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# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXXVIII : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4: 1-16)

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## **Ephesians 4:12** —

*that the saintes might have all thinges necessarie to worke and minister with all to the edifyinge of the body of christ* (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

*For the repairing of the Saintes, for the woorke of the ministerie, and for the edification of the bodie of Christ,* (Geneva Bible, 1599)

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* (King James Version, 1769)  
*unto the perfecting of the saints, for a work of ministration, for a building up of the body of the Christ,* (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

*for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ:* (Revised Version, 1885)

*for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ:* (American Standard Version, 1901)

*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* (New King James Version, 1982)

*for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* (New American Standard Version, 1995)

*to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up* (New International Version, 2011)

*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* (English Standard Version, 2011)

πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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**TO THE 'PERFECTING, EQUIPPING' OF THE SAINTS** — πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων [*pros ton katartismōn tōn hagiōn*] — The word used here for 'perfecting, equipping' is the only NT use of the noun form of this word, although the verb form is common in the NT. "The noun is rare, appearing only here in the NT and seldom outside of medical texts prior to the first century. Its medical use refers to the straightening or setting of a joint or broken bone. It also appears in nonliterary texts from roughly the time of Ephesians, where it refers to 'outfitting' a guest room with furniture, the 'equipment' that goes along with a couple of beds, and the 'preparation' of woof and warp necessary for weaving a garment." [Thielman, 279] "The verb [form of this word] is found more frequently and expresses the general idea of making *fit, complete*, is used in the sense of *repairing* literally (Matt. iv. 21; Mark i. 19), *restoring* in a spiritual or disciplinary sense (Gal. vi. 1), *perfecting* or *making perfect* (Matt. xxi. 16; 1 Thess. iii. 10; 1 Pet. v. 10, etc.), and also in that of *preparing, furnishing, equipping* (Luke vi. 40; Heb. x. 5, xi. 3, also Rom. ix. 22). The noun, therefore, may well have the meaning of *equipment* here." [Salmond, 330f; see also Best, 395; Lincoln, 253ff; Salmond, 330f; Hoehner, 549f; O'Brien, 303; Thielman, 279; JFB Commentary on Whole Bible; Vincent, Word Studies].

*'What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction'* (Rom 9:22 NKJV)

*'Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.'* (1 Cor 1:10 NKJV)

*'For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.'* (2 Cor 13:9 NKJV)

*'Henceforth, brethren, rejoice; be made perfect, be comforted, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of the love and peace shall be with you'* (2 Cor 13:11 YLT; see also 'Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.' (ESV)

*'Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.'* (Gal 6:1 NKJV)

*'night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?'* (1 Thes 3:10)

NKJV; see also ‘as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?’ (NASV)

‘And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.’ (1 Pet 5:10 ESV)

According to LSJ Lexicon (Liddel–Scott–Jones) this word can have four possible connotations:

- **the resetting of broken bones** — while this sense is irrelevant in our present context, it does help us understand the development of this word. “*Before NT times, [this word] was rare though used by Apollonius Citiensis forty-seven times within a work on the medical practice of setting a limb or bone or the restoration of a shoulder.*” [Hoehner, 549] “It appears frequently in the first-century-BC commentary of Apollonius of Cilium (ca. 90-15 BC) on Hippocrates’ treatise ‘On Joints’ and twice in a medical text by the Ephesian physician Soranus, who flourished in the second century AD. *Since figures from human development and physiology appear in 4:13,14, and 16, it is tempting to read the term ... as a medical metaphor: the five specially gifted groups of 4:11, like the ancient physician, are charged with setting the body in order so that it can grow and function properly.*” [Thielman, 279]
- **restoration, reconciliation** — Lincoln prefers this sense: “*It is the notion of making complete, which can include making complete by restoring or training, that best fits the context, where, in the next verse, different images for the Church’s completion will be used.... All believers are to be brought to a state of completion, and it is the ministers Christ has given who are the means to this end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership. These officers are Christ’s gifts to the Church, but again it becomes clear that such a perspective on their role should never lead to self-glorification.*” [Lincoln, 254] “For the mending (repair) of the saints.” [Robertson, Word Pictures]
- **training, discipline** — a cognate of this word is found in Lk 6:40 that uses this sense: ‘*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.*’ (Luke 6:40 NKJV) Ernest Best argues against this sense because (to him) this would limit the usage only to the last ‘official leader’ listed in v. 11 (the pastor/teacher) and not the others.
- **furnishing, preparation, equipping** — Per Ernest Best, this is the best possible meaning but requires an object, which would be supplied if the phrase continues into v. 12b in which the saints are being prepared by the church leaders for the work of the ministry. “*The notion of equipping or preparing, in the sense of making someone adequate or sufficient for something, best suits the context.* However, it does require an object: people are prepared for some purpose. *That purpose is ‘for the work of ministry’, an activity of the saints for which the leaders are to prepare and equip them. Christ has given ‘special’ ministers so that they will ‘make God’s people fully qualified’, thus enabling them to serve their Lord by serving one another.* ‘Work’ describes an ongoing activity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 2:30; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:5) seen in ‘service’. [O’Brien, 303]

Some of these meanings overlap and sometimes it is difficult to determine exactly the sense meant by the writers; for example:

‘mending their nets’ (Matt 4:21 || Mk 1:19)

“*Comparison with the ambiguity in the sense of the word at Mark 1.19 well illustrates the problem. There John and James are either repairing (torn) nets or else preparing nets (i.e. arranging them neatly) for a future catch.* Accordingly, if it stands on its own, the phrase could mean ‘restore the saints’, i.e. readmit lapsed Christians into fellowship, and certainly such a function is the prerogative of church leaders, even if there is no other indication in Ephesians that this problem is in view. Or it could mean ‘to equip people to be saints,’ to make them holy and blameless. This adjectival use of saints is sufficiently well evidenced in Ephesians to allow the possibility there.” [Muddiman, 200f] “In NT times, it is used of furnishing a room or preparation of a garment. It is found only in this verse in the NT. However, the [verb form] is found frequently and means ‘to adjust, put in order, restore, mend,’ as the reconciling of political factions, as well as ‘to furnish, equip’ or ‘to be instructed, trained.’ ... It appears thirteen times in the NT and can mean ‘to restore or mend’ fishing nets (Matt 4:21 = Mark 1:19), ‘to restore’ a fallen brother (Gal 6:1; cf. 1 Pet 5:10), ‘to prepare’ (Rom 9:22; Heb 10:5), ‘to put into proper order, complete, furnish’ (1 Thess 3:10; 1 Cor 1:10; Heb 13:21), ‘to perfect’ (Matt 21:16), or ‘to instruct’ (Luke 6:40). Hence, the verb offers a wide range of meaning. Returning to the noun in the present context, it ‘refers to the preparation of the church for becoming perfect, not to this perfection itself, as can be seen from the use of [‘complete, mature’, ‘stature’ and ‘fullness’] in v. 13. This preparation includes instructing and equipping believers so that they may minister effectively in the church. There is no idea in the passage of restoration from a disordered state.... The term ‘saint’ ... means believers. Therefore, gifted persons were given to the church for the immediate purpose of training or preparing believers. It is important to be endowed with the gift(s) of the Spirit but it is also important to learn to use the gift(s) effectively in the church for its edification.” [Hoehner, 549f] “The Greek implies *correcting* in all that is deficient, *instructing* and completing in number and all parts.” [JFB] “*The Christian ministry is designed to mature the saints, to bring them nearer the Divine law in obedience, and the Lord’s example in conformity.*” [Eadie, 308]

**FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY** — εἰς ἔργον διακονίας [eis ergon diakonias] — “Here the preposition [eis, ‘for’] introduces the goal of these gifted people, namely, to prepare other saints for the work of the ministry.” [Hoehner, 550]

**‘WORK’** — ‘work’ is to be understood actively, ‘an ongoing activity seen in service.’

**‘MINISTRY’ = ‘DEACONING’** — ‘ministry’ normally has some word or phrase qualifying it and indicating the nature of the service, or else this may be determined by the context. The qualification here is found in v. 12c: ‘a ministry which works towards the building up of the body.’ [Best, 396] Note the word used by Paul is the word would have the official sense to mean the deacons; some therefore limit the meaning to that official sense here but that would be an error. It can have a quite general sense:

*‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?’* (Heb 1:14 NKJV)

*‘Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.’* (2 Tim 4:11 NKJV)

*‘Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.’* (Mark 10:43 NKJV)

Paul even used it earlier in a general sense: *‘of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.’* (Eph 3:7 NKJV)

**“There are thirty-four instances of it in the NT basically denoting service at the table (Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1) and also the activities of an apostle (Acts 1:17, 25) or the distribution of alms (Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4). It is listed as one of the spiritual gifts (Rom 12:7) and listed in connection with the spiritual gifts to show that as there are various gifts so are there various services (1 Cor 12:5). However, the present text is not speaking of a specific gift for it includes every saint and not all saints have the same gifts (1 Cor 12:28-30). The most frequent use of the word is in connection with the ministry, the service of the Lord (Acts 20:24; 21:19; Rom 11:13; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 11). It is this concept which is used in the present context. It conveys the idea of serving the Lord by ministering to one another. This word promotes the idea of activity. Gifted individuals are given to the church for the purpose of preparing all the saints toward the goal of service or ministry.... The believer is being readied to become involved in ministry to others. The final goal of this service is described in the next phrase.”** [Hoehner, 550f]

**THE LORD CHOSE TO USE MEN AS SERVANTS TO DO HIS WORK** — *“The ministry of the officials does not find its fulfilment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister.”* [Ernest Best, ‘Ministry’] *“God might himself have performed this work, if he had chosen; but he has committed it to the ministry of men. This is intended to anticipate an objection. ‘Cannot the church be constituted and properly arranged, without the instrumentality of men?’ Paul asserts that a ministry is required, because such is the will of God.”* [Calvin, 282] *“It is a ministering work, a service and not dominion.”* [Gill, Commentary on Whole Bible]

**FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE ‘BODY OF CHRIST’** — εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [eis oikodomēn tou sōmatos tou Christou] — *“What has been done for the saints, by the apostles, prophets, and others preparing them, and by the saints through the exercise of their gifts in Christian service, is ‘for building the body of Christ’. All that has been spoken of in v. 11 and in the first two phrases of v. 12 is directed towards the goal of building the body of Christ, so that together the ministers of v. 11 and ‘the saints’ serve this divinely appointed goal.* To the metaphor of building Paul has joined the idea of growth. Previously he used biological imagery of growth when referring to the building of the temple (cf. 2:21; 4:16); now he employs building imagery in speaking of the church as a body. The key term used in the phrase, for ‘building’ the body of Christ’, here denotes the activity of building. The cognate verb appears outside the New Testament for the literal building of houses, temples, and other structures, and figuratively for the establishment of individuals or nations. In the LXX this verb is employed in both a literal and a figurative sense of building (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-13, where both senses are found). According to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, the restoration of Israel after the judgment of the exile is promised in terms of God building a people for himself (Jer. 24:6; 31:4; 33:7), and this he does by putting his words in the mouths of his prophets (Jer. 1:9-10). Matthew 16:18 (‘I will *build* my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it’) expresses the idea that as the Messiah Jesus is the one who builds or establishes the renewed community of the people of God. In line with this salvation-historical dimension, Ephesians 4 indicates that the exalted Messiah gives ministries of the word to equip God’s people for work *in* his service so as to build his body.’ This constructing has both an extensive and an intensive dimension to it. Growth in size is implied in the mention of the gifts of apostles and evangelists (v. 11), while the introduction of the body metaphor implies the notion of development of the church as an organism from within, by means of its own God-given life. *Although the expression may be built up has sometimes been interpreted individualistically, this is inappropriate, since it regularly has a corporate dimension in the apostle’s teaching, and this is clearly its significance in the present context.* [O’Brien, 304; see also Hoehner, 551; Thielman, 280] *“The two concepts of v. 12c have already appeared in the letter: (i) ‘building’ in 2.20-2; the word is used here again in the sense of the process of constructing and not of a finished construction, but the metaphor has another connotation, educational rather than physical; (ii) ‘body of Christ’ in 1.23; 3.6; 4.4. If ‘building’ is given its more physical sense it might imply the addition of new members to the community, though this does not necessarily follow as 2.20-2 shows, but if it has its more educational sense it would refer to the maturing of the community as in 2 Cor 10.8; 1 Cor 14.3, 12, 26. That the latter conclusion is correct is seen by the reference in 4.16 to growth in love. The metaphor is then used here with an ethical or educational sense.* The mixing of the building and growth metaphors (the latter implicit in ‘body’) was already present in 2.21 and reappears in v. 16.” [Best, 396f] *“In conclusion, then, Christ gave foundational gifts to the church for the immediate purpose of preparing all the saints for the goal of service and in turn this service is for the final goal of building up the entire body of Christ. As each believer functions with the gift given to each, Christ’s body, the church, will be built up. The gifts are never for self-edification but for the edification of the whole body of believers .... Apostles and evangelists need to proclaim the message and establish churches. Prophets and pastor-teachers need to inform and instruct believers. But the work of the*

*ministry does not stop there — it continues as these gifted individuals prepare all the saints for the work of the ministry with the ultimate goal of building up the body of Christ.” [Hoehner, 551]*

**AGAIN, THE LORD CHOSE TO USE MEN AS SERVANTS TO DO HIS WORK** — *“If the edification of the church proceeds from Christ alone, he has surely a right to prescribe in what manner it shall be edified. But Paul expressly states, that, according to the command of Christ, no real union or perfection is attained, but by the outward preaching. We must allow ourselves to be ruled and taught by men. This is the universal rule, which extends equally to the highest and to the lowest. The church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order choose to be wiser than Christ. Woe to the pride of such men!”* It is, no doubt, a thing in itself possible that divine influence alone should make us perfect without human assistance. But the present inquiry is not what the power of God can accomplish, but what is the will of God and the appointment of Christ. In employing human instruments for accomplishing their salvation, God has conferred on men no ordinary favor. Nor can any exercise be found better adapted to promote unity than to gather around the common doctrine — the standard of our General.” [Calvin, 282]

**THE METAPHOR OF THE BODY** — when we consider the ‘body of Christ,’ the only literal, physical ‘body of Christ’ is the risen, glorified body of the God–man, our Lord Jesus Christ. Every other usage in the New Testament is a metaphor, a word–picture to illustrate certain principles. As has been discussed often in this class, I would understand Paul’s use of the word here to refer to the local assembly of believers, the only ‘body’ the early churches knew. What is so often pressed upon our people today is the interpretation of the ‘body’ to refer to the ‘universal–invisible church,’ a misnomer for the family of God which did not come about for another 1500 years after Paul.

**CHURCH GROWTH ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLE PAUL** — “The past decade or so has witnessed the development of what is called the church growth movement. Seminars, conferences, books, programs, and even special organizations are devoted exclusively to teaching and discussing principles and methods for church growth. Many of the efforts are helpful, but only to the extent they are consistent with the principles Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:12-16. Here in its most succinct form is God’s plan by which Christ produces church growth. Since the Lord said, ‘I *will* build My church’ (Matt. 16:18, emphasis added), it is obvious that the building must be according to His plan. Attempting to build the church by human means only competes with the work of Christ.

“As discussed in the previous chapter, God’s spiritual gifts to His church include both the individual gifting of every believer as well as the gifted men called apostles and prophets, who were given strictly for New Testament times and were followed by the gifted men called evangelists and pastor-teachers, who are given for continuing ministry to the church (Eph. 4:11). It is God’s plan for the last two groups of gifted men — the evangelists and pastor–teachers — to equip, build up, and develop His church by the general operational procedure set forth in verses 12-16. In this passage we are shown the progression, the purpose, and the power of God’s divine pattern for the building and function of His church.

**“THE PROGRESSION OF GOD’S PATTERN** — for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; (4:12) In the simplest possible terms Paul here sets forth God’s progressive plan for His church: equipping to service to building up.

**“EQUIPPING** — The first task within God’s design is for the evangelists and pastor-teachers to be properly equipping the saints (a title used for all those set apart to God by salvation; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2). The evangelist’s work is to bring men and women to understanding of the gospel of salvation, to lead them to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and thereby become children in His spiritual family and citizens of His divine kingdom. In the early years the objective was to establish a local church. This begins the equipping. The pastor-teacher’s subsequent work, then, is to provide the leadership and spiritual resources to cause believers to be taking on the likeness of their Lord and Savior through continual obedience to His Word and to provide a pattern, or example, of godliness (1 Thess. 1:2-7; 1 Pet. 5:3).

“Katartismos (equipping) basically refers to that which is fit, is restored to its original condition, or is made complete. The word was often used as a medical term for the setting of bones. Paul used the verb form in his closing admonition to the Corinthian believers: ‘Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete’ (2 Cor. 13:11, emphasis added). The writer of Hebrews used the term in his closing prayer: ‘Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight’ (Heb. 13:20-21).

“Not only is the matter of individual equipping implied in these texts but also the collective equipping expressed in 1 Corinthians 1:10 — ‘Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made *complete* (from katartizo) in the same mind and in the same judgment’ (emphasis added). The equipping of each believer results in the unity of all.

**“God has given four basic tools, as it were, for the spiritual equipping of the saints.** These are spiritual means, because the flesh cannot make anyone perfect (Gal. 3:3). **The first and most important is His Word, the Bible.** ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Jesus said, ‘You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you’ (John 15:3). The first purpose of the pastor–teacher, therefore, is to feed himself, to feed his people, and to lead them to feed themselves on the Word of God.

“The example of the apostles, who gave themselves continually to teaching the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:4) indicates that **a second tool of equipping is prayer**, and the pastor–teacher is responsible to prepare himself and to lead his people to prepare themselves in prayer. Epaphras was committed to this spiritual means for building up believers. Paul characterized the ministry of Epaphras by saying that he is ‘always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you’ (Col. 4:12-13, emphasis added).

“It is essential to note that this equipping, completing, or perfecting of the saints is attainable here on earth, because Paul uses *katartizo* (the verb form of equipping) to refer to what spiritually strong believers are to do for fellow believers who have fallen into sin. The text strongly teaches that the ministry of equipping is the work of leading Christians from sin to obedience.

**“A third tool of equipping is testing and a fourth is suffering.** These are primary, purging experiences by which the believer is refined to greater holiness. James tells us to ‘consider it all joy . . . when [we] encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of [our] faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result,’ he goes on to say, ‘that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing’ (James 1:2-4). When we respond to God’s testing in trust and continued obedience, spiritual muscles are strengthened and effective service for Him is broadened.

“Suffering is also a means of spiritual equipping. Peter uses this word near the close of his first letter: ‘And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you’ (1 Pet. 5:10, emphasis added). Knowing and following Christ in the deepest sense not only involves being raised with Him but also sharing in ‘the fellowship of His sufferings’ (Phil. 3:10). Paul rejoiced in his sufferings for Christ’s sake. God ‘comforts us in all our affliction,’ he says, ‘so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ’ (2 Cor. 1:4-5).

“The sending of tests and suffering are entirely God’s operation, and He gives them to His saints according to His loving and sovereign will. But the other two agents of spiritual equipping — prayer and knowledge of Scripture — are the tasks of the gifted men.

“Like the apostles in Jerusalem, the pastor–teacher is to devote himself above all else ‘to prayer, and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:4). Like Paul, he should be able to say that his supreme effort is given to ‘admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ’ (Col. 1:28). As Paul said of Epaphras, it should be said of every pastor–teacher that he labors earnestly in prayer for those given into his care, in order that they ‘may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God’ (Col. 4:12). The devoted pastor–teacher is ‘a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine:’ which he then prescribes, teaches, reads publicly, and exhorts (1 Tim. 4:6, 11, 13). He is called to ‘preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction’ (2 Tim. 4:2).

**“Even the most biblical and efficient of church organizations will not produce spiritual maturity without the leadership of God’s gifted ministers who are continually in prayer and in His Word. Administration and structure has its place, but it is far from the heart of spiritual church growth. The great need of the church has always been spiritual maturity rather than organizational restructuring. All the books on leadership, organization, and management offer little help to the dynamics of the church of Jesus Christ.**

**“Even less does the church need entertaining. God’s people can use their talents in ways that glorify the Lord and give testimony of His grace, but when testimony turns to vaudeville, as it often does, God is not glorified and His people are not edified. Religious entertainment neither comes from nor leads to spiritual maturity. It comes from self and can only promote self.**

“The study and teaching of God’s Word takes time. The evangelist or pastor–teacher therefore cannot fulfill his God–given responsibility if he is encumbered with the planning and administration of a multitude of programs—no matter how worthy and helpful they are. Again, like the apostles in Jerusalem, he cannot ‘serve tables’ and also be faithful ‘to prayer, and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:2, 4).

“The surest road to a church’s spiritual stagnation, to the pastor’s burnout, or to both is for the pastor to become so engulfed in activities and programs that he has too little time for prayer and the Word. And programs that ‘succeed’ can be even more destructive than those that fail if they are done in the flesh and for human satisfaction rather than the Lord’s glory. It is lack of knowledge of God’s Word and obedience to it (Hos. 4:6), not lack of programs and methods, that destroy His people. When they fail it is not because of weak programs but because of weak teaching.

**“The first concern of the leadership of the church should be for the filled seats, not the empty ones. When a young preacher complained to Charles Spurgeon that his own congregation was too small, Spurgeon replied, ‘Well, maybe it is as large as you’d like to give account for in the day of judgment.’**

**“Spiritual growth does not always involve learning something new Our most important growth often is in regard to truth we have already heard but have not fully applied. Peter wrote, ‘I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, . . . that at any time after my departure you may be able to call these things to mind’ (2 Pet. 1:12-13,15). The great truths of the Word of God can never be mastered or overlearned. The**

*battle with our unredeemed flesh necessitates constant reminding. As long as a pastor has breath he should preach those truths, and as long his congregation has breath it should hear them.*

“During the Arab–Israeli war of 1967 an American reporter was flying over the Sinai desert with an Israeli officer, and they spotted some fifty thousand stranded Egyptian soldiers who obviously were dying of thirst. When the situation was reported in the newspapers, a number of world leaders and organizations tried to do something to help. But every time a plan was suggested, some military, diplomatic, or bureaucratic obstacle prevented its being carried out. By the time help came, thousands of the soldiers had died. How equally tragic it is for churches to spin their wheels in programs and committees while thousands around them are desperately in need of the spiritual water of the Word.

**“SERVICE** — The second aspect of God’s plan for the operation of His church is service. Paul’s language indicates that it is not the gifted men who have the most direct responsibility to do the work of service. No pastor, or even a large group of pastors, can do everything a church needs to do. No matter how gifted, talented, and dedicated a pastor may be, the work to be done where he is called to minister will always vastly exceed his time and abilities. His purpose in God’s plan is not to try to meet all those needs himself but to equip the people given into his care to meet those needs (cf. v. 16, where this idea is emphasized). Obviously the leaders share in serving, and many of the congregation share in equipping, but God’s basic design for the church is for the equipping to be done so that the saints can serve each other effectively. The entire church is to be aggressively involved in the work of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 4:10-11; and contrast 2 Thess. 3:11).

“When the gifted men are faithful in prayer and in teaching the Word, the people will be properly equipped and rightly motivated to do the work of service. From the saints who are equipped God raises up elders, deacons, teachers, and every other kind of worker needed for the church to be faithful and productive. Spiritual service is the work of every Christian, every saint of God. Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry.

**“BUILDING UP** — The third element and the immediate goal of God’s plan for the operation of His church is its being built up. Proper equipping by the evangelists and pastor–teachers leading to proper service by the congregation results inevitably in the building up of the body of Christ. Oikodonti (building up) literally refers to the building of a house, and was used figuratively of any sort of construction. It is the spiritual edification and development of the church of which Paul is speaking here. The body is built up externally through evangelism as more believers are added, but the emphasis here is on its being built up internally as all believers are nurtured to fruitful service through the Word. Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian elders emphasizes this process: ‘I commend you to God and to the word, ... which is able to build you up’ (Acts 20:32). The maturation of the church is tied to learning of and obedience to the holy revelation of Scripture. Just as newborn babes desire physical milk, so should believers desire the spiritual nourishment of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2).” [MacArthur, 151ff]