

The Ministry of the New Testament

Scripture Reading:

Hymns: 909

Acts 1:17b ...and was allotted his portion of this ministry.

Eph. 4:11-12 And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

1 Tim. 1:3-4 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.

I. The New Testament ministry being the unique ministry in the universe—Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12:

- A. The New Testament ministry (the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness) versus the Old Testament ministry (the ministry of death and of condemnation)—2 Cor. 3:7-9.
- B. The work of the New Testament ministry is to accomplish God's New Testament economy toward the church for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem—Eph. 3:9-10; 4:11-12.

II. The New Testament ministry being unique but there being many ministers having a portion in this corporate ministry—Acts 20:24; 21:19; 2 Tim. 4:5; Col. 4:17; 2 Cor. 4:1:

- A. The unique ministry (work) of the New Testament includes all the work of the apostles, and the apostles are the ministers (the persons) of the New Testament—2 Cor. 3:6.
- B. The ministry of the apostles is unique, that is, "the ministry", the one corporate ministry according to the principle of the Body of Christ.
- C. Although the gifted people are many (Eph. 4:11), there is only one ministry: to supply Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ; this is the unique ministry of the New Testament—1 Tim. 1:12.
- D. Although there are many ministers, yet there is only one corporate ministry, the New Testament ministry.

III. Division coming from the different teachings of the different ministries:

- A. Teaching outside of the unique teaching of God's economy being viewed by the apostles as different teachings—1 Tim. 1:3-4.
- B. Different teachings being the main reason for the failure, degradation, and deviation of the church—1 Tim. 1:3-5, 6-7, 6:3-5, 20-21.
- C. Satan organizes and systematizes the divisive teachings, creating serious heresy to destroy the oneness of the practice of the Body life of Christ.
- D. All basic elements and sources of division are different ministries. Different ministries produce problems, division, and confusion.
- E. Only one type of ministry builds and does not divide, the unique ministry of God's economy, the unique ministry of the New Testament.

IV. The unique goal of the New Testament ministry is to build up the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem:

- A. This unique ministry enables the believers to be the same as God in life, nature and expression but not in the Godhead—2 Cor. 3:3, 6; 5:21; 3:18.
- B. This unique ministry incorporates the believers into Christ to accomplish the universal incorporation of divinity and humanity:
 - 1. Believers are established and joined to Christ to experience the anointing, sealing, and foretaste of the Spirit—2 Cor. 1:21-22.
 - 2. Believers are reconciled to God to become the New Jerusalem, the expanded and consummated Holy of Holies—2 Cor. 5:20; Rev. 21:16.

Reference Books: *Crucial Contents of God's New Testament Ministry*, Chapter 2; Message 1 in the evening of the Elders' training in the Fall of 1988; *Elders' Training*, Book 1, Chapters 1 to 7; *The New Testament Ministry and the Teaching and Fellowship of the Apostles*, Chapter 1; *Crystallization-Study of the Humanity of Christ*.

Excerpts from the Ministry:**The New Testament Ministry Being the Unique Ministry in the Universe**

There are only two ministries in the entire universe. In 2 Cor. 3, the Old Testament ministry is called “the ministry of death” and “the ministry of condemnation” (vv. 7 & 9). The ministry of the Old Testament only accomplished two things: to condemn man and put man to death. However, in the New Testament and concerning the New Testament ministry, it is the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of righteousness, which is also called the ministry of justification (v. 8 & 9).

The work of the New Testament ministry is to accomplish the New Testament economy of God concerning the church (Eph. 3:9-10) and to build up the Body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12 says that the perfecting of the saints is “unto the work of the ministry”; this means that hundreds and thousands of saints could be perfected for the work of the ministry. Undoubtedly, the term “ministry” refers to the unique ministry of the New Testament to accomplish the eternal purpose of God in the New Testament. God’s New Testament includes God’s economy. To accomplish the economy requires tremendous work and this work is the ministry. In Ephesians 4:12, the phrase “unto the building up of the Body of Christ” is synonymous with the phrase “unto the work of the ministry”. This clearly states that the work of the ministry is for the building up of the Body of Christ.

**The New Testament Ministry Being Unique
But there Being Many Ministers Having a Portion in this Corporate Ministry**

The unique ministry of the New Testament includes all the works of the apostles (corporate ministry), and the apostles are the ministers of the New Testament. Second Cor. 3:6 clearly uses the word “ministers” in plural form, however, in verses 8 and 9, it uses the word “ministry” in singular form. In 2 Cor. 4:1, Paul uses the pronoun “we”. He did not say that he (singular) receives the ministry; rather he says that we (plural) receive this ministry (singular). The word “we” not only includes Paul, but also all the New Testament ministers. All this suggests that although there are many individual ministries, there is only one New Testament ministry....Ministry is a service, a work, but the ministers are those who serve. There are many serving ones. After the twelve apostles, there were a lot of ministers who entered into the ministry; it includes Paul, Barnabas and many others. Although there are many ministers, but all the ministers have only one ministry.

...Paul admonished Timothy to function in his ministry. In verse one, Paul spoke of the ministry of Timothy, which was an individual ministry. It was the ministry of Timothy, however, the individual ministry is the corporate ministry, “this” ministry. It is also a part of the unique ministry. The ministry in 2 Cor. 4:1 is the corporate ministry of the New Testament ministers. In this corporate ministry, Paul has his portion, Peter has his portion, and Timothy has his portion as well. Each of the ministers has his portion in the corporate ministry. When we add all the portions together, it is “this” ministry, the

ministry of the New Testament. (*The New Testament Ministry and the Teaching and Fellowship of the Apostles*, published in Chinese but not in English, Chapter 1.)

The reality of the one ministry, the ministry that fulfilled the figure of the old covenant ministry, did not actually begin with the Lord Jesus, but with John the Baptist. First there was John the Baptist, then the Lord Jesus, then the twelve disciples, and then so many others from Acts to Revelation. In all of these ministers the New Testament bears or unveils only one unique ministry, a ministry to carry out the ministry of Christ to bring forth the church. Eventually the unique ministry of God is to carry out the ministry of Christ that the church might be brought into being. Christ and the church is the central subject of the entire Bible. This is the center, the focus, and also the circumference of God's economy. Christ and the church must be everything in God's economy. To carry out this economy, God has only one ministry, a unique ministry.

Division Coming from the Different Teachings of the Different Ministries

I am burdened to stress this point of the oneness of the ministry because of all the divisions and confusions that have taken place in the past centuries among the Christians. The most damaging thing among the Christians is the divisions and the confusions. Moreover, all the divisions and confusions came out of one source, and that source is the different ministries.

All of us today need to be on the alert. We need to realize that Satan could use any one of us to bring in some other kind of teaching that may be scriptural.

When I speak such words of warning to all the dear saints, I speak them even the more to myself. Many times I have seen something new that had to be considered very carefully in the light of the Lord's up-to-date ministry. I need to consider very carefully whether or not each item is something of God's ministry today. Each point must be measured according to God's basic economy. How to measure every point, how to make a decision about every item, all depends upon God's basic economy, which is to carry out the ministry of Christ for the producing of the church.

If we keep this one basic principle and one basic factor concerning God's economy, we will be well protected. Nevertheless, each one of us needs to be on the alert not to watch over others but to take care of ourselves that we would not be used by the enemy to bring in different thoughts or different teachings that may seem to be scriptural. (*Elders' Training*, Book 1, pp. 12-18.)

Nevertheless, all of us need to realize that we are in the Lord's recovery. The first characteristic of the Lord's recovery is oneness. Once we lose the oneness, we are through. If we lose the oneness, we are no longer the Lord's recovery. Therefore, we need to see that there is a peril of different teachings and different opinions damaging the oneness. I thank the Lord for His mercy that since the beginning of His recovery in this country I have never been so cautious in any other matter as I have in this one matter. In all these twenty-three years it has been my practice to exercise myself never to debate with any of the brothers concerning doctrines or concerning opinions. Six years ago some very serious problems arose among us. During that time, you probably did not hear me say anything concerning these problems because I did not want to give any impression that I was open to debate concerning the opinions and doctrines of others. However, this

did not mean that I agreed with those opinions and doctrines. Now I realize that the more we are going on, the more we are in a trend with a peril that opinions and different teachings may come in. Opinions may be good, and teachings may be scriptural, yet they may be different. Sooner or later, these matters will create a hidden division. The blessing that always comes down from God to His recovery is based upon the oneness (Psalm 133). If we lose the oneness, we will lose the blessing.

I believe that we can learn from Apollos' case that there is the possibility of having different flavors, different atmospheres, and different colors, although we may move together, minister together, work together, and all be together in the Lord's recovery. Apollos was not dissenting with Paul, but his ministry bore a different color and flavor than Paul's ministry. (*Elders' Training*, Book 1, pp. 29-30.)

If you are burdened to go on in the New Testament ministry of God, you need to go on along this line, in this major, and in this school. I strongly encourage you not to get out of this school, not to get off from this major, and not to get on any other line. Here is a strong major in the unique school for you to explore in your spiritual study. In this line is what the Lord needs, and in this line you will never cause trouble. Your going on in this line will edify the saints, build up the church, and build up the Body to its fullest extent. Furthermore, it will never create any division or any confusion. If you take another way, you will be out of the unique school, off from this major, and not in the line of the New Testament ministry. In that case, whatever you preach, whatever you teach, and whatever you present will be a cause of division. I encourage you to consider this matter soberly.

In the Lord's recovery, if we were to control people merely so that we could present our teaching, that would be foolish, and it would be low or mean. No one can control people except a strong sect. Nearly all of the denominations exercise control over their preachers. For example, if you are going to be a preacher in a certain denomination, it is necessary for you to preach their teaching. Now we need to consider what is the teaching in the Lord's recovery, whether it is Witness Lee's teaching, Watchman Nee's teaching, or some other teaching. It is on this point that I am burdened. We need to be very clear that we do not have anyone's teaching. We are in the Lord's recovery, and His recovery is to recover His unique ministry. This unique ministry is the ministry of the New Testament, which is to minister the Triune God embodied in Christ as life into His chosen people to make them living members to form the Body of Christ to express Christ as the very embodiment of the Triune God. If we say that we have some kind of teaching, surely this New Testament ministry is our unique teaching, and this ministry should control our preaching and our teaching. We are not controlled by any sectarian denominational teaching, but we should be controlled by this unique New Testament ministry. (*Elders' Training*, Book 1, pp. 102-103)

**The Unique Goal of the New Testament Ministry—
To Build up the Body of Christ to Consummate the New Jerusalem**

The goal of God's economy is for the Triune God to be incorporated with man to be an incorporation. The New Jerusalem is the universal incorporation of God with man. For God to carry out His economy to have this incorporation, a constitution of God and man,

man needs to be mingled with God. Without this, the whole universe means nothing. This truth is the unique truth in the whole universe. God needs man to match Him, to be united with Him, to be mingled with Him, to be incorporated into one incorporation with Him. The New Jerusalem will be the consummate incorporation of God and man. In eternity the New Jerusalem will stand to declare to the whole universe that this is God's eternal goal for His expression and for His enlargement.

The sixty-six books of the Bible are very consistent, but to see what the Bible unveils requires light. Apparently all the books are different, but in the unique truth the entire Bible is consistent. The Bible unveils to us that God's economy is to have God and man incorporated into an incorporation. Without man, with whom could God be incorporated? Therefore, there is the need of man. The one Bible reveals to us only one thing. First, God wants to be united with man, to have a union with man. Then God wants to be mingled with man. Consummately, God wants to be incorporated with man to be an incorporation. This enlarged, divine-human, universal incorporation is God's eternal goal, which is the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the ultimate union, mingling, and incorporation of God and man. I hope that we all can see this. (*The Crystallization-Study of the Humanity of Christ*, p. 20.)

We have seen that the New Jerusalem as the goal of God's economy is the universal incorporation of the consummated God with His regenerated believers. God in His Divine Trinity is an incorporation, mutually coinhering and working together as one (John 14:10-11). Furthermore, Christ is in the Father, we are in Christ, and Christ is in us (v. 20). The conclusion and totality of these three *ins* is the Spirit of reality, who is Christ Himself, to be the reality within us (v. 17). The Spirit of reality came not only to be with us but also to be in us. Our being in God the Son and God the Son being in us and also in the Father reveal an incorporation. This incorporation is first the Body of Christ and then the New Jerusalem...God's economy is to have a Body for Christ which consummates the New Jerusalem—the enlarged, universal incorporation of the consummated God with the regenerated believers. (*The Crystallization-Study of the Humanity of Christ*, p. 46.)

Questions:

1. Please explain what is the New Testament ministry according to the Bible.
2. What is the relationship between the New Testament ministry and its ministers?
3. How are divisions produced?
4. What is the unique goal of the New Testament ministry?