

The Perfecting of the Saints

by Chip Brogden

The purpose of ministry is to bring people into spiritual maturity and a deeper knowing of Christ, not to make them dependent on the ministry or pastor.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 4:11, Philippians 3:12, Colossians 1:28, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Ministry Gifts"

Description

Chip Brogden emphasizes the importance of ministry gifts such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the church, highlighting their role in perfecting the saints, working in the ministry, and edifying the Body of Christ. The goal of these gifts is to lead believers to spiritual maturity, not sinless perfection, but a fully developed relationship with Jesus Christ. The focus of all ministry should be centered on Christ, bringing individuals into a deeper, experiential knowledge of Him for spiritual growth and maturity.

Transcript

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

For what purpose did God give apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers? Verse 12 tells us they are for "the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ". This, of course, does not mean that the saints are supposed to be perfect in the sense that they never make a mistake or can do no wrong. "Perfection" here means "maturity", and it would be good to simply remember that whenever we see the word "perfect" used in this context we should think "spiritually mature".

The perfecting of the saints means the maturing of the saints, the process of bringing the saints out of spiritual immaturity and into spiritual adulthood. This is the purpose for the ministry gifts. We are not born fully-grown; we must "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18a). In Biblical language, to be "perfect" is to be fully developed. For instance, "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9ff). What does this mean? "My strength is matured through your weakness, and is fully developed in the one who comes to the end of his natural strength."

After more than twenty years of Christian experience, Paul explains that he has neither attained, nor is he already perfect (cf. Philippians 3:12a). Clearly he expects to be perfect one day, but he has not yet attained it. But to what is he attaining to? Sinless perfection? No. He is striving for spiritual maturity, which he defines as an experiential, intimate, fully-developed relationship with Jesus Christ ("to know Him"). Then he says everyone who is perfect (that is, spiritually mature), will be like-minded in their pursuit of knowing Christ.

Paul says he preaches Christ: "...warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28). This, in essence, is the purpose of all ministry, whether it is the ministry of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher. It is to preach CHRIST, and to bring all men into a spiritually mature relationship with Him. Christ is at the heart of everything; He is at the center of all activity; we begin with Him and we end with Him.

When we are introduced to a new ministry and we wish to test its authenticity and spiritual value, we need only ask ourselves two questions: is this ministry centered upon Jesus Christ, and does it bring people into a deeper, more experiential knowing of Him?

If we wish to evaluate someone who claims to be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher, we can apply the same test: is this person centered on Jesus Christ? And when they do whatever it is that they do (preach, teach, prophesy, sing, plant churches, etc.), does it bring people into a deeper, more experiential knowing of Him?

Some may think that kind of test is too severe. Why, if we applied this criteria to every minister and ministry in the world (they say) then we would probably disqualify a majority of workers and works that are doing the Church and mankind a great service. Yes, we probably would. Yet in terms of value to the Kingdom of God, if the work is not Christ-centered and does nothing to bring people into a mature relationship with Him then it has no value to God and is worthless in His sight. If we are not preaching Christ then we are preaching something or someone else; and if we are not bringing people into the depths of Jesus with our life and work then we are either leaving them as they are or leaving them worse than when we found them. We become a distraction and a hindrance to the spiritual growth of others.

If the minister or the ministry does not preach Christ, and does not bring people into spiritual maturity, then they fulfill the opposite of God's intention - they make themselves the center and make the people dependent upon them, guaranteeing the spiritual immaturity of those affiliated with them. A congregation that is dependent upon its pastor to hear from God for them, deliver a message to them, pray for their needs, and take responsibility for their own spiritual growth is doomed to infancy and spiritual immaturity. If the pastor accepts this situation then he reinforces the congregation's dependency upon himself. Instead of pointing them to Christ as their Shepherd and getting them to stand on their own, he becomes their surrogate mother. Unfortunately, this is precisely where many churches are today. "We leave the spiritual work to the pastor, while we attend the services."

The prophetic ministry is just as guilty. The "prophet" or "prophetess" and their "word" becomes the focus of everything; and instead of bringing people to Christ and teaching them how to hear from the Lord on their own, they take responsibility for giving them messages from God. So now people are passively depending on the prophetic ministry for direction, instead of growing up into Christ and developing their own discernment and ability to hear His still, small voice. I read recently of a "prophet" who claimed to give personal words of prophecy to over five hundred people in the course of a week. I do not have to know

what was said to know that this person's idea of a "prophetic ministry" will only keep people spiritual dull and incapable of hearing from God on their own. Why should they develop any kind of spiritual sense when they can have a "prophet" come and give them a "word" whenever they like?

Just because we CAN give a word does not mean that we SHOULD give a word. The goal is not to give people a word, but to give them CHRIST as their Word. Or to put it another way, the goal of ministry is not to give people a loaf of bread every day, but to show them how to obtain all the bread they wish in CHRIST who is the Bread of Life. Do you see the difference? If my entire goal is to give people a sermon every week or a prophetic word every day then both I and they will fall far short of God's Purpose, which is spiritual maturity and knowing Christ experientially. If the crowd is coming to me for a loaf of bread every time they get hungry then they are dependent upon me to feed them. This is only acceptable so long as they are children who cannot feed themselves. But if I show them where to get bread on their own then they will not have to come to me anymore: and THAT is the goal. Then they can get nourished directly from the source, Who is Christ Himself. The truth is that selling loaves of bread is big business, and a ministry whose survival depends on selling loaves actually WANTS the people to come back to them over and over again to be fed!

May we see before God that CHRIST is the object and the reason for all ministry. Our goal is not to see anyone become dependent upon us, our ministry, our work, or our word; our goal is not to give them a loaf, but rather, to encourage them to go experience the depths of Jesus Christ experientially and personally - to show them where the Bread of Life is.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chip-brogden/the-perfecting-of-the-saints/>

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