

The Heart Of Christian Service (Ephesians 4:7-16)

In Ephesians 2 God described the amazing process of conversion. A gracious plan has been designed so that people can escape from the darkness of sin (see Ephesians 2:8, 9). Paul summarized the results of conversion: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Once saved, the Christian distinguishes himself as a worker for the Lord.

A parallel passage suggests that once a person is converted, he serves because his attitudes have been changed: “Not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (Colossians 3:22b). One who is converted will see every action as an expression of submission to God’s will. A Christian, being created for good works, will work willingly in order to serve the Lord God! Whatever he does is an expression of love to God. Through his labor, others will see the light of Christianity—and God will receive the glory (Matthew 5:14–16). Doing good deeds brings blessings in this life and in the afterlife (Revelation 14:13). The Christian completes these works out of joy. He is happy to be involved in such works because every act of service provides an opportunity to express the joy of salvation.

The Christian has two areas of service—that performed in the community (Titus 3:1) and that performed within the congregation (Jude 20; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27). Paul well expressed the correct attitude toward work that builds up the church when he said, “I will most gladly spend

and be expended for your souls” (2 Corinthians 12:15a).

This attitude of servanthood is discussed in Ephesians 4:7–16. Paul said that the “proper working of each individual part” in the church is what “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (v. 16). Each person has a talent that can be used “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (v. 12). What can you do to build up the church? What services can you offer to your brethren to strengthen them in the Lord? Now that your attitudes have been converted to Christ, how will this help you to be involved in devoted labor?

Those who have become Christians are set apart for God’s use to do good works. Each Christian must be involved in service that expresses a godly attitude and glorifies God. Not only will the faithful convert display the heart of a servant in every other aspect of life, but he will be especially devoted to works that build up the church! One can be involved in many good projects in the community, yet fail to participate in the work of the Lord’s church in his area. This lesson describes Christian service and gives the reason for serving in the church.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS UNIQUE (4:7)

Every Christian has an ability to offer service. Paul stated that “each one of us” has received an opportunity to serve God. No one is left out. Everyone has an ability to do some-

thing to help the local congregation. Christ's "grace" has been given to each member of the church, and this enables even the newest Christian to find an opportunity to serve. This grace blesses each member with the strength, motivation, love, and concern to serve God. Everyone has the potential to further God's work in the church.

How can you serve to build up the local congregation? What talents and abilities do you possess that are uniquely yours? You need not do what others are doing. All you have to do is serve God according to your own abilities! Many look at themselves and say, "I do not have any 'big' talents; all I have are 'little' talents." This was the attitude that the prophet Zechariah confronted. Zechariah spoke to a group of people who believed that everything was a failure because only the little things were being done. God spoke through the prophet, saying, "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10a).

God expects every member to help with the tasks that will build up the local congregation. If members depreciate their efforts as being "little" or "unimportant," they will not offer the service God expects. Paul reminded the Ephesians that God has given talents to "each one of us" so that those talents can be used in serving Him.

A story tells of a beautiful church building admired by all who came to view it. People commented on the beauty of the appropriately painted walls, the stained-glass windows, the comfortable seats, and the well-designed pulpit. On the roof, a nail that was holding a shingle heard these conversations. The nail never heard anyone praise him. He began to think, "I'm nothing. Nobody notices me. Nobody appreciates me. I'm not needed. I'm not wanted." Lonely and dejected, this nail one day pulled itself out, tumbled down the slanting roof, and fell to the ground. That night, rain came and the nail became buried in the mud. As it rained, the shingle that the nail had held in place came loose and slipped out of position, permitting the rain to flow into the beautiful building. The previously attractive walls became stained. Some of the comfortable seats were soaked with water. All of this happened because one nail started thinking "I'm a nobody" and refused to stay at

work!¹ (See 1 Corinthians 12:22.)

Becoming a Christian has given you the rewarding opportunity to serve God in a local congregation using your unique talents. Never depreciate your work for the Lord or criticize yourself because you cannot do what another can do! Simply do your best with the talents you have been given.

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: . . . if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:6-8).

Nothing is too small to be blessed by God! As a Christian, your major concern is to do whatever you can so that the Lord's church is strengthened in steadfast faith and grows according to God's expectations! You have been appointed for service in God's kingdom!² Let all strive to hear the same kind of commendation that the Lord gave to the woman in Mark 14:8a: "She has done what she could."

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS RECIPROCAL (4:7b-10)

Why is a Christian expected to use his or her talents in serving God? The answer is simple: Each Christian realizes the service that was rendered by Christ and begins to serve with the same attitude with which the Lord served! (See Galatians 2:10; 1 Timothy 1:12-17.) As Paul urged the Philippian Christians to practice the attitude of a humble servant, he used the Lord's example as the major incentive. He wrote, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5).

Jesus Christ is able to offer gifts of service today because He was willing to come to earth and experience death. When we understand the sacrifice of Christ, we will also offer willing sacrifice. The Philippians recognized the servant attitude demonstrated by Christ and acted

¹Wendell Winkler, *The Mission of the Local Church* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Winkler Publications, 1971), 9.

²See Luke 12:42, 43, 47, 48; 1 Timothy 1:12; Ecclesiastes 9:10.

accordingly. They were commended by Paul: “I seek for the profit which increases to your account. . . . having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God” (Philippians 4:17b, 18).

Christians serve in the church out of appreciation for the matchless service rendered by Christ Jesus. Look at your talents, and see how you can use them in the Lord’s church to serve in a way that will strengthen the congregation in its holy faith!

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS DESIGNED (4:11)

God has designed His church to function in a specific way. He has revealed that structure in the Bible and does not want us to modify it. God expects Christians to follow the biblical design and not exceed it (1 Corinthians 4:6).

The Lord’s church was organized to have first temporary offices and then permanent offices. The apostles and prophets were needed to govern the church when it was first established. After God’s revelation had been written down, the apostles and the prophets were no longer needed because others could read the written revelation and understand God’s plans (Ephesians 3:3–5). However, there was still a need to teach the written revelation throughout the world. Those in the permanent offices of the Lord’s church would do this teaching. The permanent offices include the evangelists (those who preach the gospel message), pastors (the elders who oversee the local congregations), and teachers (those who teach the revealed truth). The men occupying these permanent offices are obligated to serve so that God’s Word will be communicated accurately. Christians not occupying these offices are obligated to listen to the revealed Word, learn the instructions given by God, and urge others to learn and follow His Word.

As a new Christian, you need to learn more of God’s Word and mature in your faith. Think about the opportunities that are available to you for learning God’s truth. Be present at every opportunity when the gospel is preached or when teachers of God’s Word are presenting biblical studies.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS PRODUCTIVE (4:12–16)

Why must each Christian serve in the church? This is the only attitude that can build up the local congregation! Three things will happen when each Christian is serving in the local congregation. *First, there will be perfect unity* (v. 13a). Those who are involved in serving will have neither time nor occasion to encourage division (1 Thessalonians 4:9–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:11–13). Nothing adds joyful unity to a congregation as much as when every member is excitedly involved in serving! *Second, there will be knowledge of Christ* (v. 13b). A greater knowledge of Christ will help Christians understand what attitudes to possess and which kinds of service to practice. *Third, there will be maturity* (v. 13c). Those who participate in various efforts will mature in the faith.

Every member of the church is responsible for being productive for the Lord. Christians have been saved to bring others to Christ! Members of the local congregation are members of one another and must be sure that each “part” in the body is working properly. God has revealed His inspired Word to help in “equipping” His saints for service that will build up the church. The local congregation cannot reach its full potential unless each member within that congregation is working. Verse 16 shows that each member is responsible for the “growth” of the congregation. Each member is responsible for doing his part to build up the church in love!

As a new Christian, you have a duty to be involved, diligent, and dedicated. Why? Because every member will be held accountable for how he serves. Each member has a gift to serve, a talent or an ability to use in the local congregation, and should eagerly serve out of love for the Lord’s church and the desire to imitate the blessed Lord!

You must become a productive member of the church where you worship! Please note that a “productive” member is not necessarily the most visible member. The productive member is the Christian who is serving with the attitude of Christ! Consequently, the local church is built up in love, the members are encouraged to serve more, and faith is strengthened.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What an uplifting section of the Scriptures we find in Ephesians 4:7–16! As a new Christian, you have become a part of the local church of Christ. In this congregation you offer godly service. Your service is *unique*—only you can do what you do! Your service is *reciprocal*—you serve because you understand the Lord’s willingness to serve you! Your service is *designed*—you are following God’s

revealed plans for service! Your service is *productive*—you are building up the body of Christ!

Becoming a Christian has brought many blessings into your life. One of the greatest blessings is that you now serve others in the name of the Lord! Through your Christian service, you bring glory to God and help the body (church) of Christ to grow!

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