

*“Let all things be done with charity. I beseech you brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanus, that it is the first fruits of Achai, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints). That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to everyone that helpeth with us and laboureth.” 1 Corinthians 16:14-16*

## **ADDICTED SAINTS**

**by Craig Marlatt**

Did you know that you can choose to be a servant of God? Many Christians don't realize this. After the Protestant Reformation the Church was again awakened to the long forgotten idea of a 'Priesthood of Believers', and that all born again followers of Christ have a place of responsibility and authority in the plan of God for the world. He has not given the work of the ministry to a few 'special' people only. Every Christian has the duty and available power to minister in the work of the Lord.

Although we like the idea of a universal priesthood of believers when it comes to scripture interpretation, we tend rather to lean the other way in the area of service and sacrifice. Often, when we are called upon to serve, we try to pass it on to ministers who are "called" to do that kind of work. We look at someone like Mother Theresa or David Wilkerson and see the sacrificial love and courage that are so much a part of that kind of ministry and we conclude that they were specially called of God and sovereignly ordained to do what they do. Though most Christians would probably agree that God sovereignly ordains, and sets certain people apart for the work of the ministry, it seems as though there are just some people who are always looking for something to do for the Lord. Even though they may have never heard a booming voice speak from the sky and say, Go!, they have chosen to give their lives for the kingdom. I think these are the kind of people Paul is talking about here in 1 Corinthians 16:15 when he mentions, ". . .the house of Stephanus". They were addicted to the ministry of the saints.

The word addicted here is unique in its real meaning. It comes from the Greek word *tasso*, which is used only eight times in the New Testament, and is normally rendered 'ordained' or 'set aside'. In light of this it seems a little peculiar that the translators wrote, ". . .they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." Not only had God ordained them or set them aside for this service, but also they had set themselves aside willingly. In fact they had addicted themselves.

I like that word addicted. To put it another way, they were hooked on serving the brethren. The character of Christ was so deeply embossed upon their hearts that it was just natural for them to give themselves totally for the work of God. Somehow I can see them running around, helping the poor, ministering to the sick, loving the little children, volunteering for anything and everything, doing whatever had to be done to further the kingdom of God, and making incredible sacrifices just for the well being of the brethren.

They didn't need God to speak from heaven and say, Go! They just did what came natural. "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). They didn't need the elders to bring them before the body to see if God might be calling them to serve. They just went out and began to do the things that needed to be done. No wondering! No big deal! There's work to do, let's have at it. What a great attitude.

And what did Paul say about them? He told the believers in Corinth to "submit [themselves] unto such." Their service to others was a sign of their leadership. They had

set themselves aside, and dedicated themselves to the ministry. For this reason, Paul says, they were worthy of honor.

We need more like the household of Stephanus. Too many Christians are just sitting around twiddling their cassette tapes expecting God to write, Go to Africa in the sky for them. As the world around them is dying before their very eyes they see it happening and wonder what God's will is for them. Can they really be so blind?

I am certainly not trying to belittle the fact that God calls and ordains people for ministry, and I don't think that everyone should be full time in the pulpit, etc. But that is just the point: If we can't quit our jobs and go into ministry full time, many of us will just do nothing at all. This is not what one would call being addicted to the ministry, but rather trying to get paid a salary for telling others how to live.

I'll tell you one thing about being addicted: you'll never get that way unless you try it first. A junky doesn't just go out one day and start shooting up \$1,000 worth of heroin and get addicted. He builds up to it slowly. He tries a little on the weekends, then another shot or two more, and before too long he's doing it all the time. Now he's addicted! Up until then he was just a user, but now he's addicted . . . Hooked!

That's the way it is in ministry and serving others. You have to get your feet wet first, then you ease into it until you're in all the way. It's too much to take all at once right off the bat. It would probably kill you spiritually (and physically). But it is important that as a Christian you begin to get involved in some fashion, and to some degree, in ministering to other people.

At this point you might be asking yourself, "How do I know what to do?" Look around you . . . See what the needs are and minister to the needs. "How far should I go? How much should I give of myself?" . . . Give until it hurts. That's when the real giving takes place: when it costs you something. Sacrificial giving.

"But I'm not a minister. . . I thought you had to be ordained to do that kind of stuff." Well you might have some problems in that area if you try to go 'uptown', but as long as you stay among the poor, hungry, and needy you won't have any problem. The only credentials you need to minister there are love and faithfulness. Besides that, nobody will be fighting you for your job anyway. There is always room for those who are willing to be used: willing to be laborers in God's vineyard. There's plenty of work to be done, but few who want to work. But you give it a try. . . Get a little taste of it yourself. Who knows, you might like it. But watch out! You might get hooked!