GOD'S GIFT TO THE CHURCH
(Ephesians 4:8-14) Larry Booker, 14 May 1989, Texas Bible College Accent Weekend, Houston, Texas [Sunday Morning]

Why did God give these gifts? He gave them for the saints. He gave them for the work of the ministry. For this purpose, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God. Until we all come to a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is a load, that is a job. That is a commission.

God in His mercy and plan gave to the church the ministry. The ministry is the gift of God to the church. We have to understand that we are God's gift to the church in the proper perspective. You cannot go around with the attitude, "I am God's gift to the church."

Even though you are God's gift, you need to understand for one thing the nature of a gift. The gift is not the main thing. You give the gift to the recipient of your main desire. When I give a gift to my boys, the gift is in no way more important than my boys in any way. The boys are the main thing and the gift is just a token to them to show I love them.

The church is the recipient. That is what God really has in mind when He gives this gift of ministry to them. God did not give the church to the ministry. We fall into a very grave and dangerous error if we ever get it in our minds that the church belongs to us.

Before there ever was a world, God wanted a Bride to share eternity with Him. In His mind then He thought of the Church, of which He referred to (among other things) as His Bride. This bride would not be something He created as He did the angels. This bride would have proven that they really do love Him.

Rebekah left her home and went to a land she never saw to a man she never saw. She went to become the bride of someone she knew absolutely nothing about. And of us the Bible said, "Of whom having not seen, we love." We have not seen heaven nor
streets of gold. We have never seen the Lord Jesus Christ. We have heard of Him and have believed in Him.

He is going to have a bride out of something that it is hard to conceive that could ever produce a church. Not only is He going to have a bride that has never seen Him, but one that comes out of a world that lies entirely in wickedness, steeped in it, soaked in it. He will a bride out of a world that has overcome the snares of the devil. A bride that has no propensity to good. Paul said that in his flesh dwells no good thing. Job said that he knew man was of few days and full of trouble. He is just as likely to end up in a mess as sparks are to fly upward. The Psalmist said there is none that does good, no there is none righteous. Yet He will have a bride out of all that who love Him with all their soul and all their mind and all their strength. He will come for a bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

He is not coming after a girlfriend. He is not coming after a one night stand. He is not coming after a people who want to have an affair with Jesus and not have a commitment of marriage. He is coming after a bride that has made herself ready. How do you get that kind of a bride from such a wicked and perverse generation?

God has one method and that is the Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. He bought and paid for the Church with His own precious blood. The power of the Gospel can build His church.

The Gospel is brought to us through three main vehicles: (1) He gave us the Book [Bible]. One of the main things to get the job done is the Bible. (2) His Spirit (3) His ministry. You come into the ministry part. It is through these three main things He will work. By these He will obtain a bride.

I believe the church is the first thing God had in His mind toward creation. He conceived in His mind what His bride would be like, and that is what He is coming back after. The greatest favor you can do any people that you ever minister to, is to keep in the back
of your mind, "Oh God, help me to produce a church that is just like what you had in mind." The law was not the first thing with God. Galatians 3:19 "Wherefore serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions." The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. This was the most important dispensation, for that was to bring us to this. Things that could not be known to them we know. There were things righteous men wanted to know and could not comprehend. We play a key role in the history of the universe.

In Hebrews He said the works were "from" the foundation of the world, but Ephesians 1 says the church was chosen before the foundation of the world. We are what God had in mind in the beginning. When He had the bride in His mind He also had the ministry in mind, because He knew that in order to get the bride He would have to have the ministry that He needed to get it.

I if I were to ask you which of these three main vehicles God uses (The Word of God, the Spirit of God and the Ministry of God) has the greatest influence on the church, which would you say? I am willing to propose to you, and you probably will not believe me when I get started, that it is the ministry. You have a greater influence on the Bride than either the Word of God or the Spirit of God in the short range and scheme of things. You will not outlive the Word.

Look at the Book of Judges. They all had the Word of God, and in a measure the Spirit of God. But read of Othniel's influence, or Shamgar, or Ehud. Read of Gideon and Samson and Deborah, and read about Samuel, and you will find that as those men went, so went the nation. The Book of Judges itself proves you have to have a ministry working within the body, because people left to themselves will do that which is right in their own eyes.

Look at the Kings. How was it that Saul could affect the people so mightily, and then David, and Solomon. As was the spiritual pulse of those men so went the whole nation. If you still wonder, look at the churches in our ranks. We all have the same book, we all have
the same Spirit, then why the vast differences from church to church? It is because that man of God so affects the Bride.

Here is what the word of God says, but for the most part people interprets this book how the minister lives it. The Bible says be angry and sin not, let not the sun go down on your wrath. What the pastor does with his wrath denotes what that scripture really means to his people. If the pastor believes what that means and does it then the people believe it, but if he carries his wrath around for a week or two then the people believe that is that that scripture means, either consciously or unconsciously.

If the pastor responds a certain way with gestures of physical movements, you will soon have a number of people in the audience who do the same. Men take carnal churches and that church is transformed. Because God knows the tremendous influence of the ministry He deals with that ministry in such an unbelievable way.

We go through things that saints only get to taste in a measure. God knows this man is going to be the blueprint for His church. It can be through the hands of the ministry that Jesus died in vain for some. It can also be through them that men who would have never made it now are in the Bride.

It sends cold chills down my spine when I hear a preacher say, "I am tired of being the conscience of the church." You are the conscience of the church. The day you abdicate that your people are in trouble. A lot of what they know about law and righteousness and truth, and heaven and hell, and everything else has to come through and is filtered through your spirit. If you cannot see things they will not see it. If you refuse to see it, God pity those people.

A preacher said long ago, don't preach this unless it is a matter of heaven or hell if you don't. As Paul said, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." If it hits you that hard, be a preacher. If you are not that serious about it do something else. That is because there is so much that hangs upon this.
God has an obstacle course that the ministry must go through in order to prepared, refine and weed out his ministry. They have to go through this obstacle course because the ministry is the gift to the church and God uses them in order to get the bride He wants.

Recently a Baptist wrote an article in which he said, "The preacher and his wife are the only people that have to go through hell to get to heaven." Paul Harvey made this statement several months ago, "The most stressful position held by anybody in American society is the position of the pastor's wife. There are more emotional breakdowns in that one position of American society than any other profession."

2 Corinthians 1:4+ Remember first of all there are many good things in the ministry. I tell my boys, you see this car you ride in, and see this house, and all these good things we have. Do you know why we have this? Good and faithful men paid their tithes so we could enjoy this. Let your kids know they are fortunate to be in a minister's home.

We go through a lot so we can comfort others. We learn something and become a blessing to others. Though it is true of all Christians, it is doubly true of the ministry. You do not belong to yourself, you are bought with a price. Even when God blesses you it is for the sake of the church. Everything God does for His ministry is for the sake of the church. 2 Corinthians 4:14-15 "all things are for your sakes." 2 Corinthians 5:13 "If we are sober it is for your cause." Paul had a revelation that his life was here for the sake of the church. He had the option to go home or stay. He wanted to go home but he would stay because it was profitable for the church. 2 Timothy 2:10 He endured all things for the elects sake.

When Reagan got shot the doctor who worked on him was more careful than on anybody he had worked on before. In the civil war more people died by unclean hands of medical doctors than died of gunshot wounds. They did not know you had to have clean hands.
Of all people the ministry must have clean hands. Clean, moral, godly hands. You are not working on just anybody, every time you preach you are working on the body of Christ. If your hands are not clean they are begging for infection in the body.

When a man has been at a church pastoring for 10 to 15 years, when you see that church you see that preacher's guts. If a minister has a quirk in his spirit and stays there long enough the church will have it. If he has a strong point they will have that too. When I see ministers play with things of God I cringe. That is what is wrong with the playboys of Pentecost. They are only interested in what they can get out of it. They want applause and money.

God will be glorified through His ministry. In Leviticus 10 Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire. Jewish Rabbi's say they did not want to wait until God put them in position. They felt they were as good as Aaron. Fire came down and consumed them. When Aaron and Eleazar came on the scene, Moses said don't you dare weep or rend your garments. Why? Because if Aaron and Eleazar had gone out of the tent weeping and rending their clothes, then the people would have gotten a misconception of God. They would have wondered, "What kind of a God would kill those two boys who were just trying to offer up sacrifice?" But Moses said, "Stand there." So that the people would say, "They got what they deserved."

For 40 years Moses put up with murmuring and complaining and backbiting. Then when God told Moses to come up on the mountain and Moses came up, God said go back and tell them not to come up. Moses said, But Lord, I have already told them. God said go back. Moses was like the guy who said, I won't have problem with that because I preached on it last week. God knew people better than that.

Toward the end of his ministry these people were complaining again and Moses smote the rock when he was to speak to it. He had been provoked by these people. It had been a long day, a long
week, a long year, 4 long decades. He had watched these people grow up as a rebellious people, but one time he got made and smote a rock and now he could not go in. God was saying, if I let you get by with that you will leave a pattern for this people that before this night is over they will be kicking every cat in the parking lot. They will think in their minds, "I can curse God." He was dealing with 3,000,000 and to whom much is given much is required. Every word he spoke affected so many. That is the reason God gives us small ministries.

There are some churches that I do not know if they will ever grow, but they have been wonderful training grounds for preachers. If the preacher did nothing for them, that church did worlds for the preacher.

What God did to Moses only reinforced the fear of God in the children of Israel. When they heard that Moses did not get to go to the Promised Land, they knew then that they must be careful. If this man who was so godly could miss it like that then they had better be careful. That is the effect God wanted it to have and he was willing to sacrifice Moses desires to get the bride He wanted.

A fool can ask more questions than a wise man can answer, but I want to ask you a few questions. These are a part of God's obstacle course and He will find out these things about you. God must know your feelings and your attitudes. He will understand thoroughly your moral conduct. You will be tried, you will be tested in the arena of morality. I heard "I don't care how old a preacher gets and I don't care how ugly he is, there is a woman out there somewhere that wants to ruin him just because he is a preacher. You must you retain your moral integrity. God will find out how important truth is to you. Not just all truth, but truth to your neighbor, truth about stories you tell. If you find it easy to lie the church you are in will find it easy to lie.

- Will you be willing to lay down your secular work and leave it as did Elisha? About the time you are about to lay it down you suddenly get blessed and a raise, a promotion.
• Do you have it in you to attack your brother?

• How will you esteem money? What criteria will you give it? How will you treat money? One out of every seven verses in the Gospels deals with money.

• Can you handle the end of all security? If God so ordains that you have no security, can you accept Him and it?

• Will you resort to fear tactics or prejudices to hold your people? Some had rather build of wood, hay and stubble.

• Can you wait for God to wait until you are 40 to begin? Moses could not get started until he was 80.

• Can you submit yourself to other ministers? Especially as you get older?

• Can you submit to others work even if you do not like them personally?

• Can you bring yourself to work with people you do not like?

• Can you learn from your peers and those around you?

• Will you release your work and leave it forever and give it into the hands of God if God so ordain? It is hard not to develop the attitude that "I own this place." The Levites owned nothing but the call of God. Can you leave it and only look back in your prayers.

• Would you split a church for any reason?

• Could you serve a lifetime, with very little, grow old without a nest egg, and do it all with joy and perhaps die in poverty, and have no regrets?
• Will you work for God and not be lazy?

• Will you get ugly when personally attacked? Whenever Moses was personally attacked, he never defended himself. When anyone attacked the kingdom Moses came out swinging. Most men get it opposite. Defend God's kingdom and He will defend you.

• Will you continue to grow spiritually when you are older?

• Will you retain your convictions and stand resolutely for truth, even though those around you are giving up?

• Will you refuse to get bitter?

• Will the love of Jesus Christ continue to be your pattern? I live for Him the way I do because I love Him?

• Will you get angry at God's people even some are so slow to learn, and so quick to forget? People you do the most for are usually the ones who hurt you the most. You must not be angry at them.

The other day I went into my office and it was a bad day. I was tired. Did you ever see a dog or cat come home and all her kittens or puppies grab onto her? One day I saw my dog like that and I looked at her and I said, "I know just how you feel." This day I came into my office and said, "God you know I want this church to grow, and you know I want revival, but you are going to have to give me bigger shoulders. I lay down on my couch and was just fixing to doze off and He spoke one word to me. All He said was "Compassion!"

I saw them all in a brand new light. People need help. People who need love the most deserve it the least.

• What will be the definition of "Wolf" in our midst? Some people use issues to make personal attacks when they really have no
convictions themselves. Don't jump on somebody's bandwagon just because you don't like somebody doing something. Get a hold of God. Do what He wants you to do.

• Will you go around throwing teachings of submission to authority realizing that respect can only be earned? You must teach authority but you will only get what you earn. You cannot demand respect. You have to live a life the people come to respect.

• Will you make something other than Jesus Christ the centrality of your message experience?

• Will you be courageous, or cowardly under extreme pressure?

• Can you live in pain and yet never let it break you? You will face heart breaking circumstances but they must never get you down.