

Work

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Introduction.

- A. We all know that with old age, a whole bunch of problems arise that weren't there before. Generally speaking, the older you get, the less able you are to do things you used to do. Specifically, many of our older members here don't have the capacity to carry out many of the home maintenance tasks that they used to.
- B. That leaves them with three alternatives. First, they can hire somebody else to do it, which, for our brethren on fixed incomes, can be a big problem. Second, they can leave it undone and let their houses fall to ruin around them. Third, and perhaps most frightening to the rest of us, they can attempt to do the maintenance themselves, even when they're past the age when they should be doing it.
- C. Along these lines, let me tell you a story I heard recently around here, with the names withheld to protect the guilty. Apparently, one of the sisters here, an older lady whose husband has passed on, decided that her gutters needed to be cleaned, so she was going to climb up on her roof and do it herself. Friends, I can think of about a million ways that could go wrong without even trying. I wouldn't let a 70-year-old neighbor lady go leaping around on her roof, much less one of my sisters in Christ. Thankfully, some of the other folks around here got wind of that and put the kibosh on it, but I wonder how much of that goes on that I don't hear about.
- D. Clearly, then, there are many other brothers and sisters here with needs. All the rest of us, if we're any kind of decent human beings at all, would be eager to help out. The problem is that we don't have a good way right now to match up needs with helpers. That's why for our final service group, the elders have chosen to set up a work group, as a way to help our brethren with tasks beyond their ability. This is something that we need to do, and I believe it's something we want to do. Let's look at the Scripture that encourages us to work.

I. Defining Our Gifts.

- A. As we begin to figure out what we can do for God, we need to start by figuring out what we have to use for Him. We have to define the gifts that we bring to His service. Peter tells us something important about those gifts in 1 Peter 4:10-11. When first we focus on those gifts, we have a tendency to define our service to God in terms of what we do in the assembly. In other words, only the gifts that help us lead singing or preach a sermon or teach a Bible class count. I can understand where that tendency comes from. After all, in our continual struggle against instrumental music in worship, one of the arguments that we hear is that people who are gifted in playing instruments should be able to use their gifts for praising God. Of course, that's not true. Just because a gift exists doesn't mean that we have to use it in a worship service.
- B. However, if a gift does exist, there's a pretty good chance God wants us to use it somewhere. Look at the way that Peter classifies gifts here. On the one hand, he mentions the gift of speaking. Everything that we do in the assembly has some part in that gift. Even leading singing has to do with "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." On the other hand, though, Peter mentions the gifts of ministry—all the acts of service that occur outside of the assembly. Those gifts, even though we don't put them in the spotlight all that much, are equally given by God and equally meant to be used for Him. We need to see that.
- C. One of these gifts, and I think one that would surprise many of us, is described in Exodus 36:1-2. We don't normally think of it that way, but the ability that some men and women have to work skillfully with their hands is a gift from God too. Of course, judging from other passages that discuss these two men, their gift was miraculous in its extent, but there are certainly people like them today. Just a couple weeks ago, Jeff and I were talking about men who are good at plastering drywall. Just one quick swipe with a putty knife, and their work looks better than anything I could do with hours of laborious plastering and sanding. Part of that's talent and part of that's training, but it all comes from God. I know that there are people in this congregation who have that skill with their hands in certain areas too. We need to make sure that we're using it as we should.
- D. Even beyond the gift of skillful craftsmanship, there's another gift that just about all of us have that we can use for work like this. It's the gift of time. Paul refers to it in Ephesians 5:15-16. Let's pay attention to the way that Paul describes this. He calls working for God "redeeming the time." In other words, when we use our time in God's service, we buy it back from whatever other idle pursuits we might be following and invest it usefully in doing good. Just like many of you have been studying in the adult class, it's an issue of stewardship. We need to make sure that God is getting a good return on the time He has given us.
- E. This is important because even if we aren't particularly skilled with our hands—and I'm not—as long as we are healthy and strong, we can still put our time to good use in the work group. I can remember back when I was worshiping with the brethren at Cedar Park in the Austin area, and they had a work day. I showed up and was put to work raking up the ground for grass seed, even though I'd never done it before. As I was working, one of the elders there, Jim Everett, came by and complimented me. It wasn't that I was a particularly competent raker. It's that I was putting my unskilled time to work in a useful way, and he was glad to see it.

II. Why We Should Use Them.

- A. From this, it's clear that God gives us gifts we're supposed to use outside of the assembly too, and that those gifts include things like skill with our hands and just plain old time. So what? Why should we take these gifts and use them in our work service group? Scripturally speaking, I see four main reasons. First, it's important that we do this kind of work because it's an important expression of love for our brethren. Look at John's take on this in 1 John 3:16-18. If you take the word "goods" out of this, and replace it with "gifts," it's talking about what we're talking about. It's talking about our responsibility to have love that's not just an expression, but an action. We have these gifts that God has blessed us with. We have brethren who don't have those gifts any more but still need them. Just like we should be eager to share our money and possessions with Christians who need them, so too we should be eager to share our gifts. That might mean helping a brother who can't stand on a ladder anymore by painting his house. It might just mean helping a sister who can't get down on her knees anymore by weeding her flowerbed. All those things are love in deed and truth.
- B. Similarly, only by taking care of each other's needs like that are we fulfilling Christ's vision for His body. Paul discusses this in 1 Corinthians 12:24-25. Sometimes, I don't think we get the significance of our language when we talk about "church members." Whether we realize it or not, that's an extremely close-knit way to describe Christians. Basically, we're all calling ourselves parts of the same body. We're not just related. We are members of one another. That means we do the best job we can of taking care of one another.
- C. Sometimes, we do a wonderful job with this. For instance, I remember last summer, when Lois was in the hospital so much and John was running himself ragged trying to take care of her, some Christians came by and mowed his lawn and cleaned up his house for him. It's great that we did that, but we need to make sure that we are doing just as good a job when the need isn't so obvious. Let me ask all of you one of those questions with mental answers. When was the last time that you went to one of our older members, or to one of our shut-ins, and asked them if they had any maintenance needs you could help them with? That's something that we want to do, but it's not often something we think to do. Our members need to be taken care of.
- D. Third, we need to be involved in this work service group because it keeps our use of our gifts in balance. We see an occasion of spiritual imbalance described in Haggai 1:2-4. Here's what was going on: the exiles had returned to the land. They had built their own houses for them to live in. However, they hadn't rebuilt God's house, and God was unhappy about it. The problem wasn't that they were using their gifts to provide for themselves. They were supposed to do that. The problem was that they were focusing on their work while ignoring God's work. Their gift use was out of balance. We can easily run into the same problem. We can get so caught up in using our skills and time for ourselves, on all the million and one little projects that we all have going, that we forget where those gifts came from and forget to give some skills and time back to God too. We need to do better than that. We need to make sure that our gift use is as balanced as it should be.
- E. Finally, we need to take care of each other because of the example it gives to outsiders. Look at Jesus' comment in John 13:35. We are part of the one true church. I believe that. But what should tell the people around us that we are truly disciples of Jesus is not the purity of our doctrine. It is the purity of our love. It is the way that we take care of each other, far beyond what anyone in the world could expect or even imagine. There are times when I see this passage alive in this church. There are times when any non-Christian who looks at us can see that we have a special relationship. We need to make those times all the time.

III. Our Work Group.

- A. All of this, of course, takes us to a look at our work group, which is going to be led by Matt Sterba. As with all these others, there's a basic way that this is going to start out. Here's how it will go:
 1. **Brethren who need help contact group leader.** Basically, if you have some home maintenance issues that you can't take care of any more, get in touch with Matt.
 2. **Group leader assesses needs, figures out whom to help.**
 3. **Group leader sets up two work days a year.** This is just for regular, anticipated needs. I would imagine that if a situation like John and Lois's comes up, Matt can assign days for that too.
 4. **Group members show up and work.** The amount of work may vary widely, but there will be something to do. Also, as we're setting things up, the people we're helping will provide any significant supplies, unless there's a financial need there too.
- B. That's the way the group is going to work in a nutshell. Here are some **REASONS** why you might join it:
 1. **You prefer larger, infrequent commitments.** This is another one of those groups that isn't going to take half an hour a week, but may take much bigger chunks of time irregularly.
 2. **Your gifts of ability or time make you useful.** Obviously, this is not going to be a group for everyone. I don't want to see Dorothy Lee climbing around on anybody's roof. However, if you still are strong and agile enough to help, or you're good at things like this, this group might be for you.
 3. **You want to help out brethren who need it.** As with all these groups, the most important motivation for this one is love. If you love the other members here and want to help, this is a way to do it.

Conclusion. If you're not a Christian, though, you need to begin by expressing your love for God.