Opening Words

There must be a vision among the leaders to equip God's people to do the work. Unfortunately, some leaders want to do all the work.

58 Eph Equipping the Church

It is a glorious and revolutionary truth that Christ has given gifted leaders to the church. I say it is glorious because the giving of gifts is a sign that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and has assumed his sovereign seat at the right hand of God from which he pours out his Spirit and bestows his gifts upon his people. I also say it is revolutionary because the giving of these gifts was so that these leaders might equip God's people for ministry.

One of the greatest tragedies of church history was the hard line drawn between clergy and laity, between the leaders of the church and the members of the church. This resulted in the loss of millions of workers because the members of the churches relied upon the pastors to do the work. The pastors became a guild of professionals, and the members became a compliant body of non-workers who passively listened to leaders talk about spiritual things.

This was never what Christ intended. While it is true that Christ does put some in charge he puts them in charge in order that they might equip God's people to do God's work. Let's look at our verses. I'm going to read Ephesians 4:11-12 and today we move forward into verse 12. Listen closely.

> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Did you catch that? The gifted leaders Christ has given have a job and Paul describes that job as equipping the saints so that they can do the work! That's quite a difference. In my most recent job as pastor, when we would have classes for new people to orient them and integrate them into the church we loved making this point. There were three pastors on staff, and in our class for new people we would say, "We have 500 ministers in this church." Then I would explain, "Our job as pastors is to equip you to be ministers in his church. You can say that we administer while you minister!" And how much better was it to have 500 people serving rather than three people serving. Multiply the difference in those numbers by the tens of thousands of churches throughout the hundreds of years of church history, and you can see why I say that the hard line between clergy and laity has robbed the church of millions of workers throughout history.

Paul says in these verses that Christ has given gifted leaders to equip the saints to do the work of service. How much better is it to have all God's people involved rather than a handful! How much better is it to have 500 workers, using my example, than three workers! How much better is it for 500 people who each have connections with a handful of people to have the mindset that God wants to use them to bless the lives of others. Think of the potential of unleashing thousands of people!

Think of the time factor. Rather than limiting serving the Lord to, say 50 hours a week by three leaders, what happens if thousands of God's people use their time to serve the Lord! Let's do the math. Three pastors working 50 hours a week will work 150 hours. But if 500 people will serve, say three hours a week, you have 1500 hours of service!

Think about location. If you have three pastors working they are going to be limited to their locations. They will serve in the church building, and maybe in their neighborhoods or community in some way. But if God's people have the mindset that God wants to equip them to serve any time in any place to any one, then you have people infiltrating relationship networks and communities and spreading the love of Christ in places that the pastors could never get to.

One of my favorite illustrations of this truth is from the book of Acts. When persecution broke out because of Stephen's preaching, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but many hundreds and perhaps thousands of believers were scattered from Jerusalem as they sought to avoid arrest. Remember, a lot of the first believers were from regions all throughout the Roman empire. When we read Acts 2:9-11, we find a list of regions where they were from. This list includes regions as far east as Persia, as far west as Rome, and as far south as Egypt. These were Jews who lived throughout the Roman empire and who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. At **this** time, God poured out his Spirit and thousands of people from these regions heard the Gospel and embraced their Messiah. Then, when the persecution began, these people started making their back to the homes, and here is the verse I want to mention to you, Acts 8:4, "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word." While they fled from Jerusalem and started their journey home, they were telling others about Jesus the Messiah. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem. The non-leaders scattered and advanced the work of the kingdom of God into new regions of the world!

We discover in Acts 8 that Samaria was opened to the Gospel and the strategic city of Antioch in Syria was established as these people scattered and shared Christ with others. This was the city where Paul would grow up spiritually and the church that would send him and Barnabas on a missionary journey. It was all because so-called non-leaders knew that the work of the ministry was not limited to so-called leaders. The work was there for everyone.

This is Paul's message in Ephesians 4:11-12, God gave gifted leaders to the church to equip God's people to do the work.

God wants to do the same today. Think of your church – how many members do you have? 100? 200? How many pastors do you have? One? Two? Do the math – do we want to see 50-100 hours of work done by the leaders or 300-600 hours of work as everyone gets involved. I think we know what the Lord wants!

But we must realize that this does not happen automatically. First, there must be a vision among the leaders to equip God's people to do the work. Unfortunately, some leaders want to do all the work. That could be from pride. They love the power and the adulation from others who think they are so great. They want the ministry to be about them. It could be from insecurity where they think that if they don't have their finger on every little thing they will lose their position or influence. It could be from all sorts of things. It really starts with a vision among the leaders where they know God has

not gifted them for themselves, but he has gifted them for others. Where they know that God has not gifted them for their glory but for the building up of the Body of Christ for the glory of Christ. It's his church, not their church. And it starts with this vision among humble men.

I can't imagine not wanting to equip others. There is so much to do and to have others by our side who will gladly help and serve and who want the church to succeed is a wonderful thing. I am happy to delegate work to others. It's good for me, it's good for leaders and it is good for the people who will grow more as they engage in ministry.

Do we want our people to grow? Their growth does not come only by hearing our teaching. Their growth comes as they put our teaching into practice. Listen to these classic words by the apostle James in the first chapter of his letter. I am reading from James 1:22-25.

> But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

Don't we want churches full of people who are blessed? Then we must equip them to obey God's word and part of that obedience is their ministry to the Body of Christ.

Here is another one: Hebrews 5:11-14:

> We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Notice that last phrase in this passage – through constant use these people train themselves to distinguish good from evil. We must teach our people to use the word of God and one way they use God's word is through acts of service.

This is the vision of Christ. He was exalted to the right hand of God so that from that place of glory far above all principalities and powers he might give gifts to leaders of his choice. He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers. But he gave those gifted leaders that they might equip God's people to do the work of service. Christ wants to launch a tidal wave of servants who will make a difference in the world. Are you part of this tidal wave? Is your church part of this?