

## What's Next?

This past Sunday, we resolved as a congregation to embrace an approach to church administration that allows us to more flexibly tailor our ministry efforts around the known gifts within our community. Now what? You were asked recently to fill out a *Talent and Interest Survey*. Be assured, that really was more than just an exercise in killing trees. We will now rely heavily on that feedback to freshly invigorate some of our existing ministries as well as to start up a couple of new efforts. Please make this an item of earnest prayer over the next few weeks.

One of the most remarkable things about the community that we call a local church is that we believe that Jesus provides each and every member with some gift, some tool, to help him or her to build up the church:

<sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ... - Ephesians 4:7

Paul goes on to describe how after Jesus “took us captive” for Himself (out of sin and darkness), He poured out His gifts upon us. In Ephesians, his language is somewhat poetic, but elsewhere, in Romans and 1 Corinthians, his language is much more straightforward. In those letters, he explains that every believer has a gift from God, given to him or her for the purpose of making the body of Christ whole. It is one of God’s ways of reminding us, at one and the same time, that we are of great and precious worth when we are part of something conceived in His mind but not that big of a deal when we are on our own.

Every Christian has received grace from God to make the church stronger. Every Christian is a steward of some gift that contributes to the health of the whole. In fact, our unique gifts and talents belong to the church every bit as much as they belong to us, for they are provided by Christ for His purposes. We are not gifted uniformly. We are each gifted according to the will of Christ.

<sup>11</sup>It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>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. - Ephesians 4:11-13

There were and continue to be specific role-players that Paul mentions by title or task, but they do not exhaust the sum-total of Christian ministry. On the contrary, these have been given to the church “to prepare *all* of God’s people for works of service” to Christ for the building up of His body.

Occasionally, it is useful to reconsider what that word “service” means to us. We are probably accustomed to thinking of service as something like volunteering with the Boy Scouts or the rescue mission. We might belong to a service club like Rotary, Lions, Kiwanas, Sertoma, *etc.* Such groups are organized to do many worthwhile things. “Service” has a noble connotation to us, but it still is not so very much different than volunteerism. Ultimately, however, we are the masters of our own volunteerism.

To the ancient, service was the function of a servant. It did not “connote” a man’s civic interests. It “identified” what he was. The meaning was clear to the original Greek-speaking audience. “Service” is *diakonias*, the function of a *diakonos* which meant not a volunteer, but a “servant.” In the pages of the Bible, the two are in no way synonymous. “Service” was what a servant did – like “policing things” is what policemen do, “building things” is what builders do and “catching dogs” is what dog-catchers do. To be a servant of Jesus is much more akin to a spiritual vocation than it is to modern volunteerism. Think of how senseless the following parable of Jesus would be if servanthood and volunteerism were interchangeable concepts.

<sup>7</sup>“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat?’ <sup>8</sup>Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?’ <sup>9</sup>Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? <sup>10</sup>So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” – Luke 17:7-10

So, as we move into a new season of ministry, let us each resolve to do so with a renewed self-awareness of ourselves not as volunteers, but as servants of a generous Master, Who has given us precisely the tools we need to please Him and to bring forth fruit to His glory.

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