

## **Making Christians relevant to the work of the Kingdom.**

(Ephesians 4:11-16)

Today many pastors and churches seek to win people to Christ, and impact the world by attempting to make the Bible relevant. Although their heart is to advance the kingdom, what often gets lost in their quest is true “equipping of the saints” (Vs.12) so that they can go into the world and “speak the truth in love” (Vs 15) as ones who have grown “up in all aspects of Christ” (Vs 15).

Endeavoring to transform preaching and teaching in the church in order to make the Bible relevant through culturalized creative preaching, principlizing, psychologizing, and/or governing the content of the message to what is interesting or immediately applicable for the culturalist and carnal actually undermines the work of the kingdom because Christians remain immature and are therefore never relevant to the work of God to the degree that He designed them.

Equipping the saints through thorough and substantive teaching and training matures them to understand the Scripture in the historical context in which it was given and they now live. Again this is not a superficial understanding attained by shepherds being able to quote the N.Y. Times, some new psychological discovery, most recent polls ad nauseam, merely chronicle examples of further degradation of the movie industry, or, especially, of romantically living in the past or having some fanciful Pollyanna notion about how things ought to be.

The biblical model of the church begins with supernaturally gifted men given to the church to mature and equip believers “for work of ministry” (Vs 11-12). This truth reminds us that as wonderful as salvation is, it does not make one equipped for the work God has for them. Salvation makes a person *capable* of becoming usable to God in the advancement of His kingdom, but equipping makes them *actually* usable just as human maturing is a long process before true maturity is attained even more so is the process of spiritual maturity.

God does not use a baby Christian to do His most serious work any more than a person would make a toddler president of a college. The fact that unusual things have been done with or through the presence of infants in no way changes the reality of this truth. No toddler can accomplish what he will be able to do if he is matured to his full potential. The same is true with a babe in Christ. It is true that God surely does use babes in Christ, and we have heard the stories and many have even experienced God using us as an infant Christian, but that does not compare to how He desires to use us if we avail ourselves to His plan and provision for maturing, equipping, and serving.

The approach of making the Scripture relevant to the carnal and lost in the regular assembling together of the church trivializes and marginalizes the maturing and equipping of God’s people and thereby undermines the work of the kingdom. Babes must be matured, and if not, their guardians are at best neglectful and at worst cruel. True training and maturing of the saints does not happen by superficial teaching of the

Scripture, a mere seminar, or in a few minutes a week, rather it is the product of years of teaching and training by faithful shepherds in tandem with a hunger by the believer to know and be used of God. This transforms babes who require constant and immediate attention into ambassadors sacrificially advancing the kingdom of God in the context of history that God has placed them. That is what equipping and maturing is all about. Equipping is to biblically teach and train believers in order to **make us relevant to the work of the kingdom in the cultural context in which God has sovereignly placed us.** That is what the shepherds and the church do. The gathering of God's people is not primarily to evangelize the lost; that is what matured believers do when they go out into the world.

Once a person is born again, he begins his spiritual journey as a babe in Christ. He will only experience being and doing what God wants him to be and do if he matures. Therefore, to a large degree, a believer determines how much God will use him in the future, by his willingness to be equipped today.

When has someone had enough equipping? It is not uncommon, even in conservative evangelical churches, to hear comments that communicate that "there is too much teaching or preaching" or "too much emphasis on understanding Scripture". So when should a shepherd begin to deemphasize the teaching of the word of God? This passage gives the benchmarks we as pastors are striving for in maturing the saints.

"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; ***until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*** As a result, we are ***no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (*Ephesians 4:11-16*) *emboldened and underlined italics added.*

Therefore, since we are matured primarily by the word of God (2 Timothy 3:15-16; 1 Peter 2:2), in order that we can have "unity in the faith", be doctrinally correct in our "knowledge of the Son of God", know Him deeply (Philippians 3:10), be invulnerable to the waves of false teaching from deceitful men, and be able to counter and correct them by living and speaking truth, teaching is to be the priority for the pastor teacher<sup>1</sup>; in addition, note that everything in this passage is inextricably dependent upon and only potentially proportionate to one's knowledge of the Scripture; moreover, there can only be too much teaching of Scripture if it is teaching that is disconnected from equipping by being in a vacuum where there is no challenge to engage culture, to live what you learn, to serve or mentoring and/or modeling maturity or the church corporately living out the truths learned as a church. Then, the amount of teaching is not the real issue or less

teaching the answer to the problem, but rather living, serving, practicing and speaking truth.

Believers are not to stay cloistered within the comfort and protection of their spiritual families, they are trained to leave that place of fellowship and security and spiritual nourishment and go into the world of sin, danger, hostility, Satan's domain, the world that is at enmity with God, the world of lies, mendacities, fabrications, delusions, deceptions, distortions, cons, perversions, deconstruction, historical revisionism, and distortions of truth & God; where right is called wrong and wrong is called right, where God is not welcome except on man's terms, where man redefines sin to be sickness, self responsibility and accountability are replaced with self rights and self-esteem and darkness of Satanic evil enshrouds the world; Where the cults are numerous and the occult is thriving, where art is Christ on the cross immersed in Urine and Mary is covered with dung, tolerance means everything is welcome except God on God's terms. A world that seeks to write its own morals, truth, future, seeks self justification at every turn, scorns true righteousness, self-deification is normalized, God who blesses is welcome but a God who judges is ridiculed, mocked, blasphemed and rejected, where men are blinded and energized by Satan, and follow him being both deceived and deceivers.

Into that world, the saints of God are commanded to go, armed with the sword of truth, which is the word of God, and we are to "speak the truth in love". The only way that can really happen is if the local church makes full use of Christ's Provision to the church by shepherds fulfilling their purpose to equip the people of God, People of God fulfill their purpose of doing work of ministry, and we have all Christ's passion to be a mature church". Then, and *only* then, can we know that we are being good stewards of His sufficient provision and armed to speak the truth in love to our world.

Most often those who deemphasize the teaching of Scripture, can't answer some of the most basic questions that are posed to Christians, or if the leader can he is failing to adequately communicate essential truth to the ones he is training.

Maturing and equipping involves developing new thinking until we "bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and those thoughts are manifested in our speech, motivations, goals, ethics, etc.... We continually mature the babe to spiritual adulthood in order to liberate spiritual infants from the tyranny of the domineering proclivities of our fallen flesh and the flesh's insatiable quest for worldly gratification; maturing is the process of conforming every area of the believer's being to conform to our new life given at regeneration, which is righteous and holy (Colossians 3:10).

We must constantly be renewing our minds by the truth of Scripture (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23) and then walking in this new truth. The *only* model that can accomplish this is the model given by our Lord in this passage, which is the model for carrying out the mandate of Matthew 28:18-20. To the degree that the church veers from God's plan for the church and advancement of the kingdom, they become complicitous with the

enemy. Any method of advancing the kingdom that does not intersect with this model is at that point null and void and deleterious to the work of the kingdom regardless of immediate results to the contrary.

The shepherds must give themselves to sacrificial, steadfast equipping of the saints. The saints must eschew pride's alluring mantra, "you know enough", by realizing their Father desires their maturity; thus, we are motivated to remain devoted to being equipped to serve more. It is equipping that makes us relevant to God's plan to advance His kingdom; therefore, shepherds must be unabashedly devoted to "equipping the saints" and saints must be unceasingly passionate about being equipped to do "the work of ministry".

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor and teacher in this passage refer to one person; also, the only functional requirement of an elder is that he is "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2).

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from chapter 9 Somewhere Between Fundamentalism and Fluff.