

Resolved to Live – As a Ministering Church

“equipping the saints to do the work of ministry...” (Ephesians 4:12).

Expectations – what are they? Expectations – one of my favorite words to use when counseling, asking couples what they expect from one another; are their expectations reasonable; have they been communicated. Expectations – those things which we anticipate or assume will come to pass or come to be. We all have expectations. Some of them have to do with our family relationships; we have expectations of our spouses, of our children, of our parents; those things that we believe they ought to do. We have expectations of our jobs, that we will get a paycheck, that our work will be recognized. We have expectations on our friends that they will be loyal, that they will be there for us. We all have expectations.

It would be naïve of us to think that there would not be expectations when it comes to our relationship to God and in our relationship to church. In fact, let me ask you this question, “What are your expectations of the local church?” Now, what comes to mind might surprise you. For many, to ask such a question immediately causes them to think of things like, “I expect good preaching;” “I expect something for the children;” “I expect the people to be friendly.” Those and other things like it are indeed “expectations.” But you could take the question another way, could you not? “What are your expectations of the local church?” In other words, what ought to be expected from you in your relationship to the local church? Does the Scripture have anything to say about your involvement, your engagement, your activity, your participation in the local church? Obviously it does.

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 4 as we take a look at verses 11-13 this morning to serve as a foundation upon which we might come to see biblical expectations when it comes to the local church. As you turn there, let me remind you that it has been exactly one year since this congregation left the comfort and confines of our 2300 S. 13th Street property to take up the task of worshipping in the context of this school, along with all the work that comes from being a mobile church. Let me remind you that we took this step of faith believing that by relocating our congregation, we might shake ourselves out of our comfort zones and have opportunities to reach our community for Christ. A year later, this goal has not changed; we still need to be shaken from our comfort zones and seek opportunities to reach our community for Christ.

Before looking at our text, I would like to encourage you, by pointing out a number of things God *has* accomplished in this congregation through this past year. I have had the privilege of asking a number of you how you have seen the hand of providence at work in our church and there are a number of notable items. For one, it has been seen how much this congregation has pulled together for something as basic, but necessary as our set up and tear down on a weekly basis. It has been noted that on Sunday evenings, our little ones are even involved as they love to help move things from the meeting area to the trailer; often getting distracted along the way, but helping nonetheless. We are instilling in our young ones an example and the attitude of working together as a team.

With regard to teamwork; there has been nothing more community building for this congregation as last year’s Awana program. Not only was this used to reach our community, but the testimony of so many of you, seeing children who were closed and sometimes socially awkward open up and participate with the group; but also the way the Awana program has encouraged and challenged you in your own spiritual development. As last year was our first for Awana, the leadership worked together to customize it to work with our philosophy of ministry, which, above all things focused on a high view of Christ and a high view of Scripture.

This centrality of the Word of God has been seen by many in the congregation as the very catalyst for all that we do; as it should be. Many have commented on this congregation growing in their love for getting the Word of God into their own lives as well as into the lives of others. This congregation has caught the vision of being a church that relates everything to the Word of

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God. To that end, a theme of this past year, and one that will continue into the near future, is the apologetic nature of our ministry. By way of reminder, apologetic does not mean being sorry, but comes from the Greek word, *apologia* – meaning, to give a defense or reason for what we believe. Whether through our corporate involvement with the Ken Ham vs. Bill Nye debate, our summer series working through the Answers in Genesis series “Foundations” or even with our Fall evening series focusing on Apologetics, we have found ourselves as a church hungering to know and to defend the truth of God’s Word.

Whether our ladies through their “Women Helping Women” ministry; or through “Handmaidens of Hope”; whether our men through “Men of Hope”; or involvement on the Church Leadership Team, or being available for Sunday morning Scripture reading and prayer; we have seen an increase in what Titus 3:14 exhorts saying, **“Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.”** But even as this verse implies, there are a few expectations involved. First, we have the expectation that we are not all there *yet*, that as the people of God, we must continue to learn and how to engage in good deeds. But also there is the expectation of continued fruit, that we cannot and must not give up, give out, or give in. Coming back then to our text, let me read Ephesians 4:11-13 and then from this text I would like us to consider this issue of “expectations.” Can you see what is expected from the congregation from these verses?

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 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.

Before looking at the expectations, let me put these verses into context. There are two key themes in the letter to the Ephesians, that significant city where Paul spent some two years as pastor. These two themes can be caught by a phrase; that the letter to the Ephesians “reveals Christ as Head of the Body.” There are 155 verses in this letter and at least 53 make some reference to Christ, Jesus, Son of God or other title to Jesus. That means one of every three verses speaks of Christ. This letter is Christ-centered. But there is another theme that we do well not to overlook. Christ is head of the Body; that is the church. And of the 155 verses of Ephesians, there are at least 65 references to the church, the Body, the saints and other similar titles. In other words, this letter is not only Christ-centered; it is also Church-centered. To be in relationship with Christ is to be in a relationship to the local church. As we begin our second year here at Central Park Elementary; and as we look forward to where God will lead us as we look for another temporary location or even for land upon which to establish a more permanent location, I would like to point out to you that according to our text, there are expectations, reasonable and communicated expectations that we are to have as a church.

My purpose is not to thoroughly expound upon our text; but let me make a few observations that afford me the opportunity to speak to you about the expectations that we are to have on one another as members of a local church. To begin with, look up at Ephesians 4:7. Here we find the motivation, the very reason given that gives people abilities to serve one another in the context of the church. Here we read:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

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Please notice that Paul speaks of “grace” here as a gift; as a spiritually given gift given to each one of us. What is this grace that Paul is speaking of? We generally think of “grace” as God’s unmerited favor to sinners - the forgiveness God offers in spite of our sinfulness. There is an aspect of what Paul is speaking of here that fits this understanding. Let me remind you that whatever God has given you by way of serving in the church, there is not one of us that deserves such a spiritual gift, and that God gives such gifts or abilities to us in spite of our own unworthiness.

In looking for a definition of what this “grace” is then; not only is it unmerited favor given to those who are unworthy, but as we will see, grace is actually a divine enablement; a talent or ability by which a believer may serve and please God by serving the church.

Notice that this “grace” gift is “given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” In other words, these grace gifts are given according to God’s choice. In 1 Corinthians 12:11 we read of such grace gifts...

But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

And in Hebrews 2:4 we read,

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

The point is, that it is the Lord who decided how to give these gifts of grace and therefore I must not ever feel inferior to or slighted by those with different gifts. It is God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit who, in His infinite wisdom, has given me an ability by which to bless the church that is perfectly suited for both me and the church. So, on the same line of thinking, we have no reason to boast over the grace gift(s) we do have. I can never say, “Look at me, I am the pastor and therefore am the most graced person in the church!” God, in His wisdom, gave me this gift to use for the church, just as He has given each and every one of you a grace gift to bless the church.

Then, dropping down to verse 11, Paul reveals what some of these grace gifts are saying that Christ ***gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers...*** It is not my intention to expound on each of these gifts and offices except to say that I see the first two gifts as being temporary; that of apostles and prophets and that the final three gifts are permanent gifts for the church, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Evangelists have replaced the apostles in that they are now the missionaries and heralds of the gospel to those who are lost, a role once filled by the apostles. And the role of pastors and teachers have replaced the prophets as those who speak the word of God to the congregation. Even though apostles and prophets are no longer active in the church and have been replaced by permanent offices held by those with the grace gifts of evangelists, pastors and teachers, the work the apostles and prophets performed still benefit the church. The very text we are working from are the words of an apostle, words still benefiting us.

But I would have you notice now that there is an expectation given; a reason why Christ has given those who would proclaim the word of God to a church. This pertains to you and to me directly as we read in verse 12... ***for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...***

According to our text, Jesus gave the grace gifts of verse 11 with the expectation of two things occurring. First, that God’s people might be equipped, or prepared for works of service; to

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the end that the church, the body of Christ, would be built up. In other words, God expects the teaching leaders of a church to prepare God’s people with the expectation that God’s people would be constantly engaged in works of service. The word “equipping” there in verse 12 is actually a technical medical term that speaks of the setting of broken bones. It pictures for us the proper putting together of something. In other words, the expectation on pastors and elders is to make sure that individual Christians are using their grace gifts and divinely given talents to serve the ministry. This ministry of the saints is expected in turn to build up, or edify the body of Christ. The phrase “building up” literally speaks of erecting a structure. The saints, as a result of the faithful proclamation of the Word of God, are to be strengthened and empowered to build, add to, construct, expand the body of Christ.

How long are we, as a church, to be devoted to this task? We read the answer to that in verse 13; **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.** The idea here is to know what we believe, agree with what we believe and then to act on what we believe demonstrating the fullness of Christ. This is the general expectation of a local congregation; that we would be working in ministry; that we would be building up the church, encouraging other believers to walk more diligently with Christ and evangelizing the lost that they might become part of the church; and that we might experience unity in our beliefs along with seeing one another live out their faith in a manner consistent with who Christ is. That is a noble task for the church. Again, we see the centrality of the church in the thinking of Paul and in the heart of God.

Please allow me a moment then to expand upon this God given organism known to us as the church. Let me remind you of some truths about the church that we might have forgotten or taken for granted. Beloved, the church is to be recognized as a gift from God to mankind. It is through local churches that God has brought people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is through local churches that the poor are ministered to; that marriages and families are healed and strengthened; that the sick are cared for; that people are encouraged in the faith of Christ; that young people are equipped with the truth; where leaders are trained; and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is advanced throughout the world.

Beloved, it is through the local church that God primarily demonstrates His grace to mankind. For this reason, God has the expectation that His people be in a local church where they can experience God’s grace in greater ways and become increasingly effective channels of His grace to others. Because there are many different types of people with many different types of needs, God has provided many types of churches to meet those needs.

Now, let me tell you something about our God. You know that our God is not only a God of grace but also a God of commitment. This commitment was revealed to us when He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross that we might have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life through faith in what He did for us (John 3:16). Now, as a response to God’s great love for us, there is an expectation that we would love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others as ourselves (Mark 12:30- 31). Additionally, there is the expectation that we would love, in like manner to our love for God, our brothers and sisters in Christ; loving them like Christ loved us; being willing to lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). There is also the expectation that, in light of the teaching of the Scriptures, those who profess to be Christians, would be *devoted* (committed to; making as a primary responsibility) to a Christ-honoring, grace-filled; gospel-preaching local church where they are called, in the most practical and tangible of ways, to show their love of God by loving and serving God’s people (Hebrews 10:23-25; Acts 2:42-47).

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To be a people “equipped for works of service”; “equipped to do the work of ministry” means that you have been both challenged and taught to be committed both to Christ and to a Christ-honoring church. To be committed means that you understand what is expected of you as part of this Christ-honoring community. So, let me challenge you with what are some of these expectations a member of the body of Christ is to have on him or herself:

1. A believer in a local church is to be devoted to God and to the Scriptures: Growing, learning, obeying and sharing God’s word (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
2. A believer in a local church is to live a life of Christ-like love – being kind to others, caring for others, serving others and giving to others (Romans 12:9-16).
3. A believer in a local church is to be actively praying with the church and for the church (1 Timothy 2:1-8).
4. A believer in a local church is to be using his or her spiritual gifts in ministry (1 Peter 4:10-11).
5. A believer in a local church is to contribute financially to the local church (Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
6. A believer in a local church is to be faithful and timely in attending the weekly worship service (Hebrews 10:25).
7. A believer in a local church is to live in a loving and honoring relationship with the elders of the church who are given by God to provide humble, servant leadership to the local church (1 Peter 5:1-5).
8. A believer in a local church is to be so concerned for the body that if he or she believes that congregation has stopped or is not following the Scriptures, he or she will make an honoring appeal to the church leadership so that the church can be corrected and become more honoring to Christ (Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:1).

Beloved, while there will be at times legitimate reasons for leaving a local church (moving to another city or state, being part of a local church plant, necessity due to errant doctrine or unbiblical philosophy, etc.); let me share with you what is a general biblical expectation on a member of a local church; that expectation is that each believer who commits him or herself to this local church ought to regard it as a life-long commitment. I urge you to be involved in a specific local church the rest of your lives. Let me be clear, I am not saying that it is God’s will that every person be in the same local church their entire lives or that it is God’s will that a person would never leave Hope Community Bible Church. Each of us must be committed to follow Christ and not men with regard to one’s decisions regarding their involvement in a local church (Galatians 1:10). Yet, I would be doing you all a disservice if I did not also exhort you and remind you of the spiritual benefits that come to you as an individual and for the universal church of Jesus Christ when Christians avoid continual “church-hopping” and “church-shopping” and instead become committed to one local church in their community. These are reasonable and biblical expectations.

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Let me close by coming back to Ephesians 4:12 and the equipping of the saints for the work of service. Why is it that so often church members can come to think and come to act as though the Pastor is the only minister? Do you know what the answer is? It would seem that too many in the congregation believe they are not on par with their pastor when it comes to their ability to minister. It would seem that too often pastors are put in a different category; they are thought to play in a different league; are seen as higher on the hierarchal scale of spirituality. Pastors and elders; they are the professionals and as the professionals, they are the ones who do the “real” ministering; the real works of serve.

Beloved, this is so unbiblical. While it is true that I am in “full-time” ministry; let me assure you that I do not regard myself as higher up the spiritual scale over others. And, I can assure you that I do not play in a different league than the rest in this congregation. And let me tell you something, I know that there are those in this congregation who can minister, do works of service, just as effectively, and in many cases even better than I can.

Our Christian culture has come to believe that a pastor’s knowledge of the Bible, his theology and hermeneutics, along with his understanding of ecclesiology, because they might be greater, makes him greater by default. Let me tell you that any pastor or elder’s life experiences are still limited. Our relationships do not run as deep as some of yours. And, our ability to comfort others is, at times, not nearly as effective as many of you can be. Let us not mistake knowledge of ministry as necessarily equating into better ministry.

Also, let me point out again, in light of our text in Ephesians 4:11-12, that if my main job is to equip, prepare you, the saints, for the work of ministry, that assumes and makes the expectation that others in the congregation are not only given the responsibility to minister, to work, to encourage and build up the church, but that they also have the ability to do such things. Beloved, I am simply a coach, but you are the players! Get in the game.

And before you sell yourself short, let me be clear; you, each of you, because of the grace given you according to the measure of Christ’s gift, have the ability to minister to others. True, you might not be able to answer every theological question thrown at you, but ministry is so much more than sharing the details of knowledge. It is also about sharing the experience of wisdom; wisdom that is gained from years of walking with the Lord and applying His Word to your life.

Beloved, I expect you to be engaged and involved in this next year of ministry. I would ask you to prayerfully consider how you might be involved. Some of you are so involved and busy in ministry that such a message might overwhelm you. No, I would not ask you to necessarily pray to do more ministry; but I would ask you to pray to do ministry more effectively. And for those of you who hang out on the sidelines; who doubt you have anything to offer; I am exhorting you; get with it; be here; be available; get your feet wet and start fulfilling the expectations that God and this congregation have a right to see you fulfil. Let us demonstrate that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength by demonstrating our love to God’s people.

Soli Deo Gloria

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