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Reformed Presbyterian Church
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'Renewing Your Hearts and Vision' Series
#8

"Renewing our Personal Ministry" Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction

For many years in the RP church there has been a growing movement toward a broad based, congregation wide, discipleship oriented ministry approach that many believe has led to the turnaround in the decline of the church and has led to a new focus on church planting and mission development and to a resurgence in the enthusiasm of the youth for the church. But alongside those encouragements, there is another trend that leans toward a way of thinking that says the ordained leaders of the church are the ones that have been given the responsibility to do the ministry, and it is primarily, if not exclusively their domain. There is an important and needed focus in this view, upon the formal preaching of the Word in worship; but often that view excludes an openness to ministry led by the people of God.

Today, as we conclude our summer preaching series on renewal, we want to examine a historic and fundamental approach to the ministry that has been at the heart of this congregation's ministry for 40 years. That principle and approach is simply that *the ministry of the church has been entrusted by Jesus to the people of God*. It is not the exclusive domain of those who have been ordained. For some of you this will be a reminder of what you have known and seen practiced here

through the years. For some of you it will be a new and, I hope, both a challenge and an invitation to be fully involved in what Christ is doing in the midst of this body.

[Ephesians 4:1-16]

One of the things that has been a great blessing to observe in this congregation is the willingness of you to be committed to and sacrificially participating in the ministry on many levels. There is, of course, always a tendency to leave the ministry to someone else, or to have a sense that you are somehow not welcome or invited to the ministry table. And so we have to keep working hard to open doors. But as we ask God to renew our hearts and vision for ministry, it's important that we are operating from the same foundation. So what I want us to examine today are those basic foundation stones that support this theology of ministry. Here are four principles.

I. We understand the centrality of the church.

We dealt with this extensively last week so I won't repeat all of those things. But clearly Paul is focused on the unity of the body of Christ. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God who is over all. The context for the coming of Christ's kingdom on earth is the existence and the oneness of the visible church.

Now understand, when we talk about the church, we are not talking about the church building or the church activities. We are talking about the church sent out into the world with the good news of the gospel. The Great Commission of Matthew 28

has a decided focus on the church. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . .* After going, the next step in making disciples is to bring converts into the church through baptism so that they have the context for being taught to observe all that Jesus commanded us.

II. We share a common goal to be like Christ.

Look at verses 1-2 (read). If our understanding of the centrality of the church sets the *context* for our ministry, the goal of walking in a manner worthy of Christ sets the *content* for our ministry.

While there are limitless places that we can go and countless avenues for ministry, we always want to be gospel driven. Our message is always *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. It is always to offer forgiveness for sins and a new life lived for His glory.

Isn't Paul's language interesting? We are *prisoners of the Lord*. That means that we are His outwardly (what we do) and inwardly (how we are motivated.) I was struck this week, in my Bible reading, by the life of Joab the commander of King David's army. You could argue that Joab was loyal and faithful to David. But he was not a holy man. He outwardly did the things David asked of him and always promoted David as the king, he was mostly motivated by his own ambitions and pride. He walked on the edge, not quite following the desires of David's heart, but doing things that seemed outwardly to be for David's best interest. He murdered Abner, Absalom, and Amasa, but explained it as for the good of the kingdom. Really it was for the good of Joab. But David kept him because he was an excellent tactical military leader.

We need to be careful to guard against the tendency to be loyal to Christ outwardly, but motivated by selfish and personal ambition. Our

goal, both personally and in terms of our ministry to others, must always be Christlikeness. This must be the thing that captures us and makes us prisoners. So we always want to evaluate our activities and efforts and trace them to the gospel.

III. The ministry of the church belongs to the people of God.

Here's where a proper exegesis of Ephesians 4:11, 12 is critical. Listen to how the NASB translates this passage. *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Now listen to the King James Version. 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:*

In this passage is Christ giving the leaders of the church one job or three? The answer is pretty clear in the Greek. And it's found not in the big words, but the little prepositions. There are two different prepositions used in the text. The first is *pros* which means *for the sake of*. It is the preposition first used. He gave the pastor's and teachers *for the sake of equipping the saints*. But then the next two prepositions change. Paul is not giving a list of things for the pastors to do – they are not given for the sake of equipping the saints, for the sake of the work of ministry, and for the sake of building up the body of Christ. No, the next preposition is *eis*, which means *into*. He gave the leaders for the sake of equipping the saints ***into the work of the ministry, into the building of the body of Christ.***

The consequence of this is that your eye should naturally be upon becoming equipped into ministry. There is a difference between being a disciple of Christ and being an equipped laborer.

- A disciple can feed himself. A laborer can feed others.
- A disciple obeys the Word. A laborer teaches others the Word.
- A disciple takes responsibility for his own walk with God. A laborer feels a sense of responsibility for others and for the ministry.
- A disciple is growing. A laborer is reproducing.

But Jesus said the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. Why is that? In II Timothy 2 God uses the analogy of the soldier, and the athlete and the hard working farmer to explain why the laborers are few. It is costly to labor. It requires a selflessness best seen in a soldier who is willing to live differently than those around him. It requires a commitment to training on some level, like an athlete who invests himself so that he might win the prize. And it's hard work. Look at the farmer. Unlike the athlete who has the crowd to cheer him to the finish line, you'll never see a crowd of people cheering on the farmer as he plows his field. But he does it because he knows the value of hard work and is not simply trying to impress others.

The laborers are few because there is a price to pay. If you want to see God use your life for fruitful service in His kingdom then you have to be willing to invest. Ask the folks on the jail team, or our teachers, or the elders and deacons, or those reaching out to their neighbors.

But the ministry belongs to you. It is Christ's of course. But He has called you to share in what

He is doing. The ministry will be the strongest and most fruitful when the saints are engaged in works of service with the desire to see the body of Christ built up and matured.

IV. He has, is or will give you everything you need to be involved in ministry.

If indeed Jesus wants you to labor, then certainly He will provide the means.

1. Training (vs. 12 – equipping)
 - a. Vision
 - b. Skill
 - c. Desire
2. Maturity – vs. (14)
 - a. Front line ministry. Stable convictions and character
3. Love – (vs. 15)
 - a. Motivation, testimony and effectiveness (I Thes. 2:8)
4. Gifts, calling and function – (vs. 16)
 - a. A part of the body. You have gifts, perspective, and a place. Issue is not title, formal positions, recognition – but involvement.
 - i. Example of Jim Fisher and outreach program

Applications: What can you do?

1. Take advantage of training.
2. Existing ministries
3. Personal ministry
 - a. Mentoring
 - b. Discipling
4. Meet needs in the church
5. Go and meet needs in the world