

The work of service in the body of Christ

In our consideration of the New Testament church, we first focused our attention on the ultimate priority and structure of the assembly. Then we focused our attention on our personal responsibilities in the assembly.

Last week we considered our mutual responsibility in the matter of church discipline.

Today we turn our attention to what ought to be considered a unique privilege – a privilege that God has granted to each and every member of Christ's church.

This privilege is found in the 12th verse of the 4th chapter of Ephesians. It is the work of service.

Many of us have fallen for the deception that portrays work in a mostly negative light.

In the labors that are required for us to provide food, clothing, shelter, and material blessings for our families – there can undoubtedly be drudgery and many, and even serious, hardships.

But even in the mundane, tiring, and repetitive efforts required to take care of our families there can be some very satisfying rewards.

There are many times that I have been intensely aware of the special satisfaction that comes from working hard to accomplish a needed task for an appreciative customer.

I would go so far as to say that without that sense of satisfaction, my work would at times be unbearably unpleasant.

Are you alert to what a precious privilege meaningful work is? Steve had a very helpful series on work.

(I remember...)

** In the end – everybody is going to serve somebody – self, Satan, or the Lord of glory.

** In the end – there is only one service that finally and fully satisfies.

In the church of the living God there is a very crucial need for diligent labors. Our loving Father has provided a very special opportunity for mere mortals to have a vital part in the accomplishing of His perfect will for the church.

God didn't have to accomplish His glorious purpose this way. He certainly doesn't need the like of us to bring His plan to completion. In fact, it would seem that it would have been so much easier for the Lord to do it all Himself.

We are familiar with the saying; 'If you want something done right...'
Surely with God this takes on a whole different dimension.

But God is accomplishing far more than we could have ever envisioned if we were responsible for an effective strategy.

God is demonstrating the marvels and infinite dimensions of His wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

God's way of accomplishing His purpose in the church is bursting with infinitely more potential to display His incomparable glory than anything that could have ever been conceived in the mortal mind.

God has ordained that sinners redeemed through the surpassing riches of His grace should have the incomparable privilege of active, personal, collective, and productive contribution to the accomplishing of God's purpose for His church in the present age through the work of service.

With this spiritual diligence there ought to be a deep and abiding sense of satisfaction far surpassing even the most impressive efforts that are relegated to the purely material realm.

The work of service in the church of the living God provides us with an opportunity to become an integral part of something which transcends the hopeless futility of all other human endeavors.

The Lord of glory Himself is the founder, the foundation, the builder, the owner, the Head of an entity so phenomenal in redemptive scope and efficacy, that it will bring the everlasting God, everlasting glory.

Notice the importance of the work of service in the context of Ephesians 4:11-13.

This is something we need to look at closely – it is so integral to the progression in this text.

It is so vital to the potential for real progress in the church of the living God.

Let's begin by considering what this work of service involves. What is included in the work of service?

The word that is translated 'service' here is often translated 'ministry' in other passages. It refers to a selfless act or continuing effort – for the benefit of others in direct relation to Christ, and the building up of His body.

There are a number of different areas in which God's children can be doing the work of service.

- In testifying of the gospel of the grace of God Acts 20:24
- In hospitality, and meeting physical needs Romans 12:13 Acts 6:1
- In preaching and teaching the word of God Acts 6:4
- In encouragement and edification I Corinthians 16:15-18

The work of service includes many different kinds of selfless and diligent efforts (I Cor. 12:5) – but only in a spiritual context. Notice very carefully the context of the passage in Ephesians 4.

It does not include anything we may want to call ministry.

A business is not a ministry – though it may provide an opportunity for spiritual service.

Pursuing self-serving interests is not ministry – although there may be accompanying opportunities for the work of service.

How can we experience the exquisite joy, and effectual productivity of the work of service?

How will we realize the deep and abiding satisfaction of the work of service?

1. When our serving is in grateful response to the gospel of the grace of God. Romans 12:1

- When our hearts are continually filled with thanksgiving and awe at God's kindness to us in Christ
- Though there are none righteous, none who seek after God, none who do good,
- Though all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,
- God has – through faith in the Lord Jesus – justified us as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.
- It does not depend on the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy! II Corinthians 9:10-15
- “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...” Hebrews 9:14
** Hebrews 12:28

2. When our service is done from the right motive. Galatians 5:13

- Love is crucial in the effectual up-building of Christ's body Ephesians 4:16
- In light of the Lord's overwhelming love for us, how can we treat each other with anything less than an overriding love – (Romans 5:8)

a love that is greater than the hurtful ways we have been treated, greater than the obvious weaknesses of our brothers and sisters, greater than our petty grievances against one another?!

3. When our service is self-perpetuating. Ephesians 4:10-12

- when the service of teaching the word is being done faithfully, there are certain implications that should follow
- this needs to be a continuous cause and effect when there is a general breakdown anywhere, there will be a stronger tendency for breakdown everywhere. (notice Ephesians 4:11- 12 again)

4. When our service is focused on the highest goal.

- there is an immediate goal – vs.12b
- there is a longer-term goal – vs. 13
- Colossians 3:24

5. When we are alert to specific dangers.

- laziness Romans 12:11
- lack of zeal Romans 12:11
- weariness in difficulties Romans 12:12
- deviation from an intense focus on the Lord Luke 10:40-42
- failure to be rejoicing in hope Romans 12:12 I Thessalonians 1:9-10

Serving the Lord will be a significant privilege in heaven, not only will we regain with Him, but we will also have the unique privilege of serving Him – with a permanently pure heart – forever and ever.
Revelation 22:1-5