

God's Call to Ministry

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"Christ has given gifts unto men for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:8-13).

The question that always seems to be before us is whether men called of God are going to meet man's requirements or God's requirements. How are these men prepared for this ministry? What is needed, with regard to education? To answer these questions, we can only look to God and to the instruction He has given us in His Word.

It is God who calls, and it is God who prepares men to labor in His church. When the Lord calls men, He always reveals His purpose to them and gives them the grace to function in what He is building. In saying this, we must state that the building God is doing in the church is by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22). Christ gave gifts to men, and men with gifts of ministry are given to the church as channels for grace to flow to the body (church) from the ascended Christ.

Today, when a man is called of God, he is faced with a choice: either to let man prepare him for ministry, or to let God. Men who look to man and man's institutions will never be a gift to the church, because man in himself does not know what God is doing. If man does not see God's purpose, how can he be faithful to it, or have the ability to function in it together with others under the Holy Spirit? There can be no mixing of head knowledge with spiritual knowledge. What God is doing is *all* spiritual. Let us look at the spiritual work that God is doing in the world.

II Corinthians 3:3, *"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in the tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."* Verses 5-18: *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."*

"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious."

"Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

II Corinthians 4:1-2, *"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*

If we look to the religious system of our day as being any different than the religious system of Jesus' day, we are blinded. It is the same religious system and religious people that once cried out, "Crucify him!" What God is doing today, as in the past, is a living organization, not a religion with a form of godliness that denies the power of God. We must be able to discern the difference between what man is doing for God and what God is doing by His Spirit. To be able to do that, we must be spiritual, controlled and taught by the Spirit.

The Gospel We Preach - The Power of God Unto Salvation

What is the true gospel? If we are going to be faithful as ministers of the gospel, we must know what the gospel is. The gospel being preached in most of the fundamental groups of our day is nothing more than a "cheap believism," rather than the power of God unto salvation.

The religious world has redefined salvation, and most of what is being preached is not salvation at all. In many cases the salvation that is being preached leaves people in sin; but the salvation that God gives us in Christ saves and sets us free from sin. In most cases the salvation of man is according to the letter, rather than life by the Spirit. The salvation man preaches, which he says is by grace, is nothing more than a salvation of works. This is why we are saying that we must come back to God and His way of ministry, being called and prepared by God.

I Corinthians 2:11b-13, *"Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God: that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth: comparing spiritual things with spiritual."*

I Corinthians 2:4-7, *"And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."*

When Jesus was preparing to leave and go back to the Father, He told His disciples, *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things..."* (John 14:26). John 16:13 says, *"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..."* God has made full provision for the preparation of those He calls, and His provision is the Holy Ghost. The choice is still the same--God's way or man's way? Are we looking for the approval of man or God? Our choice will either throw us fully on the Lord, or right into man's institutions of higher religious learning.

The Training of a Minister

The religious system has training programs that are supposed to turn out ministers. But it does not matter whom the teachers or sponsors are or how good the program sounds; unless the Spirit is in control and doing both the building and the equipping for building, we are only working in the natural realm. Men can be most sincere, and seeing the need, but without the Holy Ghost in control, man is still just trying to do something for God.

With transportation being what it is today, men have brought men together from around the world, in order to equip those who would minister to do what the Holy Ghost alone can do. They have had schools in evangelism, congresses on evangelism, and many other good intentions, but are missing one thing--the Holy Ghost and God's plan. Many good men have had their minds corrupted by other well-meaning men moving in a natural way, blind to the true spiritual revelation of what God is doing Himself. God never gives the control of what He is doing into man's hands, in any area of His kingdom. God uses men, but never gives them control.

Jesus did not tell His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they finished Bible college; He commanded them to wait until they were filled with the Holy Ghost. Then, that still is not enough. Before we can labor, we must have God's ability with God's plan (revelation). Paul didn't go out and do what he wanted to do for God. The Spirit himself separated and prepared him for the work He had called him for. Why does a man think that because he sees the needs around him, he can go out and meet needs, without the Spirit's ability and timing? Jesus tells us that we can do nothing of ourselves. We must be abiding in the Vine, moving in union with God. This is the only way we are going to see fruit come forth that will be a glory to our heavenly Father.

Moses had the best education Egypt had to offer, but when it came to God's plan, it was God who instructed Moses and sent him to Pharaoh. Moses came before Pharaoh in the power and demonstration of God's working, not with the wisdom of man. What good would the education and wisdom of man do for Moses before Pharaoh? Moses was there by God's appointment and in God's power. Moses was not there to speak meaningless words or to tell Pharaoh a Bible story; he was there to speak for God.

We see another man called of God who already had the best education man could offer. Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and *"was taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the Fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day"* (Acts 22:3). Yet when he needed an education for the call Christ gave him, he did not go to man. Ananias was sent to speak to Paul, and this is what he said, *"The God of our Fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of His mouth"* (Acts 22:14).

Paul's own testimony was, *"The gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (Galatians 1:12). Paul didn't go to a religious school, but went to Arabia, and there he was taught and prepared by God for the work God had called him for. Then again Paul tells us plainly, *"And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"* (I Corinthians 2:4).

If we want God's results today, and want to see God's people brought to maturity and spirituality, there is only one way--God's way. God's ministers are those who are called and prepared by God; there are no exceptions. If you want to learn how to preach, then go to man. If you want to speak for God, you must come to Him. Man, with only his knowledge about church history, his schooling about the church and how to preach and how to evangelize, cannot know what the church is, or know the head of the church, Christ. I would not make a place for ignorance in ministry--all I am saying is that when it comes to God and His call, we cannot go to man to learn how to do what is spiritual. It all comes from God by His Spirit.

The apostle Paul couldn't possibly get into the religious clubs of our day. He had no degree. He was not Dr. Paul or Rev. Paul--he was just Brother Paul, one sent by God. He spoke for God. This is what preparation for the ministry is all about. In God's presence, we experience God by faith and become men with the revelation that is from God, with the living word burning in our hearts. God's ministers

are being trained in life, not in methods and theology. God's church must have the living bread; it must drink from the fountain that will never run dry. There must be rivers of living water flowing out from the church.

It is evident in all we see around us that we do not have many men called of God or prepared by God. If we did, we would clearly see the testimony of the oneness of the church. Jesus said, speaking to His Father, *"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou has loved me"* (John 17:22-23).

This is not the ecumenical movement of our day with its characteristic compromise, but true oneness that comes from obedience to His Word. This is the new and living way. It would seem that only severe persecution such as China has gone through is enough to purge man-made methods from the church and bring forth the testimony God has designed.

Functioning Together

At Antioch, there were prophets and teachers. This is what we need to see--that the Lord gave gifts to men. Here we see the two gifts that the Lord has given to His church in order that she might be built up and move together. The functioning of more than one gift together must be under the authority of the head, Christ, and moving under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The religious world has gone to the "one pastor system" because men are not in touch with God and thus cannot function together. God has never changed His plan, which is plurality of ministry as it was at Antioch. The church needs the ministry of both the prophet and the teacher for proper feeding, and that it might stay in the purpose of God. In almost every religious group, the ministry of the prophet has been done away with and the teacher has been placed in the Sunday school program.

This has been done because Christ no longer is head, and because the Holy Spirit has not been given His proper place in the church. Instead, men have been chosen by the members of a congregation to be pastors. In all these individual cases, men have taken control and then asked God to bless their plans and methods. But they have tried to use the right terms, and say that they have been led by the Spirit. In reality, this is not true, because if men were moving in God's purpose under the direction of the Spirit, we would see God's purpose revealed in the testimony He wants, and the church would be the light and salt she has been called to be. We don't see this taking place with the course the religious system is taking. The church will never be light and salt until man gives control back to the Head and until the power of the Holy Spirit is in the life of each member. It would take severe persecution to purge the religious system, to throw people back on God for their lives, and to bring the ordering of the church back under Christ who is her head.

Elders and Their Function

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God..." (Acts 20:28).

Let us look at what God's order is, pertaining to the elders of the local church. Overseers, or elders, must be ones whom the Holy Ghost has prepared and given grace to function. The responsibility of the church is to recognize what God has already done. When Paul gave the command to appoint elders in every church, he was saying that the church should point out those whom the Spirit had chosen and prepared. We must always remember that nothing spiritual is done in the church separately from the head, Christ. We must see God's ordering in the church.

This means that our religious concepts of what elders and pastors are must be destroyed, along with the way we may view religion all around us. Man's ways and methods can never bring the church to maturity or to any degree of spirituality. It takes men called of God, and grace working in them, to see the wisdom of God revealed in a many-membered body.

For anyone to submit to God's order, they first must know what the order is, and that can only be seen in God's Word by those who are spiritual. But there is a place where all may start, and that is with a true hunger for God and for the reality of the new and living way. When we want God with our whole hearts, we will be willing to lay aside our programs, our concepts and our own ordering of the church--the calling of pastors and many other things that are done by man--in order to see God and His working returned to the midst. If man is not willing to seek God with his whole heart, he will not find Him. Half-heartedness always settles for the natural working of man, because the natural man does not know the things of God.

In the two places in the New Testament where ordaining of elders is spoken of, it is always more than one elder that is recognized. Acts 14:23 says, "*They had ordained them elders in every church...*" and in Titus 1:5, Paul is moving in God's order when he says to "*ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.*" When Paul called the leaders (elders) at Ephesus to meet with him at Miletus, it was not one elder, but more than one. We should note that it was not the pastor of Ephesus that Paul wanted to meet with, but the *elders* of Ephesus. Ephesus did have pastors--they were the elders, who are also called overseers.

Acts 20:28-32 gives us understanding in the grace that is to be moving through elders (or pastors, overseers, bishops). Their function, or the grace that is given them, is to be responsible for the feeding of the church of God. They are like shepherds to the sheep, leading them in green pastures where they may feed.

The church belongs to God; He has purchased it with His own blood, and remains the Great Shepherd of the sheep. Now, the elders are to watch over the flock; they are to have the oversight. They are watching to see that the believers do not feed on the wrong things, or that men do not enter in to draw away disciples after themselves. Paul calls them all brethren, and commends them "*to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*"

Elders are called to serve--not to "lord it over" or have a special place of recognition. The elders are brethren among the brethren. They do need to be recognized, not for what they are, but for the grace that flows from them to the flock of God. "*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves*" (I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Recognition is for the purpose of partaking of the supply that the Lord has for each member of the church. If the members of a local body are not spiritually alive, they cannot feed from His word that is being ministered. When the members are alive, they know that the Lord himself feeds them. The word may come through a brother with a ministry, but it is the anointing that teaches us and allows us to grow spiritually.

The Minister's Responsibility

We have talked about the need to know those who labor among us; now let us look at the responsibility of the ministers, with grace to serve Christ in life. There is a great need for ministers to be able to discern the spiritual needs of the church, and to be seeing the same goal. After they see the needs, they must function together to supply the needs. Every need can be summed up in one, and that is to know God in the area of need. Before this can be supplied, each brother who has a gift of ministry must be prepared.

This preparation is not natural, but spiritual. The preparing is done in the presence of God, that the word of ministry might be a ministry of faith. The brethren must be given a place in which to respond to God. That is what ministry should be doing--constantly bringing the hearer to a place of response to God. Faith comes from hearing God, and faith is also our response to God in obedience.

There is no way for the believer to attain to and prove his union with God's will, except by obedience. In this walk of faith, there is no place for reasoning. Every response to the word of the Lord is obedience. All of us are to live this life of faith.

Time must be spent in the presence of God. Preparation must be made in His Word as the Spirit makes it alive to us. The Word must be delivered in life. The minister is to speak as an oracle of God, in the ability the Spirit gives. These truths are set out for us in I Peter 4:10-11: *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in ail things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever."*

The minister is a steward of the gift of grace. There is one thing that is needful in stewardship, and that is faithfulness. Everything in the functioning of ministry must be under the direction of the Spirit. It is when the Spirit directs and the minister is faithful that he will be ready to function, having been prepared in the presence of God.

There are many responsibilities that go with spiritual ministry. The ministry (all gifts of grace and leadership) must be moving together to build up the church, and they must be moving together with knowledge. The word of God must be alive in you and real to you by the Spirit at the time of sharing or ministry. The message must be new and living at all times. Each minister must be spiritually alive, able to discern the capacity of the hearers. He must know when the word has been given, and whether there is a need for more building in an area.

We all need to realize that there is very little reason for the church to come together if there is to be no strong ministry to feed, challenge, and inspire. God's speaking to us through ministry should dominate, master, and unify. The functional union of Christ with His body is essential. It is essential to Him for the fulfillment of His purpose, and to us for the fulfillment of our very lives as Christians.

The Source of Ministry

The minister's life must be not only prepared, but also filled. Ministry always comes from the overflow. It is what God has given to the minister, not just for himself, but for others to partake of.

Paul said that he was a master builder. He laid the foundation, the only foundation, which is Christ. Then he cautioned all ministry to beware how they built upon that foundation. By this we can say that ministers are builders in their function. They are channels by which Christ may supply to the church all that He is and can do. There must be an outworking of His purpose in union with God. We can do

nothing of ourselves; it must be God working in and through us. It must be the new and living way--the heavenly walk down here.

We must all be ministers of faith, for faith sees the possibilities and then walks in them, always remembering that it is Christ who gives and maintains His life within us. Our life must be all faith. There can be no place for natural ability or thinking in the life of the minister. Faith is making way for God and giving Him the place to work all things.

Ministry has three vital elements: seeing, experiencing, and anointing. Seeing must be with the capacity to minister to others. The minister must be experiencing what he is seeing, or his ministry will be only in theory and not from the presence of God. The anointing must be on both the word that is brought and the time in which it is brought. We need God's timing. As we go on to function, we will see how important God's timing is. Ministry must be faithful to the Lord at all times, patient but diligent.

The minister must be mindful that anything that issues from the natural or soulish realm defiles the church. This can only be avoided when ministry is moving together under the Head, and by His Spirit being able together to recognize the fruits of spiritual ministry. There is one fruit we can look for in the lives of believers--growth in knowing Him.

We see that ministry must be bringing forth the message out of the same revelation of God's plan, and moving in the same direction. If ministry is under the direction of the Spirit, it will function together in harmony, seeing lives changed and being able to function together--*"fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love"* (Ephesians 4:16).

All ministry must come forth from the revelation. If ministry is not coming forth from God's revelation to men's hearts, it is not under the control of the Spirit, and will not build. If the oversight allows that kind of ministry to go on without correcting it, the Spirit can be grieved, and confusion brought to the direction the church is taking. Ministry must be pulling together. Where the Spirit is in control, there is liberty--liberty to move together in the will of God.

Ministry must be tolerant, but without compromise. This can be possible only in the Spirit. When we are single-eyed, the body is full of light. Different ministries can be recognized by the members when they are receiving light and are able to move in faith. The Spirit within each member gives witness to the words of life.

Stewardship

Ministry called of God demands 100 percent involvement in the fulfillment of its stewardship--the stewardship of the grace the minister has been given and is moving in. A minister cannot be halfhearted in his commitment. Only the valiant in faith move into the kingdom of God and know God's rest. The rest of God is a place where man has ceased from all self-effort, and God is laboring. Everything is being done in faith and in union with God. Ministry must remember that Jesus never moved separately from the Father. Ministry cannot move separate from the Spirit.

The goal of ministry is to see each member brought to the place of responsible action and response in the life of God, and moving together. Only the Spirit can teach us the ministry of life. The ministry of life is not just ministering the word. It is ministering life by the word. Only life can bring forth life, after its own kind.

Many today have put much value in their knowledge of history, Hebrew, Greek, customs and so forth, but these still fail to bring forth a ministry of life. If all scriptures are given by God, it doesn't matter whether they are written in Hebrew, Greek or English. The Spirit is the one that must give us understanding of His living Word.

If you want to be recognized by man, you must look to man, receive his approval, and be qualified according to his standard. But if you want God's approval, you must look to God and fulfill His qualifications. If you are called to work in His church, you must meet God's requirements. Of course if you have been called by men to work in their so-called churches, you must meet their standards and receive their approval.

Therefore, to work in God's church, you need to be qualified in Christ. He is our wisdom, our understanding, and our ability to minister life. You must continue to look to God and know that His order is divine and heavenly, not just a gathering of people in some group down here on earth. God's working is beautiful to behold. God's wisdom will be given by His Spirit, so that His eternal plan may be accomplished. God gives a gift, a ministry, and a message to those He calls. God builds His church in the hearts of His ministers. Through His ministers He brings His church to the fullest expression of His life. He gives power to minister His word. The Spirit's work is to reveal a full expression of the Son. *"Till we all come...unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ "* (Ephesians 4:13).

God's Call to Ministry

I Corinthians 12:28 tells us, *"God hath set some in the church..."* You must decide whom you are going to work for and from whom you will receive your pay. Man's ways have no place in the body of Christ. You may behold the best that man can produce, but it is not and never can be part of God's ministry, *"workmen created unto every good work by His Spirit."* Let us take the "weak things" and let God's grace and power make the difference. They will, if you will only have faith, and you must have faith to please God. The way of faith is narrow. It is God's word. His word is the only place in which faith can find expression.

If God is moving in your heart, you have a choice to make: whether to take the lowly way, or man's way. Has God really called, and are you satisfied to minister just to Him and not be seen or recognized of men? Remember, if God has called you, you have been called to labor according to His divine order. It is the Lord who is building His church.

With every call comes wisdom and knowledge that is from above. God's ministry must see His plan, not just the need. Too many men called of God have gone on to try to work in their own ability to meet the need as they see it or as their group directs, but they have missed God and His purpose. Yes, many meet the great needs, but are those needs the needs of God's heart, fulfilled when God directs? Can we truthfully say that God must support our program, or is it His program that He upholds and says the gates of hell shall not prevail against? There can be no expression of His church, unless God gives that expression.

Is the call only what man has called you to do? Have men appealed to your senses, or has God called you by His Spirit? When God calls and sends forth, all work is by the Spirit. If there is not a divine call from God, it is impossible for us to work in God's plan as a minister under His divine authority.

All God's working is supernatural. Anything done apart from the Spirit's ability will not build in God's eternal purpose. Every word, every movement, every work begun or finished must be by the specific direction of the Spirit. If God is not directing our walk by His Spirit today, there is no value in our

labor.

Each member of the body must hear God, because hearing God is the beginning of faith. His speaking to us is what gives us the ability to do His work. There must also be a continuing in God's word. God is speaking to us *now* by His Spirit, if we have life in Him. If we fail to move in what God is saying right now, we are not moving in faith.

With God's call comes His direction: when to work, what to do, where to do it, how to do it. This is working on and in the building that God is building. God has a special way of seeing to it that nothing foreign can be built into His building. His building is controlled by the hearing of His word, the way of faith.

God has only one building. It is His glorious church according to His divine plan and order. Let us clear out the rubbish, that we may not be found working in our own building, but that God may use those He calls to be workmen in His eternal purpose.