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# A Biblical Ministry

## Ephesians 4:1-17

*Russ Kennedy*

Illustration of shopping in China and looking for the genuine article.

How do you know you are involved in a Biblical church? Calvin gave us 5 essentials for a church. Dr. Mark Dever has helped us much with his 9 Marks of a Biblical Church. So we move from essentials to characteristics, from what makes a church at all to what marks a good church. The leaders here at the Chapel are deeply concerned that we are a real church according to the Bible and that we do church according to the Bible.

You will notice an important phrase. You would see it in the men I have mentioned. The phrase is “according to the Bible”. This is fundamental. Without “According to the Bible” nothing is Christian, nothing is pleasing to God. From God, by God, for God and to God according to God’s Word is the upward trajectory of being gathered as God’s people.

But then there are two other questions:

How do we know if we are doing Biblical ministries?

How do we know that we are doing ministry Biblically?

These are important questions. We wrestle with them regularly. A Biblical ministry is one that is marked by these characteristics.

### **Lives Worthy of our Calling**

**(v. 1-6)**

Biblical ministry is marked by Christians who live worthy of our high calling.

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

### **Expecting a Christian Lifestyle**

**(v. 1)**

Biblical ministry flourishes where a Christian lifestyle is expected. People who serve should live according to the Bible and be pleasing to God. They will not legalists. They will not live foolishly nor sinfully. They understand that they have been called to salvation by God and thus called to godly living.

## **Promoting humility and gentleness (v. 2)**

A Biblical ministry is marked by humility and gentleness. It rejects the pride that seeks for power, position and prestige. It prizes and promotes working together in teams and teams working together as partners. Therefore we aim to encourage patience and giving people time and opportunity to grow in maturity and ability.

## **Maintaining the Spirit's Unity (v. 3)**

A Biblical ministry is not trying to create unity. It is seeking to maintain the unity the Spirit has made. True believers are one in Christ. That is an internal union created by the presence of the Spirit in all of us. We aim to make that unity external through how we respond to one another. So we will seek the kind of real peace that will bind us together.

## **Upholding all the Unities (v. 4-6)**

A Biblical ministry understands the centrality of God and the necessity for Truth in ministry. The commands in verses 1-3 are grounded in the truths of verses 4-7. Since there are all these unities, then we will live, think, serve and pursue those unities in the service of the Lord. We aim to keep truth and life and ministry intermingled, interconnected, interdependent.

Biblical ministry lives godly lives grounded in the truths of the Word of God.

## **Prizes Diversity in Unity (v. 7)**

This would all be so very easy if growing up in maturity and ministry meant we were all becoming the same. Except that is not the way it is. A Biblical ministry prizes diversity in unity.

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

### **Enabled by Grace**

Foundational to all Biblical ministry is that it is enabled by God's grace. Ministry can be done by the flesh. It often is. But God's people who serve will prize doing the work of the Lord through the power that comes from the Lord. God is giving God. He gives us our salvation. He gives us the desire, ability and power to do the work of ministry. This gift is His grace which is really saying this present to His people is His power He gives to His people. We aim then to do all the work of ministry by the enabling presence and power of God.

### **Distributed to All**

This grace was given to all. This grace are the abilities God gives through His Spirit. Everyone has received at least one ability from God. Some have more. This variety of graces or abilities creates a diversity in the body. Most of you see ministry through the lens of your giftedness. It gives you a focus and sometimes a framework. This wide diversity then makes the humility and patience necessary. People will be different. And

this is God's design. So we aim to see every believer serving in ministry according to the desire, ability and strength God has given.

### **Assigned by Christ**

A Biblical church prizes diversity in ministry because the Lord has assigned those gifts to each person. These graces are distributed by the Lord. He has decided what His people are able to do. He has given them the power to do it. So leadership in ministry is seeking to identify, equip and launch those gifts. Now, it is important to recognize that this is at the ability level. What you are able to do is decided by the Lord and given by Him. But what you do with it is part of the next points in the text. It is put to use in the gathered church according to wisdom, according to what seems best.

Biblical ministry serves with grace-enabled diversity.

### **Recognizes Authority over the Church**

**(v. 8-11)**

The next verses are difficult. We have expositied them in the past. But it seems to me that we can see that a Biblical ministry recognizes God's authority over the church.

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

### **The Ascended Christ**

Why does he refer to the ascended Christ? Because this highlights His kingship. Jesus has the authority over the church. He is her King. He is the senior pastor (chief shepherd). Biblical ministry joyfully submits to the Lordship of the ascended Christ.

### **The Gifted Men**

A Biblical ministry is given gifted men who lead the church through authoritative teaching. This is fundamental to the Chapel's approach to ministry. God gives us gifted people. These gifted people understand and teach God's Word. God's Word is the authority that ultimately governs and guides the church. The elders must be able to teach. Thus God has brought into existence a worshipping, teaching and learning community who serves under and with the Word of God. So, it is our commitment to teach things into existence.

Biblical ministry is governed and guided by the teaching of gifted people given by the Lord of the church.

## Implements Biblical Roles

(v. 12)

- <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,  
<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

The process of ministry development in the church has two components driving toward a single objective.

### Gifted Leaders who Equip

First, there is the equipping of people by gifted leadership. The leadership equips people in all spheres of life and ministry so that they will be broadly effective in the work of service they themselves are gifted for.

### Equipped People who Serve

Second, there are the works of service by equipped people. The ministry of the church is carried on by people who have been enabled by the Spirit and equipped by their leaders.

## Seeks Biblical Purposes

(v. 12-14a)

- <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,  
<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

### Equipping the Saints

Biblical ministry organizes itself so that the spiritually able leaders given to the church focus on equipping believers for their work of ministry. One important task all ministry leaders have is to equip people to use their gifts and abilities well. This means helping identify what those abilities are and how they can be used. We are to equip people to move from abilities to tasks. We are to equip people to work together in partnerships and teams. We are to encourage the faltering and correct the failing. Often, when a church does not minister well, it is the fault of Elders and leaders who have not equipped the people to serve.

### Building up the Body

Biblical ministry is striving to build up (edifying) the church. Now remember, in the Bible, the church is the people of God. The building up of the church is not primarily the organization of churching as we think of it, but is the spiritual growth and maturity of the people gathered in the church. The establishing of a Biblical, effective organization is desirable and will generally happen as people exercise their gifts and abilities of administration.

## **Attaining Unity in Faith and Knowledge**

Biblical ministry is seeking to arrive at a destination. There is a last stop that we are seeking to arrive at. The path that we take on that journey is mapped out by the Lord. There are a limited number of paths to the place God wants us to be.

We aim for all to be taught, believe and live a unified body of doctrine. The faith is a set of truths, from the Bible, clearly taught that are to be held and lived by all. This is not something the community of the church creates but rather what is derived and declared from the Scriptures themselves.

We aim for all to come to an intimate knowledge of Christ. Biblical ministry should be teaching in such a way that believers grow in a vital, true and real relationship with Christ.

## **Measuring Maturity by Christ**

Biblical ministry is moving believers towards the maturity measured by Christ. He is the standard of maturity. Jesus lived a totally godly life because He knew and lived the truth. Spiritual maturity comes as people grow in discernment and godliness by practicing the truth they know.

Biblical ministry then will tend to equip and grow people who exhibit the fullness of Christ in their truth, experience and maturity.

## **Avoids the True Dangers**

**(v. 14-16)**

In pursuing genuine, authentic Christianity, Biblical ministry avoids many real dangers.

<sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

### **Danger of Wrong Standards**

Ministry functioning according to the Bible will avoid the danger of wrong standards. It will know who it serves and how it is to function so that it is pleasing to God. It is easy to fall into striving to be successful according to human measure and standards. God not only calls us to be faithful, but to be obedient and wise.

### **Danger of Personal Immaturity**

Biblical ministry will avoid the danger of not challenging people who remain in spiritual and personal immaturity. Self-centeredness, self-focus, self-serving, all mark physical and spiritual children.

## **Danger of Doctrinal Instability**

Biblical ministry avoids the dire danger of doctrinal instability. Because it prizes learning and communicating God's Word, it should be growing in an establishment of the faith. With all the howling winds of error and false teaching, we want to see believers firm, settled and stable in what they believe.

## **Danger of Destructive Errors**

Biblical ministry will be better able to deal with the rise of destructive errors. Because of its commitment to truth and to love, it will love people enough to warn them about errors and myths. Error will spawn deceptive schemes. Error cannot produce what truth is designed to bring forth. So, deceitful processes are brought forward to produce counterfeit results. A Biblical ministry will avoid these and inoculate God's people against them.

## **Danger of Unloving Truth**

Biblical ministry will avoid teaching and preaching without love. Away with the notion that teaching is dry, dead and often unloving. Harsh, unkind, ungenerous teaching is to be avoided. We are to speak clearly and plainly about sin and sinners, about error and false doctrine. But even in that, a Biblical ministry will manifest real love to believers.

## **Danger of Secondary Substitutes**

A Biblical ministry will be discerning about substitutes for what pleases God. Human schemes, worldly standards, unauthorized methods and programs will be set aside. Because of reliance on grace, ministry that is designed by the world to please world to produce the world's results will not be incorporated into the ministry.

We aim to be discerning of the dangers that tempt and test a Biblical ministry seeking to be what is pleasing to God in all aspects.

## **Depends on Christ's Provision**

**(v. 16)**

*Notice the core assertion: from [Christ who] makes the body grow,*

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

## **His Design**

A Biblical ministry will gladly embrace God's design for it.

## **His People**

A Biblical ministry will focus on making disciples by going, gathering and growing.

## His Power

A Biblical ministry will depend on the working of God to produce what is pleasing to Him.

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## Reflect and Respond

Stott reminds us that maintaining our spiritual unity depends on four essential truths.<sup>1</sup> [p.147]

1. It depends on the *charity* of our character and conduct (verse 2)
2. It arises from the *unity* of our God (verses 3-6)
3. It is enriched by the *diversity* of our gifts (verses 7-12)
4. It demands the *maturity* of our growth (verses 13-16)

God has given us all we need to accomplish His mission through His presence, His people and His power. May God grant that we will serve Him well.

Maturity is measured objectively by what we know of Christ and subjectively by how we walk with Christ.

The church will only truly grow as each member is strengthened and works together within the Body by the grace flowing from Christ.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, John R. W. *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.