

Ministries to Build the Body



Restoration (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing with you out of truths that life has taught me, truths that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same for you.

Yesterday I dealt with the first essential in the process of restoration, the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Today I'm going to speak about the second essential, the ministries given by Christ to build His body, the church.

By way of introduction to this topic, I'm going to read a passage from Ephesians 4, beginning at verse 8:

> "Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.'"

(NAS)

Then, in verse 11 Paul specifies the gifts that Christ gave to His church after His ascension.

> "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers..."

There are the five ministry gifts of the ascended Christ: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And then Paul tells us the purpose for which they are given.

> "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 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 fullness of Christ." (NAS)

In just a little while I'll analyze those purpose for which the ministry gifts are given. But let's look at the alternative (I believe the only alternative), which is stated by Paul in the next verse.

> "As a result [as a result of these ministries], 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..." (NAS)

I believe that either the church must receive the benefit of these ministry gifts or if it does not, God's people will remain just little children. Never spiritually developed, carried about by every wind of doctrine, and a prey continually to deceit and trickery. I don't believe there are any others but those two alternatives.

Then Paul goes back to the positive, the real purpose of God:

> "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 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." (NAS)

In this passage Paul compares the church to two familiar things: a building and a body. And he uses both as he speaks about the purposes of the ministry gifts. The purposes of these gifts are to complete the building and mature the body Christ has constituted in His church. The five essential ministries are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. They have four main functions as defined here by Paul. The first, to equip believers to do their work. The second, to build up the body. The third, to bring us all into unity. The fourth, to produce maturity and completeness.

I'm going to state those four functions again, they are so important.

To equip believers for their work.

To build up the body

To bring us all into unity

To produce maturity and completeness

Now, out of these five ministries the first two, the primary ones, are those of apostles and prophets. They have two main, specific responsibilities: to provide a foundation for a church, and to be the channel of revelation to the church. These functions are stated by Paul elsewhere in Ephesians. In Ephesians 2:20, he says that we as believers are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus [Himself] being the chief cornerstone." So, with Christ as the chief cornerstone, churches are built with apostles and prophets and their foundation.

And then in the matter of revelation, in Ephesians 3:4–5 Paul speaks about:

> "...the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit..." (NAS)

So, the mystery of God's ongoing plan for the church is revealed through apostles and prophets. We might express that another way. The apostles are the architects or the master builders of the churches.

Now in most civilized communities today no person can get a permit to erect a building until the plans for the building have been approved and signed by an architect. What is the business of an architect? Very simply, it is to know all that needs to be known about every stage of the building from the foundation to the roof. It includes the material, the measurements, the different types of services that are required like electricity, plumbing, and so on. There's one person who, by his profession and training, is responsible and answerable for all those things. In the natural it's the architect. But in the spiritual it's the apostle.

On the other hand, the prophets are responsible to supply the fresh oil of revelation that's needed in each new situation or phase of God's program. In the book of Zechariah there's a picture of the church as a beautiful seven-branched lampstand. And on either side of that lampstand there are two olive trees which through golden pipes channel fresh olive oil into the lampstand. And when the prophet Zechariah asks what are these two olive trees, he's told they're the two sons of oil, the two sources of oil for the lampstand which is the church (Zech. 4:14). But in the book of Revelation these olive trees reappear as a symbol and they are specifically interpreted as prophets (Rev. 11). So, the ministry of the prophet is to be an olive tree that supplies continual fresh oil to the lampstand, which is the church, so that the lamps on the stand may always burn clear and bright because they are always supplied with fresh oil.

That fresh oil that the prophet supplies is the ongoing revelation of God's purpose. It's the impartation of the mind of God, the direction of God in every situation. Or, when God's program changes, when He has some new kind of direction for the church to take, it's the ministry of the prophet to

impart that to the people of God, to the church.

In Proverbs 29:18 it says, “Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint…” The word that’s translated “vision” there means specifically “prophetic vision.” The church, the people of God, cannot live without ongoing fresh prophetic vision. Religion will not do it. Both the history of God’s people in the Bible and the history of the church since prove again and again that religion without vision is not enough to keep the lampstand burning bright. Vision is essential and vision is always fresh, it’s always ongoing. God has a specific word, a specific direction for His people in each situation and in each stage of His purpose. So Christ has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—five ministries to whom is committed the responsibility of maturing His body and building His church.

And yet, if we look at the contemporary church as we know it in most circumstances, virtually speaking, there are only three of those ministries which are ever recognized as actually functioning: evangelists, pastors and teachers. To take a very down-to-earth example, the church in such a situation is like a five-cylinder car running on only three cylinders. It’s doubtful if it could move. But at any rate, one thing is sure, it will not function properly on three cylinders.

Here’s a fact that we have to bear in mind. God has chosen to work through men who fulfill His requirements. Somebody said, “God uses men, not methods.” I think I would revise that and put it this way, “God’s methods are men,” the kind of men God prepares, equips, and can use.

There’s a clear example of this in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. Israel were in bondage, misery, crying out to God for mercy and deliverance for maybe a hundred years. But God did not move to their deliverance until He had the man ready whom He could use. And it took Him eighty years to get that man ready—Moses. I believe it’s just the same in the church and in God’s people today. There are certain things that God will not do without, the kind of man that He’s determined to use for those purposes.

All right. Our time is up for today but I’ll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I’ll be speaking about the third essential for restoration: proper spiritual government or authority.

Radio Program

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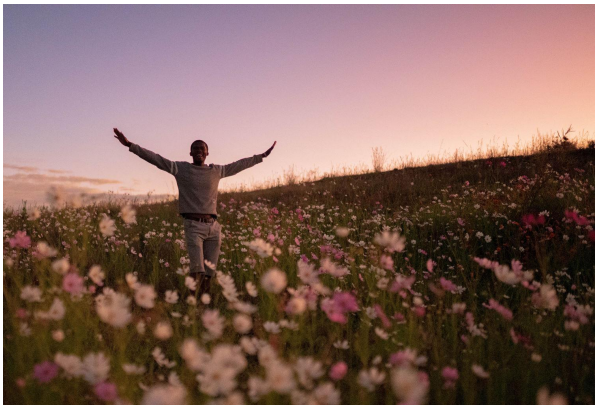

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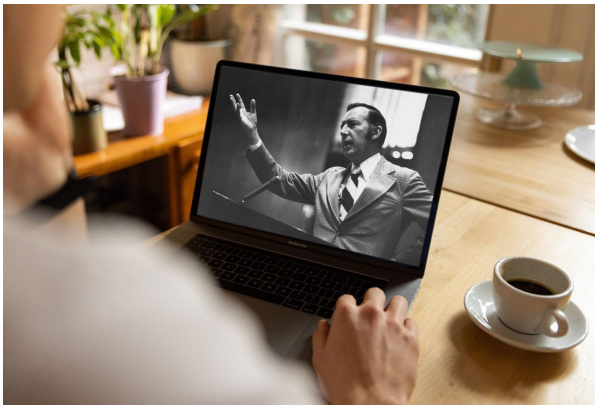

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