

MINISTRY:
WHAT IT IS--WHAT IT IS NOT

According To The Bible

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Ask any Christian what “ministry” is.

The answers will vary, slightly, but for almost anyone who has been in church a while, the answer will be something like this.....

“Oh, I’m not in ministry--that’s the pastor--he’s in ministry.”

or

“Ministry--well--God makes some people the clergy--and the rest of us are the lay-people.”

or

“Ministry is the guy who gives the speeches on Sunday--the pastor. He’s the shepherd and the rest of us are the flock. Oh yeah--there are some people who are evangelists--like Billy Graham.”

or

“Ministry? It means to serve God and we all have a ministry to do. But God has given some people the office of ministry. They are the paid, professional, full-time ministers. We have to submit to their authority--obey them that have the rule. We all have ministry--but we must be submitted to a spiritual covering.”

Think about it.

As a Christian, what is your definition of “ministry”? Does it fit into one of these categories? Have you heard these “buzzwords” used to describe the function of ministry in your church?

If we truly let the Bible be our guide--all of these definitions are WRONG!

This book is meant to be an open study of ministry. We invite you to open your mind and your hearts--and most importantly--your Bible.

Why should you study ministry?

Well, you probably have never studied ministry from the Bible, perhaps because you never thought you were “in it”.

Can I tell you a secret? Most people who are “in ministry” have never studied ministry from the Bible either!

Ministry, as the Bible describes it, is hardly ever taught anywhere. Think about it. When was the last time you heard a sermon about the subject of apostles? The word apostles is mentioned very often in the new testament, but have you ever heard anyone study carefully the methods and practices of apostles? (perhaps this is because it would so totally disagree with our very well-defined experience and tradition!)

Statistic:

The word “apostle” is used 78 times in the new testament.

The word “pastor” is used once!

What does this mean? To me it seems there is something very big in the Bible which has been put down, reduced and almost destroyed--or perhaps replaced, by something else.

Jesus throws a monkey-wrench into our ideas and traditions

Let's take a first step. Let's study what “ministry” is NOT.....

“But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, **Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:”**

(Mark 10: 42-43)

Isn't it just like Jesus to mess up all our nice neat ideas and plans! Look carefully at these verses.

Doesn't it say this:

“Ministry is NOT authority over other believers”--?

Jesus said very plainly that Christian, new covenant ministry is NOT authority (“power--rulership”) over other fellow believers. Ministry is service to others, and specifically NOT authority over others within the church.

A “minister” is a servant--it’s what the word means in the Greek:

diakonov diakonos {dee-ak'-on-os}

probably from an obsolete diako (to run on errands)

one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master,
a servant, attendant, minister

Now you may be saying that Mark 10:42-43 is just one area of scripture--pulled out of context--there must be some place else that says ministry is authority in the church.

Okay, then do this. Get out your computer Bible software, or your concordance and look up every use of the word “minister” or “ministry”. Study them carefully. Not all of them are referring to Christian ministry. For example in Romans 13 we find.....

“For he is the **minister** of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the **minister** of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.”
(Romans 13:4)

.....but read the context!! This area of scripture is speaking about worldly leadership and government--just as Jesus said.....”the kings of the Gentiles” (worldly authority).....”exercise authority one over another. We as believers are to cooperate with worldly authority as much as we possibly can, unless it contradicts God’s Word.

While you are doing that little Bible study, I’d like to mention that Jesus made this same statement 2 other times in the Gospels....

“But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, **Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.**”
(Matthew 20:25-28)

“And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye *shall not be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is not* he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.”

(Luke 22:25-27)

Now look again at Luke 22. Some people would say that “exercising authority” means cruelty or harshness. They would say that the Bible says that Christian leaders must be “nice people” (and they are---for the most part). Many people say that the authority of the church leader benefits them, so it must be from God and correct. But like it or not, Jesus said that we are not to have beneficial authority among ourselves--authority over others within the church--in any fashion--is NOT ministry.

Well, somebody has to be in charge--right?!

Yes, absolutely there is someone who is supposed to be in charge. Someone who has authority, power--rule---over the church.

His name is Jesus Christ.....

Acts 4:11 “This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the **head** of the corner.”

1Corinthians 11:3 “But I would have you know, that the **head** of every man is Christ; “

Ephesians 1:22 “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the **head** over all *things* to the church,”

Ephesians 4:15 “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the **head**, *even* Christ:”

Ephesians 5:23 “For the husband is the **head** of the wife, even as Christ is the **head** of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”

Colossians 1:18 “And he is the **head** of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence.”

Colossians 2:10 “And ye are complete in him, which is the **head** of all principality and power:”

1Ti 6:15 “Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only **Potentate**, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;”

The risen, glorified Christ is the one Head of the Church. He has all power. He is the Head of all the church but also the Head of “every man”. He not only rules all believers as a whole, but also each of us individually.

Pay particular attention to the last verse listed--1 Timothy 6:15. One not often taught! This verse refers to Christ as the “only Potentate”. This is a Greek word which means that Christ is the only One who has authority over believers. The only One!

Every believer has the God-given, Bible based right, to be lead directly by Jesus Christ.

This leaves no room for hierarchy. There are no “sub-heads”. There are no regional offices, no assistant managers, no vice presidents, no cochairmen.

In the new covenant, every believer has the Biblical ordination to be lead directly by God.

Ministry is NOT authority over other believers.

But non-authority is NOT a “feeling”.

You see, in our day and age, most church leaders are really, really, nice people. Most church leaders will tell you that they work so very, very hard at serving people (and they do--perhaps too hard!) But that is not the question at hand. As I have said, Jesus was not just giving a “heart attitude” for leadership to strive toward. No. In fact He was simply making a plain statement of His idea of operating--His way of functioning with others. He was describing the way his ministry worked.

So, the question is this: are we following the system of ministry and operation that the new testament Bible describes?

Or, are we following a format of authority that has been handed down by tradition?

History Lesson

Think about the church down the block from yours. You know. “That church”. “Those people”. You know, that strict legalistic church down the block. Maybe the church you used to go to. Those older denominations.

Look at what they do. Not the teaching, or how fast the songs are--look at the format at that church, and look at the format in your church.

How different are they---really?

When you go to church on Sunday, do things go something like this:

“We sing some songs of praise to God, and the pastor feeds us the Word.”

Get honest. Isn't this all or most of what you do on a Sunday morning? And isn't this basically what those older churches do too? And, since this is what we do, isn't the function of “ministry” being defined by this format? Is the pastor the only person who can speak? Is nearly everything we do in our meeting pre-ordained? And don't we stick with these rules and this format and repeat it over and over and over?

Well, where did this format come from, anyway?

History--what we don't know CAN hurt us!

Yet another subject I have never seen studied in church! When was the last time you heard a sermon about Christian history? (Probably about as often as we study apostles!)

So, study it for yourself!

Christian history, all 2000 years of it, is a big awful ugly and beautiful subject. In this little booklet we are not going to attempt to study all of it of course. However, we would like to look at a few key points in history that have a lot to do with where our idea of “ministry” came from.

The Roman Empire--extreme makeover, church edition.

Rome, ruled by the “kings of the Gentiles”.

In the 4th century, the church changed drastically. Up to that time, the church had been persecuted by the Roman empire (much as it had been in the time of the Bible). But suddenly there was a huge turn-a-round. The emperor Constantine completely reversed these persecutions. He made it legal to be a Christian and in fact invited Christians to be part of the Roman government (remember Jesus’ warning?--apparently the believers of that day did not!). Of course, one could hardly blame the persecuted church of that day! Imagine, one minute they were being thrown to the lions, the next they were invited to a party at the emperors palace!

Perhaps they believed God had delivered them from the horrible persecutions of the empire. Regardless of what they thought, the well-recorded fact is that the church began to be joined to the Roman empire, and it’s form of government.

A number of years later, another emperor (Theodosius by name) took another step. He made Christianity the “official religion” of Rome. This act brought huge change to the structure and operation of the church.

Imagine this:

Imagine that today, there was a king of the world who had absolute power (that is just about what the Roman emperor was). Imagine this king of the world showed up one day in your church and said “I really really like your church. Here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to make your church the one, true, universal church. I’m going to make everyone go to your church--by law!”

A tempting offer! What if you had no real choice in the matter? Suddenly, the emperor has kicked all the pagans out of their temples, and given them all to you!

Imagine. Millions of people are now coming to your church! What would you do? Well, obviously, the church has to get a make-over--and it did--this is a well recorded fact...

“Masses of people joined the church. Their registration and care required completely new forms of organization and ministry”

This is a quote from a catholic history book! (a very honest one indeed!) History records that “ministry” was re-invented in this long ago age, by a very unusual circumstance. This same book went on to say that.....

“Simple apostleship was no longer needed”

Well, it made sense, sort of. No need to witness the Gospel out to the world any more, or work in small groups. Everyone was forced to be a Christian.

New functions and ministry had to be **INVENTED**--- and they were.

Okay, since everyone is forced to attend church, let’s pick a day for mandatory attendance. Of course the church did not need to do any outreach, just concentrate of teaching----teaching----teaching----teaching----teaching----teaching-----everyone. Play some nice music while we’re at it.

“Ministry”--it’s definition and function changed. Somebody had to be in charge over the masses of unlearned people now forced into the church building.

The events of the 4th century have been debated over and over again ever since they happened. Many people in that day protested the idea--but in those days, they really had no choice. The important fact for our study is that these events really happened, and if you think they do not influence us today, please open your eyes!

FACT: in the 4th century the church was changed and ministry was redefined.

Well, haven't things changed since then? Wasn't there a "reformation" of the church?

Yes there was. The times of the reformation make for interesting study. What happened at this time (15th-16th centuries) was that through much difficulty and resistance (from the organization of the church!) the Bible was finally translated into common languages and published. At last us common folk could get our hands on the Bible. And what has happened ever since, is that people broke away from the existing "authority" of the church to form their own new church. This process keeps going on today--at an ever accelerating pace. Today new church groups sprout up on an almost daily basis.

Think about it for a minute. If we are truly meant to "submit to the authority" of church leadership, shouldn't we all be catholic? The catholic church is the oldest authority around--so it must be correct--right? Many millions of catholic folks think this way--what's wrong with you--"protestant"!

Unfortunately, all the new churches that sprout up so frequently, believe they are an authority or rulership! And, then of course, there are the "rules" of function which church groups are ultimately drawn toward. A format which is basically the same which was established by the Roman government 1700 years ago.

"We sing some songs of praise to God, and the pastor feeds us the Word."

Why do we stick like glue to this format? Isn't it mostly what we do--over and over and over and over again. How much of our time, effort and money do we expend in this format?

Well, if you should dare to question the format--the "order" of things, the pastor will gently put his arm around you and tell you---"It's in the Bible."

Is it?

Ministry = Authority

Yes, it's in the Bible after all--but--where in the Bible?

answer: the old testament

Follow this example.....

Suppose you were a Jew, and you lived in the time before Christ. You had your covenant--your agreement with God. In it, you had laws that were commandments--you know--"thou shalt not steal"--"thou shalt not covet"--there were a bunch of those commandment laws in the covenant (and these are basically the same for us Christians in the new covenant)

The purpose of the commandment laws were to show you where you sinned, where you "fall short of God's perfection"

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

These laws proved we are all sinners. So what do you need to do now?

2 things.

1. Repent--turn away from those sins--don't continue in them--do your best not to do them any more.

2. But what about the sins that are previously committed? You need to find a way to be cleansed of the sins that you have already done.

Romans 3:20 "Therefore by the deeds of the **law** there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the **law** is the knowledge of sin."

Sin needs to be understood--and repented of for the Christian also--but--here is the difference--how to be cleansed?

If you are a Christian--you know the answer--the blood of Jesus.....

Romans 3:25 "Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his **blood**, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

How To Pay For Sin

The fact is that there has to be a payment made for sin. We as Christians know that Jesus work on the cross was our payment for sin.

But you are a Jew, and you live before the time of Christ. What do you do to be cleansed? What is your payment for sin?

Well, first you need an animal. A certain “clean” animal. You took the animal to the temple in Jerusalem (now here is where it gets familiar--watch).....

This temple was called the “house of God” or the “sanctuary” of God.

You entered the temple by the outer courts of praise.

You pass in to the inner court of worship. (always start with praise and worship)

You dare not enter the sanctuary without this offering--this payment for your sin!

In the temple was an altar.

On that altar was a priest.

This priest was the “delegated, designated, anointed, appointed, God-ordained-authority to do the ministry of the temple”. This priest was born to the tribe of Levi--the Levitical priesthood.

If you were not a Levite, you could not serve God in the temple. The other tribes of Israel were often referred to as the “congregation” (the word “congregation” is only found in the old testament).

[by the way--how many animals did God ask for? “Tithe”. He often asked for 1/10th of certain herd animals or crops--”tithe” was the amount of the sin offering.]

Does some of this stuff sound familiar to you?

The basis for the format of church operation and the concept of “ministerial authority” comes from the old covenant.

It's in the Bible, so we should do it---right?

Well, at least that is what most people seem to believe, and Christians have been using these old covenant sacrificial laws as the "typology" of the church (and quite repetitively!) for the last 1700 years or so. Isn't it true that an awful lot of our time together is spent making sure that "Sunday service" goes all right?

People love to argue that *all* the Bible needs to be followed and obeyed. These arguments usually come from people who never really read the Bible. Some people say these procedures are in the law and must be fulfilled!

Well, when was the last time you sacrificed an animal in your church? Not lately I'm sure! Well animal sacrifice (and the offering of grain, etc.) is in the law--why not do it?

There is a very simple truth that it seems very few Christian fully understand...

Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial laws.

Of course we understand this to a degree. We don't offer animals to God because we know Jesus did this at the cross--He made a greater offering.....

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14)

But, it's as if we do everything else associated with sacrificial law. We have nearly everything we need to offer and animal, almost including the cutlery! Why should these old covenant sacrificial laws be used as an operational plan for the new covenant Christian church?

There are 2 problems with these old covenant procedures being used as operational procedures for the new covenant church.

1. The new covenant gives us a completely different example to follow. If we are spending so much time doing this old covenant operation--we are NOT operating by new covenant rules of meeting. We might fool ourselves into thinking we are a “new covenant church”. We might preach the new covenant quite openly--but are we operating by the new covenant definitions of ministry and authority?

2. The new covenant says very clearly and specifically that these parts of the old covenant are done away with.

We have studied that Jesus clearly defined new covenant ministry as NOT authority over other believers. The idea that ministry = authority is in the Bible, but only in the old covenant.

It was only in the Levitical priesthood, and it had nothing to do with new covenant ministry and everything to do with sacrificial law.

The new testament specifically does away with the Levitical priesthood...

Hebrews 7:12 “For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.”

The law is changed. No more Levitical priesthood.

The Biblical basis for “pastoral authority” is the Levitical priesthood. No one ever teaches this--but it’s true!

Everything to do with sacrificial law in the old testament is changed in the new testament.

The “house of God” is not the temple in Jerusalem but the heart and home of every believer...

1Timothy 3:15 “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the **house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

The “temple” is not a building, again it is in people...

1Corinthians 3:16 “Know ye not that ye are the **temple** of God, and *that* the **Spirit** of God dwelleth in you?”

There is obviously no need to make offerings.....

Hebrews 10:18 “Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more **offering** for **sin**.”

..... giving in the new covenant is Spirit-lead like all the actions of believers.

In the new covenant, the priesthood is in every believer....

1Peter 2:5 “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy **priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (note that we are to make spiritual sacrifices--not monetary ones!)

Revelation 5:10 “And hast made us unto our God kings and **priests**: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Maybe this all seems pretty harmless to you. Well, what else are we Christians going to do? We love to have big congregational meetings--lots of praise and worship--and have wonderful teaching from the pastor.

These things are all great. And there is a place for large meetings in the new covenant church, and group teaching, and worship. But we need to notice something.

All these things only benefit us believers---right?

They do nothing for the unsaved.

The new covenant church has a mission to fulfill, and if we are spending so much of our time, effort and money living out these old covenant “types” we are NOT doing and operating and living out new covenant principles.

Let’s outline some of these principles, starting with ministry.

We've seen what ministry is NOT--it's time to see what ministry IS....

The Mission.....

“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Luke 4: 18-19

The Gospel is the purpose of the church. It is the highest goal of the ministry of the church.

But take a look at Jesus' mission statement in these verses.

1. The Good News--the “free gift” --salvation by faith in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus died, shed His blood to forgive the sin of all people. He paid the price to save us from Hell. He opened wide the gates of heaven for all who believe. He left us all with the mission to spread this news.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

(Romans 10:9)

It is the first, foremost and ongoing purpose of the church to spread this message, to let people know that Jesus saves..

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the **gospel** to every creature.

More to the Gospel than you think!

“.....he hath sent me to **heal** the brokenhearted, to preach **deliverance** to the captives.....”

2. Healing. Jesus healed the sick. His followers in the Bible prayed for the sick in His name. Praying for the sick is a Gospel purpose and a purpose for the ministry of the church.

3. Deliverance. Jesus cast out the devil. He brought deliverance from every worldly sorrow and pain..

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”(Isaiah 53:4-5)

A ministry purpose of the church is to let people know that Jesus can deliver them from pain and sorrow and cast out the devil’s strongholds in every way, wherever they are.

A mission for all.

A ministry for all.

To whom shall we bring the Gospel?

“.....to the poor.....the brokenhearted.....the captives.....the blind.....them that are bruised.....”

4. Feeding the poor.....

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.” (Mathew 25:34-40)

This is certainly a big mission!

We as believers need to open our eyes and see the need for the ministry of Jesus to be spread--to be revealed in the world around us.

But how?

“to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Part of Jesus’ mission was a method for carrying on the mission.

The Greek of this phrase reads “apostello aphasis” meaning, literally, apostolic liberty. Jesus is saying here that He will, as part of His mission, “set people free so they can preach the Gospel”.

Now we’ve all read the new testament and we certainly don’t need convincing that Jesus healed the sick, fed the poor, and cast out the devil--but He also made apostles. Apostles were simply small groups that carried on His mission and in fact worked with Him in His mission. He released people (quickly!--with faith in their ability!) to preach the Gospel.

How quick? An example...

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, Who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any *man* tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit. And he asked him, **What is thy name?** And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told *it* in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw *it* told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and *also* concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, **Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.** And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all *men* did marvel. (Mark 5:1-20)

Could this man be in a worse condition?! And yet, look at what Jesus does. The man asks to follow Jesus and Jesus simply tells Him.....

“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”

And the Bible records that this man preached to “Decapolis”--which means ten cities!

Do we truly see or understand the miracle of release in the Bible?

The release to ministry is a part of the Gospel--a part of the mission of the church--a very important part!

MINISTRY = SERVICE

What IS ministry?

If we looked up the word in the Greek we would find that it simply means “servant”.

“Ministry”--”minister” ---always means “service”.

Certainly this agrees with Jesus’ definition of what ministry is NOT (authority or power or rule over others)!

Who Has Ministry?

If you are a Christian, you have God inside of you.

I am sure, that at some point, all of us have served another person--ministered to their needs in some way--and later realized ---“that wasn’t me--that was God!”

So, we could say, that God is in all and thru all of us, and He enables ministry to come out of all of us at times.

Could we name the types of Godly ministry? Could we classify the functions that God desires to enact and utilize in all of us?

How about a list like this...

1. people who carry the Gospel out to the world.
2. people who speak a word that God gives them.
3. people who teach others about God.

Well, you might think these are nice ideas--but--are they just my ideas?

Guess what, they are in the Bible--the new testament Bible!

Do something right now.....Read Ephesians chapter 4, from verse 1.....

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 *There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Ephesians 4:1-12)

These verses say that we all have been called--given a vocation (a job!) in God. These verses say we all have God inside of us--and He has given every one of us a gift. A gift of ministry--a gift of service toward others.

The gift of Christ. An anointing. A ministry. “Unto every one of us.”

Ministry gifts--What Are They Anyway?

What are these ministry gifts? Christians have been fighting and debating and redefining these words for centuries. In fact, 4 of these words are not actually English words (maybe this is why we don't understand them!).

Apostle, prophet, and evangelist are Greek and pastor is latin. Do you speak Greek or latin? I sure don't!

Over the centuries, these words have taken on traditional meanings (which almost always have to do with authority and rulership). Well we know this can't be. We know these are "gifts of service" for all Christians to function in.

If we looked at the new testament Bible (and not our experience!) these ministry functions take on very simple definitions (you already read them--but read them again...)

1. "apostles, evangelists"-- people who carry the Gospel out to the world.
2. "prophets"--people who speak a word that God gives them.
3. "pastors, teachers"---people who teach others about God.

This same list is re-iterated in 1Corinthians 12--and by no coincidence, in the same order....

"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers...."
(1Corinthians 12:28)

There is an order of importance to these functions.

“Apostles” come first.

The word “first” in the verse above means “first, primarily, of first importance”. (good question: are apostles of first, primary importance in your church?) This simply means that the witnessing of the Gospel out to the world is the 1st, foremost and primary mission, ministry and function of the church. As we’ve already shown, this is said in many places in the Bible, but apostleship is more than just this. It is a specific way to witness, meaning to work in small groups to carry the Gospel.

In fact, all the ministries of the church are meant to operate in apostleship--small groups (an easy way to have no authority but God!)

The word “apostle” if you were to look it up in the Greek--would look like this:

apostolov apostolos {ap-os'-tol-os}

a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders

It simply means someone who is “sent”. It is traditionally translated in the Bible in an odd way. Certain people are given this “title” of apostle--but elsewhere the word is simply translated as “sent”. Take a look at these verses from John chapter 17.....

“As thou hast **sent** me into the world, even so have I also **sent** them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;”

(John 17:18-20)

Realize the word “sent” is the Greek “apostello”. Jesus clearly “sent” His followers--but He also prays this same prayer for all those who “**believe on me through their word**”. That all of us!

Jesus is here saying that His followers should operate by the rules and example of the apostles. Not everyone is called to be an apostle, but we are all called to work by the example of apostleship.

“Prophets” Are Second

Acts 2:17 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your **sons** and your **daughters** shall prophesy.....”

There is a big difference between old testament prophets and new testament prophets. In the old testament, ministry was a rarity (as we can see with the example of the Levitical priesthood). But in the new testament, it is made clear in many places that this gift is for all believers to operate in as God ordains. To “prophecy” simply means to speak. To be a Godly prophet is to speak what God wants spoken (remember how Ephesians 4 said ministry is God working thru us). In the new testament it is clear that all believers may prophecy.

A Short Quiz....

The Bible tell us that God is 3 persons.

Question 1--Where is the Father?

answer: Heaven

Question 2--Where is Jesus?

answer: Heaven (at the right hand of the Father--with all power and authority--just waiting to rule the church!)

Question 3--Where is the Holy Spirit?

answer: in the earth.

The Holy Spirit is inside of believers who have invited Him in. God the Holy Spirit is God’s power and presence and person in the earth to Guide us and Teach us and Comfort us and to speak to us and through us. But He is also God’s power and presence and person to guide others thru us, to teach others through us, to comfort others thru us and to speak thru us.

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit has given gifts for believers to operate in. Most of these gifts are prophetic in nature--speaking gifts.

God the Holy Spirit has the function to speak thru believers and give Christ's instructions to us. Gospel instructions.

In the church today there is much debate, rivalry and disagreement on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All this debate is useless, and a plan of Satan to hinder God's true purpose, which is to spread the Gospel.

Some Christian groups believe very much in spreading the Gospel--but do not "allow" (since they believe they have the authority to make such a decision!) the gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate in the church meeting.

Other Christians do "allow" the gifts of the Holy Spirit to operate in the church--barely! Most "Holy-Ghost churches" use the utterance of the Holy Spirit as an accident. Someone must interrupt the ceremony of "church" to prophecy. Perhaps at other times there are large "prayer-meetings" where a number of believers all "pray in the Spirit". These are both incorrect uses of the prophetic gifts...

"I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

(1Corinthians 14:18-33)

There are rules on how to operate the prophetic gifts. They are really quite simple and make perfect sense--2 or 3 words in a meeting (also notice that teaching in the church is meant to operate by the same rules)--

26 ¶ How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine.....

Make sure to get the interpretation, so the message that God is sending can be understood.

Notice: these rules can really only be followed if we are meeting in a small group. Remember--the Bible presumes apostleship--small group meetings...

“For where **two or three** are gathered together in my name, there am I in the **midst of them.**” (Matthew 18:20)

Small groups are a new covenant example that the church has seen fit to ignore for centuries, and because we ignore this example, we easily become disobedient to the new testament definitions of ministry, authority, and the commands of operation of both ministry and the Holy Spirit.

“If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” (1Corinthians 14:37)

We take the 10 commandments seriously--but what about these commandments? (interestingly enough this is the only place in the entire new testament that the phrase “commandments of the Lord” is used!)

“Teachers”, Third and Least Important

The third, and least important ministry is that of pastor/teacher. It is, whether anyone wants to face the Bible, the least important function.

Now, I can hear pastors and teachers lining up with excuses! There are 1700 years worth of excuses why we should have something called a pastor/teacher as the centerpiece of the church. All these excuses are wrong. If they are right, then God wasted His time giving us the new testament, Jesus’ ministry is not our example, and the church in the Bible is not our example. We ignore the fact that the Bible tells us to imitate Jesus and the apostles. Paul the apostle says.....

1Corinthians 11:1 “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.”

Hebrews 5:12 “For when for the time ye ought to be **teachers**.....”

Paul here is scolding the church for not progressing to higher ministry---”by now you all ought to be teachers” (yet another place in the Bible that shows “all” are meant to minister.).

“Teachers” come with warnings (unlike the others ministry gifts). We can have too much teaching! Does the Bible say that we might “heap up apostles to our itching ears”?

2Timothy 4:3 “For the time will come when they will **not** endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves **teachers**, having itching ears;”

Teaching is also something that should operate through apostleship. Small groups of teachers. Is that such an odd idea? Well, when you went to school, did you have one teacher that brought you from kindergarten to college? Probably not! The world has understood that different people have different gifts and abilities. Specialized teaching makes sense. Teaching in the church could be highly organized and lead by God directly to what individuals need to learn.

In other words, have you ever sat in church on a Sunday morning, and politely listened to a teaching you already knew? Do we really believe that it is God’s will to waste our precious time together this way?

[quick history note: the tradition of teaching in the church has its roots in the dark ages. Have you ever heard the term “clergy”? Well, look this word up in a good dictionary (because it is NOT in the Bible!). You will find its Medieval root word is “cleric” or “clerk”--which simply means someone who knows how to read. You see, in the church of the dark ages, the priest of the local parish was usually one of the few people in town who knew how to read. Question: do we still sit in church every week following a format developed in the dark ages--under the authority of the “clergyman”--the guy who knows how to read?]

MINISTRY--THE PLAN TO OPERATE THE CHURCH

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11-12)

The statement made in these verse is one of the most important in the Bible, and yet one which seems completely ignored by Christians.

What the Bible is saying here is that these gifts, these functions, operating in different people, will edify the Body--will build God's church--will get people saved!

The single most important point in this book is this:

The gifts of ministry are meant to operate together, in different people, to further the Gospel.

Remember the order of importance of the gifts? (1st apostles, 2nd prophets, 3rd teachers). The prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant to give God's instructions on the witnessing and sending of the Gospel.

In the Bible, the prophetic gift released the apostolic gift.

The word we should be seeking in the Spirit is the "where" and "when" of the witnessing of the Gospel. We should be in a small group to accomplish this--and be ready to carry out the instructions of the Spirit. (Once we get someone saved, then we can teach them what to do--"go and tell what great thing God has done for you"--this is the extent of Jesus' teaching to the Demoniac of the Gadarenes--perhaps our teaching should be so swift and free!)

The 1-2-3 of ministry.

Something that Christians should do frequently is to:

1. meet in small groups
2. pray in the Spirit and ask the Lord where and when and how to witness the Gospel.
3. be quick and ready to be sent with the Gospel

The best thing we could do together, as believers, is to realize that God has put ministry in all of us, not exercise authority one over another, and walk in the prophetic gifts, with the goal of releasing apostolic ministry. Mission: the Gospel.

Prophets releasing apostles.....

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

(Acts 13:1-4)

Notice this example. It is simple. A small group of believers, who know they are prophets and teachers. They pray, and the Holy Ghost speaks. His instruction “sends” Paul (Saul) and Barnabas to a specific place. With what purpose? The Gospel, of course!

No one is “in authority” here--but God. And the small group of apostleship is ready to quickly respond to His command.

Think about how church tradition destroys this simple example.

1. Do we ever meet in a small group? not often!
2. Where's the pastor? Who is "in authority" here?
3. A group of ministers? We only want one minister/ruler.
4. Prophets? They don't exist since the times of the Bible are over. (Look in your church's rule-book. Many churches have eliminated all the prophetic gifts with a bunch of complicated hogwash--and what do you do instead?--act like Israel in the old testament!). That's why when it says "the Holy Ghost speaks" we think this is some grand and glorious super-special miraculous event--which only happened once, and will never happen today--ever. And if we do not believe in the prophetic gift, guess what, it will never happen.
5. Is our purpose to send people with the Gospel? (Excuses, excuses, excuses--"the Gospel has already been through our area"--"we are the established church"--all excuses. This church at Antioch is an "established" church. Who determined when the "apostolic age" ended anyway? Is everybody saved in your town? Have you really witnessed to everyone the Lord might want you to? And how do you know He might not want to send some people to another area to do their ministry?
6. "Saint Paul". Church tradition makes the apostles into "super-saints". Blow the trumpets! this is the grand a glorious calling of the Apostle Paul--aaaaammmmmnnnn. (problem--what about Barnabas? Notice that he is called just like Paul. Apostles worked together in small non-authoritarian groups and did the humble job of witnessing the Gospel)

These events are not a one-time super fantastic miraculous no-way-they-can-happen-today kind of occurrence. No. These are a simple, effective and very do-able example. We *could* do this--If we could get off our thrones, quite ruling one another, quit sitting in authority over one another--quit acting and looking like Israel--quit following a repetitive authoritarian format---respect the ministry that every believer has--get the Gospel in our hearts--be ready to be sent out according to God's purposes---and believe that God could operate us as the church.

And notice one more thing. We do not need to raise money to do these things! All we need are people. People who love and respect God and one another. Our churches are filled with people who fit that description--why are they not used!?

Let's look at another example...

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
(Acts 2:41-47)

The church in Jerusalem had 3,000 members. Do you know what they didn't do?

They didn't form the “Church of the Upper Room.”

They didn't meet on Sundays and Wednesdays.

They didn't build a building.

They didn't elect Peter the “pastor”.

They didn't take up offerings.

They didn't pay tithe.

They didn't have a pre-ordained ceremony that ran the church.

What did they do?

They followed the example that Jesus had given them.

They took on His mission as their purpose.

They carried on this mission meeting daily** in small groups.

They followed the apostles ideas and way of working (“they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine”)

They were lead by the Holy Spirit

They “broke bread” together--they talked with one another--as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

They prayed together in their homes, and this lead to daily witnessing. And they had this result....they got people saved every day!

They carried on this mission meeting daily** in small groups.

(**"daily!....this does not mean "everybody every day"! One of the ways that new testament examples have been excused away by the church is by trying to make their way of meeting sound "weird". I have heard some people say that the early church "lived in a commune"--or "they had church every day". We are always reading our church experience into the Bible! What this church was doing is really very simple. There is a lot of flexibility in it--it is NOT the rigidness of "mandatory" church attendance--rather it is an open, functional plan of meeting. Think about it. If a lot of small meetings are going on in diverse places, whenever a believer has the time they can easily enter in and help out. Perhaps some people met once a week, some once a month, other 6 times a week. The point is that we are one Body and in effect God made us as interchangeable parts. If we let Him lead us He might put us together in ways we could never imagine--but ways that would work for Him and His purposes.)

Notice, in these verses there is no mention of the ministry gifts (other than apostles). There is no mention of pastors who ruled the church--or teaching leaders--or evangelists or prophets. Why? Because these simple gifts were the basic daily operations of believers.

The ministry gifts are names of the functions of the Body.

They are meant to work together as God directs.

Get the picture:

Posted:

Meeting today, 3 o'clock at Joe's house (they probably had multiple meetings going on at the same time, with 3,000 believers--no one "house" rules over another--very important)

--"come in--we have coffee and donuts" (okay, maybe they didn't have coffee and donuts, but let's assume the 1st century equivalent!)

--"Y'know, my uncle Bernie has been on my mind lately. He's sick and old---sort of lonely since his wife died."

--"Let's pray for him"

--"I feel the Lord is saying that these donuts aren't really ours--He is saying to send Joe and Daniel..."

--"Why don't we go and bring uncle Bernie a donut, in the name of Jesus."

The prophetic ministry releasing the apostolic.

It's not glamorous, famous, loud, big. It's definitely not authority over others.

It's Christians, working together as one, with Christ as the Head.

It's bringing a donut to someone who needs one.

It is service to others.

It is ministry.

Adendum.

Hebrews 13:17A--THE BIG CONFUSION!

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.....”

This half-verse is a place in scripture that has caused more confusion and misunderstanding than any other. This half-verse runs the church--whether we realize it or not. Have you ever studied it? Have you ever heard some of the “buzzwords” from this verse?

Many people look at this verse and say--see--new covenant church--someone “has the rule”---we are meant to obey--submit.

This half-verse “fits” our church experience. It “fits” our church format.

Problem: It just doesn't fit with the rest of the new testament!

It absolutely does not fit with what Jesus said in Matthew 20: 25-26--Mark 10:42-43--and Luke 22: 25-29.

So is the Bible wrong? Is the Bible inconsistent?

I don't think so!

The Bible lines up with itself--always--and it is our job to line up with IT--not try to make it “fit” with our ideas.

Maybe we ought to do some study of this verse...

1. the phrase “them that have the rule over”--is one Greek word..

hgeomai hegeomai {hayg-eh'-om-ahee}

- 1) to lead
- 1a) to go before
- 1b) to be a leader

As you can see, the word simply means leadership--someone who is leading others.

Exactly what is the definition of Christian leadership? Well, we have been studying it!

Who should define what Christian leadership ought to be?

How about Jesus!?

That same Greek word was used by Jesus in Luke 22:25-26...

“And he said unto them, **The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye *shall not be so*: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is **chief**, as he that doth serve.”**

The word translated here as “chief” is the Greek...

hgeomai hegeomai {hayg-eh'-om-ahee}

- 1) to lead
- 1a) to go before
- 1b) to be a leader

So, Jesus’ definition of Christian leadership is someone who does NOT exercise authority over others!

Hebrews 13:17A--The Mystery Solved!

What does Hebrews 13:17 say?

Let's first look at all the verse, not just part A!...

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”

Let's take it word by word...

“Obey”this Greek word actually means “to listen to”-- “be confident in someone”

“them that ave the rule over”.....we have already seen that Jesus has defined this as a servant, not a ruler.

“submit”

upotassw hupotasso {hoop-ot-as'-so}

- 1) to arrange under, to subordinate
- 2) to subject, put in subjection
- 3) to subject one's self, obey
- 4) to submit to one's control
- 5) to yield to one's admonition or advice
- 6) to obey, be subject

++++

A Greek military term meaning "to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader". In non-military use, it was "a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden".

”cooperate with”

submit is a word that has 2 distinct meanings. One is the military-like following of a leaders commands (obviously someone who is in authority!) But the second meaning has to be the Christian meaning--given all the Jesus taught about bearing one another's burdens and loving one another. This word “submit” means to cooperate with someone in a brotherly way.

Now let's do something no one does--read the rest of the verse!....

“.....for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”

Zero in on the word “account”--it is the Greek word “logos”

The logos--the written word of God.

Now, let's put it all together...

“Listen to those who serve you the Word of God, and cooperate with them--as this will benefit you”

This is what Hebrews 13:17 actually says!

This is really a very important message. Why? Well, it is saying that if you listen to the Word of God being served to you by another believer, it will benefit you.

Makes sense, certainly!

So many people go to church on Sunday and will tell you they received so much from the pastor, and they are right. The pastor has a ministry--usually pastors are gifted teachers. But it is his service, his ministry and the Word of God coming thru him that benefits you--NOT his “authority”!

Of course the pastor has ministry--but so do you!

To God, and the effective growth of His kingdom, it is vital for every ministry to be released and come under His authority!

This is what the Bible says about ministry.

Study for yourself.

