

## Christ Equipping the Church

Have you ever wondered why so little spiritual maturity exists among believers? Possibly, we have not reached the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Have we perhaps neglected Christ's gift of spiritual ministries for the church?

*"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for service so that the body of Christ may be build up..." (Ephesians 4:11, 12).*

Three hundred years after Christ, the church became institutionalized. Emperor Constantine had accepted the Christian faith and appointed himself as head over the Church. Instead of seeing the church as supernaturally designed and controlled by Christ, the church now became structured by human design and domineered by men. Sadly, today, even after many reformations and renewals have taken place, the ministries and control Christ meant the church to have is still not being accepted.

The "fivefold" ministries were functions (not positions) Christ gave to the church. We must not ignore these ministries as they were meant for the health and the growth of the body. Even as a human body has five senses, so the Christian church should recognize the function of these five ministries as essential and biblical.

### **Apostles – The Church Planters**

When Jesus said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18) but commanded us to send His message to the ends of the earth, the first ministry function the New Testament church immediately recognized was that of apostolic teams. These were not only the twelve apostles Jesus had as his disciples, but many more are mentioned throughout the New Testament and are valid for today.

Apostles were men equipped with many spiritual gifts and their job was to go where Jesus had not yet been preached. They started new churches and ordained elders as leaders in these churches. Today we sent out missionaries; however, we no longer seek apostolic giftedness nor do we give them the same significance. In fact, our financial disbursements clearly reveal that we are no longer as interested in sending out people as the New Testament church did. In spite of this lack, some missionaries still function as apostles with a special equipping by God.

### **Prophets – The Guardians**

Prophet is neither a title nor a position but is a function. All these ministries come in the plural to the church. No ministry, especially prophetic ministries, was ever a one-man show, for as false prophets easily can come in, so their warning should be tested for truthfulness.

*"...so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Matthew 18:16b).*

Because every believer is now indwelt with the Holy Spirit and because we have the prophetic Word of God, New Testament prophets have an entirely different function

than do those in the Old Testament. For example, anyone who speaks up for neglected truth fulfils a prophetic deed. Nevertheless, we usually neglect these people or encourage them not to disturb us but rather to go to another church. In this way, we have conveniently done away with the vital ministry of the prophets.

Those who have the ministry as prophets deserve to be heard. When they see things going in the wrong direction, they are meant to be the watchmen and “trumpet blowers” (I Corinthians 14:8). In this same passage, the apostle Paul encourages the gift of prophesying for all believers (verses 5 and 39) as a safeguard for the church to operate according to the Word. In I Corinthians 12:28, we read prophets were not to be ignored, and next to apostles, they are of second importance to the church. Do we still have prophets today? Think of reformers, such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Wesley, and many others who, throughout history, were sent by God to bring us the message of repentance and revival, but like many others, were not welcomed and were forced to start another church. What none of these men realized, however, was that by starting another Constantinian form of church, that creation, having within itself the seeds of human error and decay, became one more church patterned by men’s design and not by God’s.

### **Evangelists – The Recruiters**

If the church were an inviting place, where new Christians would be warmly received and fed the teachings whereby they would grow, many believers could function as evangelists. In today’s churches, where we work with paid staff, much enthusiasm and mass involvement for ministry have disappeared. Also many churches are now seeking their own growth and have lost vision of their responsibility of maturing believers for serving the kingdom of God.

Those with the gift of evangelism have a love and passion for the lost. Ironically, today they seem to function better in other services rather than ministering in today’s churches. Only in going back to the basic biblical structure of what the church was meant to be—that of being our first love—can the problem be solved.

### **Pastors – The Shepherds**

The biblical concept for pastors was that they would shepherd and care for the flock. Hiring and bringing in pastors from outside the body is not only unbiblical but has greatly commercialized the church. “Outside” pastors are hired as pulpiteers and as strong men that will please the congregation and hopefully keep things rolling.

When churches forget that pastors and other ministries should come forth from their own midst, the vision that the purpose of Christian gatherings is to develop and mature believers for ministry has been lost (Ephesians 4:13).

Bringing in “outside” pastors results in the following:

- Promoting a lazy approach to acquiring people for ministry;
- Giving the control of the church to one man, which is not biblical;
- Costing the church major funds for long distance moving and traveling expenses;
- Unheeding Jesus’ warning against the hireling (John 10:12);
- Risking church deterioration when the wrong man is brought in (Jeremiah 23:1);
- Paying for ministry encourages mere employment.

The harmfulness of our hireling system can clearly be seen when a pastor “is called to another church” and leaves. **More times than not, that “call” comes from a larger**

congregation and with the offering of a much larger salary. Now the congregation has become like an orphanage without a head master, and the unbiblical hiring cycle starts all over again.

### **Teachers – The Revealers**

Biblical teachers, within the church, are those who love and dare to teach the Word of God. Many churches have closed the door to any laity involvement; consequently, if a pastor is absent, sermons are read from the pulpit or another pastor brought in because “the Spirit is no longer trusted to enable a layperson to teach the flock.”

Much teaching in today’s churches is no longer done by illuminating Scripture, but by relating pre-conceived theological writings. No thought is given to new insights or further revelation; as a result, any attempt of the Holy Spirit to reveal further truth or historical errors have been dismissed. By following these procedures, we are making the church faultless and are grieving or eliminating further spiritual insights.

On the other hand, on many radio programs or in bookstores, we can still discover some great Bible teachers. All too often, however, these teachers are not welcomed if they are not in full agreement with the church.

### **Conclusion**

Of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day He said,

*“These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me, they worship me in vain, their teachings are but rules taught by men.”*  
*“Every tree that my Father has not planted will be pulled up by their roots.”*  
*“Leave them, they are blind guides...” (Matthew 15: 8, 9, 13).*

Is the Bible still important today? If so, then we must repent, for we will never see the real *works* of God in our midst until we obey the *Word* of God.