

THE NEW AGE AND THE NEW CHURCH

Before the Lord's coming the church must be restored to power and credibility and to the "true ministry" of the church. This "true ministry" means that all the believers are equipped to do the ministry. EPH 4:11] And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **[12] for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.** [14] As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; [15] but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Since 1970 we have heard these scriptures preached from about every viewpoint and emphasis but the "saints" have still not been equipped to do "the ministry". The church has not yet "attained to the unity of the faith" or "the full knowledge of the Son of God" or "grown up to all the fulness of Christ". We have not yet seen "the proper working of each individual part" or "the growth of the body to the building up of itself in love".

Surely the church described in the Book of Ephesians must be restored before the great and terrible day of the Lord. She surely must become a church without spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless. If the "ministries" which is called "the five-fold ministry" is actually functioning according to Ephesians 11 then the church would look different, act different and function differently and be doing the ministry and fulfilling the rest of these scriptures.

The question that I am asking and the one that concerns me is this: Will God restore the church to this "ministry" in our lifetime. Is this time now upon us? The fact is that God has never changed His plan or methods. It is the church that has decided upon a "better way" that has miserably failed.

"The five-fold ministry" is certainly not a one man ministry but is a "team effort". I am a little weary of all the articles and messages now popular about the "five-fold ministry" because after 30 years of "revelation" we have not seen the church grow up in all things. She is still tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and in some juvenile state. It should be clear that something is wrong. These 5 ministries are not just to do the ministry but to equip the saints to do the ministry. However, these 5 ministries have been so busy "doing the ministry" that they have no time to "equip the saints so they can do the ministry". Instead the "work of the preparing the saints for service" has been relegated to institutions of higher learning and Bible schools. These "professors" are, in the most part, not of "the five-fold ministries".

The lukewarm condition of the church and the lack of preparation for the ministry is the scandal of this and past generations. The church generally has been "observers of the ministry" rather than "participants in the ministries".

With all the emphasis upon the five-fold ministry we have to wonder what happened to the eight-fold ministry in 1 Cor 12:28. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. [29] All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? [30] All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? [31] But earnestly desire the greater gifts.

This diversity of a local assembly is requisite for the local assembly to function in the New Covenant way. There is no thought here of a one man ministry or of a “pastor” run church. There is no thought of a “observer” type church where the “ministry” is done from a pulpit. We are not suggesting the pulpit type ministry is wrong but is surely mis-placed on Sunday morning unless this meeting is designed to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. Then those who equip must be a team and not a single ministry.

ACTS 13:1 Now there were at Antioch, **in the church that was there, prophets and teachers:** Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. These were not special ministries that were sent in by Jerusalem to equip the saints but were those “in the church” and were raised up by God in the church. These were not “traveling ministries”. We are not suggesting that there are no traveling and equipping ministries but that these ministries are not always traveling. There must be equipping ministries in every local assembly and not just a “pastoral ministry” by one man. The very term “Apostle” means one who is sent and therefore refers to one who travels. However, as we see in the book of Acts the Apostles returned to the local assembly that sent them out. It is clear that they remained there for some time functioning in the local assembly, probably as prophets or teachers according to their original call.

In 1 Cor 12:28 we see God has set first Apostles, second Prophets and thirdly teachers in the local assembly. Since “one who is sent” also functions in the local assembly as “one who stays” it must be that the Apostle has a stationary ministry of preparing the saints for the work of the ministry in addition to starting missionary churches.

The context of 1 COR 12 and chapter 14 is the functioning of the body of Christ and suggests that every member is actively functioning in some ministry to the other members. For that to happen effectively it is necessary for every member to be equipped and growing. To just sit in a pew and listen to a message is not equipping the saints. Preaching a message is a far cry from discipling the church and preparing the members to be ministers.

Most every system that has evolved in the church has resulted in some perversion of God’s plan and purpose for the ministries. Many church systems have prevented the equipping of the saints simply because that raises up competition for :”the pastoral ministry”. God’s plan is not to raise up a pastoral person but to raise up a pastoral [body] church where every member is helping someone in their spiritual life.

Since “the ministries” have not functioned according to God’s plan, God has raised up many

“para-church ministries” that are helping people outside the organized church. Some of these ministries are functioning in factories, banks, hospitals, offices and on the streets. Many of these are true “pastors” and lay down their lives for the sheep. Even if the “professional ministries” refuse to acknowledge those ministries we can see that God is honoring them. These “new ministries” are prophetic and are speaking of the wave of the future. God will establish the Antioch church again as He did over and over in the Charismatic movement but with more clarity and power. The “home church movement” is also prophetic and has been confirmed by God to be His doing. Only a small part of Jesus’ ministry was in the synagogue. Most was in homes, on the streets and on the country side or by the sea. Ministry in a church building is surely not wrong and will be confirmed as the place to equip the saints. However, the homes will also provide a place to equip the saints but will be limited to a fewer number because of the lack of space. Even after the revival is in full swing the homes will be a necessary place of equipping the saints because of the need to travel to a church building.

I think it is necessary to make a distinction between equipping the saints and preparing leaders for the continuity and government of the church. The Biblical way of raising up leaders is through leadership discipleship. This is still beyond equipping the saints to do the ministry and corresponds with the requirements of elders and deacons. Beyond this there is the equipping of those who will equip the saints or the raising up of the five-fold ministries. The institutional preparation has not produced effective ministries in any of these categories.

The main purpose of all this “correction” is to prepare a people that can really “meet with God”. It is obvious that God will meet with people anywhere that people are diligently seeking Him. That means homes, factories, offices, banks, farms or parks. God doesn’t just dwell in buildings made with hands but in hearts that are totally surrendered to Him. That certainly doesn’t mean that God doesn’t meet with people in church buildings. It really has nothing to do with where but with whom. Those whose hearts are totally fixed upon Him can expect God to show up for the meeting regardless of where it is held or with how many.

Some are predicting that the time has come for the equipping of the saints to be done in the great conferences that are so plentiful today. Does that mean that “the saints” of New Philadelphia must travel to some large city and stay for several days to be equipped? God’s way must be more practical than that. It seems that this emphasis is to equip out of the local assembly. Of course if the local assembly is not open to equipping ministries God can surely provide for the work to be done outside the local assembly. This may, of course, be necessary because of the “protection” of the one man ministries and the lack of vision for the fulness of the preparation of the saints.

My understanding is that the equipping of the saints must be done at least in a geographical location that is accessible to the believers in that location. Equipping one church group at the exclusion of the others cannot be God’s plan. Unfortunately, in the beginning, the “other ministries” appear to be grossly weird and extreme because of what has been “normal” for so long. The equipping of the saints must obviously flow into the entire life of the local churches for any drastic change to take place. Another doctrine of equipping will just produce another disappointment.

Most of what will soon be restored to the church must be entered into by faith. Those who want to wait and see first, will be passed over now as in the past. Any church group that is hostile to the newest move of God will grow colder and colder and farther from the manifest presence of God. We are better off to depart from any church that is not on fire for God, Himself. All the methods and programs of the past will be ineffective in flowing with the restoration that is upon us. If we are only willing to give the Lord a few minutes of "our time" on the week ends when it is convenient we are lukewarm and will certainly be passed over in this restoration. His bride will have no priorities that take president over Him. The option open to us today is "GET HOT" because cold will not cut it! Returning to first love is our only option now!