

'Till We All Come'

by Chip Brogden

The sermon emphasizes the ongoing necessity of ministry gifts for achieving unity and maturity in the Body of Christ until all believers reach the fullness of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 3:6, Ephesians 4:11, Ephesians 4:13, Colossians 1:28, 1 Timothy 4:15, 2 Timothy 2:2, Hebrews 5:12, 1 Peter 5:1

Topics: "Church Ministry", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

Chip Brogden emphasizes the importance of the ministry gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the Church today, highlighting their role in perfecting the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ. He stresses the need for a relational Christianity where Christ is the Head of His Church, and all believers function as a priesthood within a community. Brogden explains that these ministry functions will continue until all believers reach unity in faith, full-knowledge of the Son of God, and the fullness of Christ, indicating that we still need these ministries as we have not yet collectively attained that 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).

Many people question whether or not apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are for today. We wish to emphasize a relational Christianity. We hope to do away with the artificial distinction between the professional clergy and the non-professional layman. We want to ensure that Christ is the Head of His Church, and not some man or woman who holds a title, position, or office. We desire to see a priesthood of believers functioning within a community of like-minded brothers and sisters. Naturally, this causes some people to wonder how the ministry gifts fit into this model of Christianity. Does Ephesians 4:11 apply to us today? If so, how?

If we truly understand the purpose of these ministry functions then the problem of their relevance today is solved. Paul tells us exactly how long we will need the ministry of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. These ministries will continue "till we ALL come in the unity of the faith, and of the full-knowledge [epignosis] of the Son of God, unto a perfect [mature] man, unto the measure of the stature

of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

Let us simply observe the Church of Jesus Christ today and ask: have we all come in the unity of the faith? Have we all attained to the full-knowledge of the Son of God? Have we all, as the Body of Christ (not just individually), grown into the fullness of Christ? The key word here is ALL. Some may have, but it is clear that all have not. So the answer to these questions is no. Since we, as the corporate and universal Body of Christ, have yet to reach the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, we still need the ministries of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher.

According to God's thought, those who are called to serve the Body in these functions are supposed to be part of the SOME who have already entered into the unity of the faith, the full-knowledge of the Son of God, the fullness of Christ. Who is qualified to function as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher? It should be those who have walked with the Lord Jesus for some length of time and know Him to such a degree that they are more conformed to the image of Christ than their less experienced brothers and sisters. Having established a mature relationship with Christ, they can now turn their attention to serving and helping others to come to that same maturity.

I have qualified my words by saying "should be" and "supposed to be". I am expressing the ideal. We know that everyone who uses these functions as a title or office for lording over others are not who they claim to be. They can be quite gifted but remain spiritually immature and completely ignorant of what it means to bring people into the depths of Christ if they have yet to experience those depths for themselves. If a so-called ministry does nothing to bring people deeper into Christ then it really is not a ministry at all, and it is worthless insofar as the Kingdom of God is concerned. We might as well lay the axe to the root, chop that tree down and throw it into the fire. It is wood, hay, and stubble. Go ahead and kill it right now because it is dead already.

(I will go further and say if you claim to be a Christian but you do not perceive yourself becoming more and more centered on Christ then I wonder if you are really even saved at all - because you have missed the whole point of Christianity. For the Christian, Christ is increasing, Christ is becoming larger and larger, Christ is becoming the focus. It is quite simple to see who is, and who is not, living up to this standard. The more spiritually mature a person is the more Christ-centered they cannot help but become. This is the unavoidable and inevitable consequence of becoming a Christian, a disciple of Jesus. This is how the Holy Spirit leads each and every true believer, and there are no exceptions to the rule. It is as predictable and certain as the sunrise following after the darkness of night. If the Son of God is not rising higher and higher and shining brighter and brighter in your heart then stop fooling yourself: you are still in the dark.)

Now, a novice is primarily concerned with his or her own spiritual training, whereas an elder is primarily concerned with the spiritual training of others. You have to be a student before you can be a teacher. One does not just decide one day to be a teacher and start a class. To be a teacher requires many years of going to school and being a student. Only after they have mastered their subject are they qualified to teach others.

Likewise, before you can disciple and teach others and serve them in any kind of ministry capacity (and I am using the word "ministry" in its purist Biblical sense, not in any institutional sense), you have to first be disciplined and taught yourself. I mean disciplined and taught by the Holy Spirit, growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. I have never seen the inside of a seminary or Bible college. I have never taken a course in theology (although some of my greatest critics fervently wish I would take a few). I have no

certificates, diplomas, or degrees to speak of. But the Holy Spirit Who teaches me and leads me into all Truth has made me wiser than all my would-be teachers. It is not I, but Christ. This Wisdom comes from above; it is not of this world. It is Spirit-and-Truth revelation, not flesh-and-blood knowledge. One is not qualified before God on the basis of theological training, leadership ability, charisma, Bible-knowledge, spiritual gift, congregational vote, or credentialing authority. These count for nothing in terms of whether or not a person has experienced the depths of Jesus Christ.

In the Church that Jesus is building, an older person is not necessarily a spiritual elder. We do not look to the age of a person's physical body when determining their spiritual maturity. Of course, we owe a certain amount of respect to the aged by virtue of their seniority; but they may not necessarily be our elder in the things of the Lord. One can be older chronologically and be quite immature in spiritual matters. Likewise, a relatively young man or woman can have a deep relationship with the Lord and be light years ahead of those two or three times their age. A young man or woman who knows God is more elder than a senior citizen who does not know God. We cannot judge by the flesh, or we will be misled.

If our desire is for maturity, that is, if we desire to come to the full-knowledge of Christ and grow up into Him in all things, we should naturally pay attention to those who are elder in the Lord. But being an elder has nothing to do with leadership ability, filling an office, having a title, or performing some ministerial duty or sacerdotal function in the church. The elders are simply those who are older in the Lord. It is quite simple. My elder brother, or my elder sister, has walked with the Lord longer than I have. The implication is that they are more conformed to the image of Christ than myself; they have experienced a deeper work of the Cross than I have; thus, they have more practical wisdom than I do, they have something to teach me, and I need to hear Christ in them so I, too, can grow. It should be obvious to you who is, and who is not, your elder in the Lord. And, it should be plain to see that not everyone who is older is necessarily elder. If you say you are a believer but you live no differently from the world then you can be as old as Methuselah yet you are certainly not an elder.

What am I getting at? "The fullness of Christ." That is the goal. But you cannot presume to bring people into a fullness that you have not experienced yourself. Common sense tells us that true apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have to be spiritual elders. They must be walking in that fullness of Christ if God would use them to bring us to that same fullness; how could it possibly be otherwise? We have no business being instructed or disciplined by someone who is not our elder in the Lord; what can they possibly add to us, and how can they possibly bring us higher or deeper?

So each of these ministry functions fulfill different roles, but their purpose is the same, and that is, to bring ALL of us into that same fullness, that same spiritual maturity, that same experiential knowing, which the elders themselves enjoy. Thus, He gives SOME, till we ALL... SOME, till we ALL... SOME, till we ALL. Do you see this? And He will continue to give SOME till we ALL. Once He has ALL then the work is complete and these ministries will no longer be needed. Until then they ARE needed, and they are critical to God's Purpose.

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