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Commentary — From the Margins

The Importance of Ministry

The Apostle Paul writes,

And he [Jesus] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Eph 4:11–14)

Thus, the purpose of the ministry in every Christian denomination and in every fellowship is, first, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. It isn't first to promote civil good or to advocate for social justice. It isn't first to preach Christ to Muslims or to Buddhists. It isn't first to build television networks or cathedrals. It isn't first to heal the sick or to cast out demons. It is to bring disciples to spiritual maturity so that these disciples can in turn bring additional disciples to maturity who will bring additional disciples to maturity. Disciples come when God the Father draws (John 6:44, 65), and Christ Jesus calls (John 15:16, 19) them from the world. A person doesn't choose God, or choose to give his or her heart to the Lord unless God has first drawn the person. Decision theology is bad doctrine. And more resources have been squandered trying to cajole the reluctant to accept Christ as their personal savior than has been spent equipping born-from-above disciples for doing the work of ministry.

Although proving how much has been spent either cajoling or equipping is impossible, the Apostle Paul said the evidence that the saints at Corinth remained babes, subject to being blown about by every wind of doctrine, was their jealousy and strife and behavior in human ways (1 Cor 3:2–3). The evidence of behaving in human ways was one saying the person was of Paul while another said the person was of Apollos (v. 4). Today, one says he is a Methodist, while another says he is a Baptist, and both believe that their Mormon neighbors are not of Christ. So the same condition presently exists in the greater Christian Church as existed at Corinth. And this condition is especially evident among the slivers of the splintered church of God, these slivers being absolutely convinced that only they possess the truth of God as taught by Herbert Armstrong.

Throughout the world jealousy and strife within the greater Church exists, with Protestants and Catholics still fighting the battles that began the Reformation. James writes that wherever "jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice" (Jas 3:16), that jealousy and selfish ambition is earthly, unscriptural and demonic (v. 15).

And this global condition of strife between Christians will not change when the Tribulation begins. Instead, war between Christians will intensify. Whereas much has been written about Islamic fundamentalism wanting to return the world to the 7th Century, the Tribulation will return Christianity to the 4th Century, with Arian Christians representing the school of Ephesus and the demonic king of the North fighting against and eventually prevailing over trinitarian Christians representing the school at Alexandria and the king of the South. This global war has already begun although the shooting won't commence until the false prophet appears. The last time Arian Christianity prevailed over trinitarian Christianity was when the Vandals sacked Rome. The next time will be when food is levered into discipleship. And much of Evangelical Christianity has conceded victory to the Arians by teaching a doctrine of bodily Rapture to heaven, thereby leaving their saints to begin seven years of extreme turmoil with no preparation and few survival skills. These saints are neither equipped for ministry, nor equipped to provide for themselves. And it is here where exception must be taken with the heavy expenditures of resources by a few ministries that appear more interested in building themselves both physical and spiritual houses where they might dwell securely on the tithes and offerings of spiritual children than in locally equipping the saints for ministry. Those ministries, whether large or small, that foreground strife through disputing single words or by disputing passages of words that form doctrines need to stop immediately. Those employed within these ministries need to seek gainful work, thereby earning their livings with their hands after the example set by the Apostle Paul who labored night and day to support himself and the people with him.

The nature of Christianity from its conception has been strife over words. The Apostle Paul used words to the Galatians to combat the circumcision faction that came from Jerusalem. I am using words to criticize television ministries whose sincere desire is to preach Christ to the world without first equipping disciples for personal evangelism. Thus, the greater Church has been imprisoned by strife through words and over words from the 1st Century, for the kingdom of God is not of this world but words and flesh are. So are swords and bullets, rice and beans. And the next war will be fought with lentils and potatoes—disciples who will trade their birthright to salvation for a bowl of lentils will be as Esau was.

Isaac was the son of promise that represents the Jerusalem from above (Gal 4:21–31), but Isaac has twins sons of promise. However, the older was rejected before birth, but the younger accepted. When in the womb with no sin imputed to either, God knew that the older would not value his inheritance enough to die for it, and that the younger, although deceitful from the beginning, would prevail with God when the two of them wrestled. God knew that the younger would not quit on Him, but would fight even when the odds were against Him winning.

Once born from above, salvation is simply hearing the words of Jesus and believing the One who sent Him (John 5:24) by applying those words, by living by those words. Jesus was a Judean. He lived as a Judean. He taught as a teacher of Judea. His disciples were Judeans—not Pharisees, who had the law but didn't keep it (John 7:19). And if disciples today are to hear His words, disciples will also live as Judeans, which will fulfill all righteousness. Disciples are to mentally relocate themselves from wherever they were when

chosen to the landscape of Judea, the template of thoughts characteristic of Jesus, of John, of James, of Peter, of Paul.

The Bible isn't to be studied line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. To study Scripture through a lattice-work of precepts will inevitably cause the person to stumble, fall and be snared by a noose of words (Isa 28:13) that generates strife and feeds ambitions. A ministry equips saints for ministry by teaching saints to live as mental Judeans. These saints will, then, teach other saints to live as Judeans, who have the law of God written on their hearts and in their minds, who value their lives as spiritual Judeans more than their physical lives.

Therefore if greater Christianity has spent as many resources on equipping the saints as has been spent on cajoling the reluctant to accept salvation, the resources have been squandered, for the Church doesn't teach disciples to live as Jesus did, but to live as Greeks disputing words in vain philosophical wrangling that will again lead to a real shooting war.

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