

The Faithful Church Ministry According to Scripture

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The Lord of the Church has not left His church to wonder about faithful church ministry and how it must be done. Christ Himself promised to build His church and He guaranteed that even the forces of hell will not destroy the beauty of this God-designed institution. We must remember that the same Lord who rules as Lord over His church and who guarantees the ultimate triumph of His church also gives clarity on how church ministry must be done. He didn't create the church and leave it up to us to figure out how to do it. Rather, we find in Scripture what faithful church ministry looks like. One text that specifically addresses the issue is Ephesians 4. In this text, we'll see 7 ways of understanding what a faithful church ministry is like according to the Bible.

1. The GIFTS for ministry 7

The Lord equips His church with the necessary means of building up and edifying one another so that the whole is strengthened. These are spiritual gifts. Christ, the Lord over His church, gives a grace-gift to each Christian so that the believer will employ that gift corporately, for the benefit and upbuilding of the church, and for the glory of Jesus Christ. Scripture lists many gifts when one combines all of the New Testament catalogues of gifts. Ephesians 4 mentions a few: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. The Lord graciously imparts a supernatural grace-gift at salvation to each believer so that the church will be strong and equipped. The faithful church ministry has people who serve in differing roles and functions, utilizing their God-given gifts, for the upbuilding of the church congregation and for the glory of God in the midst of a watching world.

2. The GRACE for ministry 7

The Lord gives all that is needed for His people to serve Him faithfully in life, in ministry, and in holiness in the world. He gives this by grace -- sovereign, undeserved, lavish grace. Nothing in ministry is earned or deserved; it's all of grace. Even the opportunities to serve and build up one another come from the benevolent storehouse of grace. And God gives gifts according to His prerogative. Christ has all authority as He is the victorious Warrior-King. Psalm 68 makes this clear as the Lord triumphed over all His enemies and has thus received all the spoil from the conquered foes and thus is now able to distribute gifts to all of His subjects in His kingdom. This is what Christ does. He owns everything and rules over everything and has given particular grace-gifts to His people for ministry and service. Believers ought not to whine or complain in a discontented way but ought to serve thankfully and diligently because it is, after all, all of grace!

3. The GOAL of ministry 12

Perhaps one of the greatest unknowns in all of Christian ministry nowadays is *why* the church exists. What is the *purpose* of the ministry? What is the goal of gathering with the church week by week? Why did God give different gifts, all by His grace, and bestow leaders to His church? Ephesians 4 clarifies in no uncertain terms that the purpose of the church is for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (v. 12a). It is all so that the body of Christ may be built up (v. 12b). The goal does not consist in budgets, numbers, staff personnel, building programs, societal involvement and engagement, popularity and recognition or anything of that sort. Rather, *the* goal of ministry is acutely defined as the building up of the body of Christ and the equipping of the saints to do the work of service. If this is not happening, then faithful ministry is not happening. If saints are not being equipped for service and if the church is not being built up, then the church has veered off course from faithfulness and fallen into the ditches.

4. The GREATNESS of ministry 13

Christ's plan for the growth and maturity of His people is the local church. The greatness of Christian ministry manifests itself as believers *all* attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God Himself (Eph 4:13). No greater goal for Christian ministry exists. No greater joy can well up in the believer's heart than to undertake the greatness of Christian ministry by attaining and enjoying the unity of the faith with all the saints. Indeed, this unity culminates in the true and transforming knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In other words, no Christian can enjoy the fullness of the great ministry of God apart from the local church. Further, no child of God can attain the true knowledge of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, while living divorced from a local congregation of believers. Indeed, one's spiritual growth is directly linked to his direct and intentional involvement in the chief context where Christ's greatness is manifested, in the local church!

5. The **GUARDING** of ministry 14

The good Shepherd cares for and guards His sheep. He has a plan to do so through His church. Indeed, Ephesians 4 makes clear that believers are no longer to be children (=immature) who are tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. Yes, fads come and go. Waves of "new" teachings come up and then rush back out to the blackness of the sea. New ministry methods, worship styles, ideologies, evangelistic 'techniques', and programs seem to appear at the speed of light. Nevertheless, Paul says, don't be led astray by such things. Indeed, it's craftiness and deceitful scheming by the Evil One, ultimately. We must stay true to Christ, to the knowledge of Christ, to the gospel of Christ, to the church of Christ, and to the ministry of Christ. How is a child of God guarded from error and deceitful doctrines and bad teachers? Christ's great plan consists in the faithfulness of a solid and thoroughly biblical ministry that upholds His Word and expounds it faithfully and boldly. Rejoice in this guardianship.

6. The **GROWTH** of ministry 15

When Christians and ministers come together and they begin to discuss their churches it often doesn't take long before someone will speak of how *big* their church is and refer to God's growth of the church in terms of *numbers*. While this is not bad *per se* it is an inaccurate barometer of a faithful church ministry according to Scripture. How does the church grow? Ephesians 4:15 says it must consist in believers speaking the truth in love to each other. Additionally, believers are to grow up in *all aspects* into Christ who is the head over His Church. That is to say, a healthy and thriving local church that can boast in Christ because of its growth makes clear that they are endeavoring to grow up in *all things into Christ* who Himself is the Head and sovereign Lord over His local assembly. The church may be shrinking in numbers but growing in faithfulness in so far as the ministry is growing in Christ in all aspects -- in serving, in giving, in preaching, in evangelizing, in disciplining, in disciplining, in fellowshiping, and on and on.

7. The **GIVING** in ministry 16

What does all of this require? A faithful church ministry according to Scripture does not just *happen*. Coasting in neutral will never produce a thriving and Christ-exalting local church. What must be there? Verse 16 shows that the whole body of Christ is fitted and held together by what *every joint supplies*. This means that every single person, indeed, as Paul puts it "each individual part" deliberately causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself (=upbuilding/edification) in love. Faithful ministry demands the self-denying, self-sacrificing, Christ-emulating, and others-oriented focus of joyful giving to one another in the church. Lots of people exert energy in entertainment, sports, leisurely activities, hobbies, travels and vacations, and physical exercise. What if Christ's people *all* deliberately supplied diligent effort, regular service, others-oriented sacrifice, and intentional love in the context of the local church. This kind of faithful church ministry, however, cannot happen with a few leaders or a few sold-out members. It happens as *the whole body* works together and as *every joint is supplying effort* and as *each individual part* works unifyingly for the growth of the body. This is a faithful church ministry according to Scripture. O the bliss of this Christ-honoring local church which would serve to be heaven on earth; indeed, it would put us in the suburbs of heaven while we serve Him on earth awaiting our entrance into His heavenly kingdom!