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IN NOMINE JESU

Ephesians 4: 11,12 And He gave...some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

GOD'S PLAN FOR BUILDING THE CHURCH

Faulty punctuation has for a long time hidden from us the true meaning of these words. This is to be regretted, since we have here one of the most significant passages of Scripture pertaining to the extension of Christ's kingdom. This text, were it correctly understood and generally applied, would revolutionize our present method of doing church work. As it reads in the King James Version, it seems to place the entire responsibility on the pastors. Christ gave pastors that the pastors should perfect the saints, that the pastors should perform the work of the ministry, that the pastors should edify or build up the body of Christ, which is the church. Everything is to be done by the pastors, and the saints or members - so it appears - may take it easy. And I dare say many members do just that. They attend services, go to Communion, contribute a certain amount of money, and that is all. A church to them is much like a train: one gets on, pays his fare, and rides along. It is true that there are some who have cheerfully assumed office and perform special tasks in the congregation. However, their number is disappointingly small in comparison with the many who have never learned to regard such service as a duty and privilege that should be eagerly and happily rendered.

There is but one chief purpose for the existence of any congregation - that is the building up of the body of Christ by the addition of new members. Such building up of the church can be done in one way, and in one way only: by bringing, speaking, applying, to unchurched men, women, and children, the Word of God. But how many of us - really - engage in the all-important work of declaring the Word of God to others? I fear the large majority of church members consider themselves either uncalled or unable to do so. As a result, the task falls to the pastor and a few helpers. It was our fathers' way, and it is our way. But is it Christ's way Let us take a close look at our text, which seemingly places all responsibility on the pastors. Let us disregard the commas, for the punctuation of the Bible was not inspired. Let us translate this passage into clear English. Listen carefully:

And He (Christ) has given us some men...as pastors and teachers, in order to fit His people for the work of service, for building the body of Christ.

Here is Christ's plan for building His church. In the first place, Christ gives pastors. These are also called teachers, because teaching is the chief function of their office. Secondly, the pastors, by their teaching, are to fit His people for the work of service. They are to train and instruct the members of the congregation in church and missionary work. Thirdly, the members, so trained, are then to do church and missionary work for building the body of Christ. The members are so to function - not one, or a few, but all. As many members, so many church and missionary workers.

This is it. This is the way the Lord of the church would have it. This is the plan which Christ Himself advised. The plan is simple. Christ sends pastors; the pastors instruct their members; and the members carry on the work. The plan is natural. Every true member of a Christian congregation has faith in Christ. Where there is faith in Christ, there is love for Christ; and where there is love for Christ, there must also be action for Christ and for His church. And the plan is adequate. In fact, it is the only method that will produce the required results. Only by making the rank and file of her members active evangelists can the church be equal to her gigantic task: the evangelization of the world, making disciples of all nations.

Observe how Christ Himself used this plan. He did not consider His own personal and incessant labors sufficient. Nor was He satisfied with calling 12 apostles, who became the first ministers of the Word. Read Luke 10, and you will find that Christ also chose 70 laymen as His missionaries. Having selected these workers, He instructed them. He told them where to go, dividing the territory which they were to cover; told them how to go - in pairs; also told them how to approach their prospects, what to say to them, what to expect, and what to do when their message was accepted or when it was rejected. And then Christ sent them out as lambs among the wolves, as the record puts it, two by two before His face, into every city and place whither He Himself would come. The result? And the seventy

returned again with joy, saying: Lord, even the devils are subject to us through Thy name. The Word of the Lord Jesus as proclaimed by these lay workers had worked wonders.

The early church followed closely the plan of her Founder. In Acts 2 we have a detailed description of the Pentecost miracle and the conversion of 3000 souls on one day through Peter's sermon. But not less significant is this notation at the end of that chapter: And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. How were they added? And they - the 3000 - continued daily with one accord in the temple...praising God and having favor with all the people. Instructed by the apostles in the Word of God and the Gospel of the crucified and risen Savior, the members of the first church in Jerusalem went out among the people of that city, declaring to all who would hear them the saving story of Jesus and His love. As a result, we read only two chapters later that the number of men - not counting the women and children - was about 5000. And in the very next chapter the sacred historian loses all count and writes: Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.

Speaking of those golden days in church history, the renowned evangelist Dwight L. Moody said: I can imagine Jesus saying: "Go search out the man who put th crown of thorns on My brow; tell him I will have a crown for him in My kingdom if he will accept salvation; and there shall not be a thorn in it. Find out that man who took the reed from My hand and smote My head, driving the thorns deeper into My brow. Tell him I want to give him a scepter. Go seek out that poor soldier who drove the spear into My side; tell him that there is a nearer way to My heart than that! Tell him I want to make him a soldier of the Cross and that My banner over him shall be love. The first Christians could not say no to that voice. They went out, and they told. And in one year - the same year in which Christ had carried the cross along the Way of Sorrows to Golgatha - the number of Jerusalem's followers of the Cross rose to an estimated 25,000.

Now the time came for the church to burst her boundaries. And so we

read - you will find this in Acts 8 - that there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Note well, except the apostles. The apostles were not scattered - only the lay members of the congregation. And concerning these lay members we are told: Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word. The devil, fool that he is, thought he would make an end of the Christian Church by scattering the Christians. But by scattering the Christians he scattered so much fire, and wherever the fire fell, there was a blaze. Although they were not preachers, these Christians had the preacher's spirit. They spoke the Word in Judea and Samaria, spoke it as far as Phoenicia, on Cyprus, and in Antioch. God's Spirit did the rest. Hearts everywhere were kindled. A great number believed and turned unto the Lord.

So the early church flourished. It flourished because its members, pastors and people, zealously followed and put into practice the plan laid down by the Lord of the church. And in that lies the answer to the question which you and I have heard over and over again: What is wrong with the church of today? Why is there so little progress? E. Stanley Jones - and who will deny the truth of what he says - writes: There is no doubt, says Harnack, that the early church won all its victories by informal missionaries. They were spiritually contagious. They infected others with God. But today we find it easier to pay the minister to be our proxy. It is easier - and more deadly. The church becomes a field instead of a force for evangelism. And that field soon becomes dry and dead, for it is a law of the mind that that which is not expressed dies. All expression deepens impression. As someone has put it, Impression minus expression equals depression. Our churches are filled with spiritual depression because there is so little spiritual expression...No Christianity is Christian that is not Christianizing. I heard Woodrow Wilson end a speech with this climactic sentence, "We must loose American business upon the world." I inwardly commented, "We must loose the Gospel upon the world." But we shut it within our hearts, afraid. "I was afraid, and I went and

Hid my talent," said the man in the parable. He remained an undeveloped spiritual being because his spiritual life was unshared. Our churches are filled with spiritual dwarfs for the same reason. We call it reticence; its real name is barrenness. We need nothing so much as we need a passionate personal evangelism that will take men out from behind closed doors and impel "each one to reach one," In other words, somehow or other, in the course of the centuries, the church has gotten away from Christ's plan for building the church; and the health of the church, as well as the salvation of the world, demand a returning to Christ's plan.

The time for this is now. The first century was most important for the cause of Christ. It was then that the church was established. But our atomic age is scarcely less crucial. The building of the church must now be rushed to completion. We are those upon whom the end of the earth are come. Urgency is upon us. Trifling and half measures have had their day. The call of the hour is unmistakable. It is a call to immediate, determined, consecrated building of the church of Christ according to the plan of Christ.

With gusto and great fervency you sang: Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war; with the cross of Jesus going on before. You are those soldiers in the army of Christ. You are called upon to conquer a dying, damned world - a world that knows not the love of Jesus. Pray God you are not found sleeping in the barracks. Someone has said that the world has yet to see what God can do through one wholly consecrated Christian. It would be even more thrilling to see what God can do through one Christian congregation wholly committed to Christ's plan for the building of His church. I challenge you - in the name of the Lord that bought you - to be that congregation.

Amen.