

Introduction

Several months ago, a person introduced me to a family member of his as **"the minister"** of Bethel Friends Church. Observation - That introduction was Biblically incorrect. He should have said **"a minister."** Why? It's because Bethel Friends doesn't have just one minister. It has many and the Holy Spirit has made each of you who follow Jesus one of those. Our text, Ephesians 4:7-13, teaches us just that.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Verse 9 states that Jesus **"descended into the lower parts of the earth."** That language refers to His incarnation. He came to earth in the flesh, as a human being.

The word **"captives"** in verse 8 implies why He did. It was to conquer and captivate and that's precisely what He did. He conquered and captivated Satan, sin, and death. He did that through what we call His **"finished work."** He was born of a virgin, lived a perfect sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead.

Now, verse 8 reveals what He did after He conquered and captivated. He **"ascended on high,"** which means returned to His non-bodily existence. He ascended so that He could do His **"continuing work."** His finished work made way for His continuing work, what is called **"the 'now work' of Jesus."** He Himself explained how He'd do that work in John 16:7. It's through **"the Helper"** that He **"sends"** to us. That Helper of course is the Holy Spirit. Jesus, in other words, does His continuing work, His **"now work,"** through the Holy Spirit who helps us.

That's where the last line in verse 8 comes in. It reveals one of the ways that the Holy Spirit helps us. He gives **"gifts to men,"** what Paul calls **"spiritual gifts"** in 1 Corinthians 12:1. Spiritual gifts are special abilities that the Holy Spirit produces in us. He creates those abilities in us and then enhances our use of them. That's why we often call them **"the gifts of the Holy Spirit."**

Paul identifies five of those in verse 11: apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring, and teaching. He identifies at least 16 more in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, making a total of 21. There are others, I believe, that the Bible doesn't mention, like the gifts of prayer, writing, and music.

Anyway, the spiritual gifts are part of the "**now work**" of Jesus that He does through the Holy Spirit and He does it in and to us all. As verse 7 says it, "**But to each one of us grace was given.**" Every follower of Jesus, including you, has at least one gift and probably more than one.

I have an older brother named Harold. Even when my home church, Trinity Friends, had only 75 people attending it, he stood up in services and talked about the day when it would have a 1000. Or I heard him pray several times and ask the Holy Spirit to help the church win all 35,000 people in Van Wert County to Jesus. Why does Harold say and pray such things? It's because of a spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit has given him – what Paul calls the gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9.

My brother Harold is gifted and so is every one of you.

Pastor-Teacher

I don't know about you but I think I know what my gifts are. They're the ones Paul mentions in verse 11, "**pastors and teachers.**" The gift of pastoring is the Spirit produced ability to shepherd followers of Jesus, to protect and provide for them spiritually. The gift of teaching is the Spirit produced ability to instruct followers of Jesus in the realities and truths of the universe generally and of God and His Bible particularly.

The syntax in which these two gifts are mentioned suggests that they're a gift combination. It's pastor-teacher. They, by their nature complement each other. Consequently, a follower of Jesus who has one of them will often have the other as well.

Some of those have these gifts attend college and seminary and end up becoming the full time paid professionals that we call "**the clergy,**" which reminds me of an old maxim. Clergymen are paid to be good;

laymen are good for nothing.

Anyway, notice in verse 12 what pastor-teachers are supposed to do. They're to "**equip the saints.**" Equip them means inform them, train them, edify them, enable them, and build them up through preaching, teaching, counseling, encouraging, and exhorting.

You Are a Minister

But equip them for what? Paul tells us in verse 12, "**for the work of service.**" The KJV translates that "**for the work of ministry,**" which is an accurate translation. That prepositional phrase teaches us a defining fact about you if you follow Jesus. You, singular, are a minister and you, plural, are a congregation of ministers.

That fact is a corrective to a destructive error in the church today. It's that ministry is the work of the professionals I mentioned earlier. One of the ways that error is perpetuated is through the terminology we use. We call the professionals "**clergymen**" or "**reverends**" and the non-professionals "**laymen.**" I know pastors who want to be called "**reverend**" but I won't call them that for two reasons. First, that designation is used only once in Scripture, in Psalm 111:9, and it's used of God, and they aren't God. And second, it implies that the professionals are spiritually and functionally superior to the non-professionals, and they aren't.

The fact is that ministry is just as much the work of the non-professionals as it is of the professionals. Verse 12 makes it clear, in fact. That is God's primary strategy for building and growing "**the body of Christ,**" the church. It's the non-professionals, just as gifted and committed as the professionals are, ministering – doing His work in the church and in the world.

Determine What Your Ministry Is

So, carry out the ministry God has given you. That's your call and you answer it by doing two things.

First, determine what your ministry is. Determining that is a three-step process.

The first step is to identify your spiritual gifts. That only makes sense doesn't it? God always gifts a person for the ministry to which He calls him or her. That makes your spiritual gifts indicators of what your ministry might be.

One way to identify them is to ascertain what your natural abilities and personality traits are. Some disagree with me, but I believe that natural abilities along with personality traits are often linked to spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit can and does do what He wills. But I believe that He often gifts followers of Jesus by enhancing their natural abilities and personality traits, which makes them indicators of what your gifts are.

I knew an IGA grocer who was a people person. He thoroughly enjoyed engaging people and did it well. They felt relaxed and affirmed in his presence. After he decided to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit gave him the gift of evangelism. He enhanced his ability to engage people and increased the results of him doing so. In one five year period, he witnessed to hundreds of people, leading over 200 of them to Jesus.

Another way to identify your spiritual gifts is to ascertain what you enjoy doing. The pastor of a mega church told me that preparing sermons and teachings is a burden to him. In contrast, setting goals, figuring out how to reach them, and recruiting people to get it done is a joy. What he does and doesn't enjoy fits his giftedness. He doesn't have the gift of teaching. He does have the gift of leadership.

That then is the first step in determining what your ministry is. Identify your spiritual gifts. Since God always gifts you for the ministry to which He calls you, your gifts are indicators of what your ministry is.

The second step is to identify what you desire to do for God. It goes like this. You apprentice yourself to Jesus. You arrange your affairs around living interactively with Him and His kingdom at hand. Your contact with Him and it in doing so will then make you want to do something particular for Him and His church. You'll be passionate about

that and feel compelled to do it. That something particular is then likely the ministry for which the Holy Spirit will gift you.

Take my wife Jill, for instance. Since I've known her, she's had a burning desire to teach children about Jesus and His gospel. Talk to her and she'll tell you. Not being able to do that would sadden and frustrate her. She believes she was born to do that for God.

That illustrates the second step in determining your ministry. Having arranged your affairs around living interactively with Jesus and His kingdom at hand, you identify what you desire to do for Him.

There's a third step. Pray. Do that in conjunction with the first two steps. If you're a disciple or friend of Jesus, Father God won't play games with you in regard to your ministry. He won't frustrate you by hiding it from you. So, pray and ask Him what it is. Doing that in conjunction with the first two steps enables you to achieve the first thing you need to do in order to carry out your ministry – determine what it is.

Be Committed to Your Ministry

The second thing you need to do follows logically from the first. Once you've determined what your ministry is, be committed to doing it.

Notice I didn't say "**interested.**" Interested means willing to do whatever is convenient. The problem is ministry is rarely convenient. Those who are only interested in it, therefore, will never minister.

You must be committed in order to minister. Committed means willing to do whatever is necessary. That's what ministry requires. You must be willing to do whatever is necessary to carry it out. You must be willing to give it the time, energy, and resources it demands. When other things less important get in its way, they go.

A follower of Jesus I know, a busy family man and professional, has the gift of prayer, the gift of asking God to do or give things. All of us have the grace of prayer, but he has the gift and thus the ministry of prayer. And he's committed to carrying it out. He has to be at the office at 7:00 a.m. So, he gets up at 5:00 every morning and prays until he has

to get ready for work. He explains that this way: **“Prayer isn’t something I *find* time for. It’s something I *take* time for.”**

He’s committed to his ministry in other words – and so must you and I be. We must do whatever is necessary, whatever it takes, to carry out the ministry for which God gifts us and to which He calls us.

Builds Up the Church

Verse 12 reveals the result when we as a congregation generally do that. The body of Christ, our local church, is built up. Verse 13 defines being built up. We who comprise it become unified in faith (develop a singleness of mind and purpose). We grow in our knowledge of Him (develop a deeper relationship with Him). And we mature to the stature of Jesus (take on His nature individually and corporately).

God wants every local church to model what His kingdom looks like. It does so by becoming what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called **“a community of prayerful love.”** This is a community in which people, because they’re like Jesus, can be counted upon to do what is right. It’s a unique community in the world in which the agape love of 1 Corinthians 13, in all its details, routinely prevails.

Our church can become that. But it can only if you and I who comprise it minister to one another and the world as the Holy Spirit has gifted us to do.

Conclusion

Let me ask you a question in closing. Are you doing that? Are you ministering as the Holy Spirit has gifted you to do? I pastored a small country church when I was in seminary that had this slogan at the top of every bulletin, **“One pastor; a congregation of ministers.”** Use your spiritual gifts and carry out your ministry. Bethel Friends will be just that if you do – a congregation of ministers.