

## EPHESIANS #59 4:12-13 2-24-13

### *THE FULL SERVICE CHURCH*

(Ephesians 4) Ephesians chapters 4-6 teach us how to live as men and women who have been rescued from sin by the grace of Christ. And the first thing it tells us we must do is to relate rightly to the church. We are to find our place in the midst of Christ's body, among His people where the Lord causes us to flourish and grow. I want to emphasize to you again as we get underway that this matter of church is not on the periphery of the Christian life. It is central to who we are as followers of Jesus. And there can be just no such thing as a Christian walking in the ways of light who has little concern about the church. Scripturally speaking it is a big, big deal. And God spends a good bit of time in His word teaching us about what the church is and how she is to operate. **4-7** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Then, let's skip down to verse **11-13** *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* Last time we saw from verse 11 that the Lord cares enough about His church to anoint and appoint certain leaders for it. And today we are going to move on to verse 12 and see just what God's purpose is for the appointment of spiritual leaders in the church. And verse 12 says that God's purpose is for the equipping, training, preparing of the saints. And God did this so that the saints would serve to the end that the body of Christ would be built up. Just looking at verse 12 we may gain insights today about the equipment for service, the responsibility for service and the goal of service.

First we examine the equipment for service. Under this heading I simply want to open your sights to the Scriptural teaching on what a pastor is supposed to be and do. When I was ordained on June 6, 1982 I promised to discharge to the Lord's church the duties of a pastor. I'm asking today, "What are those duties?" What is the distinctive responsibility of a pastor? It may be interesting to survey this group here to find out what you think a pastor ought to be doing? *Leadership Journal*, a magazine for Christian leaders, did that with several churches, asking the people what duties a

pastor should perform and how many hours a week he should give to them. I forget how many duties they came up with but I remember the pastor ended up working around 75 hours a week because the people wanted him to do almost everything. Sometimes churches want their pastors to be everything as well. One church, searching for a pastor, worked up a model of their ideal man and here is how he came out. *The ideal pastor won't cost very much - he lives by faith. Yet he can be counted upon to give heavily and still afford a large house in which he will regularly entertain the congregation. He loves the older folks of the church, visiting them regularly while he spends all of his time with the young people. He spends many hours on his knees before God. However, he's always available to anyone who drops by. He loves to be with the lost and gives full-time attention to calling on the elderly, ill, and shut-in. He has a model family, is always in the church office when you call and is busy at the hospital, just looking for a soul to comfort. He has a worldwide ministry through television and books. He is only 29 years old and has 30 years experience. He is tall, short, lean, and husky, and is a blonde with brown hair. he dresses traditionally according to all the latest styles. He is most dignified in a laid-back hang-loose way. He smiles all the time with great seriousness.* Some churches in search of a pastor like to use the clergy rating chart. Here are just a couple of bullets from that document. Under “performance measures” we find “character strength.” The candidate who far exceeds requirements is *stronger than a herd of bulls*. Next level – *stronger than several bulls*. If he just meets requirements he is *stronger than one bull*. If he needs improvement then he *shoots the bull*. And if he does not meet the requirement he *misses the bull*. Under the category of “communication.” The top candidates *talk with God*. Next level down but still good: *talks with the angels*. He only meets requirements if he *talks with himself*. The candidate who needs improvement *argues with himself* and the candidate who fails completely *loses argument with self*.

Well, that is fun but it raises this question of where you go to decide what a pastor ought to do. I hope you are prepared to take your answer, not from your tradition but, from the Bible. And very clearly, Ephesians 4 tells me that my job as pastor/teacher is to equip the saints to minister. Please understand, that if you are a Christian, you qualify as a saint. My role then is to prepare you for works of service. You see that? But somewhere, somehow, many centuries ago someone came up with the great idea of letting the work of the church be handled exclusively by this special group called *the clergy*, while the so-called *laity* came to fill the roles of spectators. We developed the world's strangest army where only the generals fight. This mentality that has permeated the church for over a millennium is one of the greatest works of deceit the devil ever pulled off and the

devastation on the kingdom of God is beyond calculation. Things became so bad that it was commonly thought in the middle ages that if you weren't clergy you were of little good to the church and to God. After the Protestant reformation things changed for the better, but even still, where the laymen worked, they too often viewed themselves as assistants to the ordained man, there to help him do his work. But, brethren, the New Testament does not say that you need to assist me in my work, but, that it is my job to assist you in yours. Have you ever viewed your pastor in that way? Have you seen him as a trainer and a resource person to help you with your ministry?

Such a perspective is highly unusual because it is not traditional. Who, by the way, is to blame for this traditional, but unbiblical view of the do-it-all pastor? Well, first to blame would be the clergy themselves who have sometimes promoted it. Most have done so without thinking but many simply prefer the image of the do-it-all super Christian who alone is able to minister. There is a great deal of ego satisfaction in being perpetually needed. Often too, jealous pastors guard the ministry for themselves lest they find that someone else does it better than they. Seminary training cannot match the gifting by the Spirit for ministry. I don't expect, nor do I believe, that I can do half the jobs in the church as well as others can. I remember in the early years of my ministry, as a very young pastor, that I made a point of visiting the home of every new family that started attending worship with us. In 1983 if you had started coming to our church, after about your third visit I would call and arrange a visit with you. That's what pastors are supposed to do right? So I did. But I noticed something after a while. These families would come to our church 4-5 Sundays in a row, then I would go visit them and guess what? We never saw 'em again. Go figure. Well, I did and I figured that I'm not real good at this visitation thing, so I asked a couple in our church that had much better greeting and meeting skills than me to take over. And sure enough, when Dana and Joy visited these families they kept coming. They did it way better than I did.

Well, sometimes the opposite does happen too. Pastors become reluctant to give away ministry because, when they do, it sometimes doesn't get done as well. This is hard on pastors too, especially high control guys like me, to sit back and watch someone struggle or fail. They may fail because of poor training, or lack of gifting, or lack of effort, or maybe just lack of experience. But pastors who want to see ministries flourish have to forbear with this - at least a certain amount of it. One of my key verses for ministry now is Proverbs 14:**4** *Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much revenue comes by the strength of the ox* ® You got that? Working oxen create a mess that has to be cleaned up. Those big ole beasts have to be fed and cared for, but they are worth the effort and the mess. I translate it this way: when church members aren't ministering you have fewer

problems; but a whole lot of good comes when they are. Sometimes we pastors have to clean up a mess some well-meaning brother or sister made in ministry, and we have to be careful not to shoot the oxen over the manure. Pastors are tempted to resent that unless they value the produce more than the mess. You see? In spite of temptations otherwise the pastor should not monopolize but multiply the ministry and so he will if his true concerns are biblical faithfulness and fruitful ministry.

But hey, there is another party to blame for this clergy/laity confusion. And that is you guys who, out of laziness or fear, have promoted the system too. Too many of you have been happy to sit back and let the pastors do it. Let the officers do it. Let anybody else do it, but me. We have had this odd arrangement on church teams wherein the coaches run wind sprints while the players blow the whistle, offer advice and give occasional pep-talks. Richard Lovelace describes the situation this way: *Pastors gradually settle down and lose interest in being change agents in the church. An unconscious conspiracy arises between their flesh and that of their congregations. It becomes tacitly understood that the laity will give pastors special honor in the exercise of their gifts, if the pastors will agree to leave their congregations' pre-Christian lifestyles undisturbed and do not call for the mobilization of lay gifts for the work of the kingdom. Pastors are permitted to become ministerial superstars. Their pride is fed and their congregations are permitted to remain herds of sheep in which each has cheerfully turn to his own way.* (Outgrowing the Ingrown Church p.19) Brethren, to the degree that this occurs we all lose.®

I've got to do something about this. And so do you. Here is what I am going to do. I'm gonna do what God says my job is. All our pastoral staff is called to do this. We don't hire guys to do ministry so much as we hire guys to develop your ministries. We are to equip or prepare you which describes the labor of a trainer preparing an athlete or a sergeant preparing a soldier. I am concerned with your understanding of the contest, your technique, your strength, your conditioning and your entire lifestyle. This means that I'm going to have to push you, at times, beyond the levels of your comfort. That's what a trainer does. It isn't my job to please the saints or entertain the saints or appease the saints, but to prepare. The King James Version uses the term "perfect the saints" and it is by perfecting you that we equip you for service. So, the object of my ministry is you.

Now, how this principle works out in real-time church life, you see, is that your pastors will direct our efforts toward training you to be ministers. This means several things. For one, it means that I cannot make pulpit evangelism my highest priority. Evangelism is very important but in my

week to week pulpit ministry, for the most part, I must address the saints, those already following Christ. My messages are designed to build up believers more than convert unbelievers. I praise God that both can happen and do happen, but my focus can only be on one. This teaching about what the pastor is supposed to do tells us a great deal about what the pastors ought not to be doing. God would not have our time to be consumed moving chairs, or visiting the sick, or running programs. Because God has called us to equip we trust He has called other people to do those things. In a nutshell, the pastors are not so much to be handing out cups of cold water, but digging deep into the lives of their people so that they might be wells from which many may drink. So, we must model and teach you how to love, how to serve, how to encourage, how to teach, how to pray, how to witness. And you make sure we do those things, that we continually lay out the truth which can make you spiritually strong and able to minister as God directs.

It also follows that if I am to be your equipper that you are to be equippees. You are to receive that equipping and training and teaching. That means being here when the word is taught. Worship is a great start, but we offer more in Sunday School, small groups and special seminars like Financial Peace University. But these things won't help you if you don't engage with them. Frequently, as pastors we get people coming to us individually wanting special time and attention and instruction who have never taken advantage of the normal ministries of the church. Some of you won't bother with a parenting class we offer but you'll show up a year from now looking for help with your kids. Now, I urge you to seek help, and come to your church family as needs arise. But as instruction is offered, seek to be equipped before the crisis, okay? Be a good equippee.

All that is point #1 about the equipment for service which is to be provided by specially appointed leaders. Point #2 is about the responsibility for service. If the job of the pastor is to equip the people to minister then who is to be doing the ministering? I think you know the answer. You are. Every one of you are ministers. That's why I don't like to call ordained people "ministers" because it implies that lay people aren't ministers. But they are. I've thought about putting on our bulletins a list of pastors, elders, deacons and then having it read: *Ministers: Everybody*. Look at verse 12 which says pastors are given *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ*. It says that I am to equip you, Sally P. Saint, for your works of service. **15-16** *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,*

according to the proper working of *each* individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. If this body is to grow up as it should each person must be doing his/her part. The New Testament teaches that every Christian has a role to play in the church. Every Christian is to have a ministry, a work of service. All of us see this don't we? It's as plain as can be. It makes perfect sense. But if we just started practicing this we would make the devil terribly nervous. Every Christian a minister? If we started living like that the balance of power between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light would dramatically shift wouldn't it? I once attended a church in Pensacola, Florida where the people start lining up outside the doors before 4:00 to get in to a 7:00 service. At that time this church had a waiting list of over a thousand who wanted to join their church. Man alive, you know God's doing something in a place like that. But you know what may be even more exciting? Is when we have a waiting list for people to work in the nursery. When we have so many volunteers to teach children's church that we have to spend time selecting only the most qualified. When we have to have signups for church workdays to make sure we don't get too many workers here. That is the kind of thing that will happen if everybody gets serious about this concept.

What is your ministry? Every member of our church is to have an answer to that question. And if you aren't a member of a church we want you to become one and then get an answer to that question. What is your ministry? Your job? Your role? Your work of service? Do you have one? If not, then are you ready to start one? We are not operating the *Church of the Sacred Rest*. Get attached to something already going or let's start something new. We will talk more soon about this idea of distinctive roles, but for now, just see that you have a responsibility and a privilege to minister. Whenever I say that I sense a conflict that exists between how I use the word "minister" and how many of you hear that word. You hear "minister" and you naturally think of my job. You have a truncated view of ministry that needs to be broadened. When you have someone over for a meal - that is ministry. You work in the nursery - that's ministry. Greeting those around you this morning is ministry. Working for a political candidate is ministry. Prayer is ministry. What is your ministry? The locus of your ministry may be your workplace, may be your neighborhood more so than the church. That is fine. That is great – but consider the opportunities we have here (go over opps to serve in bulletin and gifts and service inventory) Listen to I Peter 4:**10** *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* You have a gift. Employ it. This is God's plan. This is your responsibility for service.

On to our third and last point for today. We have seen the equipment for service, the responsibility for service, now the goal of our service. Verse 12 has it all. It says the goal of our service is the building up of the body of Christ. <sup>®</sup> Church growth. Quantitative growth. Qualitative growth. Judging from verse 13 the main thought is the latter - the spiritual maturity of the members of Christ's body. In Colossians also Paul tells us that this is the goal. Colossians 1:**28** *We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.* Another word for *complete* is *mature*. It's the same Greek word we read in Ephesians 4:**13** *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* Maturity is what we're after. For individuals and the body as a whole. Paul said this was his passion. I say this is my passion. And I wouldn't impose my passion or even Paul's upon you except for one thing - God does. God expects you to care about what He cares for. God expects you to be doing what He is doing and the greatest thing God is doing is building His church. God's heart is in the growth of His church. Is yours? Years ago one of our elders said to me, "I care way more about the well-being of our church than I do about my business." He said it. He lived like it. But I wonder how many of you can say that. How many of you see the growth of the church as a preeminent goal in your life? I was fascinated to look thru a copy of Sports Illustrated at a doctor's office recently. What fascinated me was that an article about an athlete which included a list of his personal goals for the year. At the top of his list it said, "To keep Jesus Christ first in my life." I thought, "This is great!" I had never heard that this guy was even a believer. So I was surprised and pleased to read this, but it bothered me as I read the rest of his personal goals. Everything under keeping Jesus #1 was all about keeping himself #1, all about his career. There were no spiritual goals. No goals that relate to the kingdom of God, and I had to conclude that the first goal was just a token nod of the hat to the almighty. Listen, if Jesus Christ is #1 in your life, it can be observed by your commitment to His bride, by your love for His church. You are gonna care about the building up of the body of Christ and that goal will pervade your schedule and your budget and your prayers. It will make a difference in your mornings and your evenings and your family and your career.

What are your priorities? Are you career building or kingdom building? I pray God would give us some folks in this church who are prepared to say, "North Park Church is my project. I am committed to building this local expression of Christ's church, even at the expense of career success. Even if it means I don't get my dream house." Sounds radical huh? Listen, I know lots of

pastors who are career building, who are always looking for the next opening at a bigger or nicer place. Hey, sometimes I'm not very good at showing it, but I love you brothers and sisters. I'm attached here. I'm not building a career but a church, and the experts tell me that the most critical factor for church-building is longevity in the leadership. So, I'm here for a long stay. I'm just shy of four years and counting. Is it unfair to ask that you too at least consider a long-term commitment to putting church over career and working together for the long term growth of this body? Do any of you sports fans get bothered by how easily athletes, say – maybe Lebron James, abandon their initial team to head somewhere else they think will advance their career? It disturbs me too. I'm into the concept of team loyalty, and perseverance toward the goal. But Lebron represents where most folks are living. Team loyalty? Church loyalty? Ever heard of Bryant Stith? He was a free agent NBA player for the Denver Nuggets who was offered more money to play elsewhere but Stith turned it down and said, "The Nuggets gave me my start. Denver is my home. Some things are more important than money." Surely one of those things is the building up of the body of Christ for which He gave His life.

John Wesley was the most brilliant man in England in his day. He learned languages just for fun. He could have been archbishop or prime minister or anything he wanted in life but he gave it up to sacrifice himself in God's work, to build God's kingdom. As a result, when he died he only left behind six English pounds, a few books and an old preacher's robe, and one other thing. What was that? Oh yes, the Methodist church. One day I hope you can look at North Park Church in Wexford as the living monument which you helped build to the glory of God. I have my job. You have yours. Together we are responsible as co-workers with Christ to build up His body, His bride, His church.

Let's pray. *Our great God, help us to build a great church, that is full of truth and running over with love. Help the pastors equip and the elders lead and the deacons deacon and all the servants grow up and serve so that we would grow together into a monument not for men, but for a witness to your grace and to be a bride unblemished and beautiful for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. #203* and closing doxology Ephesians 3:20,21