

## Essential Truths III: Working With God

## 5

# The Ministry of Every Believer

One of the most remarkable things about the Church is its complete identification with Christ, not just in the redemptive bond of the Cross (our salvation) but also in the continuing bond of God's purpose (our ministry).

This total identification, as we saw in the last lesson, results in God defining the Church as "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (**Ephesians 1:23**). The same Spirit that rested upon Christ now rests upon us, both individually and collectively, with the express intent, as Paul describes it in **Ephesians 3:19**:

"...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

As we saw in the last lesson, this is not just an individual experience. It is a corporate experience. It is only as the united Body of Christ, many parts making up one organic whole, that we can truly be "filled to the measure of the *all* the fullness of God."

But what does this mean for you as an individual. How does the overflow of God's fullness pour into your life?

## Read Ephesians 4:7

In this remarkable verse, Paul lays the foundation for an understanding of all ministry within the Church. He writes:

"But to *each one of us* grace has been given as Christ apportioned."

The Birthright

Taking the Baton

The Great Commission

The Body of Christ

▶ **The Ministry of Every Believer** ◀

Joining the Work of God

The Tree of Life

Ministry of Reconciliation

Filled with the Spirit

Ministry to the Body

Sent into the Harvest

Speaking the Word of God

A Lifestyle Gospel

Salt of the Earth

Enforcing the Victory

Signs and Wonders

A New Kind of Leadership

Establishing a Daily Church

Making Disciples

The New Wine

The Goal of Ministry

This verse highlights three things we should know about the New Testament concept of ministry:

- **“But to each one of us...”**  
– there is no one left out. *Each one of us* has been given an aspect of ministry.
- **“...grace has been given...”**  
– All ministry is described as “grace” (note **1 Peter 4:10**). This grace, as the Amplified Bible explains it, is not given “indiscriminately, but in different ways.”
- **“...as Christ apportioned it”** – Christ has apportioned or divided up his ministry into countless small portions, each mix of gifts unique to each believer.

Christ carved up his ministry into multiple portions, distributing it amongst the many members of his Body. This means a number of things for our understanding of ministry:

- Every believer has a part to play in the ministry of Christ.
- No one believer has all of Christ’s ministry.
- We need one another before we can see Christ’s ministry fully expressed to the world.

These three concepts are revolutionary. They change the way we view ministry as well as way we exercise that ministry.

- Because of fact number one, you have a ministry, regardless of what kind of gifts or abilities you believe you have

## What is Ministry?

Before we can discover what our particular ministry in Christ is, we must first understand what the Bible means when it speaks of “ministry.” Too often we see “ministry” as a highly “spiritual” exercise, the domain of those who are “full time in the ministry.”

But this couldn’t be farther from the truth. The Biblical concept of ministry has a very simple definition. It means:

“The act of serving someone; the act of providing care or help.”

This act of serving or providing care can be expressed in many different ways. But all the numerous expressions of ministry may be grouped under two general headings, as seen in **Acts 6:1-4**:

### ***Ministry of the Word of Christ***

This is not just the classic “pulpit” style of ministry, but includes encouraging, sharing, teaching, discipling and witnessing.

### ***Ministry of the Love of Christ***

This other side of the ministry coin is intensely practical, meeting not just the spiritual needs of people, but also their emotion and physical needs.

**Acts 6** does not mean that the apostles saw “waiting on tables” as something below them. Rather it was a recognition that Christ had apportioned different gifts within his Body. It is only as the Body is properly functioning that every expression of Christ’s ministry will be exercised.

#### **Read Acts 6:5-7**

Each of us has a role to play – both in the ministry of Christ’s Word and in the ministry of Christ’s love. But there is also a unique emphasis that God has placed on your life. As you develop that emphasis, without ignoring the other side of the ministry coin, you will find your own special niche in the Body of Christ.

#### **Read 1 Peter 4:11**

(or believe you don't have).

- Because of fact number two, even though you have a ministry, it is not a matter of you just “doing your thing.” Your ministry is a part of a larger whole, not the whole in itself.
- Because of fact number three, you can't fulfill your ministry on your own. You need the rest of the Body of Christ. In fact, it cannot rightly even be called “your” ministry. It is Christ's ministry and, by delegation, the ministry of the Church.

It is only as we understand the balance between these three facts that true ministry will be expressed within the Body of Christ. Like one piece in a massive jigsaw puzzle, you have a vital part to play, but that part must find its place in the context of the larger picture of ministry.

## The Charter for Ministry

**Ephesians 4** provides us with a broad charter for ministry. We've already had a look at **verse 4**, which tells us that each of us has been given a part to play in the ministry of Christ. But **verse 4** is just the foundation of this charter for ministry. The rest of the charter is expounded in the whole first half of the chapter.

### Read Ephesians 4:1-32

Let's break this chapter down into some of its component verses:

#### **Verse 1**

Paul begins his Charter of Ministry with a charge to the Ephesian Christians. He writes:

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to *live a life worthy of the calling* you have received.”

This calling that Paul mentions is the one he identified in **Ephesians 3:19**: “...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” This is the call to which you have been called, and living worthy of this calling involves, in part, a right attitude toward ministry.

#### **Verse 2**

How are you to live a life worthy of your calling? Paul lists three ways:

- Be completely humble and gentle
- Be patient
- Bear with one another in love

These three attitudes undergird all Christ-like ministry.

#### **Verse 3**

Paul elaborates further with this broad statement:

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

The *Amplified Bible* translates this statement as:

“Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of [produced by] the Spirit in the binding power of peace.”

As we will see, the “harmony and oneness” of the Spirit is both the starting point of Christian ministry and also the goal of Christian ministry.

### **Verses 4-6**

*The Message* expounds on Paul’s meaning with colloquial English:

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have...one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”

Let’s list down all the “one” things that are the basis for all ministry:

- One Body
- One Spirit
- One hope
- One Lord
- One faith
- One baptism
- One God and Father of us all

Interestingly, Paul again alludes to the hope to which we have been called, or as the *New Living Translation* puts it, our calling “to the same glorious future.” That hope, once again, is based on **Ephesians 3:19**:

“...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

But in **verse 6**, Paul echoes this hope, showing how we are already partakers of that hope due to the fact that even now we belong to God. We are all linked, he writes, to “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

### **Verse 7**

It is in this context that Paul now writes concerning the individual role that you play in God’s grand scheme of ministry. You, as an individual, have been given special grace – a mix of ministry gifts – just as Christ has apportioned them to you. Your ministry gifting is found in the context of the unity and harmony of the whole Body of Christ.

### **Verse 8-10**

Paul here quotes from the Old Testament, establishing that this apportioning of gifts to the Body was foreseen by the prophets long before the appearance of Christ. And in these verses Paul establishes the basis upon which God, in Christ, “fills everything in every way” (note again **Ephesians 1:23**).

Christ not only came down to the lowest place, he also ascended to the highest place “in order to fill the whole universe.” This is the nature of the “the whole measure of the fullness of God” that Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 1:23** and **3:19**. It is God’s presence filling every nook and cranny of the universe, his light penetrating every dark corner, his life overflowing into every barren place. This is the nature of the calling that undergirds your ministry, as an individual, and the ministry of the Church as a whole. As the Church that is “, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way,” we are the ones through whom Christ now presences himself in every part of the world.

### **Verse 11**

Paul now describes five of the leadership gifts – a group often collectively known as the five-fold ministry.\* This verse is closely related to **verse 4**, which tells us that Christ gave grace (or an aspect of his ministry) “to each one of us.” In **verse 11**, however, Paul tells that Christ “gave *some* (not all) to be apostles, *some* (not all) to be prophets, *some* (not all) to be evangelists, and *some* (not all) to be pastors and teachers.” In other words, amid all the countless gifts that Christ apportioned to his Body, a small subset he gave as leadership gifts to that Body. Why?

### **Verse 12**

This verse tells us the reason Christ gave leadership gifts to his Body. As the *New King James Bible* translates it, the purpose of the five-fold ministry is “for the equipping of the saints *for the work of ministry...*”

The Greek word translated “equipping” was a medical term for “the setting of a bone”<sup>1</sup> and “describes the dynamic act by which persons or things are properly conditioned.”<sup>2</sup> Note that it is not the leadership of the Church who are supposed to do the work of the ministry. It is *every* believer who does the work of the ministry. The function of church leadership is to equip the believers for that ministry.

### **Verse 13**

This verse states both the end-goal of all ministry and the time-frame for which the five-fold ministry of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher have given. This end-goal is what Paul, in **1 Corinthians 12:7**, calls “the common good” – in other words, the common purpose toward which all gifts, and thus all ministry, moves. What does **Ephesians 4:13** describe as this “common good”?

- The building up of the Body of Christ
- The reaching of unity in the faith
- The reaching of unity in the knowledge of the Son of God
- Becoming mature
- Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

\* Paul lists five types of leadership gift – the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Some claim that the original Greek grammar may support only four leadership gifts (with the pastor and teacher combined as pastor-teacher), but our experience has shown that although pastor and teacher can often be merged in one person, they are also two unique ministry expressions. Also, Paul’s list does not embrace two other expressions of leadership in the Body of Christ – the elder/overseer and the deacon. These Paul speaks of elsewhere.

**Verse 14**

Paul goes on to describe what will happen as we move toward the goal God has set for his Body. The result will be:

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”

What we see presently within the Body of Christ is a lot of immaturity, described as being “tossed back and forth by the waves” and “blown here and there by every wind of teaching.” J. B. Phillips phrases **verse 14** with these words:

“We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching and the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies.”

The ministry gifts that you have been bequeathed by Christ are not intended to add to this tossing back and forth. You are not supposed to add to “every chance wind of teaching,” nor are you to enter into “the jockeying” of those who want their ministry to be seen and heard.

This kind of “ministry anarchy” is the inherent danger of a leaderless Body. If every believer is exercising his or her own ministry, but this ministry is not focused on the goal of **Ephesians 4:13**, then those gifts become self-destructive.

Think of it like a natural human body. If the body’s muscles are all pulling together, you have a common effort that produces a common result – the “common good” to which that body is moving. But if the muscles are all moving in different directions, twitching violently, what do you have? Most doctors would probably diagnose it as an epileptic seizure!

Without leadership, ministry gifts can potentially pull in many different directions. God does not just want activity in his Church; he wants *harmonious* activity – activity that is driven by the purpose of God, not selfish ambition or an individual’s idea of what should be done.

Now we can see why Paul predicated his Charter of Ministry with the words:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”

It is leadership that causes all the ministry gifts to be tied together in a unity of purpose. With discerning leadership, ministry gifts can be harnessed so that they are all pulling in the same direction – toward the “common good” of the Body.

**Verse 15**

This verse summarizes and rephrases **verse 13**, using these words:

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

The goal expressed in this verse – “in all things grow[ing] up into...Christ” – is a rephrase of **verse 13**, but it adds the means by which we grow up into Christ – and thus the main focus of all ministry. This method is “speaking the truth in love” – not just speaking the truth, but speaking the truth *in love*!

The whole context of Paul’s Charter for Ministry is love.

**Read Ephesians 3:16-19**

**Read Ephesians 4:2**

**Read Ephesians 5:1-2**

And we see exactly this same emphasis in **1 Corinthians 12-14**, where Paul writes concerning spiritual gifts, encouraging his readers to “follow the way of love” (**1 Corinthians 14:1**) in the exercise of their ministry.

### **Verse 16**

Now Paul drives home the main point he is building toward – the philosophy that undergirds all New Testament ministry. Let’s break this verse down to see Paul’s point clearly.

- **From him** – the *source* of ministry
- **Joined and held together** – the *bond* of ministry
- **Grows and builds itself up** – the *goal* of ministry
- **In love** – the *focus* of ministry
- **As each part does its work** – the *method* of ministry

### **Verse 17-24**

Having described his Charter of Ministry, Paul now reestablishes the foundation of all ministry – the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This understanding that “the old has gone; the new has come!” (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) is the basis upon which all ministry is conducted (note **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**).

Without an adequate understanding of “the whole Gospel for the whole Christian life,” ministry is flawed. Any Christian with an unresolved old self will foul ministry up, tainting it with self-interest and working counter to the goal toward which God is moving. Only the new self – “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” – can be properly equipped to play a role in the ministry of Christ.

### **Verse 25-32**

In the closing verses of this chapter, Paul amplifies on his meaning in **verses 22-24** – what it means to put off the old self and what it means to put on the new self. In this last section of **Ephesians 4**, he wraps up what he began in **verses 1-3**.

## **Purpose-Driven, Love-Driven**

Right through **Ephesians 4**, we see two principles at work in ministry:

- Purpose
- Love

Both are vital to Christian ministry. And both are complementary. The Christian life should be both love-driven and purpose-driven. The first provides the foundation for Christian growth; the second, the impetus for the Christian walk. Purpose without intimacy is meaningless, but intimacy without purpose is directionless.

### ***Your ministry is purpose-driven***

This purpose, as described by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, is:

“...until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.”

#### **Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7**

This passage shows us that ministry gifts, in all their variety, have:

- A common origin – the Holy Spirit
- A common purpose – the “common good” of the Body of Christ

The starting point of ministry is a realization that God wants us to be outward-looking, not inward-looking. We are to “purpose-driven,” and the purpose we are to be driven by is nothing less than the purpose Christ is driven by.

### ***Your ministry is love-driven***

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

Love should be the motivation for all ministry. **Romans 13:8** tells us that ministry is driven by “the continuing debt to love one another.” In fact, without love your ministry is nothing more than “a resounding gong or clanging cymbal” (**1 Corinthians 13:1**). **1 Corinthians 16:14** tells us:

“Do everything in love.”

We see these twin aspects of love and purpose in **Romans 8:28**, where Paul explains that “all things God works for the good of those...”

- Who love him
- Who are called according to his purpose

## **Full Time in the Ministry**

Every Christian is in the ministry, not just a select few. The responsibility of leaders is not to do all the ministry, but to lead, guide and equip each part of the Body to function in ministry - at work, at home, on the street and in the church.

There has been no longer-enduring fallacy in modern Christianity than the fallacy of being “full time in the ministry.” By this, we usually are referring to those who have dedicated themselves to Christian ministry, either as a pastor or as some other kind of “full time” worker.



But God has a very different view of what it means to be “full time” in the ministry. Every believer is full time in the ministry – wherever they are. Each one has a vital contribution to make to the total ministry of the Church. But how do we discover our ministry gifts?

We talk about “full time ministry” as if there is anything else. *All* ministry is full time. It’s just that some ministers are fully supported *financially* by a church or Christian organization, while others are not.

Do you work in an office? Guess what! You are full time in the ministry! Do you work at home? Guess what! You are full time in the ministry! Are you unemployed? You guessed it! You’re full time in the ministry!

## How Do I Discover My Ministry?

Discovering your ministry is part of your walk with God. You should not be overly concerned about trying to discover your specific gift and calling, because this will unfold as you walk closely with the Lord. But here are a few helpful hints:

### ***Start with your general calling***

Every Christian has the same general calling:

- A ministry to the Lord (**John 4:23-24; Hebrews 13:15**)
- A ministry to the family (**1 Timothy 3:5; 5:10**)
- A ministry to the world (**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**)
- A ministry to the church (**1 Corinthians 16:15**)

Ministry is not about position or authority. It is about serving (**1 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 2:5-8**). If you have an attitude of serving others, God will clarify your specific ministry.

### **Read 1 Peter 4:10**

### ***Start ministering to people***

It’s difficult to discover ministry gifts if a person is not actually ministering! It’s only as you move in your general ministry that your special gifts become obvious.

### **Read Matthew 9:35-36**

Ministry is people-focused. If you concentrate on yourself – your needs, your desires – it will be difficult for you to discover your ministry. As you begin to look out to meet the needs of others, your ministry will come forth as a natural outflow of the grace God has deposited in your life.

## Expressions of Ministry

### **Read Romans 12:4**

Apart from your gifting itself, there are three levels of operation that will distinguish your ministry from other similar ministries in the Body:

- **Capacity** – Ministry gifts are distinguished by capacity. Some people have the capacity to minister to thousands, some to hundreds and some to tens, while others operate best one-on-one.
- **Field** – God assigns a field to our ministry (**2 Corinthians 10:13-16**). That field may be a particular location, age group, sub-cultural group or ethnic group (**Galatians 2:7-8**).
- **Emphasis** – In the broadest expression of ministry, every believer will tend to major in one of three emphases – gathering, nurturing or teaching. By recognizing what emphasis you have, you can begin to focus on that aspect ministry. Some people will gather, others will nurture new believers, while still others will have a teaching emphasis – in one-on-one sharing, in small group Bible studies and in larger teaching seminars.
- **Personality** – Your gifting has one further dimension: your personality make-up. Your personality will flavor your ministry in a unique way. Some people have a strong emphasis in leadership; others in serving; still others in compassion. As we learn to recognize “the grace given us” we can give ourselves more fully to our specific areas of ministry.

### Read Romans 12:6-8

J. B. Phillips paraphrases **1 Corinthians 12:4-6** with these words:

“Men have different gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them. There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served. God works through different men in different ways, but it is the same God who achieves his purposes through them all.

No two ministries are exactly the same. God takes elements of many gifts and creates a “ministry mix” which is unique to each believer. As the different ministries in the Body of Christ work together, the ministry of Christ is expressed in His Church. Perhaps it is fitting to summarize this lesson with just two verses – **Ephesians 4:15-16**:

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love *as each part does its work.*”

<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, quoted by Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 531.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Barth, *The Anchor Bible: Ephesians*, quoted by Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 531.

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