

William MacDonald:

“For the equipping of the saints for the work of service,” (Eph. 4:12, NASB)

A revolutionary insight! The gifts in Ephesians 4 are given to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry. As soon as the saints can carry on, the gift can move on.

This means that success in Christian work is working one’s self out of a job in the shortest possible time, then looking for new worlds to conquer.

This is what Paul did. He went to Thessalonica, for instance, preached to the Jews for three Sabbaths, and left behind a functioning assembly. No doubt that was an exception as far as speed in the establishing of a work was concerned. The longest Paul ever stayed in one place at a time was two years. That was at Ephesus.

God never intended that His saints should be perpetually dependent on any of the gifts mentioned. The gifts are expendable. If the saints remain professional sermon-tasters, never becoming involved in the work of service, they never develop spiritually the way they should and the world will never be evangelized the way God intended.

William Dillon said that a successful foreign missionary never has a foreign successor. That should be equally true of workers in the homeland—when the worker’s task is completed, the saints themselves should take over, not start looking for another pulpiteer.

Too often we preachers look at our position as a lifetime appointment. We reason that others couldn’t do the work as well. We excuse our permanence by the fact that the attendance would drop if we left. We complain that others can’t do things right and that they’re not dependable. But the fact is that they have to learn. And in order to learn they have to be given opportunities. There must be training, delegation of responsibilities, and evaluation of progress.

When the saints reach the point where they feel they can carry on without a particular preacher or teacher, that’s no reason for him to sulk or nurse wounded feelings. It’s cause for celebration. The worker is released to go where he’s more needed.

It’s a bad scene when the work of God is permanently built around a man, no matter how gifted he is. His great aim should be to multiply his effectiveness by building up the saints to the point where they are no longer dependent on him. In a world like ours, he never needs to be without work in other places.