

WHAT IS THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH?
Eph. 4:1-16

Intro: To state our subject another way we could ask, What is the ministry of Central Bible Church? What are we to be doing as a New Testament local church? What is God's purpose for every NT church?

The ultimate answer to that question is given in this Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians -- and he gives it of us personally as well as of the entire body of Christ.

- 1) Personally: "That we should be to the praise of his glory . . ." (Eph. 1:12a). See also vv. 6a, 14b.
- 2) Corporately (as the body of Christ): "Unto him (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." See Eph. 3:20.

All that God has ever done, and all that He ever will do, is for His own glory. We must never lose sight of that. And He is jealous of His glory. Cf. Isa. 42:8 -- "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." And so our response should be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Psa. 115:1). Sin is defined in Rom. 3:23 as falling "short of the glory of God." Therefore, if all that we are and hope to be, as well as all that we do, are not designed with this purpose in mind, we are guilty of the most grievous of sins in the sight of God. In fact, failure here is the practical cause of all other sins!

Let there be no question about this. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:31.

Having said all of this, my concern this morning has to do with the way the Lord is glorified in the ministry that we have. What does He want us to do? How can I find that out?

There is only one way for us to find out -- and that is by looking into the Word of God itself to learn the answer. That answer -- God's answer -- is given in Eph. 4:1-16, especially in vv. 11-16.

Let me point out some of the details of Paul's teaching at this point.

I. THE MAIN PURPOSE FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH IS THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF EVERY CHILD OF GOD.

Look at the text. You have it in vv. 12, 14, and 15.

Thus, the local church does not exist primarily for the purpose of the evangelization of the world, but for the edification of the saints.

II. HOW IS THIS PURPOSE TO BE ACCOMPLISHED?

Paul is not stating one way that it can be done. He is declaring this as the only way!

You have it in v. 15. It is through "speaking the truth in love." The only way for a Christian to grow is through hearing and understanding and believing and obeying the Word of God. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:2, "As newborn babes . . ."

This means that the doctrines of Scripture become very important. In fact, they are of the most importance! We are to minister in the church anticipating that time when all of us in the body of Christ will "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto . . ."

So there can be no true Biblical unity apart from a unity of the faith, and any such unity which may be attempted is a perversion of what is taught in the NT about unity.

The oneness of His people was the great concern of the Lord in John 17, but even there it is not a unity which ignores any truth of Scripture, but a unity that is based upon the Word of God.

We have no guarantee that this will be accomplished before the Lord comes, but this is to be our goal. This is the basic reason for our existence.

One more question:

III. WHAT ARE TO BE THE IMMEDIATE RESULTS OF MINISTERING FOR THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF BELIEVERS?

There are two:

- A. First, the body of Christ will be edified. See vv. 12, 13, 16.

Note that Christ has only one body. It is not proper to speak of the local church as the body of Christ, or even as a body! This only confuses the NT teaching. There are many local churches, but only one body. We are a part of that body (if we truly know the Lord), but we are not all of it.

The other result is this:

- B. True, spiritual ministry will take place. See vv. 12m, 16.

This is the reason that the ministry of the church is so

spiritually weak and ineffective today. It has moved away from its calling. We are trying to do any and everything to attract people, even to the point of becoming like them, instead of realizing that God has giving us a distinct calling, and that we can only see the blessing of God when we do the work of God in His way and for His glory!

The heart of the Lord's work on earth is the local church -- not any outside organization! The local church will never be stronger than the individual believers who are a part of it, and those individual believers will only grow and become strong as they are taught to understand and to live the Word of God.

Concl: Make sure you understand this, and make sure that the local church is a permanent part of your own life and worship and service. This is God's way, and this is what we are seeking to do here at Central Bible Church -- PREACHING THE WORD FOR THE GLORY OF GOD!

We want you to understand this, and to become a part of it.