

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: June 1, 2008

A Biblical Definition of Ministry

by Dan Trygg

“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 (ministry), to the building up of the Body of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11,12

“...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 what 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.” Ephesians 4:15,16

What is a "minister"? In the Biblical understanding of the term, a "minister" was simply a servant. There was no clergy in the early church, although there were men and women who were gifted and called by God to serve Him as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. These particular giftings were aimed toward preparing other people in the Body of Christ for work of service (Eph. 4:11,12). **There are certain people whose calling in service requires them to speak, teach, lead by example, counsel and give exhortation to assist others in developing their walk with God,** ...especially in getting these *other* people equipped for, discovering, and actively stepping into the opportunities for service which the Master has for *them*. Some of these “influencers-of-others” may be carrying out their function in a very informal, almost invisible, way in their network of relationships, while others feel God propelling them into a more visible role. Some may continue their function while being employed in other jobs in the business world (so-called "tent-making ministry" -- cf. Acts 18:1-3; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:6-12), while others are directed to leave their other employment to devote their time and energies more directly and completely toward developing people for the cause of Christ (so-called "vocational ministry", or "faith ministry" -- cf. I Cor. 9:1-14; Mt. 4:18-22; Lk. 5:1-11; 8:1-3; 10:1-7; Acts 18:5; Phil. 4:10-16; II Cor. 11:7,8; III Jn. 5-8).

In common parlance today, a "minister" is generally thought of as someone who is a "religious professional". In Biblical times, however, the NT Greek term which is translated as “minister” (*diakonos*) was **a completely non-religious term, used primarily for domestic service.** It was used of table waiters, cooks, kitchen help, butlers, maids, and other positions of practical, generally “hands-on” service. **The role of servants was to attend to the needs of those they served.**

The double-edged sword of ministry is that we are servants of God, called to serve *people* (II Cor. 6:4; II Cor. 3:3; 4:5).

The Primary Responsibilities God Has Given Us

Sometimes **it helps to understand what the big picture is concerning what God wants from us.** We can't very well be effective servants, or even know how to *begin* to grasp what service to God (and others) might entail, if we do not have at least some very broad ideas regarding God's general will for us as His people. In Ephesians 1:10, Paul tells us that **God's overall purpose is to “sum up all things in Christ”, meaning that everything is to point to Him and bring Him honor.**

In Matthew 28:18-20, **Jesus specifically charged us to “make disciples of all nations”.** He defined the "disciple-making" process as involving three aspects: (1.) Going; (2.) Immersing in His name; and, (3.) Teaching to obey all that He commanded. In other words, **we are to bring the good news to every person, to bring them to identify by faith in Jesus, and train them to become obedient servants of Him, as their anointed King.**

Becoming Equipped For Ministry

When we come into the kingdom, however, we all come in at different levels of brokenness and preparedness. That is why Eph. 4:11,12 says that **we need to be “equipped” or “fitted-out” for works of service.**

(1.) The word translated as “equipped” can also mean “to repair; to make sound or whole; to complete”. It is used in Matt. 4:21 of James and John “mending” their fishing nets, which had been torn, frayed or broken by the night's work of catching fish. In a similar way, we also get “torn up” by hurtful experiences in life, or

we have been ill equipped by our upbringing. **We need to be healed, made sound and complete, in order to be able to be fit to do the work God has created us to do.** The apostle Peter encourages new believers to no longer live according to the former desires which they were driven by in their ignorance. God's plan is to deliver us from the futile, vain, useless or unprofitable ways of living which we learned from our family backgrounds (I Pet. 1:14,18).

(2.) Beyond overcoming the hurts and destructive patterns of living from our past, **another aspect of being "equipped" is to become "prepared by teaching and training so as to become capable and adequate" to do what God intends for us to do.** This is more than simply self-healing. **This involves knowing God and His word well enough to minister to others.** It also implies an understanding of how the Holy Spirit works, and enough practiced experiences so that one can confidently deal with serving others in a variety of ministry settings. In II Timothy 3:16,17, Paul indicates that **the study of the scriptures are uniquely suitable to lead us to maturity and equip us for every good work that God may have for us to do.** In Acts 20:32, the apostle told the Ephesian elders that an active pursuit of God and His word would build them up and help them discover all that God had for them. Of course, we must not only read and intellectually study the scriptures, we must put them into practice (Jas. 1:22-27). **The goal is to become discerning and ready to handle any situation that may come up** (Heb. 5:14; II Tim. 4:2). It is clear from Hebrews 5:12 that every Christian ought to become a teacher of the word, in some fashion or other. This is not for pastors or "professional clergy" only. **God intends for every believer to be teaching and developing other people.** One of the most tragic shortfalls of most church ministry is that the average person never grows to where they are capable of instructing others, or that they never actually do so. This is nothing less than disobedience to the Master's directives. We are all to become prepared to teach, admonish and encourage one another and be actively doing so (Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24,25).

(3.) A third aspect of the equipping process is **becoming prepared to be servants.** Our world system generally exalts those who are *being* served, and looks down upon those in serving roles as having "lesser jobs". In the kingdom of God, however, strength, power, ability and mature character are given to enable us to serve God and others. **In God's economy those who have strength and resources are to use their abilities to help and lift up those who are weak. Being a servant is esteemed as a high calling,** especially when the service is given voluntarily and with love (Phil. 2:3-11; Jn. 13:1-17; Mk. 10:45). Because this world system teaches us to be self-seeking, and to gather power and wealth for personal gain, **we need to be taught to want to serve.** It is the grace of God which teaches us, not only to purify our lives, but to be zealous to do good deeds to bless others with the love and joy which we have from God (Tit. 2:11-15). We see in the early church the transforming power of God's love to motivate new believers to share with one another and come to one another's aid during times of need (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; I Jn. 4:7-21).

Body-Life – The Learning Laboratory For Equipping God's People

From the beginnings of the early Christian movement, the understanding was that disciple training could most effectively be accomplished, and lived out, in an interactive Christian community. Thus, in Ephesians 4:11-5:21, the apostle describes most thoroughly the dynamics of interactive Body-life, and its potential for growth. In 4:12,13, he lays out three specific objectives for the interaction of Christian community.

The purposes of Body-life are to lead us into:

- (1.) **a unity of the faith (theology);**
- (2.) **a personal, experiential knowledge of Christ (mystical intimacy); and,**
- (3.) **to a fully-developed person, one whose character is like Jesus (incarnational ministry),**
...one who faithfully *expresses* in part, by good deeds, what Jesus is in His fullness.

Notice also that, in vss 15,16, **it is the Body that builds up the Body,** as we are responsive to the leadings of the Head, or Source, Jesus, and as each part does its work of serving one another. **As God's servants, we get our primary direction from Him,** but it is His heart to set us to work on helping and developing one another in the Body of Christ. In order to do that, we must develop the ability to discern what people really need, and be able to supply *what* is needed, *when* it is needed, in a *way* in which people will receive it and profit from what we have to offer. So, while we get *counsel* and direction from God, **we also get our cues from the people we serve.** The work of ministry is service, however practical and mundane that may be. **A "minister of the Gospel" is one who is actively serving others in the power of the Spirit. Practical works of service enable God to reveal Himself through us.**