

Ministry According to Ephesians 4:1-16

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Introduction

"A Shepherd or a Coach?" was the title of the foreword that Professor Armin Schuetze wrote for the January 1977, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 74, #1). In that foreword he addressed the way some people interpreted and understood Paul's words in Ephesians 4:11,12 in regard to a pastor's work in ministering to his people. Prof. Schuetze made four key points:

- 1) While a pastor's work of shepherding receives first emphasis, his work of equipping is also important. On page 7 Prof. Schuetze said: "Is the pastor to shepherd or equip? It is not an either/or."
- 2) Every Christian is a minister by virtue of the faith which has made him a member of Christ's universal church. The pastor is to equip all the members of his congregation for this personal ministry (pp 7,8).
- 3) Special needs may lead a congregation to designate (call) members of the congregation to a form of "public ministry" that renders service to other Christians in the name of and by call from the fellowship of Christians. The pastor most often is the one held responsible to equip those saints in the congregation who are to render this special, public service (pp 8,9).
- 4) It is important to distinguish between these two ways in which God's people may minister in our congregations (cf. 2 and 3). Then one type of ministry will not be considered a higher order of service than the other, and the pastor's role as shepherd will not be lost in the mistaken idea that his only role is to equip Christians for public service in the congregation (pp 10,11).

This article will reiterate the truth of Prof. Schuetze's four points by means of a study of Ephesians 4:11,12 in relation to the whole context (vv 1-16). It will underscore especially points 1 and 2 above by emphasizing three truths: 1) God gives his church spiritual leaders who are to nurture Christians in spiritual growth; 2) God wants each individual Christian to nurture every other Christian in spiritual growth; and 3) God wants the spiritual leaders to equip the individual Christian to nurture every other Christian.

Ephesians 4:1-6—God urges all Christians to be active in preserving his gift of spiritual unity.

In the first six verses of chapter four Paul encourages the Ephesians to live sanctified lives, especially bearing with one another in humility in order to maintain the precious gift of unity God had given them. This gift of unity had been Paul's focus in the first three chapters.

In chapter 1, Paul showed that it was only because of God's gracious election that both Jew and Gentile were chosen to be saved (Eph 1:14). Paul prays that both Jew and Gentile will be enlightened to see the riches of the glorious inheritance which was guaranteed them by Christ's powerful rule over everything in the interest of his church (1:15-23). Neither Jew nor Gentile had earned this inheritance; instead it was purely a gift of God's grace received by them through faith—a faith God had worked in Jew and Gentile, both of whom were dead in sin by nature (2:1-10). In the Old Testament time the Sinaitic Covenant had erected a fence which set the Jews apart as God's special people while the Gentiles were separated from Christ and without hope. Through Christ's redemptive sacrifice that fence was removed and the Gentiles were united with the Jews as God's people—built together as a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit and united on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (2:11-22). It had been Paul's special assignment and privilege to share this message of God's uniting of Jew and Gentile in Christ in order to glorify God's saving love that surpasses all knowledge (3:1-21).

In 4:1 Paul urges Jew and Gentile to "live a life worthy of the calling" they received as people united with one another through Christ's saving work. Paul grants that this won't be easy. It will require the kind of total humility that gladly yields to others and bears with their faults and weaknesses in patient, self-denying love (4:2). The motivation for doing this, Paul reminds them, is to hold on to God's precious gift of spiritual unity (4:4). In case they have forgotten, Paul also reminds them of all the blessings of God that are part of this spiritual unity. They are one body, united in spirit by the one hope they share. They share one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father who covers them all, unites them, and is in every one of them (4:4-6).

This exhortation of 4:1-6, based on chapters 1-3, is the setting in which we need to read the remaining verses of this section (7-16). Paul is speaking to the Ephesians of the wonderful unity God has given Jew and Gentile in his New Testament church. He urges them to practice those virtues which will serve to maintain this God-given unity. This unity is so precious that every Christian needs to seek actively to maintain it and to avoid anything that might undermine it in any way.

Ephesians 4:7—Christ gives gifts to every believer to use in serving each other.

Ephesians 4: Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ

The connective at the beginning of verse 7 (δὲ) indicates that Paul is going on to a new point that is connected to the foregoing. In this verse and those that follow, he speaks about the gifts God gives to each member of the church and to the church in general. Both kinds of gifts are meant to serve the purpose of helping Christians grow in their faith in Christ and so also to serve the unity of the church.

In this verse Paul speaks about a "grace" that is given in different measure to each believer. "Grace" here cannot mean God's saving grace because that is given fully to every believer. Rather, Paul is speaking of the different gifts which God graciously apportions to the members of his church. This use of the word grace is explained by Romans 12:6, "We have different gifts according to the grace given us."

Each gift is given to a Christian according to (κατὰ) a specific measurement (τὸ μέτρον, cf. the article) which is a special act of giving (τῆς δωρεᾶς, cf. the article) done by Christ (τοῦ Χριστοῦ, subjective genitive). Note that Paul says that God's grace, i.e. the different gifts he apportions to Christians, is given to each and every one of them (Ἐνὶ δὲ ἑκάστῳ). Some interpreters would like to limit what Paul says in this verse to those serving in the public ministry. But that would not reflect what this verse is saying, following as it does on verses 1-6 and connected as it is (δὲ) to those foregoing verses. Nor is the quote from the psalm which follows in the next verse limited to gifts given to the leaders of the church. Note also that Paul repeats the thought of verse 7 in verse 16 where he again uses these same words (ἐν μέτρῳ ἑκάστου) to refer to all Christians, not just those serving in the public ministry.

Verse 7, therefore, could be paraphrased this way: Every Christian is given a gift that was measured out to him/her as Christ knew best. In verse 16 Paul will speak again of these gifts given to individual Christians and will emphasize that it is essential to the spiritual growth of the whole body of believers that every Christian be active in using his/her gift for the common good.

It is helpful to note that the combination of Paul's thoughts here in Ephesians is similar to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 12: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are *different kinds of service*, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given *for the common good....The body is a unit*, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink...so that there should be *no division* in the body, but that its parts should have *equal concern for each other....*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And *in the church God has*

appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles" (1 Co 12:4-7,12,13,25,27,28).

Note the italicized words because they express thoughts parallel to those we will be considering in Eph 4:7-16: each Christian is given a different kind of service; each Christian is to work together with all the other parts of the body of Christ for the common good; and God gives the church spiritual leaders to further the growth in faith of all its members.

Ephesians 4:8-10—The ascended Lord is the one who gives these gifts to every believer.

Ephesians 4:8-10 διὸ λέγει, Ἀναβάς εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις (τὸ δε Ἀνέβη τί ἐστὶν εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς; ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα)

In verses 8-10 Paul expands one point made in verse 7, namely, that Christ is the one who gives these gifts to the members of his body, the church. First, Paul quotes Psalm 68. It speaks of the Savior who would descend to fight and defeat the enemies of his people. Then, ascending in triumph he would receive gifts from the conquered enemies and also bless his own people with many wonderful gifts. Christ is the one who fulfilled this prophecy, Paul says, and it is he who now fills all things with his presence. He is always present to measure out gifts to each Christian as he knows best (verse 7). The fact that Christ is the giver reminds each Christian to treasure his/her gift as one received from someone who is nothing less than the triumphant and ascended Savior.

Ephesians 4:11,12—Christ also gives spiritual leaders to equip believers to use their gifts to build one another up in faith.

Ephesians 4:11,12 καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say that besides the gifts which God in grace apportions to each member of the church, God also (καὶ used coordinately = a second, additional gift) gives the special gift of spiritual leaders to the church. He mentions four kinds of spiritual leaders in particular: the apostles—understood in this list in the narrow sense as those who were chosen directly by Christ to be responsible for the spiritual feeding and welfare of the whole church; the prophets—those who spoke God's word to his people either in specially revealed messages or by proclaiming the word revealed by God through others; the evangelists—probably best understood as referring to proclaimers of God's word who traveled about, especially to places where God's word had not yet been proclaimed; and shepherd-teachers—those who tended a particular flock of God's sheep, teaching them to obey everything Christ had commanded.

Though this point is not the main focus of this article, it should be noted in passing that Paul speaks of the spiritual leaders God gives to his church as serving in at least four different forms of ministry. These four are not the only ones; others are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. The four mentioned in this verse are not merely four different ways of describing a single form of the ministry. Nor is one form spoken of as the basic form from which the other three are derived to serve different functions of the one form of ministry. The conjunctions (μὲν...δὲ...δὲ...δὲ) indicate there are four types of ministry, each one distinguished from the other. This topic will receive fuller attention in a later article in this series.

Verse 12 states the purpose for which Christ gave each of the four types of spiritual leaders to his church. The prepositions πρὸς and εἰς denote purpose when they are used with a noun expressing a verbal idea. The question is: are the three prepositional phrases in this verse used in apposition to one another, describing a single purpose of a spiritual leader viewed from three different angles? Or does the first prepositional phrase

express a purpose of a spiritual leader, the second phrase a purpose which follows out of the first, and the third phrase a purpose that follows out of the second?

Either explanation is in perfect accord with usage in the Greek language. In the first case, the three prepositional phrases would be in apposition to one another. One needs only to look ahead to the next verse to see such an appositional construction. In verse 13, three εἰς phrases are used consecutively without any conjunction. Each successive phrase is parallel to the preceding one. Each phrase adds another description of the goal and duration of the activity described in verse 12. That activity of equipping the saints is to continue until all Christians are: 1) united in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, 2) becoming mature adults, 3) who measure up to the full height of Christ's perfect knowledge.

Note that in such an appositional construction each successive phrase would be parallel to the preceding one. They would not form a series expressing three different types of work done by a spiritual leader. That latter would more likely be expressed by the conjunction καὶ or δὲ coordinating the three phrases as independent members of a series as was done in verse 11. Koine Greek regularly expresses coordination by using conjunctions, and if Paul would have meant these phrases to be coordinate, he could easily have made that clear by the use of several conjunctions. Without any conjunction, the three consecutive phrases in verse 12 express one purpose with each successive phrase adding to the description of that one purpose.

The first prepositional phrase, then, would express the purpose for which Christ gave spiritual leaders to the church, namely, to equip the saints. The second phrase would explain that this equipping is doing work (ἔργον without an article) which is ministry or service for others (διακονία without an article and serving as a descriptive genitive). The third phrase would explain that the service performed is the building up of the body of Christ. According to this analysis, Paul would be saying that Christ gave various kinds of spiritual leaders to the church so that they could equip the saints, thus performing a service that builds up the body of Christ spiritually.

The second syntactical possibility (the first phrase expressing Christ's purpose in giving spiritual leaders to his church, the second expressing a purpose following out of the first, and the third expressing a purpose following out of the second) would be similar to the use of consecutive prepositional phrases beginning with πρὸς and εἰς; in Romans 3:26. There, following the statement that God presented his Son as the ultimate sacrifice of atonement, Paul goes on to state the purpose for which God did this with a πρὸς prepositional phrase. His purpose was to show that in spite of the fact that he had let the sins of the Old Testament believers go unpunished in the past, he now had punished Christ for them. So he was a just God who punished sin as he said he would. But there was also a second purpose which followed out of this first purpose. This Paul expresses with an εἰς; phrase. The ultimate purpose of God was to show that he is a just God who in Christ both punished sin and at the same time justified the believer.

When we interpret verse 12 according to this syntactical possibility, each consecutive phrase gives the purpose for what precedes. Christ gave spiritual leaders to his church so that they would equip the saints. Christ wanted the saints to be equipped so that they would be at work performing service for others. Christ wanted the saints to be at work performing service for others so that his body might be built up spiritually. This is the way Luther translated this verse: "Dasz die Heiligen zugerichtet werden zum Werk des Amts dadurch der Leib Christ erbauet werde" ("so that the saints might be prepared (to do the work of the ministry in order that the body of Christ might be built up").

Which syntactical possibility gives the meaning that best fits the context? In both of these possibilities the basic point is that Christ gave spiritual leaders to the church to equip the saints. The first one stresses that this activity of the leaders is a work of service which builds up Christ's body spiritually. The second stresses that this activity of the leaders enables the saints to be active in building up the body of Christ spiritually. Thus there is no essential difference in meaning between the two; there is only a slight shift of emphasis. The first emphasizes the important activity of the leaders in building up the church in faith by equipping saints for their personal ministry as individual believers. The second emphasizes that the leaders are to equip the saints so that they can be active in building up the church in faith as they carry out their personal ministry as believers.

The whole context of this verse emphasizes the activity of the individual believer. This would seem to argue for the second possibility as the one that fits the context. Remember that the setting for this verse is the exhortation in verses 1-6 to the Ephesians to be actively working to preserve the precious unity of faith God gave them. Remember also that in verse 7 Paul emphasized that each Christian has a gift given him by God to be used for this purpose. Look ahead to verse 16 and note that in his summary of this section, Paul again stresses that the spiritual growth of the body will be in direct proportion to how active each member of the body is. As in the similar passage in 1 Corinthians 12 noted above, the introduction of the spiritual leaders simply shows that one reason God gives them to the church is to equip the saints to use the gracious gift Christ gives each of them. Thus while the first possibility would not conflict with the context, the second fits the flow of thought from verse 1 to 16 better.

The KJV translation ("for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ") is faulty in two ways. It might suggest to the reader that the three phrases are coordinate (three distinct functions of the public ministry) instead of each successive phrase being in apposition to or expanding on the previous one. Also, the addition of the article "the" to "ministry" in English has often led people to think that there is only one ministry in the church, "the ministry" of the public ministers such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. However, there is no article with *διακονίας* in the Greek, and serving as it does (as part of a phrase which explains or expands on the previous prepositional phrase and in turn is explained or expanded on by another prepositional phrase), it is doubtful whether the technical meaning of the term fits here. If the prepositional phrase *εἰς ἔργον διακονίας* were the first one and the other two phrases were explaining or expanding on what it means, the technical meaning might be given some consideration. As it is, the general meaning "service performed for others" is the meaning that fits this context.

Before we leave verses 11 and 12, two other misunderstandings of these verses need to be addressed briefly. One is the NIV rendering "works of service." Translating *ἔργον* as a plural fits neither with Paul's use of the singular nor with either of the two syntactical possibilities (appositional phrases or consecutive purposes). The second misunderstanding is the idea that Paul is speaking here primarily of leaders equipping saints for public ministry. This doesn't fit the context at all. Verse 7 speaks of the gifts Christ gives every member of his church—not just of gifts given to those who serve in some form of public ministry. Verse 16 speaks of every member of the body doing its part—not just the spiritual upbuilding that public ministers do. The only way verses 11 and 12 can be limited to equipping for public ministry is if one thinks that the ministry of every Christian is public ministry. Some of course do teach this, but this conflicts with the fact that Scripture clearly distinguishes the ministry of every Christian from the public ministry (cf. Prof. Schuetze's first two points).

Ephesians 4:13-15—This building each other up in the faith is a continual process which has the goal of uniting the body of believers ever more closely with Christ their head.

Ephesians 4:13-15 μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἀυξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὃς ἐστὶν ἡ κεφαλή, Χριστός,

As was noted earlier, verse 13 states how long the equipping of the saints described in verse 12 is to continue. Paul says it is to go on until all Christians have grown in faith and knowledge and become completely mature adults, measuring up to the full height of Christ's knowledge. Since this "until" will never be reached this side of heaven, helping Christians grow in faith and knowledge is a continuing activity of the leaders of the church as well as of each member of the church.

Verses 14 and 15 state the goal of this continual growth. Paul states it first in a negative way and then in a positive way. The goal is to enable Christians to avoid being like little children or like boats on a stormy sea which are yanked this way and that by cunning stratagems devised by Satan to destroy the faith of Christians.

Instead, as Christians lovingly instruct each other in pure doctrine, we who are Christ's body are joined ever more closely to Christ our head. Note again how Paul mentions the activity of every Christian and not just the leaders in this process of spiritual growth. That is also the point he underscores once more in the closing verse of this section.

Ephesians 4:16—The activity of every member is vital to the building up of the body of faith.

Ephesians 4:16 ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβασζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

In this complex sentence it will help to sort out the individual parts and analyze each in relationship to the basic core of the sentence. The subject of the sentence is the "body" of all believers and the verb is "grows" (literally "produces the growth of the body"— τὴν αὐξησιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται). So the basic thought of the sentence is that the body of believers produces its own growth. However, this basic thought is modified in a number of important ways. The prepositional phrase "from him" at the beginning of the sentence indicates that the source from which the church draws its ability to produce growth is Christ, the head of the body (v 15). So although the members of Christ's body are helping each other grow in faith, it is really Christ working in and through them by whom this is done. In short, they are serving as ministers of Christ in building each other up in faith.

The subject of the sentence, "body," is modified by the word "whole." It can't be just a few parts of the body that are at work in producing growth as ministers of Christ. The whole body needs to be active. This is emphasized by the words that modify the "whole body." The whole body is described as "joined and held together by every supporting ligament" (literally, "by the supporting [activity] of every ligament" = ἰὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας). Compare the parallel passage in Colossians 2:19 where this same thought is expressed in these words: "the whole body, *supported* and held together by its ligaments and sinews." Note the emphasis put on the unity of the body ("joined and held together") and the unifying activity of every part ("by every supporting ligament").

This complex thought (Christ working in and through each member of the body of believers who are united in faith and working together in harmony to build up the body even more in faith) is modified further by four prepositional phrases:

- The first (κατ' ἐνέργειαν) tells to what degree the building up of the body in faith will take place. This will happen in proportion to (κατ') the actual activity (ἐνέργειαν) of each member of the body. In other words, to the degree that any one part fails to be active, to that degree the growth of the entire body will be affected. Think of how the growth in faith of a group of believers is affected when 1/10 or 1/2 of them are inactive! The pastor may be nurturing them spiritually, but how much more growth in faith could be realized if all the believers were also nourishing one another as well.
- The second prepositional phrase (ἐν μέτρῳ...μέρους) tells in what sphere (ἐν) each member of the body needs to be active to contribute to the growth of the whole body. Christ wants each member to be active in the role he apportioned. The phrase ἐν μέτρῳ...μέρους refers to a specific measure, as the modifying objective genitive μέρους indicates—so the lack of the article with μέτρῳ stresses the quality of the noun, namely, that this gift was carefully measured out to each one of the members (ἑνὸς ἐκάστου). With this phrase Paul is recalling verse 7 and the point he made there about Christ graciously apportioning gifts to each believer. The added point here is that each member needs to be active in the sphere measured out to him by Christ. If he seeks to take over the work of another member in preference to what Christ apportioned him to do, he becomes divisive and harms the building up of the body in faith. This is a point that Paul dwells on at considerable length in 1 Corinthians 12. There Paul shows how detrimental it would be if the hand didn't want to serve the body unless it were a foot, or if the ear

did not want to serve the body unless it were an eye. How harmful it is to a group of believers if some or many are disgruntled and do not in humility seek to serve one another in the precious unity given them by God (cf. verses 1-6 above)! How wonderful it is when believers unite in humble service to one another, each using his apportioned gift to build all the others up in saving faith!

- In the third and fourth prepositional phrases, εἰς indicates the result that takes place when each and every part is active in (ἐν) its own assigned sphere, namely, the body builds itself up in love (οἰκοδομῆν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ). What a wonderful result Christ brings about when each believer actively uses his gift(s) to serve the fellowship of believers!

Thus this final verse pulls together all the thoughts expressed in the previous fifteen verses. God wants all believers to be working actively to preserve his gracious gift of unity in faith. Christ gave gifts to each believer to use to this end. He also gave spiritual leaders to equip believers to build one another up in faith. Each and every believer is to be active in using the gifts given by Christ to support and serve one another. As all Christians do so, Christ uses them to build up his body in faith and so brings them all into greater unity with himself as their head.

Conclusion

Ephesians 4:1-16 speaks both of the public ministry and the ministry of all believers. According to these verses, one of the purposes which both serve is to bring about spiritual growth of all believers. Thus the focus here is on what we often refer to as the nurturing work of the church rather than outreach. This does not imply that the work of nurture is more important than outreach. Nurture is simply the focus here while elsewhere Scripture stresses the equally important work of outreach.

Although the work of *public ministers* in nurturing the church is spoken about in these verses, it is not the primary focus here no matter which syntactical possibility one follows in verse 12. The primary emphasis is on the activity of *all believers* building one another up in faith. The exhortation in verses 1-6 to work to preserve God's gift of the unity of faith is addressed to all believers, not just to the spiritual leaders of the church. Verse 7 speaks of the gifts Christ gives to every Christian. Verses 11 and 12a speak of the spiritual leaders whom Christ gives to his church to equip believers for their work. Verse 12b and 12c could possibly refer to this work of the spiritual leaders which contributes to the building up of the body of Christ in faith by equipping the saints. But the context suggests that they refer instead to the work of all believers who serve others as a result of their being equipped by the spiritual leaders and so contribute to the building up of the body of Christ in faith. In either case, Paul concludes the verses which speak of the importance of the body of Christ being built up in faith (vv 13-15) with a closing statement which emphasizes how critical the activity of every believer is in producing this growth (v 16).

This passage makes it clear that the ministry of all believers is more than just the thanks they offer to God in worship and sanctified living. It includes praying for one another (Ja 5:16) and bearing one another's burdens (Ga 6:2). It includes becoming mature in the knowledge of God's Word so as to be competent to instruct other Christians (Ro 15:14, He 5:11). It includes encouraging other Christians with the Word in the trials and difficulties of life (1 Th 4:18). It includes admonishing others when they are falling into a life of sin or being misled by false teaching (Mt 18:15f) and comforting them with the assurance of forgiveness when they repent (2 Co 2:7). It includes sharing the sorrow of those who mourn the loss of loved ones (Ro 12:15) and comforting them with the assurance of the resurrection of the dead (1 Th 4:18). It includes comforting others in any trouble with the comfort with which God comforts us (2 Co 1:4). It includes spurring one another on to love, good works, and faithful use of the means of grace (He 10:24f). It includes visiting those who are sick and in prison (Mt 25:36). It includes showing mercy to those who doubt and snatching others from the fire to save them (Dude 22,23).

Yes, all these are things that God wants public ministers to do. But we ought not forget, as the passages cited in the previous paragraph make clear, that these are also things that God wants every believer to do as a

member of the priesthood of believers. We echo the words of Prof Schuetze: "What a busy service it is to be one who belongs to God's chosen people." And what a blessed service it is to be a public minister of the Word, whose work includes as one of its privileges the equipping of the saints for the important service they render as ministers of Christ to one another.