

TEAM MINISTRY in the Local Church

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“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:11-13

FIVE FOLD MINISTERS WORKING TOGETHER

In all aspects of leading the Church, the Five Fold Ministers (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) are to be collaborative and mutually submitted to each other in stewarding the Vision of the Church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAM

For men to play on a football team, much more is required of them than to pass a physical fitness test. While a strong physique and great endurance are very important, their real strength lies in how efficiently they will work together as a team according to the rules of the game.

Without the closest cooperation and total harmony, that team will not go very far.

Likewise, in Kingdom expansion, men need to demonstrate more than Bible verses or spiritual principles, they must learn to cooperate together and become collaborative with their gifts and strategies the Lord has given them.

JESUS EXAMPLE OF TRAINING:

Jesus said to twelve men, “Come after me and I will make you to BECOME fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17). Through His life and example, Jesus trained and mentored these men to be effective workers in the kingdom of God.

The ratio of all our teaching, and men ‘becoming’ is very much out of balance.

If a boy is to learn to fish, we do not give him a rod, a reel, a line, a sinker, a hook and some bait, and tell him to “Go do it”. No! We take him out to the lake, show him how to put the gear together, how to bait the hook, how to cast the line, and when and how to pull in the fish.

It is not enough to tell people how important is it to become a fisher of men, nor to inform them of the techniques to catch fish. The important thing is to show people, by example, how to reach people.

All men who play on a football team know their primary objective is to score touchdowns. They must learn to protect the quarterback as he initiates plays. They learn to make a way through the opposing line for their ball carrier. They must learn to protect and support the man who makes end runs, and the man who catches the forward pass.

Additionally, every man must fully understand the function of his position, how to relate to the other members of the team, what to do if a man makes a mistake by overplaying his position, or not doing his part fully. He must know how to meet his opponents, and how to respond to those who cheat or do not play fairly.

Men in Team Ministry in the body of Christ must know the function of their position, and how to relate to their partner in his position. They must know how to fill-in if a partner makes a mistake, goes beyond his responsibility, or fails as some point. Above all things, they must practice love, and maintain a right attitude in every situation.

Leadership should give demonstration to team ministry in every area of ministry in the church. With clear understanding that all men must be saved, one would suppose that Jesus would have called many more than twelve men. But He understood that He could effectively train only a small group. One man can preach to many thousands at one time and lead them into salvation, but to lead people into maturity, one can only minister effectively one on one or in a small group.

Jesus said, "Come" to twelve men, and lived with them in daily, personal, intimate relationship. After three years he said, "Go" to those men, and sent them out, two by two, to preach the gospel. (Mark 6:7) Later he appointed other seventy, and sent them out also, two by two. (Luke 10:1)

WHY TWO?

Why did Jesus limit himself to teams in the face of such tremendous need everywhere? He could have covered twice as much territory by sending men out one by one to different places. Deuteronomy 32:30 ("How could one man chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight...") tells us that two have five times as much strength as one.

Two can give a more complete demonstration of the Christian life than one.

Two can minister more effectively to special and difficult needs than one.

Two can support and uphold one another under pressure.

Two can be checks and balances to each other.

If one begins to fall prey to temptation or error the other can correct him.

If one fails to respond to correction, so that disciplinary action becomes necessary, two or more people are required as witnesses so that every word may be established. (Matthew 18: 16).

Even in as simple a matter as borrowing a colt for his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples to get the colt. Matthew 21:1-11.

From Matthew 18:19-20 ("... if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.") we see the importance of praying together. When church issues arise, many times people are praying independently and sometimes even against each other, rather than being in agreement and in unity.

BIBLE SCHOOLS

Jesus spent about three years training His disciples to become fishers of men. Because of that precedent, many men across the land have opened three year Bible Schools to train students for service. Comprehensive Bible study is always a plus, but in the final analysis; it is not how much a man knows about Church History, about the Bible, or even about God. It is the measure in which that individual knows God personally and intimately. It is the implementation of spiritual principles into practical daily living that will determine the measure of his effectiveness in ministry. (Philippians 3:10)

Jesus also clearly demonstrated the ideal during and after training, of sending out His followers two by two. On one occasion He sent out His disciples two by two to minister (Mk. 6:7). On another occasion He sent out seventy two by two. (Luke 10:1). In most Bible schools today after training (and often ordination) they are sent out individually to minister. Two have much greater strength than one.

APOSTOLIC TRAINING AND RELEASE:

Unfortunately there is little recognition for the need of apostolic and prophetic oversight in the Church today. Paul set an example by training and then ordaining Timothy. He then told Timothy to reach faithful men who in turn would teach others also. (II Timothy 2:2).

The Lord has only one body... the Church. If there is any malfunction in our human body, it is not long until weakness and sickness set in. There is much weakness in the body of Christ today. Instead of all flowing together harmoniously in the bond of love, disagreements and differences have split the Church into many splinters.

The growth and expansion of the church is to come by being knit together and sharing in the work of the Lord. (Ephesians 4:16) Those who move out into new fields should have the full blessing and support of the sending body, both in prayer and finances.

In the church at Antioch, they were fasting and ministering unto the Lord. (Acts 13:1, 2) The Holy Spirit told them to separate Barnabus and Saul for the work He was calling them to. They fasted and prayed some more, laid hands on them, and sent Barnabus and Saul out as the first official missionaries of the Church.

The Holy Spirit was following the pattern set up by Jesus- sending out ministers two by two.

THE FIVE FOLD MINISTRY

In Luke 6:13 Jesus calls his disciples together, chooses twelve, and called them Apostles... sent out ones.

He gave them all the same power to do the same things. The twelve were to cast out unclean spirits, heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. (Matthew 10:1)

They were to preach, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." They were to cleanse the lepers and raise the dead. (Matthew 10: 7, 8)

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost. The Lord began to make provision for the growth and expansion of the Church. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:8-11, when the Lord ascended up on high He gave five ministry gifts to the church.

Today these men are recognized around the world. Their ordination gives them authority to fulfill all the functions of Church life. By virtue of their office, the government grants them certain privileges and exemptions.

These men are no longer classified in the general terms as 'sent out ones' but are given five distinct ministries as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers.

Combined, they fulfill that which is necessary to bring the Church into full maturity. (Ephesians 4:11-13). It is not within the capacity of one man to fulfill the full purpose of the Lord in the Church. If one could do it all, the other four ministries would not be needed. They would become superfluous.

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

Paul told the Church at Ephesus they are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:19, 20).

In the building world, everything depends on a good solid foundation. This is especially true with our modern high-rise structures. It is most important that architects calculate accurately the total weight of the building, plus the stress and strain that can come from violent winds. The foundation must be laid, accordingly, so as to hold the building under great stress.

Likewise it is necessary that gifted men lay a strong foundation for a new church so that in the days to come the Church will be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil.

The apostle Paul said that apostles and prophets have God given insight that other ministers do not have. (Ephesians 3:3-5).

How are these men to be recognized? The Bible says a man's gift makes room for him. (Proverbs 18:16). That is, they will be identified by their service to the body and the anointing on their ministry.

APOSTLE

The apostle is set in the church by the Lord. (Ephesians 4:8-11). Men cannot vote him into that position. They need to recognize what God has already made clear through the man's life and ministry. Paul said he was called by God to be an apostle. (Galatians 1:1, 15). They are identified by other leaders. Paul saw qualities in Timothy, trained him and ordained him. The leaders in Jerusalem saw the leadership in Paul and extended the right hand of fellowship to him. (Acts 16:1-3, Galatians 2:9).

First came the recognition, then ordination through the laying on of hands and prophecy. (I Timothy 1:18, 4; 14, II Timothy 1:6).

Paul said he was a wise foundation layer. He began the work in Corinth. Others continued to finish the work. (I Corinthians 3:10).

One strength of the apostle lies in his gift of administration. The ability to draw people together around a common vision and set goals and objectives for Kingdom life.

PROPHET

The prophet is set in the Church by the Lord. (Ephesians 4:8-11). He is a man of authority. John the Baptist challenged the sincerity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He also directly confronted King Herod. (Matthew 3:7-11).

The prophet foretells future events. In Acts 11:28 Agabus told of a great famine that should come to the entire world. It came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

He is also spiritually perceptive. He sees things in the Spirit that others do not normally see. (I Samuel 9:9, 15-20. Ephesians 3:4, 5)

Amos 3:7 says God does nothing but He reveals it to his servants the prophets.

The ideal ministry is for an apostle and a prophet to work together as a team. The apostle draws the people together and the prophet establishes them in the Word. It was not by accident that Paul, the apostle, and Barnabus, the prophet, became the first official missionaries of the church. (Acts. 13:1, 2).

Several years later Paul and Barnabas had a serious disagreement over John Mark. They parted company because Barnabas insisted on taking John Mark. Paul did not go on alone because Barnabas left him. He chose Silas, another prophet, to be in a team with him. Barnabas choose John Mark and they also traveled and ministered together as a team.

EVANGELIST

The evangelist is an anointed communicator that has a simple message of salvation. Through his personality and preaching people are drawn to the gospel message. He has a home church from which he is often released for evangelistic meetings or crusades.

PASTOR

The pastor functions as a shepherd that gives oversight, spiritual nourishment and care to the congregation. He has a deep concern for right relationships to be maintained within the church.

The pastor has a genuine concern for every family in the church. He brings regular messages from God's Word to the congregation and on occasion must bring a word of admonition or rebuke. He performs dedications, marriages and funerals for those in his sphere of love and influence.

TEACHER

The teacher is responsible for the systematic instruction from the Word of God. The teacher does not seek to establish principles of conduct from one or two isolated texts. He compares Scripture with Scripture on a given subject and bases his conclusion on the whole content of truth relative to the subject. He has the ability in God to explain the Word simply and clearly.

Teaching, normally, does not produce signs and wonders. Only over a long period of faithful teaching will he see gradual changes in lives. It is a great consolation to know that a man is not rewarded for accomplishments, but for faithfulness. (I Corinthians 4: 12, Matthew 25:21).

GIFTINGS & EXPRESSIONS

God's sovereignty gives to the five fold ministers different ways to express their calling. This accounts for a variety of manifestations among men with the same calling. Personality also is part of the equation.

One apostle also has an anointing in evangelism.

Another apostle has a strong teaching ministry.

Another apostle serves pastorally in a local church

Paul told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. (II Timothy 4:5). That did not make him an evangelist. He did it as part of his apostleship. These 'additional' giftings are only in limited measure. They do not overshadow his apostleship. They enhance it

One prophet may have an anointing in evangelism

Another prophet has an administrative gift
One teacher may be involved in evangelism
Another teacher may have a pastoral heart ...
One evangelist may also have a strong teaching ministry.
Another evangelist visits and cares for the people ...
The pastor, along with the cares of the people, also does some evangelizing ...

ELDER AS a DESIGNATION:

On most any subject there are two or more schools of thought. How can this be when they all go to the Greek as their authority? In the English dictionary one finds several words are used to give the full meaning of a word. The same is true in Strong's Greek dictionary of the New Testament.

In Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:28 where the five ministry gifts to the Church are first introduced, they are not referred to as elders. In Titus 1:5-9 and I Timothy 3:1-13 where elders are first mentioned, there is no reference to five ministry gifts.

The elders are called bishops and deacons. The term 'elder' is a designation. It says a person is in a place of responsibility. The office, or function, or the responsibility is described as that of a bishop or a deacon.

Today the ordination of the five ministry gifts is recognized around the world. They are granted special privileges and exemptions. When a minister leaves a Church, he takes his ordination with him.

Local Elders are not a Church board that runs or controls the affairs of the Church. Local elders cooperate with the five fold ministry in stewarding the Vision of the local church. They serve only in the local congregation. When they leave that church, they leave their eldership behind.

Apart from the fact that a bishop must be 'apt to teach', there is virtually no difference in the list of qualifications for a bishop and a deacon. (I Timothy 3:1-13). Although their character qualities are virtually the same, there is a difference in service. The Bishop is concerned more with the spiritual care of the people and the Deacon serves more in the area of meeting physical needs and administration in the church.

The Bible speaks of bishops and deacons. Somewhere along the line a change has taken place. Today many churches have elders and deacons. But an elder is a designation, not an office.

Many pastors and Churches have the elder (bishop) on an elevated position in comparison to the deacon. Scriptural usage is the most convincing evidence on any subject.

It is generally understood that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 were deacons. The ministry of Stephen, (Acts 6:7) and Philip, (Acts 21:8) (both deacons) demonstrate the anointing and responsibility this calling can develop into.

COVER TERMS:

Many differences of understanding come because we do not compare Scripture with Scripture in the light of the principles of interpretation.

We have already stated the primary references to elders are Bishops and Deacons. In I Peter 5:1 the apostle Peter, while addressing elders, says he is also an elder. From this scripture, we may deduct that all men in the five ministry offices can also be described as elders, but not all elders are in the five ministry gifts.

There was a Church council meeting in Jerusalem on the subject of circumcision. After many had shared their views, James came through with the word of the Lord. It was received and confirmed. Acts 15:22 says there were three groups who were present: apostles, elders, and the whole church.

If the whole Church was there, it is only natural to believe the five ministry gifts were all there. Apostles were mentioned in verse 22 and prophets in verse 32

We discover usage in the Bible reveals cover terms. Instead of Paul saying it pleased the apostles and prophets and evangelists, and pastors and teachers and bishops and deacons, he says it pleased the apostles, using the cover term for the five ministry gifts, and elders, using the cover term for the bishops and deacons. (Acts 15:22)

Is it all that important that we keep all our terminology straight? If it were not important the Lord would not have identified these two groups separately.

Moreover, if we intend to send out teams in the days to come, it is necessary that we know in which category a man is, and what his giftings are, so he can be properly joined with another man in a team, whether it is among the fivefold ministry, or even among elders working in the local church.

There is much more involved in team ministry than for two or more men agreeing to work together. There needs to be a joining together in spirit, a common vision and trust established.

CHOOSING TEAMS:

We have previously seen that the apostle and prophet working together are a powerful team in church planting and oversight. It is equally necessary that the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher be working together, in some combination, as a team in the building of the church.

In as much as no two congregations have the same need, the combination of ministry will vary accordingly. If the personnel of a congregation changes, ministries may change also. Teams are not chosen on the basis of camaraderie, but by the direct leading of the Spirit. Normally, men on a team will have complementary gifts. They become a mutual strength to each other as they press on together in the Vision God has given. Teams are not limited to two men. Paul traveled in a company of men. At one point he was concerned because, "Only Luke is with me." (II Timothy 4:11).

As the work of the local church grows- more men with complimentary gifting need to be added to the team. Proverbs 11:14 says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." As the five ministry gifts seek only the glory of God, they will know, by the Spirit, what men should team together.

TERMINOLOGY:

We need to be fully aware that any terminology and any structure can be misunderstood. It is not primarily the terminology that empowers teams. It is rather the faith and love of those joined together, that makes all the difference and sustains spiritual life.

MINISTERS AND ASSOCIATES:

Many men say they are in a team ministry. They have associates working with them. Strictly speaking, an associate is not of equal status with the pastor. He has lesser responsibility. Consequently they are not a team in the full sense of the word.

When Jesus sent out his apostles, two by two, there is no inference that one was the pastor, and the other the associate. One was not the senior pastor and the other a pastor.

When Paul and Barnabus were sent out by the church, Paul was not the pastor and Barnabus the associate or assistant. They were of equal status. In I Corinthians 12:28 when Paul said, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teacher, he was not talking of rank, but order. The apostle is not at the top of the ladder with the others somewhere below him. He is the first one to go through the door. He is the spokesman, the chairman, the leader. The word of God is very clear. We are members, one of another, not over each other. (Romans 12:5)

Jesus soundly rebuked those who aspired for position. (Matthew 20:20-28). The New Testament is very conspicuous for its absence of any rank among the leadership. Jesus was servant to all. (Luke 22:27).

CO-EQUAL LEADERS?

Because we do not leave room for rank in the leadership of the church, some conclude we are projecting, 'Co-equal Eldership' (no leadership among the five ministry gifts). Not at all! Co – equal eldership can take up much time and bring confusion and frustration while decisions are being reached as to who should lead the next service, the next event, or order of business.

While little children meet on a playground it takes only a few minutes until one emerges as a leader. In all the various functions of our society there is a chairman or leader to bring and keep order throughout that event.

LEADERSHIP:

When the Apostle and Prophet are working as a team, laying the foundation of a church, the apostle is the leader, and also fulfills the function of the pastor. When his ministry is fulfilled the normal procedure is to find a man with the shepherd's heart to succeed him, to lead and co-ordinate the work, and if possible, work closely with one or more men of equal stature; each man recognizing his divinely appointed ministry.

If a pastor is not available, those with spiritual oversight should look to the Lord to find who should fill that office until a pastor is located or raised up in the local church.

The bottom line is that the leader does not dominate, or control, or issue orders, but in the humility of Christ, works as a servant (Luke 22:27) in full harmony with the team, co-coordinating the affairs of the church and ministering to the spiritual needs of the people.

CONTINUING THE VISION

So that new works may be raised up in the days to come, the Lord requires those serving in the five fold ministry to observe the lives of young men and women they come in contact with in the local church. They seek to discover their gifting by the revelation of the Spirit, by their general conduct and attitude, and by their response to opportunities for ministry. As they respond to the Lord and the local leadership in serving the church, they may become local elders and eventually candidates for five fold ministry.

EXPECTATIONS:

In the church, as in many other endeavors of life, the question often arises, how does this 'team ministry' concept practically work? What should be my expectations? What are my specific responsibilities? How much input do I have or should I have in affairs of the church?

There are no simple answers to those questions. There is not a template we can apply since ministering in a team is out of a calling from the Lord and a mutual submission and respect for one another. When Love is our motive and the Kingdom advancement our goal, team ministry on all the different levels of church leadership will be fruitful and blessed by the Lord.

CLOSING SCRIPTURES:

Ephesians 4:1-3 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”

Ephesians 5:1, 2 “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. ² And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma”

Ephesians 5:21 “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Philippians 2:2, 3 “fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. ³ *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”

Note: Much of this material is taken and revised from the teaching ministry of Vernice Smith

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