19], he will be a vessel for*

honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

3. As individual Christians, and as a congregation of the Lord's people, we must be prepared to either teach others ourselves, or to bring souls to those who are ready to teach.
 4. We must be ready as a congregation to assimilate new converts into the family of God and nurture them during a vital stage in their new life in Christ.
 5. But what if we're not prepared as individuals or as a congregation to do the Lord's work? How is the Lord going to use us in working through His providence to save the souls of the lost?
 - a. Who is He going to use to teach?
 - b. Who is He going to use to encourage or edify?
 - c. Who is He going to use to serve?
 6. Can we really expect the Lord to "open a door" for this congregation if we haven't taken the time or taken the effort to prepare ourselves to do His work – to be a laborer in His vineyard?
 7. Would you knowingly assign a critically important task to someone you knew wasn't prepared to perform the task adequately?
- C. Do you remember what the Lord told Paul in a vision before He came to Corinth?

1. **Acts 18:9-10** – *"Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."*
2. How many people does the Lord have in THIS city who won't hear the gospel of Christ simply because we haven't prepared ourselves to take the gospel to them?
 - a. And perhaps more importantly, what answer will we give when we stand before the Lord in judgment, trying to explain why we were unprepared for the work of ministry.
3. And what about all the other works of ministry – encouraging the discouraged, supporting the weak, restoring the erring, caring for the sick, and on, and on, and on we could go?
 - a. Who is going to serve in all these other areas of ministry if we haven't prepared ourselves to be a servant?
4. Don't forget the words of Jesus to His disciples – these words burn in our minds constantly.
 - a. **Matthew 9:37-38** – *"The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."*

CONCLUSION:

I. Do you now see why "*equipping the saints for the work of ministry*" is SO important?

A. The Lord has done His part.

1. He has given His life and shed His blood to provide eternal life to all who would come to Him.
2. He has established the church – the body of the redeemed.
3. He has given us the gospel of Christ through the teaching and preaching of the inspired apostles.
4. And he continues to providentially open doors of opportunity for those who are truly seeking to do His will.

B. But have we done our part?

1. Have we equipped ourselves to teach the gospel, to serve the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to perform all the other works of service the Lord has for us to do?
2. Jesus put it this way when speaking to His disciples: **Matthew 5:13-16** – "*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light*

to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

- a. Someone once said: If we wish to be a "*light*" for the Lord in our community we must develop the ability to "*shine*," and if we wish to be the "*salt*" of the earth we must develop the ability to add "*divine flavor*" to all we come in contact with.
3. Are you the salt of the earth, and the light of the world?
 - a. Do men see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven?
 - b. Or are men not able to see your good works at all?
- C. The first step in being able to do good works that glorifies your Father in heaven is to be in Christ and faithfully serve Him.
 1. If you've never obeyed the gospel of Christ...
 2. Or, if you're a child of God who needs to repent of things in your life and turn once again to faithfully serve the Lord...