

February 7, 2016

Jesus and his Church

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become, mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

4:11-15

Ephesians

Earlier in this letter the Apostle Paul reminded these believers that they had been saved by grace through faith and that they had been created in Christ Jesus for good works. As he builds on his theme of unity in the body, the church, he leads us back to this central focus of the church, good works. In establishing his church Jesus put into place certain players whose primary task is not to "run" the church, but to prepare the church for good works.

It is easy when we focus so much attention on the rules and regulations that we have created in church for us to forget the actual purpose of the body of Christ. During his ministry on earth the Son of God filled his days with good works. He told his apostles that he had not come to be served but to serve others.

Functioning as the body of Christ in our time is no different. Our primary function is to serve others through good works. As we grow up in our faith, the Apostle writes, our focus on good works and service to others leads us to better know and understand Jesus. We only function effectively when, Paul adds, "***...each part does its work.***"

There is a truth that I have observed in my own life and in the lives of many of those with whom I work. When I am selfless and actively serving others, life as a believer is hugely rewarding. But, Satan often attacks me with things that force my attention in on myself. The more I focus on me, on my needs, disappointments, sufferings, the less time I spend in service to others and the weaker my faith becomes.

Jesus, who understands us perfectly, planned for this by giving his church Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastoring teachers to train us to be selfless, humble and gentle. These shepherds of our faith do not exist to direct the business of the church, but to prepare the parts of the body, you and me, to do what the Father called us to do.

In church as it exists in our time leadership is more often than not focused on the business of "running" the church. Shepherds are pulled into the daily business of the church as a business. Paying bills, balancing budgets, and maintaining buildings all demand their attention so at best they have little time to do more than put out fires.

Preparing God's people for works of service should be our single focus as those who shepherd. In no small way that means that we constantly remind and encourage one another to work on overcoming our old, self-serving life. The Apostle will bring us right back to this point in chapter four, verses 22 and following. ***"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desire; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.***



Thus, we need to constantly be reminded that living in our old, self-serving ways is not acceptable to the Father. In Jesus we are called to give up those selfish ways and become servant minded in every situation. The, the Apostle teaches, is the way to maturity.