

The Captain of the Ship

There once was a very industrious captain of a large ship. He worked hard from morning to late at night, rushing around doing many different tasks to make the ship function efficiently. His knowledge of the different tasks required for the efficient running of the ship and his tireless energy rushing from one task to another were most impressive. Everyone who knew him held him in high regard; not only was he very competent and hard working, but well spoken, friendly and genuinely concerned about the welfare of his crew, his business associates and all those he came into contact with. The result was that his ship was generally recognised as well run and an enviable place to work. The captain was well-satisfied with his achievements, and felt confident of receiving warm praise and good rewards from the owner, to whom he had ultimately to report.

But when the time finally came for him to report to the owner, and he stood before him full of confidence of the commendation and rewards he was sure were about to be bestowed on him, he was aghast and heart broken to learn what the owner really thought of his performance as captain of the impressive ship he had been entrusted to command. The owner had this to say: "I never appointed you, as the captain of the ship, to do all the work yourself, and in fact in trying to do it all, or even so much of it, you have missed the whole point of my appointing you as captain". "I don't understand", stammered the captain. "Quite right", the owner replied, "and it is clear you never did. Your job as captain of my ship was to ensure the ship was run as efficiently as possible, so as to ensure its greatest profitability. The only way to do this was for you to do your best to ensure that each member of your crew knew what their individual functions were, and to ensure that they were each fully equipped, motivated and trained to do it. Each one of them needed to know that they too had an important function and that their efforts were vital to the efficient running of the ship, and hence contributed to the overall success and profitability of the voyage. But you were so busy trying to do everything yourself that your crew never knew just what they could or were expected to do, and neither were they given any training to do it. So some of them just did what they thought best, while many others stood around wondering what to do. So much talent and ability were wasted that could have been so much better employed to run the ship more efficiently and hence to increase my profits". The captain hung his head in shame and embarrassment.

What if the owner of the ship was God, the ship was the church, the voyage was life, the profits of the voyage were God's eternal glory, the crew were the congregation and the captain of the ship was you. As a leader, would you be able to stand before God with a clear conscience that you have done your very best to manage His ship in the best way possible, for His glory? See the following scriptures: Ephesians 4:11–13, as well as 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Ephesians 4:11-13 *"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ."* This passage does not say it is the function of the elders or of the five-fold ministry leaders to do all the work themselves, but that their function is to equip God's people to do His work, "so that we (the whole body of Christ) will be mature in the Lord". Note especially the reference to 'people' and 'body' in this passage.

1 Corinthians 14:26 *Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given (a prophetic word) one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.* (Sunday services are really powerful and enjoyable when all of these are included). Again, note the reference to 'everything' and 'all' as having a part to play, i.e. *everyone* has something to contribute even IN the service, and hence to the life of the church in general and *all* of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

This surely means that the function of the leaders in the five fold ministry is primarily to motivate, to train, to instruct and to equip their congregations, rather than to try and do everything themselves. It is not the leader's duty to do everything himself. And if he tries to do it all, others will sit back and watch him, and gradually lose all motivation and interest in even trying to help, and their talents will be wasted. My I politely ask, do you want to raise up a church of spectators, or participators? And put another way are you, as a leader, intent on raising a herd of sheep, or an army of disciples?

A happy and effective church, in my experience, is where everyone is fully appreciated as having a vital part to play in its life, (and allowed to do so) and whatever that part is and no matter how invisible or insignificant it may seem, and the leadership, through the five-fold ministry in particular, is delighted to honour God through helping to equip and train the members through the identifying, development and use of their gifts and talents, so that each member can fulfil their role in the life of the church.

Dr. Brian Drury