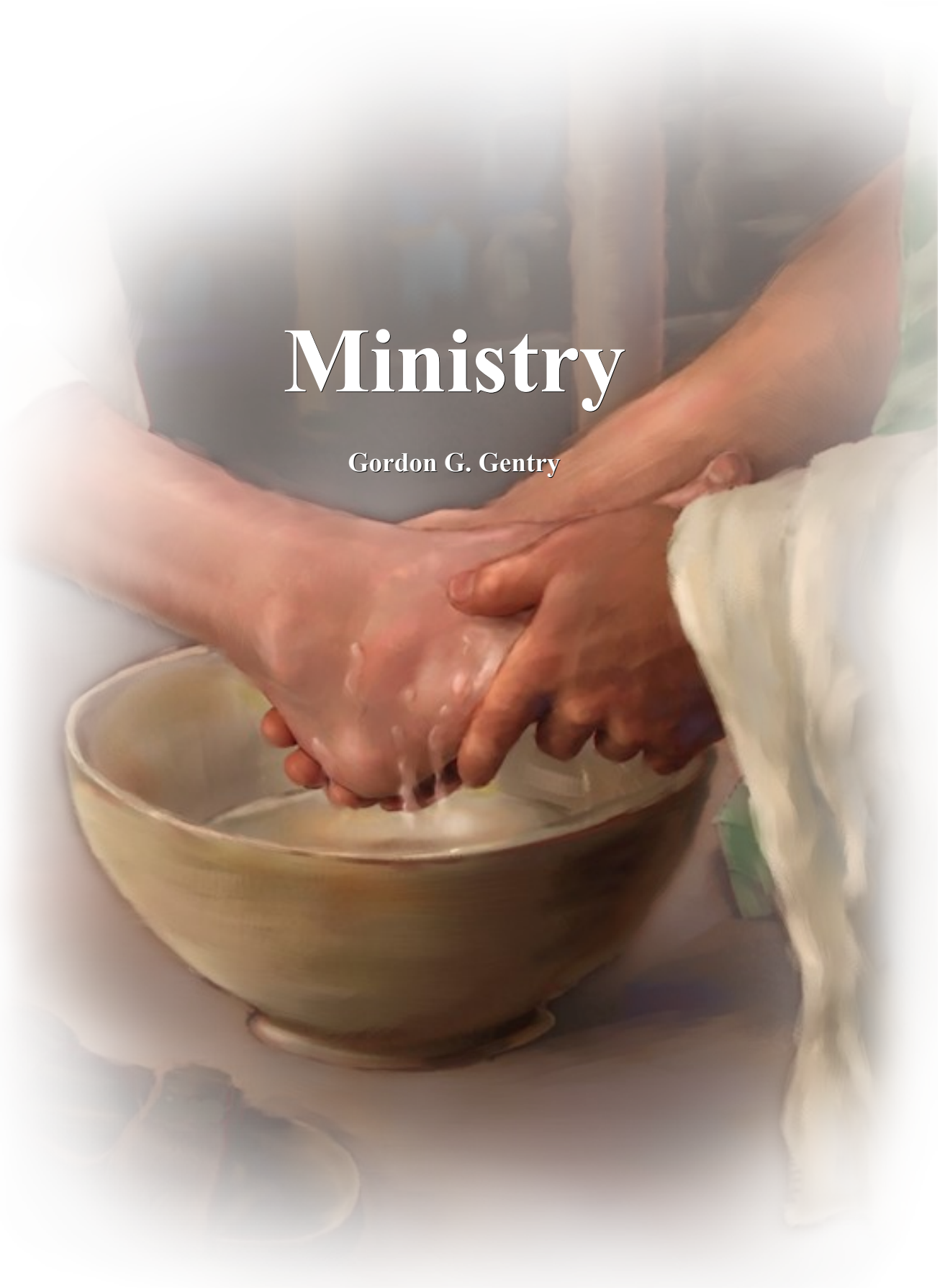


Ministry

Gordon G. Gentry



Introduction

Those in close fellowship with Brother Gordon Gentry heard him mention on several occasions that he wanted to write a book on ministry. For reasons known only to him and the Lord, he did not complete the task before passing on to his reward (in April 2002), although he ministered extensively to share what he saw in this area. He considered ministry to be one of the most crucial needs for the function and growth of the local assembly, and he was always laboring to see the overall ministry strengthened. He himself always ministered to “lose his ministry” and to see every member of the body functioning under Christ the Head. His definition of ministry was “a supply of Christ to the body.”

The text of this book was taken primarily from tapes of two sessions on ministry by Brother Gordon. The first series was given in 1974 to the brothers in a local gathering in West Palm Beach, over a period of four weeks. The second series was given in three meetings a few years later to a group of brothers in the same gathering who were preparing to give leadership to special home meetings. Additional material was taken from a tape recorded about the same time to be sent to radio listeners, and a few excerpts from out-of-print booklets published by Brother Gordon were also used as appropriate.

Since most of the material was originally delivered in spoken form, it has been edited and organized to be more readable. Subjects from the series overlapped, so the topics have been merged and arranged for a logical flow of thought. The material from written sources was used to fill in topics that were not covered in the original presentation. The manuscript has been reviewed for accuracy by several brothers who knew Bro. Gordon and heard him minister on these subjects many times.

There is much debate today over the subject of ministry and the place of ministers in the body of Christ. Some have sought to defend a “clergy-laity” distinction, feeling that this is necessary to maintain order and purity of doctrine, while others have sought to emphasize an “every man ministry” or “level brotherhood,” often as a reaction against the abuse of authority within certain realms of Christendom. Bro. Gordon did not believe ministers were to be given a special place (or office) above others, but that their place was to be “brothers among brethren.” The distinction he drew was that ministry is not a “position” but a God-given grace. His goal was to encourage every member to function in the place God has put them in the body, and to serve other members with a supply of Christ. He taught that the more grace a brother has, the more God expects him to lay down his life and serve, and that the proof of effective ministry is a reproduction of the life of God in other members.

The last thing Brother Gordon would want to publish is a “how to” book on ministry, to be used as some kind of formula, separate from a vital relationship with God. Perhaps teaching in any area could be taken that way, but the primary purpose and value of this material is to stimulate fellowship among brothers on the subject of ministry, sending them back to God and the scriptures for a living revelation of Christ and His design in the body. If this book accomplishes that, its goal will be realized.

David Sheats
March 2010

*All scripture quotes are from the King James version unless otherwise noted.
NAS = New American Standard*

*If you wish to know more about the style of this book and the process used to compile it,
please see “Editor’s Note” at the end.*

THE PURPOSE OF MINISTRY

The word of God is committed to the church

The church is designed to reveal the wisdom of God throughout the ages. Everything God is doing is being done in the church. All that is worked by the Holy Spirit in individuals—salvation, the fullness of the Spirit, the appropriating of the cross, sanctification, justification, and so on—is for one purpose: to bring us all into relationship in the one body of Christ.

In the church, ministries are given to bring us to the unity of the faith, functioning as a body, with each member moving according to the ability God gives. To move in God, each must be spiritually equipped, and that equipment comes from the ability of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the ministers in any local gathering. Ministry is the work of God in the midst of His children for the perfecting (maturing) of the saints. It is for one purpose: the supply of Christ to the body. Ministers are to move in their ministry by the Spirit until we all are experiencing the fullness of what God wants for us.

I believe we must look at ministry God's way, to see God's results. Ministry is given by the Lord himself, it works out in various ways, and it has been given for various purposes. Ministry is not something we can work up. It is not seeing something intellectually and moving in that. If you feel you have a ministry, but it is not given by God, it will not bring God's results. God has placed us in the body as it has pleased Him. He has given each of us His ability to function. It is only the ability God gives to the minister that will fulfill His will and desire to have the body function as one. *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us..."* (John 17:21) This is in God's heart; this is God's nature. It is a mystery, but when we begin to taste of this mystery, the reality becomes life to us and we begin to see more of how God is working right now. It also has a bearing as we start to affect others and submit one to another.

The word of God has been committed unto the church. A minister is called by God to take that word and impart it to the church. "The word" or "the revelation" is Christ himself. Ministers serve Christ to others, and ministry must be "alive" by the Spirit to accomplish what God says it will do. God is not just interested in preaching; He is interested in meeting needs in our assembly. When needs are met, it brings each one to a place of strength, able to move with singleness of purpose and able to minister in turn to others.

"...Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation..." (Romans 12:7-8) As we meet together, any one of us can have something to give to the assembly without having a ministry of the word. If we are alive unto the Lord, desiring to please Him, and seeing what He is doing, it adds to our assembly life and to our oneness. But the word of God in our assembly life is the most important thing. We meet to hear God! If God is speaking in our midst, you won't want to miss a meeting. You'll be eager for ministry, listening for God to speak to you! This brings us to a place of worship, adoration, and praise. It is only when this is lacking that we sit back and try to "think it out." We don't need a program when the Holy Spirit is moving! We just need to give Him His place, and we need to function.

Some may think that worship is most important, or something else perhaps, but the fact is, we assemble together to be fed. If the word of God is not flowing to and through different vessels, we will

lack. Worship, songs, and praise have no meaning unless the word of God is living among us and we have made a place for it. Worship is born out of that living word in our midst, and so are many other functions. Therefore, ministry of the word is extremely important.

God's ministry working through men should do three things:

1. Dominate¹ the assembly
2. Master the individual, and the assembly as a whole
3. Unify the body

We need ministers who are led by the Spirit of God, anointed, functioning together, and sensitive to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to accomplish His work through ministers to bring the body to the place of functioning. Ministers must learn how to function with the gift God has given them, but not dominate as individuals. It is God who must dominate. It is what is coming *through* the minister, not the minister himself, that should dominate. So ministers must decrease, “get out of the way,” not draw attention to themselves. We will delve more deeply into this in later chapters.

As ministry functions together and holds up the revelation by the Spirit so that it dominates every member, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ will put such a demand upon people that they must obey, or get out. Maybe we don't like to hear the expression “get out,” but Jesus puts a demand (of love) on us. When the rich young ruler turned and walked away, the demand was too much for him. I think we often talk about authority, but there is not enough authority ministered. The authority of God's ministry brings a demand of Christ upon each member.

The goal (fruits) of ministry

What should the church of Jesus Christ be revealing to the world? What goal should ministers be moving toward? What should be seen in the expression of ministry? Consider the following brief points, many of which will be explored in more detail.

First, the *lordship* of Christ should be prevalent. When I look at the members of the body, I should see that Christ is in control. This may be working out in different measures, so we shouldn't condemn, or set measures that God has not set. The word of God lays out the requirements, and each of us must move with faith to measure up to what God is saying. We should see God's authority in the midst of His church. Not only is each one attached to the Head, but we recognize the power and the authority of God, and we give Him reverence.

Love, the very nature of God, should be manifest. Also, we should see *oneness* in some measure. If we're not seeing oneness, the ministry in the midst is not fulfilling what God wants it to do. Believers should be being brought to a oneness of faith.

If we are gathering together in faith, the order of our assembly life must encourage a constant flow of *spiritual life*. If Christ is in the midst, and the lordship and the authority of God are evident, we will start to have fellowship and sense the oneness of God—an agreement with what God is saying. The spirit of each believer, and the hunger that is in our hearts if we are growing, make a spiritual demand for the constant flow of spiritual life.

¹ The meaning of “dominate” that applies here is “To exert a supreme, guiding influence on or over”

We should see *growth*, or maturing. This could mean different things. For example, outreach proceeds from healthy growth. As we start to mature in any measure, we will want to reach out to the world and fulfill all that God has commanded. We can't just focus on perfecting a small group of people. If we only look at that aspect of ministry, we will dry up and die. Ministry does focus on the local church, but also encourages reaching out and reproducing. God is not only perfecting, but reaching out. We need that vision to reach those who have not heard the gospel, and to disciple. We need a full-rounded ministry. This is what we must ask God to give us.

We will also show forth the Lord's death until He comes. The *cross* continues to work. If the ministry is coming forth in the life of God, by the Spirit of God, and in the timing of God, we will sense that His death has worked and is continuing to work. There also will be an expression of *holiness*.

We're not judges of one another, but these should be the fruits of ministry in the midst. If ministry is not doing this, we are missing what God has said it should do, and we're missing the purpose of God. In this case, we need to stop and get a new direction!

Ministry is lacking in the day in which we live. If we see that we are not measuring up to what God has for us, we need to fall upon our knees and pray. Seek the Lord! Pray that God will give us laborers, that He will raise up brethren in the midst of His church to bring forth His word for the maturing of the saints. We need to look back to the word of God and see what God has for us, and then be obedient to His plan.

Revelation in the church

How important it is to have a revelation! I've been in the midst of people who knew doctrine, knew the "letter of the word," were well-educated, had fullness of knowledge—but there was no revelation. They had nothing that God had spoken to them directly. They had salvation, but everything else was book knowledge. They knew what others had said, but they had no revelation of their own. Revelation is of vital importance for spiritual life.²

Each member (not just the ministers) must have the ability to see spiritually. But having an individual revelation doesn't mean the members function separately. What God is doing is corporate. Above all, He is making us one. I believe that any revelation coming to any individual which does not make him a functioning part of the body of Christ is not from the Holy Spirit. What God reveals brings each one into a vital relationship with the body of Christ.

If there is no revelation in our midst, there can be no building. If there is no revelation in our hearts, no understanding of what God is doing in Christ, there can be no revelation added to it. I believe that revelation begets revelation. I can tell you from my own experience: when I start to see something, what I see causes me to see other things. If I don't see at least a measure in the beginning, there are many hundreds of things I cannot see at all.

2 The term "revelation" is used throughout this teaching. It is not typically used by other writers in quite this way, and may confuse a first-time reader. The word is difficult to pin down to one definition, but you will glean from reading that "the revelation" is Christ himself, or increasing "light" or understanding of spiritual truth, or that it is a personal vision or understanding God gives us of His plan and purpose, or many other things—but most of all, that it is essential. The reader is encouraged to "read between the lines" and to seek God for personal understanding—and for a revelation!

There are different kinds of ministry in addition to the ministry of the word. For example, a brother may give a word of exhortation that is very beneficial. It may “unlock a door” for someone who is moving in the life of God and the revelation. Now more revelation can come. You may receive revelation by many avenues if your heart is open and your mind is centered in God. Even the words of a song can open a further revelation to you, adding onto what God is doing. All of this continues to enhance your ability to minister life to others. The more you partake of God, the more there can be a flow of God through you.

The overall expression of any gathering usually lags to some degree behind the revelation that comes forth. It takes time for people to see what God is ministering through the messengers He has chosen. As we move, God shows us more, and we move in that. The demands of God’s love continue to come. So ministry is a vital area, not only in the assembly, but in each individual life, for each of us to function together and to find purpose in God.

In Ezekiel 43:10-12, God speaks to Ezekiel regarding the temple and the outworking of all the different ordinances: *“Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.”*

These verses speak about the old covenant, but we can still see that there was a form of the house of God, the temple, just as there is in the body of Christ, the church. We are being built together by the Spirit for a habitation of God. I am struck with the importance of seeing. This is what ministry does: it shows the body of Christ the revelation of what God wants to do, so that the vision may start to possess us. For us to attain what God wants will depend on whether we are fitting together. As we see how far short we fall, we lay aside every weight and press on to fulfill the demands that God is placing upon us. We do not do it because we are forced. Every movement in the life of the body of Christ is because we desire to take a step. The demands are love, and we respond in the life He gives us. Ministers in our midst are showing us “the form of the house” so that we may “keep the whole form thereof.”

Revelation must be worked out in life³, in each one who ministers and in those to whom we minister. It will take some time, and we need to accept this, see the purpose, and begin to labor. We are more than conquerors! This is a very positive thing. When God ties us together, we can labor, hold on, embrace each other, impart to others, and receive from each other. In all the pitfalls, trials, and testings, we will pull toward that one mark, striving with purpose. We must realize this will not happen overnight, but also that we must continue to press on, apply ourselves, consecrate, and give ourselves. We will see what it means that “Jesus sanctified himself” (John 17:19). When we begin to see this in a fuller measure, there will be more giving, and more impartation of life, revelation, and light.

³ “In life” is another expression that may need clarification. It refers to the life of God, or the Holy Spirit. We live by the Spirit. We see and understand all things by the Spirit, and move by the ability of the Spirit—or *in* the Spirit or the *life of God*. We hold truth (the revelation) “in life,” not by our natural reasoning or understanding. So the simplest expression is that we see “in life” and move “in life,” not by anything natural or fleshly (according to our former condition of being dead to God).

Ministry is an impartation of life

Look at II Timothy 2:1,2: *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* God has laid out a very simple plan. The impartation of the life of God came from Jesus to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, from Timothy to faithful men, and from faithful men to others. It has always been so. This is what God had in His heart, the plan by which He will bring forth His purpose. Each one is connected individually to Christ, but the one who ministers has a responsibility to the one receiving ministry, and the one receiving has a responsibility to the one to whom he gives it in turn. There is an impartation through each one. This is not accomplished quickly. As life was imparted from Jesus to Paul, from Paul to Timothy, and so on, each of these instances took time—much time together.

I believe this can take place in the body of Christ. This is not only for an apostle or for one under the authority of the apostle. If God has given you something rich, do you want to hold it to yourself, or do you want to impart it to others? I believe we want to impart it to others. We want to share! Because of the life we have in Christ, we want to share! We want others to see the same thing we are seeing. And if it is so rich, we want to continue sharing. It is the same when we receive from another: we want to see what they’re seeing. We’re not holding back, saying, “Well, I don’t see it that way.” We want to see what they are seeing. As we do, I believe that our lives will be enriched.

If there were no impartation of life and revelation through ministry, ministry would have no meaning. We would all look to the Lord and everyone would receive directly from Him. It is true that the anointing of the Spirit of God teaches all men (individually). But there is still an impartation of life through ministry. Jesus himself said, *“My words are spirit and they are life.”* As ministers and as brethren, our words also must become spirit and life. We have a responsibility to the Lord to give forth the light that He has given us. It cannot just be knowledge; it must be the light that God has actually imparted to us. If our words are anointed by the Spirit of God and we have the revelation of Jesus Christ, the impartation of words does not stop at the brain—it goes to the spirit. It imparts *life* to the hearer.

For the word to give life, it must be not only imparted but also received. Jesus spoke words of life, but they were not always received. The impartation is not complete until the words are received. But there should always be an impartation of life through ministry. Otherwise, how will it bring us into the unity of the faith? The truth is given to set us free. Our word becomes life because it is living in us, and God anoints it and anoints the ones receiving it. There may be other terminology we can use to express this, but still it is an impartation of the *life of God*, and the vessel must be dead to self in order for God’s life to flow life through him to others.

Note that Paul said, *“...these entrust to faithful men.”* There is a rich truth here that only God can speak to us. Not only must ministers desire to impart the revelation to others; there is also a need for faithfulness in the brothers it is being imparted to. This precious revelation should be entrusted *“to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* We look for this ability in a man—one who can take the precious revelation and not hinder it, but enhance it. One brother may impart a revelation, but God may give another brother the ability and anointing to take a small truth and see it in a much fuller way, then impart it in a way that adds more to the understanding of the first brother. Our initial

understanding is built up and expanded by the ability, anointing, and grace that is working in another brother's heart.

The plan of God has not changed. Even though we may live in a lukewarm time, God's plan has not changed, and if we are to see God's results, we must labor with what God has given us. We're not looking at numbers of people as evidence of "results." Jesus didn't look at numbers. We're looking at faithful brethren. As ministers and as brethren, we want to impart what God has given. The one purpose of coming together is to impart. I am convinced that there must be a continual sharing and continued fellowship in the revelation of God as we move on day by day. As we look at the scriptures and God opens them up more to us, we will see how important it is to impart life to one another.

Ministry brings oneness

What is God's purpose for the body of Christ? What is God doing, and what does He want to do? What is actually happening? Ephesians 4:9-13 says, *"(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

Here we see that one of the prime purposes of ministry is to bring the body of Christ into oneness: the oneness of the faith and the personal knowledge of the Son of God. Everything God is doing is to bring us into this unity, and if a ministry is not doing this, either the minister is not hearing God, or he is grabbing truth in his own mind and using it for himself. A spiritual understanding of God's purpose is needed, to direct and urge us toward the goal. All ministry urges us toward God's goal in some way.

Ministry is given to bring life and understanding. All that Christ is to the minister is expressed in words that are made effective by the Spirit, not by the letter. Ministry brings revelation and feeds the people. It must be single-eyed, for as the scriptures say, *"If the eye be single, the whole body is full of light"* (Matthew 6:22). If what the ministers have does not possess them so much that they are moving together with one goal in view, they will never get the body moving in the same goal. But if the ministry is single-eyed in vision and direction, not because the ministers have gotten together and "agreed," but because they have had fellowship in what they all see (what God has given them), and it is unified, then the body will be "full of light."

The revelation has to be so big that it demands all of our attention, and we must believe it can happen. If we don't believe it can happen, we will never move in that direction. We'll just say, "It's a good theory." You may have heard people say, "We just cannot come to a place of oneness," and they never do. They don't believe it can be done and they are not interested in even working at it. But God said He will make us one, and He will use ministry to do it. Believing that this is God's plan and that it is possible, the ministers will be "obsessed" by the revelation, it will first start to work in *them* to make *them* one...and now there's no end! It will only come to completeness when Jesus comes, but we're still looking for a oneness of faith while we're here. But we never come to the end of what we're

moving in, because we're constantly knowing the Lord, who is infinite. This is the climax, I think, of all spiritual ministry: an actual experiencing of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does Paul mean by the “oneness of faith” in Ephesians 4:13? We can say we come to a oneness in the faith that brings salvation, but I think that just scratches the surface of what Paul meant. He is bringing us into the fullness of *all that Christ is*. The oneness is *in Christ*. In all areas that have any meaning in our salvation, we will be brought to oneness.

God will bring us to a unity in what we think—and we could even say, in our doctrine. I believe “doctrine” is only something to explain what we're experiencing in Christ. If we use this definition, then I believe we will come to a oneness of experience. When our experience is heavenly, our minds (our understanding) will be heavenly. To come to oneness means completeness: a place of maturity in Christ Jesus. Oneness of faith is also oneness of relationship.

All true spiritual ministry in its end result brings us to oneness: where we are one and we are expressing the lordship of Christ. Sometimes truth divides, but normally we're looking for ministry to bring us into unity, oneness, and singleness of mind and judgment. To be a strong testimony and witness of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must have a strong, unified ministry. Now, we don't get that by just talking about it! We must come on our knees, roll up our sleeves, come back to the plan of God and start to work at it. We must have spiritual discernment and recognize the authority of God in the midst—the authority and flow of the Spirit of God through the brethren. Then we must submit to and obey that authority, to see God's end results.

We must also have a message that is not distorted. It must be in the “center” of truth, not on one side or the other. Truth is Christ. It is possible to go to the right or the left of that truth and minister in areas that sound like the truth, but are not in the center. That is why so many today are splitting apart in ministry, leading away from the central truth. All true ministry must be working toward the center, pulling toward the center, to bring forth the lasting results that are the proof of any ministry. As ministers and as brethren who have a responsibility in the body of Christ, we must be concerned with those lasting results.

All of these areas go against the society we live in, so it is difficult. There won't be many who commit to this, but if we can be faithful even in a small group, if we can start to move together, begin to see something, and to strengthen one another, God can multiply His word and use each of us to impart it to others. But if we do not take this seriously and give it the utmost priority, we will not labor at it. I believe ministry is a labor.

Ministry brings light and imparts vision

The burden lies on those who first see the vision. The responsibility of the minister is to bring light, building in the revelation, so that light is imparted to each member—so they may begin to see what God wants us to see. If ministry is together in purpose, even though ministers may labor in different areas, ministry will bring the same light and we will start to see together.

If I don't see something clearly, I should *want* to see it, or know that it does not fit into what God is doing. The church is firstly a “seeing organism.” It must have spiritual eyes to see. It's not just one or two members seeing, or just prophets and teachers seeing in the revelation, but the church as a whole is

a “seeing organism.” Every member must be seeing. This is God’s design. Ministry has no meaning unless the church recognizes that God is speaking, and what the Spirit is saying. The church life is dominated by what it sees. If our aim and our vision is single, we will move in a single path, and we will be dominated by the vision. We will be utterly abandoned to it—to see it come into manifestation, not in our own strength, but because we declare the word, and the word of God has power.

Reading the book of Jonah, I noticed that Jonah went to a heathen city, not a Jewish city. He went with a message of God’s salvation. The message wasn’t what *he* thought—which is why we see the balking. But he went, and the heathen nation repented! We must be more convinced of what God is saying and revealing to us, than of what *we* think, so that we also can be changed by the message. Then we will not rebel and run from what God wants to do, but have the same confidence the Lord Jesus had. He said, “I will build My church on what My Father reveals to the heart of man.” (See Matthew 16:16-18.) We need to have this confidence rather than the spirit of Jonah, who didn’t want the rest of the world to see. We need to be convinced of what God is saying, and then move in that direction, abandoned to it—not sulking because God isn’t doing what *we* think He ought to do. That was how Jonah ended up sitting under a gourd, pouting! We cannot do this.

We are made one by the vision, by beholding it. We are made one by what we are seeing. We see the revelation: what God is doing. We’re not confused, wondering what God is doing. We may not understand at every moment what He is doing in every heart, but when ministry comes forth, we can tell where it fits into the rest. We don’t have any doubts about what God is doing and what He wants to do.

Ministers cannot labor on another man’s vision. If you’re not called, if you don’t have a vision to minister, you cannot minister by just following what somebody else has brought. You cannot minister on another man’s revelation or ability, trying to copy him or just bringing certain facts together because you agree with him, yet not seeing the vision yourself. You must see clearly yourself in order to bring ministry that will feed the body.

Fellowship in the revelation is very important, and it should be growing sweeter and sweeter. The revealing of Jesus Christ in your heart and through His word should not grow old. We should be growing in the Lord, and we should strive to grow into full stature together. God has called us to be mindful of what He is doing continually, not just when we are partaking of ministry or when ministry is coming forth from us.

Ministry gives a place to move

All ministry is designed to bring believers into the plan of God, into His purpose, and then enable them to go on and find true fulfillment in it. We aren’t just looking at concepts; we will actually be a *part* of what God is doing—functional members of His body!

According to Paul, “...*the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but [want] to have their ears tickled...*” (II Timothy 4:3, NAS) Ministry is difficult! To minister over a period of time, pulling together with others, seeing the truth and seeing it built in lives, not by self-effort but by God’s ability, so that the relationships of individual believers and the fellowship of the corporate body are growing, takes work! It takes labor in prayer, working together, and fellowship together in the

revelation. The time will come, and it is already upon us, when people will not endure sound doctrine. So we need to labor in it!

People generally are not looking for something to motivate them into action. We tend to prefer something that sounds good, which we can sit and listen to. But everything that God ministers puts a demand upon us to obey. Over a period of time, a true ministry will motivate us to obey the demands of love put before us. All ministry motivates us to take another step in God.

If people only want their ears tickled, they will accumulate, as the scripture says, teachers in accordance with their own desires. “I don’t want any demands put upon me...” “I don’t want anybody to criticize me...” This is the situation in many places today. I’m not criticizing, because these people need help. But we need to be mindful of this tendency, and move with love, understanding, and truth. Without compromising the truth, we should move with love, longsuffering, and instruction.

Ministers are not trying to be the head of the body. We’re moving together under the anointing of God’s Holy Spirit, that Christ Jesus might be everything. Our ministry must give a place for people to move in faith. We have to minister faith: words of faith that bring light. The hearers need to be able to step out on those words that the Holy Spirit makes alive in us and in them. Jesus said to Peter, “Come,” and in His command was the ability to step out on the water—and that is exactly how the word must come. If we really minister in the anointing of the Spirit, people will step out of where they are, on the word. The word of God gives them a place to move.

If we do not bring people to this place of moving, we have not yet ministered. We ourselves cannot move them, but the word and the anointing will move them. If there is no obedience to the word, something is wrong, either in their lives or in us. Our responsibility is not to judge them, but to judge ourselves to see if we are right, and then let God take care of them. We may discern what the problem is, but not in order to judge.

Of course there are times when God’s authority will move to accomplish certain things by counseling. Sometimes judgment must be brought when members rebel against what God is doing. But that will be done according to the grace of God that moves in brothers who are able to do it. At times, there is a “negative” aspect of ministry. Sometimes we need encouragement to “lay aside” and to “put on.” We may need to point out problems, but when we point them out, we must leave a place to move—a step to take. A demand is left with the hearers—a place where the Holy Spirit can zero in. When people go away, they’ve been smitten by the Holy Spirit!

Making disciples

Let’s look at Jesus with His twelve disciples. He spent a lot of time with them. He was not just interested in communicating the message—He was going to make the *men* the message. Sometimes we think the message is more important than the man, but the man and the message must be one. If they’re not, we have no ministry. If the message and the vessel are not one, there is no life coming forth from the words. We can take this lightly, or we can let it come to our hearts and begin to “*study to show ourselves unto God, workmen rightly dividing the word of truth.*” We can look to the Lord and really allow God to build in us. God is interested in the vessel!

Jesus knew exactly what He was doing. We see the wonderful miracles He performed, and the Spirit on Him, setting the captives free. But He had one thing in mind when He chose those twelve. He chose them to be a witness. They walked with Him all through His ministry. He worked with them; He imparted all that He had. He let them see the power of God in action. They were right there with Him at all times. He was sharing, instructing, giving them understanding, and imparting to them the life that the Spirit of God would later bring into full manifestation to spread the gospel.

I think we realize that God is interested in the vessel of the believer, and even more so with ministers. In Matthew 13 and 28, the command of Jesus was to “go and make disciples.” We are not just to preach the gospel, although that is a part of it. The overall purpose of God was to make disciples. That takes time spent together. If we are not together, sharing and having fellowship in the revelation of God, we are not in the plan God has laid out, and we cannot be partakers of what God has ordained, nor able then to commit it unto other faithful brethren.

A person may hear the gospel and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, but that is not enough. It never has been enough, because before Jesus left this earth, His command was to *make disciples* (Matthew 28:18-20). That commission is no less for us. God’s way is discipleship. There is no other way. If we don’t see this and make it our aim, we might say, “All you have to do is get through the door of salvation.” But God has put a responsibility on ministry to make disciples.

What is a disciple? If we can’t first become disciples of Christ ourselves, let’s not think of making other disciples. God wants to get us ready. He will do this through ministry, through fellowship in that ministry, asking questions, looking for the truth, and having fellowship together in whatever measure we see. God will bring us to the place of being disciples, not just believers.

A disciple, in its simplest definition, is a follower of Christ. Our attitude of heart makes us disciples. If we are followers of Christ, we want to go on. A disciple is a learner; we are all learners. Now we are being conformed to His image. We could define a disciple as one that is a partaker of the Lord, manifesting the life of God, to *be* the message, not just a carrier of the message. We cannot just carry the message; we must *be* the message before we can actually impart the message.

How do we make disciples? Men have devised systems for discipleship, some of which bypass and try to simplify the pattern of God, but it cannot be simplified. To make disciples, we must do it God’s way. We cannot just spend six hours per week in meetings and think we are making disciples.

The commission Jesus gave was to the disciples He had made over the past three years. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus did not call His disciples and say, “You go your way. I’m going to fulfill my ministry here, and then I will leave you a commission.” The disciples of Jesus were with Him night and day. They saw Him work. He was more interested in them than in all the other things He was doing. He intended to leave them as a testimony, and that took time. He imparted truth to them—revelation to their hearts. They had to be established, and even after the establishing of truth, He said, “*When the Comforter is come, He will bring all things to your remembrance*” (John 14:26). God did the work through Jesus Christ in these disciples as they were with Him day by day, night after night. Their experience was not in a teaching class, but in actual fellowship.

Whom will we disciple? We will make a disciple out of every brother and sister, and then of others as the gospel is preached. We do not just make a little circle of disciples and then have the disciples bring

the message to others. Once we have learned what discipleship is, our disciples will bring others into the fellowship and then they will make disciples also. Whether we are brethren or ministers, each one will bring others to the Lord and be faithful in causing them to grow unto full stature. Discipleship is growing up into Christ, unto full stature. (See Ephesians 4.)

I believe discipleship means full commitment. When we commit ourselves, we have only begun to move toward the fulfillment of what God wants to do in us. There is a constant work. So as we have heard, as we have been diligent in what God has spoken to us, and allowed it to work out in our lives, now our responsibility is to commit that same message to faithful brothers—not just to anybody, but to faithful brothers, so that they also may take the same message under the same anointing and impart the same life to those that hear.

In making disciples, we must be selective. We must be directed by the Spirit of God, and we must recognize those that are willing to move on. Then there must be a concentrated effort (by God through us) to do what God wants to do in the vessels we are ministering to, and ministering with. You see a concentrated ministry of Jesus in His disciples, and there must be a concentrated ministry and fellowship in the ministry together. We must see a reproduction of the life of God in others. We cannot do just what we please. We must be constantly mindful of others, mindful of what God is doing, and doing all things unto edification. So many things are working together. We cannot come haphazardly and think that we will build. If we build, it is because our lives have been disciplined under the authority of God and we are sensitive to the Spirit of God.

We *must* make disciples. If we are not making disciples, what are we making? Whatever God has made us to be, we must make others to be. As ministers, we must have seen something that caused us to be changed. Now our ministry, combined with all the ministry God has put in our midst, must want to see that same life come forth in others. If we see something together, we must move in that direction together. We are to make disciples. We don't know how long we will be here. If the Lord tarries, others must be raised up, and we must work in the plan of God.

We cannot “hurry up” the process. Programs will not speed it up. We need to nourish, cherish, water, pray over the oneness we do have, and then move on to more, asking God to build us together in a fuller measure. If there is any division, or lack of oneness, not looking at the same plan, we are pulling apart. We need to be submitting to one another and moving together. This is the only way to really minister and feed the flock.

To become disciples of the Lord together, we will have to spend time together. We must fellowship in the revelation, to see together, buffet one another, look to the Lord for more hunger in our hearts, and move together. As we are available, and as we come before the Lord for His word to be built in us, there will be more oneness. And as this oneness starts to develop, we will start to reach out and touch others, because a full ministry will produce a full working of the church. A ministry of the word will not allow us to just sit here and try to perfect one another. We will be perfected, we will grow in grace in Him, but the full ministry will do what God wants it to do by reaching out to others and making disciples—by taking the message out. But you cannot do that unless the message is first built in you, unless you have been disciplined and disciplined, unless you recognize authority, unless you have submitted and obeyed. Unless the minister has allowed God to work in him the fullness of all that the cross means, the message has no meaning, and there can be no “flowing out” in ministry.

The real test of any ministry is not what happens tomorrow, but what is still continuing ten years from now. What happens when the minister leaves the scene will depend upon what kind of ministry he had—whether it was a ministry of life, in the revelation of the Lord. We need to examine ourselves, see what God is doing, and know whether what we see is worth giving ourselves to. If it is worth doing, then we need to put our whole hearts into it, and move with that purpose which God alone can give us.

GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Ministers speak as oracles of God

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (I Peter 4:11).

God has chosen certain channels to work through. He has chosen not only to indwell all believers by His Holy Spirit, but also to use men with His anointing to bring forth life to others. He has not chosen to use angels, but human ministers. He has given gifts to men, and we need not fear that He hasn't given enough. We should have confidence that He has given what we need.

A minister speaks for God. Our experience, our fellowship and history with God, and God's dealing with us will bring us to the place that when we speak, we speak as a mouthpiece for God. If we have really seen something that God has spoken to our hearts, we need to speak it. If we speak with faith as the oracles of God, the Holy Ghost will use what we speak. That word will be the word of the Lord. We must move with faith, and God can always correct us if we're wrong.

The Holy Spirit is the one who works the message in the minister. If the message is according to the Spirit and prompted by the Spirit, the words will be life to those who hear. He has chosen us to speak His words, and it is most important how we speak them. The hearers are learning not just from man but from God. When people listen, they should listen to what the Spirit of God is saying. They will learn from the anointing of the Spirit that is speaking through the minister. All the assembly should be listening for God, then going on to think upon the things they have learned.

In Acts 13:1 we see that there were prophets and teachers in Antioch at the time Paul and Barnabas were separated unto apostleship. We also read in the 27th verse, *“For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.”* The Jews condemned the Christ because they could not hear the voices of the prophets. They had ears, but they could not hear. In a similar way, when ministry comes forth we are listening for the voice of God speaking to us within the words—not just the words that are coming forth. The words *are* important; God doesn't call us to stand up and “ramble.” But while the words are important, more important is hearing the word of God underneath. The Spirit of God must be upholding the word. We must sense what God is trying to say to us through the words.

It is the Holy Spirit who discerns, and we who are open to receive. We should be more eager to receive than to reject. But we should never hear a word and receive it just because it's spoken by a certain brother. By the Spirit, we must try every word that is brought—not according to our own reasoning and opinions, but by the word of God. Both the speaker and the hearer should be moving in life under the anointing of the Spirit.

One revelation, differing ministries

In the body of Christ, Christ has given ministry: ministers and specific gifts. As we have seen, God's divine order is that the body might come into the unity of the faith through ministry. He has no other plan for the maturing of the saints. Whatever the ministry in a body sees and moves in is what the members partake of and move in. In some circumstances where God's plan is not able to function, God can reveal Himself to individuals. But all that He reveals in a believer's private prayer life, in his devotions, and in his reading of the scriptures, will bring him into the fellowship of the body. Believers will seek it out even at the cost of their lives.

The gifts of ministry are separate from the gifts of the Spirit. They are all manifestations of the Spirit, but the gifts Christ has given unto men (Ephesians 4) are men with the anointing of the Spirit and with the message worked in them by God. It is a continuing process, and the work of the Holy Spirit, but these men see something and they are here to bring the rest of the body into a oneness of faith. So these gifts have an important function. Any of the gifts of the Spirit could come through a minister, but I believe the gifts laid out in I Corinthians 12 are manifestations of the Spirit which may come through any brother to the church. Gifts of ministry are anointed by God for a specific purpose in the church, and they work continually. The gifts of the Spirit are also anointed by God for a specific purpose, but they are manifestations of the Spirit only for a specific need at a specific time.

Each of the ministries God has set in the body has its own purpose. The ministries are different from one another, but each one is only effective when the ministers are seeing the same thing. There is one revelation, but different ministries. If ministers are receiving from the Lord and God has truly called them, they should all be seeing the same truth and ministering the same truth. It may be in varying measures, but God has given each minister a measure of grace to minister what he sees. This God-given ability to minister is the only kind that will bring results. This doesn't leave anyone out, and it puts a responsibility upon those to whom God has given gifts. There is no ministry above another; they will all be held accountable for the grace that has been given to them.

Although it is very important, ministry of the word never eliminates the need for individual and corporate fellowship. Also, there may be brothers with functions other than those in the listing of gifts we about to consider. For example, one may have a ministry of exhortation, or praise. The *whole* body must function, not just a few of us. God, through ministry, will cause every member to function. The wisdom of God and gifts of the Spirit—not us in our own strength or wisdom—will supply whatever is needed at the time. The Holy Spirit is able to meet each need if we really believe Him. This leaves a full place for God to raise up anyone He wants to, and a full place for every ministry.

As ministers and as brothers, we must be co-laborers with God, moving in the same direction. We must continue to gain a fuller understanding of the purpose of God, and this gets right down to the smallest things. There must be *love* in all of our hearts as we get into this working, because it gets into very personal things. As ministers, we must humble ourselves before God so that His life might find expression in others. We're not trying to make others into what we want them to be; we're moving in the life of God, and we're workable.

The gifts of ministry are not a purpose within themselves, but they will bring forth a result that glorifies God. The gifts will pass away. Your ministry will pass away. In eternity we won't have need

of these ministries. But right now, God has given them and we have great need of them! God has not chosen any other way. Sometimes we think, “God will take care of it,” but God will not work in spite of us. There are serious consequences if ministry does not function in the church.

Five ministering gifts

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

God has never removed the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers from the church. All five ministering gifts that God placed in the church originally are still in the church today. They are still functioning in the way God designed and for His divine purpose. Today there is a misuse of titles and definitions, so let us define these again for our understanding. When we see what these gifts are designed to do, we will have more knowledge of God’s love and provision for us.

“And he gave some, apostles...” An apostle is “one that is sent.” He is sent of God, separated unto the Lord for the work God has called him to do. Paul was an apostle. There were other men who were sent to do the work God called them to do: to go forth to minister the word, and to see God’s people come together and give a local expression of the body of Christ.

An apostle, a delegate, or a messenger, is one that is sent with full “power of attorney” or authority to act in place of another. The sender remains behind to back up the one sent. So an apostle is one that is called of God and sent forth to do the things that Christ would do if He were here himself. The gift and works of the apostle have not ceased. Man has sometimes removed this gift, but God has not. There are still apostles that are sent forth with the full authority of God to do His divine will.

“...and some, prophets...” The prophet in the New Testament is one that keeps the divine will of the Father before the church. He keeps the church on course, right in the center of God’s purpose. The Spirit uses the prophets to keep the living revelation before His church. I Corinthians 14 says that it is possible, and should be expected, to have inspired revelation come to the prophets as we gather together. By continual revealing through this ministry, we see how the church can move in God’s purpose and fulfill His will.

In Acts 11:28, we see that Agabus signified by the Spirit that there should be a great drought throughout all the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. The prophet may be used of God to foretell, but this is not the main purpose for which God gives prophets to the church. Prophets are ones who speak for God. They are primarily preachers of righteousness.

“...and some, evangelists...” Evangelists are called to proclaim the gospel. There were evangelists in the early church, and the gift continues today. An evangelist does see the purpose of God (what the church is), but he mainly has a burden and the grace working in his life to proclaim the good news of salvation. An evangelist is actually a “bringer of glad tidings.” We see many times that the apostles and prophets, at some time or another, were used as evangelists to bring forth the glad tidings of the gospel as God moved upon them.

“...and some, pastors...” Pastors are also called bishops, overseers, shepherds, or elders. These words describe their function. A pastor or shepherd is one that watches out over, or oversees the body. Pastors or elders are always recognized in plurality, so that Christ may remain the head of His church as brothers function in the grace that is given them to watch out over the children of God.

The elder’s function is to care for the flock of God. He is given grace to discern what is happening and to watch out for those who might rise up in the midst to draw away disciples unto themselves, or those who come in from the outside to defile the church of the living God. The New Testament uses two Greek words when speaking of elders or bishops. The word “presbuteros” is translated “elder” in Acts 14:23. The word “episkopos” is translated “overseer” in Acts 20:28 and “bishop” in I Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7, I Peter 2:25, and Philippians 1:1. These two Greek words imply the following: charge of the church; over, order, or direction; having charge of; a watch (sentry or scout), implying a goal or mark; to oversee; to beware; look diligently; take the oversight.

An elder is one that wants what God wants for His children. He is an example to the flock and leads them as God has given him charge. Elders have a care for God’s children in a special way. This is the function for which Christ has given them to the church. Their ministry is effective only as the flock recognizes the authority (or anointing) God has placed on them.

“...and teachers...” Teachers are those that are given the grace (ability) to break apart the word of God and feed the church. The grace (ability to minister life) may differ in different men. Teachers are given spiritual insight and understanding, along with the ability (grace) to impart it to the assembly, by the Spirit. They teach the commandments of the Lord, expound the scriptures, and teach doctrines. The ministry of the word mainly comes to the church through the teacher and the prophet. We saw in Acts 13 that there were five prophets and teachers at Antioch, but we may have more or fewer, depending upon the need and the size of the gathering.

In Romans 12:5-10 we see that it is grace and faith which allow the supply of Christ to come to the body through the different ministering gifts: *“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another...”*

“The supply of Christ” is the meaning of all ministry. This is not just good sermons; it is the supply of Christ coming to us in life. These gifts are in the hands of Jesus, and they should be under His control, to benefit the body of Christ. They are given for *“the perfecting (maturing) of the saints,”* and *“for the work of ministry,”* so that God can edify (build up) the body of Christ and so we can reach out and do what He has designed us to do. This perfecting is not going to take place in some other age. Paul plainly says that it will take place in this age, because only in the church age do we see these gifts that Christ gave for the perfecting of the saints. We are to come to full knowledge, be brought to full maturity—not halfway.

In the natural, physical realm, we realize that we need food to grow. In the spiritual realm it is no different. To grow, we must partake of nourishment, partake of life—the food God has for us. The

words that are spoken will be life if they are coming from the hand of God. God does feed His own through the supply of the different ministers He has set in the midst.

The members of the body of Christ must recognize the authority flowing through these gifts if perfection (maturity) is going to take place in the body. We must be spiritual enough to accept God's word as it is brought, and God's divine will and purpose as it is worked in the midst of the body through these gifts. Until we as a church are willing to be obedient to God and His word, and willing to respect the gifts He has set in the midst, we will not come into the unity of the faith or to the knowledge of the Son of God. We will not know the fullness of Christ. Also, there is no place given for some to have it and some not. The scripture says "*till we all come...*"

One of the great troubles in the church today is the lack of members willing to be in subjection to the gifts God has set in the body. There is not enough respect and reverence given to the gifts of God, or to accepting the words given through these gifts to the church. This never implies that we get our eyes upon man. We get our eyes upon Christ, and by becoming spiritual, we are able to discern what is good and evil, not being carried about by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). We will be able to discern those that are apostles and sent of God, those that are prophets, those that are God's true evangelists and pastors and teachers, and be willing to become subject to the will of God as it is worked out in the body.

Ministry of the word

Prophets and teachers must have the same revelation; they must be seeing the same thing. Their ministers differ in the manner in which the revelation is brought forth, but the end purpose is the same: to bring the church to oneness in Christ. The two gifts give balance to the ministry of the word so that the church might stay in the purpose of God and so that each member will have understanding in the plan of God. These ministries bring God's church into a unity of the faith so that the church's ministry—giving a witness to the world of the reality of Christ—will be manifested.

In Frankly Speaking, Vol. I, John W. Kennedy lists four things that result from the lack of adequate ministry of the word:

1. *A smallness of spiritual understanding.* (We are spiritually "narrow-minded," so to speak.)
2. *An absence of spiritual discernment.* (We discern by our natural minds and reasoning rather than by the Spirit.)
3. *A weakness of spiritual character.* (Ministry builds character. As ministry of the word is obeyed and we "eat" or act upon the word of God, we partake of the character of God. We start to reveal who God is in our daily walk.)
4. *A limited capacity to work together and fellowship with others.*

Sometimes because of our thinking about being "Spirit-led," we cut out the teaching ministry that would give direction, break down the word, and feed, week after week. When we do not have this in an assembly, ministry is just "shooting out" randomly—each one doing what he sees to do. But when we start to function properly, there will be both a prophetic ministry and a teaching ministry manifested through the overall ministry (not just one or two men), and we won't have this problem. People will come to the "edge of their seats." You won't be able to find a place on the front row when the word

really starts to bring a demand. People will start to say, “Let’s get there early so I can sit on the front seat!” When we start to give them something to feed on, the ones who want to move on will be there. We can’t do this by changing the form; we just need to get under the control of the Spirit.

If we are going to move in God and be changed into His image, it is not enough just to have teachers in our assembly; we also need prophets to keep the revelation clear and God’s purpose continually before us. On the other hand, we cannot have only prophets. We need teachers that are able to minister the word to feed us. (This was emphasized as Christ told Peter three times, “Feed my sheep.”) We see that one without the other is not enough. We need *all* that God has provided. We must have God’s perfect balance.

Many would put these gifts into two groups: one ministry appealing to man’s emotions, the other ministry appealing to man’s logic. This has never been God’s purpose for giving these two gifts. I do not believe the revelation is limited to any emotional or logical explanation of the truth. All of God’s revealing is by His Spirit to our spirit. As Christians, we do not know anything by the ability of our minds. We know in the ability of the Spirit (I Corinthians 2:11-14). The simple difference between these two ministries of the word is not in the manner in which the message is brought, but whether the message comes in teaching or by more of a prophetic revealing of God’s will and purpose. Although the expression may differ, the outworking of every message is Christ. These two ministries serve to do two different things, both necessary to the completeness of God’s work in each believer. The revelation must be in balance as it is brought forth. Just as each member in the body has a function, so these two ministering gifts have their differing functions and purposes.

We cannot judge anything spiritual by the manner in which it is brought forth, nor can we judge the anointing by any outward evidence, other than whether it has a lasting effect on those who receive the message. Anointing is spiritually discerned, not emotionally felt. God does not try to appeal to the emotions or intellect of a man, but reveals Himself to us in the Spirit. The degree of inspiration can vary according to the fellowship between the vessel and God. God has given individuals the ability to discern by the Spirit the degree of inspiration and the truth of the message being brought forth at the time of utterance. Some utterances may have greater spiritual depth, but this does not mean we make a distinction in whom we look to for the revealing. We must all look to God and the anointing to teach us.

To see the benefits and purposes of these two ministries, we must be able to discern beyond the way and manner in which they deliver God’s message. If we can see these truths, our faith can go ahead to receive truth and grow in grace and understanding in the mystery. If not, we will be continually taken up with personalities and abilities, or we could find ourselves judging God’s anointing rather than being on the receiving end of God’s ministering gifts. These gifts are given to the local church, and are a part of the local expression and subject to the body as the church is subject to Christ. When Christ calls a man and gives him a gift of ministry, He also gives the authority and ability to fulfill that ministry. These gifted men are part of the church, given by God to help bring it into perfection.

The reason for bringing out and emphasizing these two ministering gifts is to understand God’s plan and why these gifts are placed in the church. Truth will set us free and give liberty to move in the Spirit, allowing God to call and set in His ministries. You may ask, “Where will these men come from?” I say, from the body of Christ and from the face of God. They must be God’s men with God’s

message. These men must be those who look to God for what they minister to His church. We need the freedom of ministry. We need what God is saying, not what man has been taught in a school. We must know what the mind of the Spirit is for us as the body. We must have this ministry, because it is the only way God has designed for us to come to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Spiritual authority

God doesn't delegate any authority in the New Testament church. Ministers are channels of spiritual authority, but God never puts His authority within them. God's authority is in the minister only as His life flows through him. The words the minister speaks must have God's authority and anointing on them. The members are submitted, not to the minister, but to the authority of Christ flowing through. In this way we submit one to another. Christ never relinquishes His place of headship. Recognizing God's authority will bring the church to oneness under the Head.

As individuals, we are always connected directly to the Head, whether we are ministers or not. There is no "small head" between members and Christ. Ministers must understand this, because it affects our ministry. Only as we understand this will we be able to function properly, with God's authority reaching out to affect others.

I believe the question of authority in the local church is brought forth in I Corinthians 15:24: *"When he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."* All rule and all authority must be put under Christ. He must be the last word. As we recognize this, we will respect the authority God has laid down in His gifts and in the word of God, and as we yield to the authority of God by the Spirit, then all of our judgments, our rules, and our authority will be brought into the perfect will, rule, and authority of Christ.

In I Corinthians 16:1 Paul says, *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye."* Paul took the authority of God, and spoke as an oracle of God, and men and women respected this. As they carried out the wishes of God (not the wishes of Paul), they were blessed. If we have the life of Christ in us, His commandments are not grievous. They are life unto us as we obey them. In I Thessalonians 5:12 Paul writes, *"We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."* Paul asks the Thessalonian saints to recognize the authority of the ministers in their midst—not the men so much as the calling of God on those men. We are all members of the body, but all are not prophets, all are not teachers, all are not evangelists, all are not pastors. God has set gifts in the body as it pleased Him. Paul says we should recognize and give place to the gifts, and esteem them very highly in the love of Christ, for the sake of the work of their ministry.

II Thessalonians 3:14 indicates the authority in which Paul spoke: *"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he maybe ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* Again, Paul spoke as an oracle of God. Just as we recognize Paul, John, Peter, and James as men that were inspired of God to write the scriptures we now are quoting, we must recognize the authority in the ministers God has set in the midst of the body in this hour, in this church age. If we are not willing to do this and recognize that God is using them and

speaking through them, and that it is not man but God, we will not see the body of Christ come together, as is the desire in so many of our hearts.

Let us not look at great numbers. Let us not look to be condoned or recognized by man, because this is in direct contrast with the word of God. If men refused to recognize Christ as the Son of God, they will refuse to recognize those that are walking with God in the fullness of power. They will refuse to accept your ways and the ways that are set out in God's word. Be willing to be led by the Spirit, obedient to the Spirit, and be willing to take your place in the body of Christ and minister in the place God wants you to minister.

For the authority of God to flow through ministers' lives, they must be yielded to the Spirit and thus reflecting the life of Christ. Their lives must be beyond reproach, holy, hid in Christ. They must be willing to be obedient in all things as the Spirit of God leads them according to the word of God. As II Corinthians 7:1 says, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* Only as the lives being used measure up to the life of God can these ministering gifts be effective. We must give no place for the enemy to come and bring division and strife into the body of Christ.

For spiritual authority to flow, we must abide in Christ and be obedient to the leading of the Spirit at any cost. We must forsake all outside authority and depend utterly upon the Spirit to reveal God's divine plan and will for us as we go forth day by day. We will have to pray without ceasing. We will have to gather together and continually stay before God for His divine purpose to be worked out in His body. We will have to stay abiding in the Vine. The only way the body can move in perfect coordination with the Head is to stay connected with the Head and in a healthy condition.

We see in the book of Acts that Paul and the other apostles, on their missionary journeys, appointed elders in different churches. We may take this to mean that the apostles were the ones that designated them. But we see in Acts 20:28 (NAS) that Paul said, *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."* Elders were set aside over the flock *by the Holy Spirit*. Paul is saying that even though the apostles appointed elders, the apostles were merely led of the Spirit to *recognize* those that were spiritual in the midst. It is clear that the authority of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and elders comes directly from God by the Holy Ghost. They are set aside to do a work in the body, and the body must be willing to accept God's authority which comes to them and through them.

In II Timothy 3, Paul says that in the last days, perilous times shall come. He says that *"men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."* This is what often creeps into the midst and robs the body of Christ of the authority that God has designated. Some men, even those who were appointed at one time to carry forth a ministry anointed by God, and through whom the gifts worked, fail to go on with God and let Christ become everything. When we fail to yield to the Spirit and the spiritual understanding that God brings, we will revert back to man's way.

Paul goes on to tell Timothy to *"make full proof of thy ministry"* (II Timothy 4:5). I believe that if we are spiritual, if we are seeking the Lord, and if we have refrained from the things of this world, we will

know those that are God's by their fruits. If we are spiritual, we will be able to discern spiritual things and understand the things of God as He brings them to us and as He builds us into the fullness He is taking us into. Let us pray that God will show us His church by divine revelation, so that we might become part of it, making full proof of the ministry God has called us into, God making us one as we come into the fullness of Christ, taking on His mind and growing up into Him.

The authority that the church is shunning today is not the authority of man, but the authority of Christ. The book of Revelation states that Christ walks in the midst of the candlesticks and that He has the seven stars, or seven messengers of those seven churches, in His hand. If we shun the authority of God's messengers, in the forms we have spoken about, we are not shunning man, but God and His ways, His admonishments, and the edification He brings to us. So let us not be high-minded, but let us be in subjection to the body and to the leading of the Spirit, so that ministry might bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

The order of God in ministry

The order of God's authority is: God the head of Christ, Christ the head of man, and man the head of woman (I Corinthians 11:3). If we move outside of this order, we will not see the fullness of God. Ministry is given to bring us to a place of fullness in God—fullness in functioning and fullness in fulfillment. We are “members in particular,” and God has designed for each one to find fulfillment in Himself—in the exact place He has designed for him or her.

All the gifts of ministry we have just discussed have been given to men. Nowhere in scripture do we see women called to fulfill these ministries. I Corinthians 14:34,35 says, *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”* This does not mean a woman cannot come and worship the Lord. She has a very important place in the outworking of God's plan. But God has given her no place of spoken ministry or authority in looking out over God's people.

We do see in the scriptures some called “deaconesses,” such as one named Phoebe (Romans 16:1,2). Deacons and deaconesses are ones that serve. But this serving is not the ministry of the word. These may be ones who care for the saints. They may move from house to house, or they may wait on brothers passing through, like the apostle Paul in his time: serving him or waiting on his needs in such things as food. But nowhere do we see that the woman has been called to minister to or even address the church. Paul tells the women, if they have questions, to ask their husbands at home. If a woman does not have a husband, I think she can find a time to speak privately to those who have the care of the church. I know that God will honor this, and the plan of God will be worked out and lived out in a proper way.

If we find ourselves out of order, we need to get into order. Ministry is present to get us into order, and as we see what God has designed for ministry, we will start to order our lives accordingly. As we begin to “measure up” to these different qualifications, and as we start to see more clearly, grace will be manifested in individual members of the gathering. If the gathering is spiritual in any way, it will recognize grace moving through different brethren for ministry and for the care of their own souls. The body will submit properly and obey—and remember, all obedience is “as unto the Lord.” We're not

obeying man; we're obeying the Lord, just as the woman submits to her husband in all things "as unto the Lord." Everything is being done in direct relationship with the Holy Spirit, underneath the headship of Christ. We are connected to Him. We have received His life, and now we need to go on to receive His supply and nourishment.

Plurality of ministry

God does not call one man to lead the church. Men have allowed the one-pastor system to develop, but that does not mean it is the pattern of God. God's pattern is plurality, a functioning together, a flowing together, man not having the preeminence, but rather God moving, doing His perfect will in the church, feeding, keeping the church on course through the different ministries, with men watching out, caring for, and giving direction by the power of the Holy Spirit in each one's life.

"Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:1-3). In this local gathering at Antioch, five prophets and teachers, ministers of the word, are named. We may conclude from this passage that these men were the spiritual leaders at Antioch. It is possible that the elders were represented in this group that *"ministered to the Lord, and fasted."* (In I Timothy 3:21, Paul states that an elder must be apt to teach.) There is a difference between a pastor and one that God calls to minister His word, but an overseer may also be a teacher or a prophet, or have some other gift. When the Spirit said "Separate me," the two that were set aside went forth as sent ones (apostles), but their ministry of the word and revelation of Christ did not change; they ministered as teachers and prophets. They also did the work of an evangelist where it was necessary. As we know, the winning of souls is the first labor of love in establishing a local assembly of believers. We can see that God is able to do His perfect work, and that He has chosen a plurality of ministry to function in the midst.

Many passages show us the plurality of ministry. Paul, passing by Ephesus, called for the elders to come to see him. To them he said: *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified"* (Acts 20:28-32). Here we see that there was a plurality of eldership. We see the function of overseers: what they do, their watchful care. Acts 14:23 says, *"...ordained them elders in every church..."* Titus 1:5 says, *"and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee..."*

Just because a man is called to be an elder and he meets the qualifications set forth in Titus and I Timothy does not mean he should go on to be the sole leader in a gathering. A plurality of eldership is required to meet the many needs of God's people. Shepherds or overseers can only care for a certain number of people. It takes grace to watch out over lives. It takes understanding in the purpose of God,

and one man cannot watch out over hundreds of people as we see many trying to do today. We cannot say exactly how many elders are needed in a particular gathering, but we need more than just one. The number partly depends on how many people are gathering together.

If there is only one elder, we will see local churches being built around personalities rather than being led by the Spirit. The Lord has not designed that man should be the head of the body of Christ. Christ is the only head of the church. The only way Christ can rule as head of His church is by the anointing and by each member recognizing Christ as the head. We can only have the anointing if we are in God's divine order. If God's church is not in His order, there is always something out of balance.

If God's plan calls for two or more elders in every church, let us obey and allow the Spirit to take control and put the church in order. We will begin to see the beauty and perfect order of God as the Spirit moves through a many-membered body for oneness to His praise and glory. Every local assembly of believers that has Christ as its head bears the image of Christ and "one another" in all its life and activity. Oneness is the mark of God's church when the government and ministries are by His order and moving by the Spirit.

Locality of ministry

In the beginning, the apostles were sent forth under the leading of the Spirit to do different works. These works produced souls, and these souls came together to edify each other and to learn more of the word of God. As God added to the church, the ministering gifts began to be manifested in their midst. As these churches grew from a beginning work into the maturity of a local assembly with everything put in order, they sent forth other ones, and as more works were started, they also became established churches. This same pattern can be followed today.

The church is the "ecclesia," meaning those that are called out. It does not belong to a fellowship of churches or an organization. It belongs to Christ. It is made up of believers in a certain locality that gather together to worship and to receive the ministry of the word and gifts that God has set in their midst. Nowhere in the scriptures do we find that these groups are joined together even loosely. They are autonomous in their expression, and God gives ministry to each local gathering, to feed and to bring them to unity. This does not mean that the saints in different churches do not enjoy fellowship with other saints in the Lord, but they are "members in particular" in a certain locality. They gather so that the body might be edified, that they might be used of God, that the gifts might be manifested, and that the body might grow to the place of perfection or full maturity in Christ. As they mature, they will be led by the Spirit to reach out and start other works. Thus we will see other churches formed and the gospel spread according to the word of God rather than according to man's precepts.

If we find ourselves in a local gathering where we do not see the five ministering gifts coming together and ministering unto the Lord, we must look to the Lord to bring it about. We may run into difficulties, but this is where we stay before the Lord in prayer, seeking His face, and maybe even fasting.

I have talked to many leading men in the world who feel they have a ministry, but the problem is, they are not building the body of Christ together. They go beyond the area God has called them to work. If a man is a teacher, God has called him to work within the local church. Today, with the communication that is available, we can go way beyond what God intends, while not being under the authority of

Christ and not seeing the body of Christ brought to the place of maturity—the very purpose for which God has given ministry!

An apostle may admonish and exhort in any local assembly, but he is there only by invitation and has no authority to oversee the gathering. In a similar way, an elder cannot be transferred to another church as an elder. If he moves to another area, he can become part of that local church and maybe after some time he may be recognized as an elder. But moving elders back and forth by man's choice is not according to God's word. The gifts of the Spirit work through elders in the same way as in all other members wherever they are, but they are only elders in their local church.

There are times that God may bring a minister from the outside to help and encourage us, and to labor for awhile, or someone in our midst may be used in an extra-local ministry to encourage the body of Christ in other places. But normally we look for God to work His ministry through local brothers. We need to bear the responsibility, realizing that ministry in the church will come from among the brotherhood. If God moves upon a man, he must be willing to submit to what God wants to do, because we are not looking for ministers to come in from somewhere else. We must stay before God as a brotherhood. There must be a desire in our hearts for God to move upon men's hearts in our midst with a burden of ministry. We must be actively engaged. We cannot let other areas crowd this out, but continue to wait upon the Lord for ministry.

Recognize those who labor among you

“But we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves” (I Thessalonians 5:12,13).

We don't vote on men to fill needs, nor do we force men to serve. It is the grace of God that moves in a man's heart. If he has a gift of God, and if grace is working in his life, he should be willing to serve. He serves out of the love of God that has been shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit. He sees the vision, he sees the need, and more than that, he hears the voice of the Spirit of God speaking to him. He senses the responsibility placed upon him by God. It is a great responsibility to have the privilege of serving God's people, serving them Christ, watching out over them, caring for them.

When God gives ministry, we need to recognize it. We look for ministry to come through men who meet the qualifications. We can't choose men by a vote. We can't look at positions and ask, “Who's going to be this? And who's going to be that?” Ministers must be recognized for the grace of God working through them and for the qualifications which they meet. They must have lives that are upright; their families must be in order. In some situations, this may take some time, but ministers can't come and “set the church in order” until their families are in order. If a man does not meet the qualifications, he should not be pointed out as one who has a ministry. (Also note that when brothers are recognized as ministers, this may not necessarily mean everybody has recognized them, but there is a recognition by those who are spiritual and responsible within the body.)

Remember, this is all being done by the grace of God, the ability that comes from the Spirit of God. So no man can take the credit. The glory must be given to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of His church. These ministers are brothers in the Lord, sons of God, members in particular. We don't give

them titles, as such. So many today want to give titles to leaders and honor them by the title. But let's honor each other by submitting to each other, looking to the Lord and partaking of the ministry coming forth from these brothers. Nowhere has God called us to honor these men above the status of "a brother." Each one is a brother among the brethren (see Acts 15:22). They are not "heads." Christ is the only head of His church. All of these gifts by Christ to the church are servants. They are called to serve, and if we remember this, we will avoid the common tendency to honor the person of man rather than glorifying God and honoring Him in what He is doing.

We may not realize the importance of these areas, but if we see Christ as the head of His church, it is important to give thought to the expressions we use or the names we put upon people such as "pastor," "elder," or "reverend." Many with more education like to be called "doctor" because of their degree. I say nothing against them except that this has no meaning in the working of God. We do not honor the person of man; we honor the person of Christ. If these men desire to function in the body of Christ, they can be nothing more than brothers among the brethren, serving and giving of themselves.

Have we usurped the authority of Christ by becoming "recognized" in the church in the wrong way? The leaders (those who serve) do need to be recognized for what they are doing, and we need to share with them in material things as they share with us the spiritual things (I Corinthians 9:11-14). But we are not to give them a place higher than God gives them. They are here to serve and to meet the needs of God's children, to watch out over them, and to see that there is movement, discipline, and training of the family of God.

Another area to mention briefly is the greed in men's hearts in the world today that can affect the outworking of ministry. Men cannot be laboring for money. Ministry must be born out of the divine compulsion of the Spirit of God in a man's heart, and he will labor unto the Lord whether he gets any money or not. We do need to support those who are laboring. We need to give as God directs us. The laborer is worthy of his hire (I Timothy 5:18). God knows we have to live and we have to eat, but if we want to have a spiritual ministry, we must approach everything from a spiritual standpoint. When God calls, God provides. If a man is looking to the material benefits of our age, rather than looking to the Lord, he is not fit to minister or to have a place of service in the body of Christ. The way man has devised seems easier: we bring a man in and pay him wages to serve us and do what we think a minister ought to do. But where we have a functioning body, and where we have ministers that God has placed in the midst, it is an entirely different working, and we need to understand this. Do we want God, or do we want man? Do we want to be religious, or do we want to become spiritual, growing up into maturity?

If we have come far away from God's plan, it will not be easy to humble ourselves. We may find that men will fight for recognition. We will have to wait upon God. If hearts are sincere, really looking to God, and we're seeing in some degree what God wants, I know God will give the grace and enable us to partake of what He is doing, and we will go on to grow and mature as we enter into the supply that He has for us—and God has abundance! He has done everything in fullness. God will give us what we need—not particularly what we want, but what we need. We must have eyes and ears that are spiritually attuned to God. We are not just listening to man. We are listening to what the Spirit of God is saying *through* man, the word that *God* has prepared for us. For as we have said, ministry is given that we might receive the supply from the Head.

GIFTS TO MEN

A man who has a ministry

In the church, any man may bring an exhortation, a testimony, a psalm, or a truth God has revealed that he wants to share with the body of Christ. But this is different from a man that has a ministry. If you make a study of ministry, you find that it is *serving*. With the specific choosing or calling of God, a greater responsibility is put on the one who serves because he is given a greater measure of revelation for a purpose. God requires more of the one He gives it to.

When we begin to “build in God’s building,” we may begin by seeing many good truths. But we have not yet driven one nail into the building. We have not yet given direction, or said, “This is the way.” The Holy Spirit has had no opportunity yet to put on a demand that moves us on from where we are. But this is what God wants to do in the assembly, and this is the responsibility God puts upon the minister. It’s not enough to say, “All of us in the church will do our little bit.” We need those that have a gift. Yes, other brothers can work and share in the burden. But God has given gifts to the body for a purpose.

If you’ve been given a gift, you have a responsibility from God. You will have to answer to Him for your life. Is your life a broken vessel though which the message can be ministered to others? You must answer to God for that. I don’t believe that God asks, “Do you want a gift?” and then gives it. He gives gifts according to His will and choosing, and then we’re responsible for that gift. The responsibility God calls us to bear is not always easy. It’s a grave responsibility because God gives the gift for a purpose. We should know the aim and purpose of our ministry.

The importance of spiritual ministry in the body of Christ cannot be overemphasized. As ministers, we must believe that what God has given us is important. No matter how small it seems, or even if the truth is only in seed form, it is important, or God would not have given it to you. Even if God is just beginning to work in you, you must be faithful to God with what He has given.

A man who has a ministry sees something and continues to labor in what he sees. Over a period of time you will see a brother laboring in what God is revealing to his heart. He is not sitting by passively; he is laboring to bring that light to the body of Christ. You can’t mistake a man who is laboring in the measure of grace or ministry God has given him. You can’t help recognizing when he sees the purpose of God and is ministering in it. It fits right into place, and it does what God wants it to do. It supplies the need: the life of God to the body.

If a minister is ministering light and life and the word is real to him, he wants to see that same word working in others. He wants to see them moving in the same joy he has. He doesn’t want others to be like him, but like Jesus. He continues to labor over a period of time. He is stable and consistent. He may get discouraged, but he continues to labor. As time goes by, others will know those that are laboring, holding up the vision, responsible. Then God moves in all the others who may not have that calling or ability, to bring a full expression of His life with every member functioning. Even if it is “only” a prayer ministry, every member is active. I believe every brother and every sister should be functioning. Each one is a part of the body, just as the minister is. Ministry will bring a gathering to the

point where each member is alive. It should prepare each member to be open to the moving of the Holy Spirit. It is the responsibility of the ministry to bring the assembly to this place.

Ministry without anointing will not bring the results that we and God desire, but a true ministry is one that God can anoint. God must build the ministry in the heart of the minister. It must possess and swell up within him. It will burden him as he sees the needs. A minister doesn't just say, "I'll go study my Bible and stay before the Lord a little bit, and then I'll come in and minister." No! When a minister comes into the assembly and sees needs in individual lives and corporate needs in the whole assembly, he will be burdened with them. How does he exercise this burden? Where does he bring it? Does he get discouraged and say he can't do anything about it? No, he brings it to the Lord, and by the gift God has given him, he starts to build.

Ministry is a function, not an office

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (I Timothy 3:1). I believe "office" is an inaccurate translation here. "Function" is a better term. Do you say your thumb has an "office," or your foot has an "office"? No, they are members of one body and they have a function. They serve a purpose, but you don't bow down before your thumb or let the thumb govern you. In the body of Christ, Christ is the only one who governs. We must always recognize Jesus Christ as the head of His church. To do this, we cannot look at individuals as having an "office" that gives them any authority to govern others. But God has given them a function and we should recognize and honor the authority of Christ that flows through them.

Saying this does not take away from our personal honor of one another. But we cannot elevate man—we must only recognize the authority of God. We must see the balance, and not go to one extreme or the other. One danger is to not respect or honor anybody, and the other is to only respect certain ones. We need to see that we are gathering together as one body, and that the church is the apple of God's eye.

The condition of the church throughout the ages is always revealed in the ministry. Trace it and see. Whatever the tendency of ministry was in a certain time, it is revealed in the church. For example, the scripture makes no distinction between "clergy" and "laity." It is a revelation to see what the brotherhood is, what the body of Christ is, what the church is, and to see that all brethren are equal, yet there are grace gifts. The authority of God moves through those God has chosen, not because man has set them up as a special group, but because the grace of God is upon them. They have no more privilege than another brother, but they have a greater responsibility because of the authority of grace flowing through them. They will give an account to God for that grace.

With wrong understanding, we will make a distinction between "laity" and "clergy," and think that some men have been given an "office." We cannot make this distinction. God does not give any brother a "position" or an "office." He gives grace that flows through the vessel. The gifts set forth in Ephesians 4:11—apostles, evangelists, etc.—are "grace gifts." They are all by grace. What we are saying is that you can't separate the man from the message. We are admonished to honor those who labor among us (I Thessalonians 5:12-13) but we don't honor the brother just because he has a ministry. We honor him because of the word of God that is coming forth from him. His authority is recognized because of what God is doing in and through him, not because he is "holding an office."

This is very important. It will make a difference in what we go on to do or to see. What God is doing in ministry is precious, but it's not in "persons." He does not choose a person and put authority on him.

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ..." [we're all equal, we're all members] "...and individually members one of one another, and since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each one exercise them accordingly, if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith..." (Romans 12:4-6). Everything God is doing is according to the proportion of our faith.

Individuals have a responsibility, but I believe the scripture reveals there is an equality in God between members of the body that takes precedence over the ministry that God has given. In this equality, we recognize the grace that flows through men, and we partake and submit to the message and to the authority of Christ, not to the man. We submit only to the authority and grace of God that is flowing through any brother, in the measure and portion that is moving through him. If we don't understand this, and we start looking at the man rather than the authority of God, our feelings about a person will hinder us from submitting to the grace of God. God wants ministry in our midst to be established in Him.

Functioning in grace

We read in I Peter 4:10, *"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."* In Romans 12:3-7 we read, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."* Our relationship is as "many members in one body." Now we must have a concern for ministry, or "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." And now we minister "according to the proportion of faith." We need not go past what God has worked in us and what we are convinced of.

Paul said, *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation..."* (I Corinthians 3:9,10). Grace is a personal thing. You can't go beyond, nor should you lag behind, the measure of grace God has given to you. God has given you something and He expects that measure of grace to manifest in you. We need to learn the place of rest, but we shouldn't hold back. Paul, as a "wise master builder" said, "I have laid the foundation." Paul knew what he was doing. A measure of grace was given to him, and he knew what he was here to do. We should never become proud or think too highly of ourselves, or tell people who we are. We just need to know what we are here to do.

The "grace" given to ministers is the ability of God for a certain ministry, and the "measure of grace" is all that he can actually deliver to those God has sent him to. The grace to minister and the grace

given to every member of the body are two different things. Titus 2:11-12 tells us what grace does. Grace moves through ministry, *“instructing us to deny ungodliness, worldly desires, and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age.”* This is the grace we are looking for, to be flowing through faithful brethren, ministers of the word. Thank God for the ministers of the word that He has given! We should pray that God would give more fullness of ministry and add to the ministry.

Calling, ability, and responsibility

Because ministry is given *“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,”* a great responsibility lies on the ones that God has called. The way of the minister is not an easy way, not an easy life. It is a life that must pay the cost. You cannot just feel you have something to say and speak it out, thinking that it will bring life. Ministry costs. It is a daily encounter with God, a continued open anointing before Him for a continued expansion of the revelation.

How does God begin to work in the heart of a minister? First, I believe we must know we are called by God. This is shown throughout the epistles. Paul knew he was called. There are some whom God calls to specific ministries in the church, and the one who is called does not decide, “I’m going to be a teacher,” or “I’m going to be an apostle,” or “I’m going to be a prophet.” When God calls a man and gives him a certain ability, he must apply himself to that calling.

James 3:1 in the King James version says, *“My brethren, be not many masters...”* but I think a better translation is, *“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment”* (NAS). God has called some to be prophets, some to be teachers, some to be apostles, some to be evangelists, but all are still brothers. These functions are gifts of grace to brothers. James says that not everybody should desire this place. But if you are called, you cannot escape the call of God. If man feels he may be called to ministry, but he is struggling or has doubts, I would advise him to get together with the brothers that have a recognized ministry, and submit himself to them through counseling and fellowship. Then, if there is no evidence of a gift, he can just move back into the rest of God, and function in whatever God would have him do. It may be exhortation once in a while, or something else. Sometimes we try to do one thing when God has really given us ability to do something else. But each one has a function.

On the other hand, sometimes we are afraid to make a positive statement about what God is doing in our lives. We know it is all by grace, and that we are nothing in ourselves, but still we are either called or not called. If God calls and sets His seal upon a man, He gives the ability. You cannot work up this ability within yourself, or even by fellowship with others. Either you have ability from God, or you don’t, and we cannot “fool” others who are seeing and moving in the revelation. Brothers and sisters can tell whether a man is moving out of his understanding, or ministering out of the revelation. This discernment doesn’t require great understanding; all it takes is the Holy Ghost.

As ministers of the word, we are responsible unto the Lord for the message and for the discipline of our own vessel (bodies and minds), so there can be a real, pure flow of the word of God, not just our thoughts or feelings. We must allow God to work this discipline, but first we must know that He has called us.

I am convinced by the scriptures that when God calls anyone to be a minister, the first thing He does is to give him the message. It may be only in “seed form”—and it usually is. I believe it takes years of God’s dealing with us to produce vessels He can really use to let His word become life to others. This is where we must be patient, one with another, encourage and exhort one another, and give direction. God wants a free-flowing ministry. There will be struggles, and there will be difficulties, but we cannot become discouraged just because we have difficulties. We must continue to strive for openness, so that as God moves in the heart of a brother, he can feel free to exhort the congregation. This puts great responsibility, not only on those God has given to care for the flock (elders), but upon each brother who ministers what God has given him.

“...That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” (Ephesians 4:14) Those that have any ministry or even a word of exhortation must be laboring for singleness of eye together. We are no longer children, so there must be a maturing. When we stand to minister, to build, there is life coming out of the minister. Or we could say, if there is life coming out of the ministry, it will build us, and give us direction and singleness of purpose. Then we must move in that.

This ability given by God to the minister is the only thing that will bring results. This fact doesn’t cut anyone out; rather, it puts responsibility upon those to whom God has given a gift. Ministry is given to bring life and understanding. All that Christ is to the minister is expressed in words that are brought to bear by the Spirit, not by the letter. As a minister, the measure of grace that comes to you is what you are to pass to others, in the fullest measure God has given it to you. Sometimes we are slack. We may get an abundance, yet be slack in passing on all that God has given us. I believe we should be channels for the *fullness* of what God is revealing. We are not to keep it to ourselves; it is to share with others.

A personal revelation

If God calls us, I believe He will reveal something to us. A call to minister means that the minister has a “revelation,” or a vision. Vision and revelation are essentially the same thing. Proverbs tells us that without a vision the people perish (29:18). We must have a vision and revelation in our midst, not just from one or two brothers, but through all that minister the word (in any degree). Each one must see the same thing. I believe that when God calls, He gives us a single basis of revelation: knowing who Jesus Christ is and what His purpose is. A minister must have that to some degree, before God can speak to him and bring ministry out of the word to serve Christ to others. The minister is not over others; the minister is a servant, a vessel that God has chosen to serve Christ. It is a very responsible place, and we should take it very seriously.

Even the whole church should continue to pray that God would give a greater revelation and increase our vision. We need to know the overall plan of God, at least in a basic way. To illustrate this, let us use the building trade. A building always has a plan. It shows where the bedrooms are, where the kitchen is, and so on. Each specialist may not know everything about the building, but he is knowledgeable about his own area. God has given each one grace. But all need to know the overall plan, to know where to work. You don’t place a door in the middle of the kitchen! If we are not ministering with the overall plan in view, in agreement with the other brothers, we’re not really building in God. We must know the overall plan in some measure.

If God has spoken to you, you need to be convinced of what He is doing. This is true for each brother. Each one must be convinced of what God is saying and what He is doing. We may not see fully, but we must see together. There must be a common divine aim, a common understanding. Where is God taking us? What does He expect of us? There must be some measure of this working in every member's heart and every minister's heart. Otherwise, we'll be divided, and we'll have troubles that can take time to work out, areas that are not easy to correct. Someone may think, "You're trying to make me believe like you do." This is not the case, but if a person does not see the overall plan of God, he may be doing something that is out of keeping, not really ministering life, not moving toward that common goal.

Without this basis of revelation and the burning goal of God, there can be no true ministry. This applies to all kind of ministry. Each of us has a "personal ministry" to some degree. Ministry is not only what takes place in the meetings, given by prophets or teachers. These are held more responsible for the gift they have received, but God has placed responsibility upon each one. Everyone in the body has a responsibility to seek God to see the plan of God. A sister may see just as quickly as any minister, if she applies herself to God. If the anointing is in her life, it teaches her all things.

If the message you're bringing is not affecting your life, you have no right to bring it. It must take effect in you. If you are not hearing what you're saying and it's not affecting you, you have no right to bring it to the church. If the message is worth hearing, it must affect *you*. It must stimulate *you* before you can expect that same message to be heard by others and to stimulate them. The dominating force is not you, not me, not us together—but the voice of God!

God wants to dominate us. The message must master us, take control of us, and speak to us so that people cannot run from it. Then when they start to obey it, it will bring a oneness. We will see these definite effects. If we're not seeing them, we need to get on our faces as ministers and brothers, and saturate the message with prayer. If we've got the message and we're moving together, but it's not doing what it's supposed to do, we will have to saturate it with prayer until it does. We can't give up bringing it forth. We must continue until we see it come into being, no matter what we have to do. It may take prayer with fasting, or anything God leads us to do, but we must see God's ministry bring forth God's results, and we must be unified in that resolve.

Moving with purpose

Looking at the apostle Paul's life, we see that a man that is called of God and has a revelation burning in his heart is not half-hearted. He's aggressive. He's moving with purpose. He's not sitting down, passive. There is a "positiveness" to your life if you are seeing something. In other words, if you are not convinced of what you see, you cannot minister in faith. You must be convinced. You must be positive about what you are seeing—yet willing to be wrong. Nobody can say, "This is the last word," but if you see something, you must minister that positively. You must know what you are seeing, and then be willing to submit it to the other brethren, to be considered and judged according to the word.

I believe a minister must be given over to ministry. If God has called you, you must give over your faculties so that God can use you to the fullest measure of the grace that is coming through you. A man can have a job and still minister, but I am talking about giving over the faculties: making yourself available for the message. If God has called you, your calling is the most important thing you have. If

God has spoken, we must minister the message with such fervency and zeal that it's as though something is burning within us!

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (II Timothy 4:1,2 NAS). This charge was given by Paul to Timothy. We can learn many things from it. We can begin to realize what is meant by the anointing of the Spirit, the anointing on the word, the anointing on the revelation, and the timing of God. We must give God a place to put a burden on the hearts of those He has called to labor, not focusing too narrowly on the aspect of inspiration, or we'll find out in the time of need that we are lacking the strength of the ministry of the word. We cannot end up only waiting for inspiration, without the ongoing labor that should be coming forth. If God has called you, you are a builder. One of the proofs of every minister is that he continues to labor at what God has shown him until he sees the Spirit of God anointing that word and results being seen in the body.

If we do not desire what God is showing us to be manifested in the body of Christ, we do not yet know or understand what ministry is. You continue before God; you labor for fruit. And Paul is saying here, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus...preach the word!" Preach the word. Don't minister your opinions. Don't minister some philosophy that you feel is right. Minister the word. That doesn't just mean scripture after scripture, but expounding the word (Christ) that the Spirit breaks into your heart—that which has become a reality to you. It can only become a reality to others as you are able to convey what God is speaking to you.

I believe it is our responsibility as ministers to so speak, that every member of the body of Christ may be brought to a place of obedience in all God wants to lead us into. We bring the word so that the Holy Spirit can use the word to bring every member to a place of obedience to what God is saying. It's an awesome responsibility, and too often we don't see the seriousness of it. God has chosen these channels of ministry to bring each person to a place where they can see more. The individual life of the member is also a factor, and hearts must be prepared. But the scriptures show that God has given these gifts to bring the revelation to people, that they might see together.

We cannot make people obey, or make the church obey. But we must bring them to the point of obedience. That's why we must minister with fervor and with diligence, but still leave every member in the hand of Jesus. That takes the grace of God working in your heart, and spiritual understanding, or you can become discouraged if people don't move after you have brought the truth. You may be "hitting the nail right on the head," but they don't move! That's why you must leave each one in God's hands—to move them as He will. As ministers, we need to move together, benefiting from what each one of us sees from God, having fellowship in it, but also realizing that we are also not trying to change each other.

We can only give the message that God has given us. We must leave every member in the hand of God. They don't belong to us, and we can't change them—God must change them. So if they're not changed and we've done all we could do, it burdens us—just as you see the burden on Paul's heart. He had a constant burden (II Corinthians 11:28). We must rightly divide what is the minister's responsibility and what is the body's, but ministers have a responsibility to affect and function. As we move with knowledge, we don't become discouraged. If we need more, God will give us more. We don't move

with earthly knowledge, but with spiritual knowledge. And if we're functioning, doing all that God tells us to do, it will still be left in the hands of God to change people.

Valuing the gift of God

The scripture says we should not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3). However, we should value the gift of ministry which God has given us. Putting a low value upon the gift and shrinking back brings no honor to God. We have been given a gift to cultivate and to use. We are not to get our eyes on ourselves, but when we realize the value of the gift, we won't hide it. As we minister our gift, we should not see ourselves, but the God who gave it.

If we don't feel that what we have has value and will change people's lives, we will not use it. But if we put value on our gift in the proper way, we will spend the time that is necessary to cultivate it, using what God has given us and sharing it with others. Giving the gift its proper value will cause us to base our lives around it, not neglecting anything that would qualify us for ministry. This should be kept in its proper balance at all times. We don't shirk other duties, and our lives and homes must be in order—but still, we have one aim, if God has given us a gift. We need to use that gift because it is precious, and because it is not ours but God's. He has entrusted it to us and we need to use it.

To use the gift properly, we will spend time learning how to use it. The Holy Spirit will teach us, but that is no excuse to be ignorant or slipshod with that which God has given us. If we value the measure of grace working in us, it should motivate us into action in God—moving as God directs, in His life. When we value the gift God has given us for the body, we will give time to it, and we will be sensitive in working with others.

The calling of God or the fact that a man applies himself to study diligently do not necessarily mean that God can reveal truth more quickly to him. A minister is a minister because of a *gift*—the place God has called him to. The gift will be revealed for what it is, and it will make a place for itself in the body. It does not necessarily mean that a man has learned more quickly than someone else. He is given the gift so that he can serve others.

Don't sell the gift short! It's not just learning about the revelation. God has given a man the ability to do something that He has not given to another. The gift is not the revelation, but the ability to move in the ministry God has called him to. The anointing of the Spirit is in each member's heart, but ministers are given different abilities by Christ for specific functions and purposes.

Christ has given the gifts according to His choosing, so let's not worry about what we don't have—let's be concerned with what we do have, in the measure Christ has given it, and He will give more. If we're looking for more understanding, God alone, by the anointing, will give us the understanding that brings forth life. We can discuss, and we can have fellowship, but God alone by His Spirit will bring spiritual understanding to your heart. This will possess you so that you will take the time to stay before Him until you can also speak words of life to those that hear.

Abandoned to God

What should we look for in a minister, or how do we try (examine) our own ministry? First, a minister should be zealous. If God has spoken to you, what you have is very precious, worth giving yourself to. A minister is aggressive—not in himself, but in the Spirit. If God has spoken something, you're sure, and you're positive in your ministry now. This doesn't mean you cannot be corrected, or that you cannot be wrong, but you should be positive of what you have seen in God until God changes you or until you see you are wrong. Your spirit is open, so that it's easy for you to be changed. But when you minister, you're speaking as an oracle of God. It is done in a positive way, without hesitation.

A minister also is uncompromising. With that must go patience. We cannot compromise the message of God. The message of God is the only thing that will unify us, the only thing that will break down every barrier. It is the only thing that will build Christ in each one, the only way we will grow up into the fullness of Him. The message is positive, and if we've really heard God, it will take zeal to come over the "hard spots" and the things that are thrown against those who are laboring. We will have to be zealous for what God has given us.

A minister is abandoned to what he sees. He is abandoned to the message. He is abandoned to his ministry. It is "number one" in his life. If God has given you a ministry, let nothing get in the way of that ministry. But rightly divide that truth, for if your character does not back it up, your ministry is no good. It does not mean that you abandon your family, because if your family is not functioning properly, you are already disqualified, and your ministry has no meaning until you get that corrected. God cannot anoint it, no matter how much charisma you present it with, how good your wording is, how much understanding or knowledge you have. You are disqualified, and God cannot bring the anointing that will bring forth eternal results. The scripture says that a man God can anoint must meet certain character qualifications (discussed in the next chapter). So abandonment does not mean that you abandon your responsibilities. It means that you are abandoned to the message and you work out these areas so you stay qualified before God in love. You keep your home working, you keep your relationships right—but you are abandoned to the message.

Abandonment does not mean you cannot have a job. I don't see any reason brothers cannot labor in "a full-time ministry" and still have a job to provide for their families. Paul had a job: he sewed tents. If we need to sew tents, we sew tents. But we're abandoned to one thing: the message. We've been called with the highest calling there is, and we will answer for it. If you are called, you will be held responsible before God. You will give an answer for the gift He has given you. Not only that, but you will be judged more severely than another brother. That's why James tells us everyone shouldn't desire this—because he will be judged with more strictness. This is very important to understand. But again, it means we must be abandoned to what God has called us to do.

A minister has an uncompromising abandonment to all that he sees. You can tell whether someone really believes what they say, or whether they just want something to say. Do you really believe what you say? Is it ordering your life? Have you given yourself over to what God is saying? It is the ones who are gripped by what they see that continue to learn. Those who have a vision, those who are gripped with the revelation, those that are hungry, are people that are learning by leaps and bounds. They are taken up with what they see, abandoned to it with their whole hearts. They are learning in

God. We all begin as learners, and we continue to be learners. The church is never a teacher; we are always continuing to grow and learn in the Lord.

PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Revelation is the basis of all ministry

All true ministry must be born out of a personal relationship and a revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ to the heart of the man He is speaking to. God does not call us to agree with or to minister something He is not speaking to our hearts personally. Revelation must become *life* to me. It's not enough to see and understand something; now that truth must become *real to me* before I can share it with someone else. I must know that it's real; I must know that it's life. I must be convinced that this is what God has given, and then God will give grace for this to be shared through words to others. You can't wait until you attain, or measure yourself by some other ministry. You measure yourself by the word of God that is real and working in your own life.

Perhaps the Lord has made something real to you. It's not burning in your soul yet, not yet possessing you, but there is something working. What you had yesterday was good for yesterday, but for life to come forth from you, you need something that is real to you today. It's not dead letter and doctrine. There must be a continual revealing. Not only do we have a vision that controls us, but there must be a continual renewing in the knowledge of what God wants, at the time He wants it.

For the word to be life to you, God's light must reach your heart. If we are really open, God will speak to us. He will reveal Himself to us if we seek Him with our whole heart. You cannot separate the living from the ministry. If we divide the life of the minister from the word that comes forth from him, something is wrong. Our ministry is only "ministry in life" in direct proportion to what we are walking in. If we do not continue to walk in what God is revealing, it isn't long until the revelation ceases to come and we drop back into a "head knowledge" rather than the spiritual anointing that brings light. If you have a call to ministry, you have a basic revelation from God. As you continue to allow God to use you and work in you the fullness of Christ, that basic revelation will become larger and larger. Your sphere of seeing will expand, and you will see more fully in areas that you formerly saw only in a narrow way. In other words, at the beginning, sometimes we see only "in the letter," a very "narrow" revelation, but we start with what we see. As we continue on and God works in us, we don't lay down our convictions, but God causes them to grow. We start to see the underlying purpose of the convictions, and then we can move in more of the love of God. At every point, we must minister in the ability God has given us, but as we go on we will see better how everything fits in.

There are two things of utmost importance, both in our corporate gathering and in those who are called to ministry: our relationship with God, and experiencing what God is saying. We cannot order our lives unless we know the demands and standards of the Lord Jesus Christ upon us. You cannot order your life unless God orders it. This means that God must reveal His standards to you, and that you must measure up to them. We should value the message that is brought, and evaluate everything coming forth, asking ourselves, "What are the implications of the message God is speaking to us? What are the demands being put upon my life?"

We should also look at the one who is ministering, and ask, "What is he after? What is he seeing? What does he want me to see?" The minister must have a purpose, or else he is just "beating the air" (I Corinthians 9:26). We may do this in ignorance from time to time, but this is not what we desire to do.

We are interested in affecting, not just hearing ourselves talk. When we do evaluate ministry, we are more open to allow God to work when He speaks to us.

After the basic revelation of God that comes to the minister, which is his basis of ministry, there must also be a *continued* anointing on his life and heart, and on that basis of revelation, if there is going to be more revelation, more life, and more enlightenment. If the word of God has not been enlightened to the minister, he cannot bring it to others. He may speak it a hundred different ways, but unless it is made alive by the Spirit to him, he cannot bring life to others. The word must be *alive*.

The Spirit gives the revelation, and we can't fool each other in the Spirit. When ministry comes, those that are open before the Lord and seeing in the revelation of God can sense whether it comes forth in life or not. The Holy Spirit senses it immediately. It is the same anointing and revelation in the Spirit of God that moves in the one bringing and the one receiving. There can be matters that hinder the one receiving or the one giving. We must recognize that these can be there, and work at them so there can be growth and a greater openness for the ministry and receiving of the word of God. Our lives will become enriched, and we will start to grow in unity and oneness, becoming more single-eyed. We cannot be single-eyed by natural fellowship or affinities. Our oneness is in seeing together, partaking of Christ together—and all of this comes down to this area of revelation.

Whether we are ministers or not, everything we bring to the church (even a testimony or a word of exhortation) must be attached not just to scripture, but to the very character of the word of God from Genesis to Revelation, and to the whole spirit of God's purpose. The word must always be on the basis of revelation, or we will cause division in the Spirit. The Spirit of God within the hearer says "no" and there is resistance. So it is most important that anything we say, even in conversation, is attached to the word of God. Think it out before you say it. Then our ministry, our words of exhortation, and our ministry outside the assembly will be profitable. We are looking for agreement in the Spirit.

Qualifications and character of the minister

A minister must meet certain qualifications in order to use the gift that God has given. I Timothy 3 plainly sets down the conditions for ministry: *"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (I Timothy 3:1-13).

Every man needs the character of God worked in him. A minister does not need more than another believer. God puts great stress on character. But character alone, without the gift, does not give a man

the ability to minister. Conversely, just because a man has a gift does not mean he can use it. He may have the gift, the charisma, but there is no place for God's anointing without the character. His character—what he is in Christ—must line up with God's qualifications. If there is something wrong with the expression of his life, he is disqualified for ministry. The grace (ability) of God does not depart from a man even if he is disqualified, but God cannot put His anointing upon the gift He has given. Just as He said regarding Israel, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (irrevocable) (Romans 11:29). God doesn't take back his gift, but a minister can be disqualified for service.

Character must be formed under the discipline of the Holy Spirit through acts of obedience. We don't just discipline ourselves. The Holy Spirit disciplines us, and we are being disciplined through faith. In Galatians 1, Paul speaks about his call: *"[God] called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen..."* *"To reveal His Son in me,"* there must be a dealing with the vessel. There must be a revealing of Christ in the one that is ministering. Most of us have come to an understanding that words alone do not satisfy, nor do they bring life to us. There must be a reality in the one that is ministering the word. The word must be life in him, to be a flow of life to others.

We will spend much time in prayer. Our lives will need to be saturated in the presence of God. Our words will be affected by our times of prayer, but prayer alone will not do this work. God does not anoint a vessel that is not fit, one that does not meet His qualifications. He may at times use various men who have problems, but on a continued basis, I don't believe He will continue to anoint the ministry of a man whose message is not backed up by his character—what he lets God do to discipline his life. It doesn't matter how much time he spends in prayer, if he is lacking in these areas, the anointing cannot be on his life as God wants it to be.

I Timothy 3:8 gives what I believe are qualifications for ministers. After speaking of the overseers (elders), Paul says, *"Ministers in the same way, dignified, not double-tongued, not to much wine given, not greedy of base gain, holding the sacred secret of the faith in a pure conscience..."* (This quote is from the "Emphasized New Testament" by Rotherham.) The Greek word translated "minister" here is translated as "deacon" in other translations, and used in only two places in the New Testament (Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:8-12). Some have made "deaconship" a position like that of the seven who were chosen at the beginning to serve tables. But all ministry is serving, so wherever the Lord speaks of ministry, you must find out what type of ministry is being discussed, because the same word is used. I believe the word actually refers to a minister, one who ministers the word of God or ministers to a spiritual need. So let us think of these as qualifications for "ministers" rather than just "deacons."

The 10th verse continues, *"But let these also be proved first, then let them be ministering, being unaccusable..."* God is exacting, not only about those He has put in functions of oversight, but about those He has given grace to minister or serve. We must always realize that God has not set the ministers over us. Ministers are given to meet needs in the body—the needs that God, not man, singles out. Ministry is serving the word of God—a very responsible place. Each one who has that grace working in him should realize that his life will have to bear up under a more strict discipline. We desire pureness of ministry, the "word of life" that causes us to hear God when it is ministered. We must at least start here, realizing why we gather together and what the purpose of God is. We should not feel

we are “narrow-minded” just because we have a purpose. Although the purpose is narrow, God has made provision to embrace all.

Paul goes on to say, *“Wives in the same way, dignified, not given to intrigue, sober, faithful in all things. Let the ministers be husbands of one wife, over children presiding well, and over their own houses. For they who have ministered well a good degree for themselves are requiring, and great freedom of speech in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”* We read both in Timothy and in Titus that if a man does not have his house in order, he cannot take care of the church of God. If a man doesn’t have God’s character working at home, how can he be expected to have it in the church? Let me stress the importance of allowing the family to be put into order. You cannot put your family into God’s order until you have allowed your relationship with your wife to be brought to a spiritual basis. That means the wife submitting to her husband as unto the Lord, and the husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). We cannot go into detail here, but if you seek the Lord and pray about this, the Lord will give you understanding. He will unfold His plan and show you how this takes place. As you start to find fulfillment in your relationship with each other in the Lord, you will see an ability to order your family and to give your children the direction they need.

If we do not order our families, there is no place to see ministry brought into expression and recognized properly. We have seen in local gatherings around the world that men can have grace working in their lives and they can be seeing the purpose of God, yet many are disqualified because their house is out of order and they cannot be an example to the flock.

In II Timothy 2, Paul admonishes Timothy as a minister: *“Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition...”* (II Timothy 2:22-25a NAS)

You may not think we all need this—that Timothy was being admonished as a young man. But the spirit of the minister is the same, whether it is those God has called to oversee or those He calls to minister or serve. All brethren must flee “youthful lusts,” or as another translation says, “youthful passions,” which may give more insight. Youth has certain characteristics that are good, but others that are untried, immature—characteristics that have not been transformed spiritually. Paul exhorts Timothy to “flee.” To flee is to turn and run. Then Paul tells us what to pursue. “Pursue” is a word that means more than just glancing at or recognizing a goal. To pursue means to put my will into God’s purpose. With the volition of the Holy Spirit, I start to move with my will toward that goal. We could say that to flee means “to run from” and to pursue means “to run to.”

Go back to I Timothy 3 and look at the qualifications of overseers, and of deacons or ministers. The first one is soberness. It is not common for young men to be sober. They may be serious at certain times, but it is unusual to find one that sees the purpose of soberness in his life. Another characteristic is self-restraint. This is not the normal expression of youth. Youth is aggressive in many ways, whether wrong or right. There is nothing inherently wrong with being aggressive; this just needs to be channeled. It is the same in each of our lives. Being older doesn’t preclude us from having some of these youthful passions working in us, and we need to flee them if they are there. We don’t look down upon youth, but at any age, it is important that our lives become orderly and self-restrained. This takes

time and discipline. Gentleness is also mentioned in II Timothy 2. Gentleness is not usually the attribute of young people. They are usually full of “vim and vigor.” Gentleness comes over a period of time. It is a work of the Spirit of God, a fruit of the Spirit. It comes as we flee impulsiveness, thoughtlessness, and all such things. Patience is another requirement, a characteristic not typical of youth.

In Philippians 2, Paul says of Timothy, *“I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare...”* (v. 20 NAS). Ministers must become completely disinterested in self. You cannot be selfish in any degree and be a faithful minister, one that is able to have the revelation of Jesus Christ and the body of Christ entrusted to him. *“...For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father”* (v. 21,22 NAS). Here is the area of submission to authority—recognizing the Lord Jesus Christ’s authority, bowing to it, able to obey it. This is difficult in some societies. Some cultures seem to be more open and quick to receive these truths. There is a quicker discipling, and maybe a closer fellowship that develops more quickly because people are brought up with more discipline and honor. I believe this may have been one of the things that helped Timothy. Paul said he was the only one “of like spirit.”

Last but not least, unless a brother is filled, controlled, and possessed by the Spirit, he is not qualified for ministry. Even if he meets the qualifications laid down for character, he is not qualified spiritually to meet the needs. He must be a man under the control of the Spirit, and he must see the revelation of Christ and the church. Many today talk about the church, but do not really see the church by revelation. A minister must see what the church is and how it works out, in order to minister or function properly among the gathering of God’s people.

Preparation of the vessel

A ministry that is not being lived out in the life of the minister has no weight. He may speak the same words as someone else, but they carry little weight and do not impart life. The depth is not there because the minister has not been through the trying of God. He has not been proven by God in the areas he is ministering. But the one who is living the message, the one that has been dealt with by God, is the one who can minister life. He is building on the foundation with something that will last. I believe every minister has a responsibility to impart the life of God to others, through words and through the example of his life.

As we continue to walk with God, our experiences with God in different circumstances, trials, and testings will enrich the flow that comes from our lives. Whether we are ministers or not, we will be able to interpret the revelation, what God is saying to us, more fully. Just because a man is a minister does not mean he has a “corner” on the revelation. Any believer may know just as much by revelation as a minister. But God gives ability to ministers for the perfecting or maturing of the body of Christ. The revelation is ministered to the body of Christ by ministers so that we all might see.

Now, the vessel, as we’ve already said, must be prepared. The vessel continues to be prepared. I can’t touch on every facet of preparation here, but let’s try to touch a few areas.

Ministry requires brokenness. For a flow of God's life to come through any minister, there must be a breaking of the outward—the flesh and the soulish part of man. This means there must be no trust in the flesh, nothing which blocks the way for a free flow of God's word by the Spirit. This may not happen all at once, but this is what we strive for—a complete crucifixion of the soulish man and the fleshly man.

When the minister's life is broken open, we can taste of that free flow of life that comes through him. But if a minister is resting on his own feelings, his own opinions, thoughts, or reasoning, that is all you will get. So a minister must be worked on by God in these areas. A broken vessel is one that is disciplined, not allowing himself to come forth, so that the word might come forth. This is an area of discipline. Our emotions and our thoughts must be brought under control. We must know what we're doing. We must have a clear-cut understanding.

This is the only way to move in a ministry of the word, a ministry of life. Maybe these terms are not adequate, but they are the only ones I know. If God can give you another way to say the same thing, praise the Lord! But the foundational truth is that we must move in a ministry of the life of God and the word of God, not a ministry of our opinions, our reasoning, or our experiences. We must minister what we see as much as possible without distorting it through the soulish or fleshly part of man.

Ministers must have a renewed mind, a changing, a different seeing. In Acts 9:5-6, Paul said, “*‘Who art thou, Lord?’ He said ‘I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.’ And he trembling and astonished said, ‘Lord, what wilt thou have me do?’ And the Lord said unto him, ‘Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.’*” Paul had to be told. There must be a renewing, a “telling” from God, a brand-new ordering of our lives and our minds. Our minds must be brought to the place that they do not wander. To hold the things of God precious, to have the ability to minister what God speaks to our hearts, our minds must be renewed in God. We must think in God. If there is no revelation, no thinking in God, there can be no ministry.

Paul says to be ready in season and out of season (II Timothy 4:2). We should be ready, brethren, at all times, to minister. This embraces preparation, setting ourselves aside, and giving our hearts to think on what God has revealed to us. We cannot wait for the times when the congregation is moving on and conditions are perfect. Ministry is needed at all times, “in season” when things are perfect (or we think they are) or “out of season” when things aren't so good. Whether you “feel” you are ready or not, be ready in season or out of season.

Paul goes on to show what we should be ready to do: “*to reprove, to rebuke, to exhort, with great patience and instruction.*” When a brother sees something and is trying to express it, but the expression is imperfect, we should be patient. The more we are exercised by the Spirit, the greater ability we will have to express what God is speaking to us. If God is showing you something within the overall revelation, you must have great patience, and you must be willing to continue to instruct. The revelation must possess you to such a degree that you can labor in love for all the other members of the body of Christ to start to partake of it—even if they resist at the beginning. If it is true, if it is Christ, you will continue to labor! We must have a love for the brotherhood.

When the Spirit directs, ministry must be ready. He cannot direct those that are not ready to minister. It's not a question of not having something to give, because if you have a gift, you have something. The question is whether it has been cultivated, thought upon, whether your thoughts are in order before

God so that when you open your mouth, you can bring to the people what God has spoken to your heart. That's being ready. If God has spoken to your heart but you're not able to put it into words, you may still not be prepared and ready when the Spirit of God directs. It may be because you haven't experienced it, or some other reason, but you cannot just "throw something out," or the words will confuse rather than ministering or building.

When God speaks something to me, I have found that I must spend time before Him to know how to communicate it. We don't need to say it like someone else does, or strive for eloquence. We're not trying to be like each other; we're simply trying to bring the message God has given us individually, in the best words we are capable of. If we go with the ability that God gives, it will work what God wants. We should always try to improve our presentation, because I don't think God leaves a place for sloppiness. But this is spiritual improvement, not natural improvement.

At the beginning, the revelation may be small, yet it might take quite a time of labor to put what we see into words, because we are limited in our expression. After God has given us some understanding, it may take a month or more to be able to put what He is showing us into a few words or a sentence. If I'm lacking in my ability to express what God has put in my heart, I should be constantly asking God to help me in this area. I shouldn't just be satisfied with where I am; I should want more. I need to be able to "break open the word" so people can see. It is the Spirit that is moving, but still He is using words. We should want to have a clear expression, the right words, words the Holy Spirit can use to break into people's hearts to feed their souls.

The minister has become a mouthpiece for God, a channel for the word of God to be expressed in life. The word can be distorted, or colored, if the vessel is not prepared. How important the vessel is, for the pure revealing of the simplicity of a word of God which gives us the ability to move! As a minister or as a brother, God is dealing with you, working on you, preparing you to be a fit vessel for the flowing out of His life. Otherwise, even if God is speaking to you, your life, your personality, your physical person, your home life, and many other things may affect or hinder your ministry.

The anointing teaches us

In John 14:26, Jesus said, *"But the helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, he will teach you all things..."* John says this again in I John 2:27: *"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."*

Although we are looking for men to be teachers, we are not looking for the teaching of man. I'm not interested in sitting under any teacher just to get intellectual knowledge. I'm interested in teachers who have a revelation from God, because as they minister what they see, if my heart is right, I will begin to see what they are seeing. I don't just look to teachers; I look to *the* Teacher, the Holy Spirit, to make His word alive to my heart. I thank God for every one He has called, with whatever degree of revelation is moving in his heart, because each one enhances what God can do for us. The richer the ministry, the more we will see what God is doing! So let us pray that God will enrich the ministry.

“...and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Jesus was speaking to His disciples there, but the same thing is true now. The Holy Spirit will bring all things to our remembrance. If God speaks to you today, and it’s real, it may be only a sentence or only a word, but tomorrow you will look at that same word and ask God again what He is saying. The Holy Spirit must anoint that word, that phrase, that statement afresh, and make it more real. The next day, you want a fresh anointing on it again. God will continue to anoint—to bring all things to your remembrance. The richer we are in Christ, in the revelation working, and in the remembrance from the Holy Spirit that is able to use these vessels—our minds and all our faculties—the richer the ministry of the word will be. The Holy Spirit teaches us all things by His anointing, but we can’t throw out the vessels God has called!

If you cannot recognize the anointing of the Spirit flowing through a ministry, you will not receive it. It is only as you recognize that authority, only as the Holy Spirit anoints your heart, that the word has any meaning to you. We must be able to discern what the Spirit of God is demanding through ministry. We are living the life of Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ that lives within me (Galatians 2:20). So we partake as the anointing teaches us through the word. It is very easy to “hear what we want to hear,” but rather than that, we should hear what God is saying! We don’t want to hear what the minister is saying; we listen to hear what God is saying. We want to hear what the demand of God is for *us*. He is speaking to many hearts and building in different areas, line upon line. Remember that God can’t build in your life until you have been obedient to the last thing you heard. When you obey, God will build upon that. But He will only build if you are ready for Him to build.

Every time we get up to speak, the word we give must be *living*. It doesn’t matter whether you or others have spoken the same message many times before. When you speak it again, the anointing of the Spirit must be making it alive. We should know when we come to the end of that, and not feel we have to go further or minister for a certain length of time. If we learn how to function together, one may minister in the anointing of the Spirit for ten minutes and another can add to it, also in the anointing. If the ministers have had fellowship, each knows the others’ lives, and they have confidence that the word of God is working in them. This helps to cut away the excess that is not really life, to allow what *is* life to blossom forth and grow in us. Then whenever we do go further, it will be in life, and when we do come to the end of what we have to give, we can stop.

There are many things that can affect the anointing: the thought God has given you, how you present it, the words you use, whether you can convey the thought to those who listen, whether you’ve spent time before God, whether it is life to you, and whether it has affected your life. All of these things have a bearing upon the anointing that that word has, and whether it is really life—whether it pricks the hearts of those who are hearing it, whether it gives direction. God knows what is needed; He will take care of meeting the needs. He breaks up the word and feeds each one of us. But He feeds us through ministry, and the ministry must bear up under its responsibility.

We cannot do what the Spirit of God can do in another believer. In other words, if the believer’s heart is not right and the anointing is not there, even if the anointing is on our words, how can we expect it to bring forth life? It must be received as well as given. But we should be responsible for putting it out, for delivering the word and not putting any hindrances before it, letting the Spirit teach us in these areas. We cannot just stand up and say anything, thinking that “the Lord can use what He wants to use.” I don’t see in the scriptures that God has ordained such a thing. He says through Peter, “*If any*

man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11) When Stephen spoke, the words so pricked the hearts of his hearers that they gnashed their teeth and ran upon him. The word was powerful. Jesus’ words were powerful. He spoke the word and drove out demons. So the anointed word we speak is very important.

Sometimes in our thinking we have divided ourselves from the working of the Spirit. We say, “God, you take care of everything, and we will do our part.” I don’t believe we can do that. The Holy Ghost indwells us and works in union with us, in the same way Jesus worked with His Father. Jesus and the Father were one. We also are to move as one. It’s the power of the Holy Spirit in the church that will convict the world of sin, not us sending the Holy Spirit to do what God wants us to do. We may have some misunderstandings due to past teachings or practices, so let us seek God for better understanding to move in. I do not believe God will do something He has chosen us to do.

A minister may speak with fervor, with great emotional emphasis (and God doesn’t remove our emotions), but we are dependent on the anointing of the Spirit, not on how our emotions reach out to affect people. People may be affected by emotion, but only the anointing will do what God wants to do: change lives. We can usually test whether we are moving to affect emotions or whether the anointing is moving to change lives. Anointing comes when God has made the word alive to the minister, regardless of his emotional fervor or style of speaking. The anointing makes every message new. When you deliver the message, you must know that it will bring forth life. You must deliver it in faith and leave the Lord the place to change and move in the lives of those that hear it.

Our emotions must always be under the control of the Spirit. God doesn’t take our emotions away, but we should be sober. I don’t believe we should joke when dealing with men’s eternal souls and eternal truths. There is a time for humor, but when you present the truth, it is serious, and we should be serious about it. We need that balance of seeing the seriousness of God’s dealing and moving with soberness, yet with the joy of the Lord. I think we will grow in this, knowing the proper balance in Christ. When God controls our emotions, they can be properly used to communicate something. Emotions are not wrong; they just need to be directed by the Holy Ghost.

We can conclude by emphasizing that God has chosen one way for both ministers and hearers, and that is the anointing. We receive nothing apart from the anointing. If a brother has an ability to feed, it’s the anointing on his word *and* the anointing on the receiving of that word which allow everybody to see. The listeners do not see because the brother sees; they see because the anointing teaches them. Life flows from the Head. If the living word is imparted, it’s not necessarily because the brother sees more (though he probably will) but because of the anointing that teaches.

This takes ministry out of the realm of who the man is, or one being above another. It is the anointing that teaches; it is God who works all things to His end purpose by the Holy Spirit. He has given some brothers an ability to take the word and feed it to others (these are teachers). Another brother is given the ability to hold the revelation of the mind of God before the people (this is a prophet). Another brother is called and given the ability to go forth and form the body of Christ (this is an apostle). Other brothers have different burdens and gifts. But in every case it is the Holy Spirit working in that brother and in the hearers.

As Isaiah 61:1 says, “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me...*” This is the anointing that is on the minister and abiding in the heart of every believer. I believe this is the secret of the outworking of the

body of Christ. The body of Christ is not dependent on a man who sees everything God wants him to see and is able to convey it to the people. No, each one partakes from the hand of the Lord. Your ministry, in reality, is unto the Lord first, and then, by the Spirit, to the people's hearts. Without that anointing of life in the hearer, there can be no teaching. We cannot work this, but we can submit ourselves before God, keep ourselves in prayer before Him, and continue to abide in the anointing by faith.

If God is opening our eyes, we can see what the body of Christ is and how it functions. This leaves us as ministers in the proper place, and allows each believer to function in the body. Christ is the Head and each member—minister or brother or sister—must be connected to the Head and recognizing the flow of life, whether it comes through a minister or someone else. This is the whole outworking of God's plan. It doesn't lift any one above another, no matter who they are or what their ability is. A brother may have great ability, but that does not put him above anyone else—it puts him below, serving. To see the working of the body correctly, we must understand this.

Study to show thyself approved

Brethren, without laying aside the importance of the anointing that teaches us, God does not “knock our brains out” and burn a revelation in us apart from our minds. God has given us minds, and we must take on the mind of Christ. Also, the ministry of God's word requires an exacting wordage. You can't have any more grace or ability than God has given you, but I believe that as Paul tells Timothy, you can *“study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness”* (II Timothy 2:15,16).

We might think we never have any “profane and vain babbling” in the church. But if we are not ministering the word of God, we're babbling. If we're only getting up and chatting, or giving our opinions, or moving out of a feeling or emotional upset, it may be just “vain babbling.” Even ministering out of our experience and God's personal dealing with us is not ministering life. You cannot minister an experience, because it may be wrong. We should first allow God to deal with us, break us, and work the message in us before it can flow out through us. After God has worked in you as a minister or a brother, you may share your experiences, but they must still be grounded in the word. So we must study to show ourselves approved unto God.

A minister must make his life, heart, and mind accessible unto God, meditate, and study. I think the spirit of the New Testament is that we are also subject to one another. In our ministry we must be approved unto God, but if we cannot have a witness with other spiritual brethren in the midst, we had better be quiet until we can, and we had better seek that witness. Or if we have had a beginning revelation of Jesus and what He is doing, and now we have gone wrong, we should desire to see where we've gone wrong.

There are ministers who saw clearly at one time and today they do not see. God moved upon them, they had a ministry at one time, but the vision started to fade. Why does that happen? Why did the vision grow dim? There are many things that can cause the vision to fade, and these can be right within us. We may feel God is showing us something—yet it doesn't fit into the revelation. It may sound good, but it's not building on the one foundation. Paul says in Corinthians that there is only one

foundation, and to beware how we build on that foundation. Revelation should unify. If the word is coming forth in life, it should unify.

There are many facets of ministry, and we will not address each one here, but we should consider the particular area of doctrines. Doctrine is teaching. We can have doctrines without the revealing of God's Holy Spirit, and they will have no life. However, that possibility does not relieve us of the responsibility to have sound doctrine. Doctrines are important. There are certain topics in the Bible in which we must become qualified. We must study to show ourselves approved unto God, and study is not something to take lightly. I believe we need to follow some kind of systematic study of the scriptures, not "in the letter," but bringing the doctrines of Christ into the Spirit and studying them to show ourselves approved unto God. God doesn't want his ministers to be ignorant. If anybody must have understanding, it is the ministers that God has called, because they are to teach others.

We cannot do God's will without having a revelation from God. If we are moving in that revelation, we will have sound doctrine. As we know God, as we do His will, experience Him, and walk in His purpose, we will know His doctrines (John 7:17). We need to know the teachings and principles of the Lord, the principles of the Spirit moving in the body of Christ. This is vast, and I don't think any one man can know all areas. That's why God has given ministers to the body of Christ, so that each one can labor in the ability God has given him, and each must continue to study to show himself approved unto God. As we study sound doctrine, we shouldn't become stagnant, or stop at any one place. God continues to give us understanding. There is no subject we have exhausted yet. Sometimes we think we have, when we haven't even started to get into the riches of the many areas in which God would speak to us. *Everything* has meaning now, in our relationship with God and the expression of Christ in us.

I Timothy 6:3-5 (NAS) says, *"If anyone advocate a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."* We see here that doctrine is important. Paul is warning Timothy about "different doctrines," and advocating that we know the doctrines of Christ.

I Timothy 4:14-16 also speaks about doctrines: *"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things..."* We should "take pains"—take time—with the study of God's words and ways in the power of the Spirit, earnestly seeking and searching for God to speak to our hearts and give more light. *"...Be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself..."* Pay close attention, look at your life—don't let it go on a long time without allowing the Spirit of God to scrutinize it. This is not introspection. I don't believe God wants us to draw within ourselves or condemn ourselves and not have the freedom God wants us to have. But an examination by the Spirit of God will try our lives. We will keep "short accounts" before God and before our brethren, so that our lives may be ordered in God, giving forth a testimony of what we speak about or minister.

"Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you" (I Timothy 4:16 NAS). This is how

important doctrine is. Doctrine is an outworking and a realization of the revelation that has come into our lives, to cause us to be stable, to walk in Christ and to experience the work of Christ. I don't believe we should get doctrine first, though we may get it in the "dead letter" and then have to come relearn it as the Spirit of God builds it in our hearts. But the way of God, I believe, is when God brings light and reveals all that He is, in different areas of our lives, giving us the ability to take hold of what He is saying and put it into words we can share with others. As we walk out what God is saying, we are able to formulate God's demands in our mind and words, and to share them in life.

Doctrine without life has no meaning. It must have life. But let us not lay doctrine aside and say we have no need for doctrine if we have life. Instruction in godliness is doctrine. Instructing in many areas of the scripture is profitable to our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. When we see that we are lacking and that we should be nourished by "*every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*," our respect and honor for what God is doing through ministry will increase. We will humble ourselves, realizing we are inadequate in ourselves and that we must be dependent on the gifts of ministry God has put in the midst, and recognize the Holy Spirit moving through them. But we are not dependent upon persons; we are dependent upon Christ, and we must always keep this in mind.

Subjects for study and methods of study

I believe that as ministers and as brothers partaking from ministry, there must be some type of system for your study of doctrine. If you don't like someone else's system, let God help you work one out, but let me suggest some subjects I feel are most important for a minister to study and have spiritual knowledge in. When you start to minister, you will touch these areas almost immediately.

If we deal with doctrine wrongly, we can defile and hinder the body—and this is possible for any of us to do. In all of these subjects, we need a working knowledge in God, not just theory. We can't minister effectively without having spiritual understanding and without having these areas working out in our own lives. It should not be just what you've heard or read, but what the word of God actually says. We will continue to build on this understanding as we receive not only from God, but from other ministers.

Sanctification

Salvation

Baptisms (Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Water Baptism)

God the Father

Son of God

Holy Spirit

Resurrection

Repentance

Sin

The Christian Life (Practical Christian Living)

The Future (Prophecy)

Election

Predestination

Suffering

Liberty

We need some working knowledge of all of these areas, brethren. If we don't, it will reflect through any ministry that we bring, at some time or another. You should begin to put together a record of what God is revealing to you (not just facts), and keep them in a file, a notebook, or whatever works for you. You may come to services with a notepad, some way to write down what God has spoken to you. After you write it down, think upon it. Let God have His full expression in your life. Remember, we are not studying "dead letter," but looking for God to reveal to us. We need understanding from Him, or our ministry will not be tied to the word of God. Also, remember that you can't get everything at one time! We should continue to study to show ourselves approved to God.

You can compile this information in different ways. Some may have a tremendous memory and be able to store it all in their minds. I don't. Usually when I'm studying I keep a notepad, and when God reveals something, when the light starts to come, I immediately write down the thought that God is bringing to my heart, to my mind, so that I can put it into words. Some may say that is unnecessary, but if you've ever studied and had a thought, then gone on and found that the thought is forgotten—it may come again, but it may not—you will learn that if you put it down, God can build on it. If you don't write it down or cannot retain it in your mind, God cannot build upon it. Personally I have found that when I write something down, God brings it afresh to my memory. I can come back year after year, and the Holy Spirit makes it more real. The truth continues to grow and expand as God builds it. But you may have another method that works better for you.

We must open the scriptures, so God can speak to us. Study the books of the Bible, book by book. You will see who God is dealing with and how He is dealing. All of these things will have rich meaning in your life as you grow in God. You cannot study any book of the Bible without benefiting from it, because God will speak to you even in the types and shadows of the Old Testament. He will speak to you of the reality in Christ, practical living, and His purposes in the New Testament, and He will speak to you of the future. So we need to study the books of the Bible, and it needs to be done with some kind of system, not just "here and there." You may read that way in a devotional time, but if you are reading to study, you should be methodical. You should know the history and background of the scriptures.

How long did Paul have to learn the ministry? He had a foundation in the Old Testament. All he needed was the Holy Spirit to quicken those things and make them alive to him. We may be lacking knowledge which someone grounded in the Old Testament may have. We may not have enough knowledge, even of the letter of the word, for the Holy Spirit to make it alive. So we may need to study more diligently, to make ourselves approved to God, as workmen that can be used. Put down the thoughts that God brings you in some system from which you can draw for years to come. If you can get a Bible with large margins and write in the margins, that will work. It doesn't matter where you write, but you need to get the thoughts down somewhere. These will pay off, in the ministry of those who labor day after day in the word. At least, this has been my experience: what has blessed,

encouraged, and helped me to retain things God has spoken to me. It has also helped me to reevaluate over a long period of time how truths fit into the overall revelation.

We need to understand men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. We need to look into the parables and understand what they are saying. Subjects such as healing or miracles can be studied, to see how the Lord worked. Word studies can be very profitable. As you look at a word and see its fuller meaning, the Holy Spirit can open it up. Just as an example, we are looking at elementary areas of the word “ministry” here, because we need to know more about what it is, how it comes, and what its effects are. You can also go into the study of the gospels, and the harmony of the gospels—seeing when different events happened and how they are recorded in each gospel. This is a good study—to familiarize ourselves with the gospels, making ourselves available to God so He can speak to us.

Just a word about prophecy: Maybe God hasn’t called you to a ministry focused on prophecy, but we all need some comprehension of what God reveals about the future, because there should be a hope in the heart of every believer, and that hope is attached to the future. There are different kinds of studies we can go into, but we definitely need a basic understanding about prophecy so that when we minister, we don’t place events in the wrong time and hurt the ministry we’re trying to give. We need an understanding of the dispensational truths of God, to minister not only by the Spirit, but also in the timing of God.

THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Building in God's house

In I Corinthians 3:9-17, Paul speaks about ministry: *“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”*

Here we see that God has a building, and that each man is building in it with gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw. Some ministries are precious, and some have no value. A minister of the word of God must have been dealt with by God to have a ministry of gold, silver, and precious stones, building on the foundation of Jesus Christ. To build with things that last, everything of God that comes through a minister must pass through death. To be precious to God, it must pass through the cross. It must come under the testing of God; it must be proven.

Paul goes on to talk about us being the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelling in us as a church. His epistle to the Ephesians also speaks of this in the first chapter. Then in the second chapter, he speaks about the Spirit of God dwelling in our midst, building us together as a habitation for God. Every person in the body of Christ is called to build in some measure, even brothers that don't have a gift of ministry, or sisters that don't have a ministry of the word. Each one has a responsibility to build, but there are some to whom God has given grace for ministry to bring the church to God's end purpose. Ministers are given a gift and called to build in the church. What does this mean? Do we know what building entails?

“We are labourers together with God...” We're not laboring alone, or even collectively. We are laborers together with God. Without God, we cannot build in the church. Without the Holy Spirit, the anointing, the direction, the spiritual material we need, we cannot build. Preaching and teaching are intended to build in the church. We may be able to preach and teach with natural ability—or at least expound truth—but we cannot build. We must have confidence in God, because with that confidence comes a boldness in the Spirit to build. Then, with compassion and love, we can move with purpose to build.

Remember that you can never touch the person. They are always in the hands of God. But you have the responsibility to sow and to spend what God has given you. There are needs in all of our lives, and to meet those needs with the supply of the Spirit is ministry. It is building. There will never be a day that we attain and sit down to rest. We will always see the ultimate, and we will always see the needs, come with the supply, then leave the place for God to do the work. We ourselves never expect anything from

the person, for they are in God's hand. This leaves the minister free. God puts a burden upon ministers, and the ministers release that burden so God can use it and the anointing can touch lives.

We need to know what it means to build. Some feel that this passage describes individual believers whose works will be burnt up, although the individual will be saved. But I personally think Paul is speaking to ministers, laborers with God, those that are given a gift, those that are responsible. Ministers will have to answer to God. Their labor may be burnt up, while they may be saved. However, they are responsible for their labor. Every man's works shall be manifest. What God has given us, what we build, will be manifest. We cannot escape the test. If we fail—if we have built with wood, hay, and stubble—our works will be burnt up. We ourselves may not be lost, but we will have wasted our time. If we're not building with gold, silver, and precious stones, our labors will be burnt up. So we need to realize what it means to build.

We need to have knowledge of what we are doing—a design, a plan—before we can move in it. You can't put on the roof before you lay the foundation. When there is a plan for a building, a man does not come in and build randomly here and there. We need to give direction. We can't say "Put on the roof" if there is nothing to put the roof onto. God builds precept upon precept. The minister must build upon a foundation that is already established in a person's life, and we are laborers together in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the superintendent, and He is building in an orderly way, building "*line upon line, precept upon precept*" (Isaiah 28:10). This is more than just going through a book of the Bible, although that may be done. If the Spirit of God sees a need and puts a burden on a brother to bring a series of sermons, and the Holy Spirit is moving through him, then we will listen to those sermons because we believe God can build something on our hearts. God may do something through one message, but the whole truth of God's word reveals that the work in you cannot be completed in one sermon. God will continue to sanctify you as long as you walk on this earth.

There is a balance between the inspiration of the Spirit and labor in the Spirit. I believe the Holy Spirit must be in our midst to lead, but I don't believe He leads spasmodically or without order. Everything God does is to edify and build up the church. Ministry is systematic—meaning that we know what we are doing, and we build in God's plan. A man with a ministry will have a constant revelation coming to his heart, and he will labor with the revelation God has begun in him. When we come together with other ministers, we will be laboring for one purpose, because we see. The revelation possesses us, and we *are* the revelation. We are being made disciples, so we *become* the message and we *give forth* the message.

Ministering with a growing revelation

We all must realize that to understand God means to understand Him in the spiritual realm. No man can understand God in the natural. We must come to a spiritual understanding of God and a spiritual understanding of God's purposes. The revelation we see, the overall basis of our ministry, is the revelation that comes to our heart of who Jesus Christ is and what He is doing. Everything else that starts to become alive in a minister's or brother's heart will fit into the basic "building" or plan of God, and everything that comes forth must be "tied" to the word of God. The Holy Spirit ensures that each new area of truth fits into the revelation, on the basis of what God says in His written word. This provides a solid place. If ministry does not fit into the word of God, we should be questioned. Our desire should be for our ministry to be a ministry of God's word.

The vision or revelation we have received from God must stay with us constantly, because all that we continue to receive from God must fit into that overall revelation. As we grow in grace, our understanding of the overall plan will continue to become clearer. It will grow, and we will see more, and become more mature, even “mellowed” in our understanding. We will not compromise, but we will see more clearly the gray areas that we did not see clearly a year or two ago, or five years ago. These will start to clear up as you walk with the Lord. But in every time of ministry you will know what you are doing. Ministry is not “raising the shotgun” and blasting out, hoping you will hit something.

Our revelation can only grow as we step out and start to build. If we never step out and give what God has given us, we will never grow in understanding. We cannot wait until we see everything clearly. When we step on out, God will show us more. And as you really partake of the word, it is different from just reading it. You’re partaking of it so God can share it through you. It is working. God is building Christ in you. Your life is being disciplined so that God can feed others through your life, and through the word that has become life in you.

The ministry as a whole must know where God wants them to build today. This must be *fresh*. It’s not a matter of what you or I have learned, or what we read last month that was real to us then. We may have heard someone minister and it sounded good, and we can expound it as well as he did, but none of that is *life* to us! When we gather, we want to partake of life. We must know what God has for us *today*.

All ministry comes from the cross

All ministry that builds up the body of Christ comes from the cross. The ministry of life must come forth from the principle of death. All real ministry begins in who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. Everything that brings forth life must stem from what God has done at the cross. Your ministry—every time—must bear up under this scrutiny. No matter what depths of understanding you reach in the Lord Jesus Christ, this principle will always remain true.

What does the cross mean? It may seem like a simple question, but it is profound, with profound answers. This is one of the principles that will carry on throughout your entire ministry with other brothers. It affects how you minister what God is showing you, and whether you leave it in God’s hands or bring it over into “the letter.” We need to be very careful how we minister. Henceforth we know nothing “after the flesh” (II Corinthians 5:16). Everything is in the Spirit now, a completely different working. The cross is the tremendous secret that divides the Old from the New.

Read Romans 6, Ephesians 1:18-21, 2:16 (and all of that second chapter), and I Corinthians 1:17, 18,23. At Calvary, God not only forgave our sins, but He brought judgment on all sinners. When we realize this in more fullness, we will be able to realize what Paul said in II Corinthians 3:6: that God *“hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”* The cross is the difference in our ministry, and all ministry should be positive. It must end up in Jesus—who He is, His resurrection, what we are in Him. We are now moving from the basis of the resurrection of Christ. Romans 6 tells us that we have been crucified with Him, we are buried with Him, and now we are risen with Him.

Our responsibility is to hold up the vision of Christ, in whatever ability He has given us, so high that He can draw men to Himself. The vision of Christ will sever us from our connection to the world and bring true repentance. It will let us see how awful we are. Many people have never been brought to repentance because Christ has never been held up, and they do not realize that the cross severs. God has judged our old life, and salvation is not trying to live a good life. We are saved only if we have died and been resurrected with Christ, by faith. On the other side of the cross, all ministry will bring us into the fullness of what God has done.

When you see what the cross means, it will shed light on law and grace. We need to see this in ministry, because we cannot give an uncertain sound. If one ministers in the law and another ministers in grace, do you think people won't pick this up? Even if they can't put it into words, they will be confused, because the demands will be those they can't meet. The demands of the Spirit can be met every time! Even if we begin to expound from the Old, it must lead us into the New, because this is the only thing that will impart life. We do not live by the letter any longer, but in the Spirit. The cross meant that the ability of men was no longer recognized, and Christ was ascending. The cross brought the intervention of God into man. The cross had to come before the Holy Spirit could come to indwell man. The Holy Spirit now brings the reality of all that the cross means.

God judged the old creation. None of it was good. Not only did Jesus die on the cross for my sins, but at the cross God judged all of mankind's sin. The cross is the beginning of the ministry of the New Covenant. Everything in Christ Jesus is now in the new creation, the New Covenant. In the old, all is negative—what we were in Adam, what we couldn't do. But in Christ we're not under the law any longer; we are under grace. Everything here is positive. The cross is the only thing that can show us this. On the other side of the cross is resurrection, and this is what we must have. When we start to minister on the positive aspect of what we are in Christ, it brings the demands of the Holy Spirit upon each life and we begin to see each one submit to His authority. No matter what the cost, we must have this kind of ministry—the kind that demands the obedience of every member.

Paul said, "I don't know anything except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). All that was in God's heart is represented at the cross, because that is where He began, in His Son. It was His Son who pleased Him. It was God who raised His Son from the dead, and we are in Him. It is positive. None of us have ability in ourselves. What we are in Christ is our ability. We are more than conquerors in Him. Faith makes us partakers of all that Christ is. It is a baptism by faith—we died with Him, and now have been raised with Him (Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12). Knowing Him in the power of His resurrection must become the expression of our lives. *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20).

Colossians 2:11-14: *"In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross."* The power of darkness was

defeated at Calvary. He is not *going* to do it...He *has* done it. All we have to do is stand in what He has done.

So we need to preach the cross, what the cross really means, and let it be seen. Our lives should be saying “Amen.” If we stand to minister, but our lives do not have that “amen” behind the message, we may as well sit down. The message must affect us first, or it will not affect anybody else. How can we expect God to use it for others if He can’t use it in our lives? This doesn’t mean we will be “spiritual giants” compared with everyone else, but if the message really grips us, if we really see what Jesus has done at the cross, we can’t escape it!

Look at Ephesians 2:13-16: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.”* The cross is the basis of unity. It is the basis on which the Holy Spirit is making us one. We need to see what the cross accomplished, and we need to be convinced of it. You may already see the revelation of the body of Christ, but you need to see this also, because the new body came out of the cross.

Ministering Christ by the power of the Spirit

“If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth...” I can only move in the ability God has given me. I can’t be anybody else. If God has given me this ministry, He is my source of ability. *“...That God in all things might be glorified through Jesus Christ”* (I Peter 4:11), That is why we’re ministering. The need is Jesus; the supply is Jesus. Your ministry is Jesus, whether it’s feeding, stirring up, or comforting. Every supply is Jesus. Every need is a capacity for Jesus. Jesus is our sufficiency and completeness. God must show us what that means. We know in a measure that He is everything, but we need to experience it, and realize that the ministry God has given you is all Jesus. It doesn’t matter if the truth He has shown you relates to the family, to discipline, to spiritual authority, or whatever it may be—it’s all Jesus. You must relate it to Him, so that it all fits into the end goal.

The word must stay in Christ. It cannot wander into other areas. We are prone to get off track, but God will discipline us and bring us back. If we stay humble, I believe God will continue working in the life of each brother so that when we preach the word, we are always ministering Christ—not just in one-time ministry, but a continual supply. If we don’t have this goal, this desire, we won’t labor in what we are seeing, because we can become discouraged if we see something and want others to see it, but we can’t *make* them see it. We must continue to labor in season and out of season, to give the Spirit of God a place to make the word alive in the other person.

Even with the “negative” that must come from time to time, our ministry must be positive. There must be judgment at times, a revealing of lacks, but in the end, ministry should give the people a positive place to move. “You *can* be this... (It doesn’t matter what you are not.) “You *are* in Christ, and if you are in Christ, this is what you are.” It is easy to condemn when we are not “measuring up.” But ministry is given to bring us up! So we must get away from ministering in response to the lacks we see in each other or in the body of Christ. We are here to lift up Christ! We see the lacks, we see the needs, but that isn’t what we minister to. We minister Christ.

Yes, to the sinner we minister differently. Here the law must have some effect, but we should always minister the reality in Christ. If we slip back under our own rule, the law will affect us: “Thou shalt not.” But we need to see our liberty in Christ, a positive message: “We’re free!” We need to know what that freedom means.

Power in the Spirit is ministry. Jesus told His disciples to go tarry in Jerusalem until they were endowed with power. That power was for ministry, for serving, and for living. God has given the power of the Spirit to do all the work that He has purposed to do. In everything that pertains to the body of Christ, our personal relationship with God, and our corporate relationship in the body, the power of the Spirit is the only way we can move. If our time of gathering is not in the power and anointing of the Spirit, it will have very little meaning. It cannot bring forth what we are looking for; it cannot feed our hungry souls; it cannot bring us together. It cannot bring us to a closer understanding and a sweeter fellowship.

So the power of the Spirit is the most important thing, if we will understand what that really means. The power of the Spirit, the anointing of the Spirit, the leading of the Spirit, the timing of the Spirit: all of this is embraced in the “power of the Spirit,” because it’s the ability of the Spirit that is ministry. God knows what we need, and to see His end results we must gather in Christ, allowing the Spirit of God to move through ministry in His timing.

It’s important for the minister to be exacting with what God is speaking to his heart, because he is not just dealing with sermons or sermonettes. We’re dealing with life-giving words, words that come from God, a vision that comes from God. It can only be given by God. It cannot be given by man, even though man is the instrument. Jesus said that His words were spirit and life (John 6:63). Many times, our humility will not allow us to rise to that declaration, but this is what God wants. He wants *our* words to be spirit and life. Jesus said: “I do not speak unless the Father speaks” (John 12:49-50). This does not mean that the Father spoke and then Jesus spoke; it means that Jesus did nothing separate from the Father. The Father and the Son move in union with one another, in perfect harmony. We too must come to be in perfect harmony with the Holy Spirit.

Functioning in the life of God

If we are not controlled by the Spirit, not being moved by the Spirit, directed in everything that we do, if we’re not knowing the anointing of the Spirit in our lives, then we will not see God’s results. We will only see what man wants to do. We must learn what it means to function in the life of God. The Spirit, the person of God, has been given, and we are to function in His life. He is to be in control. Our thoughts should be “in Him”—under His control—and now we must learn what it means to function in the Spirit, because if we can’t let the Spirit of God control us so we can function together as ministers, how will we ever get the body of Christ functioning together?

We need to make every meeting meaningful to every member of the body of Christ. Every person should want to be there and moving up to the front seat where they can hear everything. God can do this, but I think it is partly the ministers’ responsibility to function in the Spirit of God, to help make this happen. The Spirit of God will bring life through you—through the ministry He has given you. He will use you, and He will use us together. It’s not all on your shoulders. The Holy Spirit is present, and it is on His shoulders. The authority and the control of the gathering is in the hands of the Holy Ghost

moving through different brothers as channels to bring forth life to every member and build us together. The full responsibility is not on the minister, but the minister has a responsibility for what the Holy Ghost has given him.

There can be old concepts in our minds that block us from really knowing why we are here. We need to throw out some of these concepts and come into the life principles of what it really means to function in the Spirit of God. We must fellowship in the Lord with each other and in the revelation of God, until the measure of grace that is working in each one starts to give us confidence to move as the Spirit of God directs. We will find that God directs our fellowship, and what we say and how we lead. By the leading of the Spirit, He will use us. There may be a time when we “wait upon the Lord,” but in those situations there is peace. It is a place of worship in our souls. It’s not the uneasiness where everyone is waiting for someone to lead—so someone throws in a hymn!

Maybe we have trouble understanding how this all works, and we’re not functioning together. The understanding will be born out of fellowship—not fellowship to see the revelation, but fellowship *in* the revelation. We don’t share with others to help them see with their understanding, in their minds, but so that after we have seen the revelation, we can look at it, pray about it, see how God wants us to move, and realize that we each have a responsibility. God has given you a gift for one reason: to use it!

Moving with knowledge

Are you moving with knowledge to accomplish the aim and purpose of your gift? Do you know what you are doing? Is each minister, with the measure of grace that he has from God, moving with *knowledge* in what God has given him, to bring forth the aim of his ministry? It sounds like a simple question, but it touches every part of our lives.

For example, those who have wives, are you ministering to your wife with knowledge and purpose, or do you only minister when an action becomes absolutely necessary and you see that there is a need? In training your family, do you minister only when you are encouraged to give of yourself a little more—or are you moving with knowledge? In everything we do, we must move with knowledge—with an end in view. It is not our end, but God’s end. We need to know what God is doing, and move in the knowledge God has given us, even if it seems small to us. We don’t need to be as knowledgeable as someone else, but we need to know what we’re doing with what we’ve got. We cannot just function because it is expected, nor go beyond what God has given us. Maybe at times we think too much is expected, but let us move with the knowledge that we have, and not be ashamed of it, because we may have more than we realize.

This is very important, because unless you can move with knowledge, you’ll not move with faith. If you’re not moving in faith, it is easy to become discouraged if your message is not received. If you’re moving with knowledge, you can continue to bring forth the word until there is an expression. But if you’re not moving with knowledge, you’ll be looking at people’s faces, looking at situations, and not judging according to spiritual knowledge. To judge by spiritual knowledge is to actually see what God wants rather than what you see before you, and to leave it in God’s hands at all times to bring it about.

There are reasons why we may not do this, including self-condemnation, past teachings, and looking at ourselves in the natural rather than the spiritual. We do not want to think too highly of ourselves, but

we should still see the value of what God has given us and move with His knowledge in how to use it. It is one thing to know a truth that God has spoken to our hearts, but we can destroy people all around us with that truth, if we don't move with knowledge.

For example, the assembly is not a place for ministers to come and work out God's personal dealing with them. Your dealing with God needs to be in your private place before Him. Often we find that this creeps into ministry. God is dealing with the minister, and it is a genuine dealing, but he mistakes it for a revelation to be brought to the church. The assembly is not the place to air God's dealings with us. It does not edify. It does not build up the body. When we do this, we are not moving with knowledge, not building precept upon precept from God.

On the other hand, a brother once said to me, "I don't know if what God is revealing to me is what the assembly needs right now." All of us might feel that way, but there is nothing God has given you that the assembly doesn't need. It affects the ministers first, and then it starts to affect other people's lives. As ministers start to fellowship, we find out how it functions. Whatever is real in our lives, no matter how varied it is, let us not think too lightly of it, because God has worked it in. Maybe He hasn't worked the same thing yet in another brother, but He will do it through your ministry—through what He is doing in you and revealing to you. You may not see at this moment how it is needed, but in our fellowship as ministers I think God can give us understanding and fit it all together. We can move in knowledge to bring what God is making real to you, and as we move together and start to function, we will see what God has revealed to us come into expression.

Do we know when the word that God wants to speak has been spoken? When it has been spoken, there is no need to say more. What is needed after the message has gone forth? At that point we may need brothers that discern what the next step is. For example, it may be a call to prayer, or we may need to go home and meditate upon the message, or pray for each other. This is where the functioning of elders and ministry comes together. We need the spiritual authority that flows through them to bring the assembly to a place of unity. We need to see together and function together, so none of us will get out and destroy what God has already tried to do through another brother.

Discernment and sensitivity

To reiterate, I think it is of utmost importance to learn how to function in the Spirit and how to move with knowledge to build. Man cannot work this; God has to work this in our lives. We should minister in such a way that people are brought to the point of action, or to the place where more ministry, more building can follow. Are we able to discern whether there is a need for more building? We can minister in such a way that we have "shut them down," and there is no point in anybody else following.

When you stand before the people, you can discern in the Spirit whether they're going to sleep, getting restless, or whether they are opening up and listening. Sometimes even the natural person sitting in our midst can discern more than we who are supposed to have the Spirit. We shouldn't be engrossed in our own message. We should be moving with knowledge. When we see that hearts are open, we are sowing seeds, and we're building. But when people start to shut down, we might as well quit and go home, if we have shut them down. It's also possible for people to come in already "shut down." Wrong ministry over a period of time can close the hearts of people so that they're not expecting anything. But now ministry must exhort, stimulate, and bring back openness so that they can feed. The Holy Spirit puts

His demand out there so that we want more. People start to experience the word, talk about it, fellowship in it. When God begins to speak to our hearts, we can't keep quiet. We're going to talk, to share back and forth. We can see over a period of time whether people are starting to partake of the ministry as a whole.

If we go around and ask people, "What was the message last week?" and nobody remembers, something is wrong! The ministry is having no effect. People don't have to remember everything, but if it hasn't had some effect, if God hasn't spoken something to them, then we haven't done any good. We should know what is happening. God hasn't called us to be blind men. We must be able to discern the spiritual atmosphere in which we are ministering. If we come together and everybody is tired, we ought to be able to discern it and see what is needed. Maybe we need to go home and sleep! That's not unspiritual; that's just being spiritually wise. Why preach a message of tremendous value which nobody hears because they're physically tired? Or maybe the people need to be exhorted or stimulated, to be brought to a place where they're able to receive what is needed. As our appetites grow and our capacity increases, we will be able to take more. We'll be brought to a place where we no longer just praise God when we feel like it; we will have more capacity for praise, and there will also be a greater capacity for ministry. But the ministers should be able to discern, or we will just be floundering rather than moving with purpose.

If we have moved with knowledge, yet there is a need for more, we leave a place for other ministry. We don't need to ask, "Is there any other ministry?" If we realize that our ministry has not brought the climaxing demand of the Spirit, but we have built, then we should leave a place for the next brother to continue to build, so that everyone doesn't "close down." If you ever stand to speak after people have closed down, you might as well sit down. Even if the message is burning in your heart, you'll be "fighting" because the people have been wearied.

So as we move together with knowledge, we must also move with spiritual discernment. Together, we should be able to discern the capacity of those that are hearing. God might want three to speak, or four, or just one. But whatever He wants, can the ministry discern it together? The elders have their responsibility in this, and they need to move in the grace that is working in them. But ministers must be mindful of both need and capacity, and when the listeners have had enough, there is no sense in going further. The Spirit is the only one who can tell us this. We will make mistakes, but in our mistakes we need to learn.

For the body to hear clear direction means that the ministry will have to work at it. Just because we are Spirit-filled and Spirit-led doesn't mean we won't also have to work at this. Our fellowship is not only coming together and sharing what we have seen, but in the love of God, evaluating and encouraging one another by sharing things we may have done wrong, as we move together from week to week. All of us should be willing to adjust ourselves. We cannot think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. We don't necessarily change the message; sometimes we just need to adjust how we are presenting the message.

This will require us to think in God! It will put a discipline upon us that we have not had to exercise before in any great degree—a demand upon us that maybe we haven't allowed before. In the past, we may have moved in a kind of "sloppy freedom." But this will allow us to keep ourselves in the love of God because each one of us will have to change some of our ways. We will have to adjust what God is

revealing to us so that it can fit in, and so we can function together, because this is what we are expecting the body to do! Isn't this what we expect our message to do: to get everyone functioning together, not looking at each other, but at Jesus? We must be doing the same thing. If we see the seriousness of this, and we see what God has done, we will start to move. It may take a little time, but the message will clear up as it comes through us, whether we are few or many. The message will start to be single, and the demand will be put on the body by the Holy Spirit because we have submitted more and more to the Lord.

We must see that some of our ways just don't meet the need! Whatever it is, let us cut it away. I find that in cutting something away, there is a greater force released. Where we are losing energy in certain areas, if we cut that away, maybe God can blossom out some other fruits that we haven't been able to see before.

Systematic ministry and the timing of God

We need to have such a liberty in ministering, that if God starts to reveal to a brother and give him a burden to prepare a series of messages on a certain topic, a "systematic ministry," rather than individual messages, we are open for any ministry God moves on any brother's heart to fulfill. Rather than only "spontaneous" ministry on certain subjects, we also need to have a place for ministry God would give to bring forth sound and grounding teaching. Sometimes we come together to hear different ones each bring a segment of truth, but we are not in a set order. God can change our order at any time it suits and fits into His working. There should be a wide area, a complete freedom in which we move.

We cannot move to the extreme of "only inspiration," or we get away from what God is building when He wants to lay down some teaching in our lives. It is not a "program" if the Spirit is moving on a brother to bring a series of teaching. God wants to ground and settle us, and we should leave place for everything. I don't feel it is out of place for the Spirit to move on a brother to say, "I feel God wants to work through me and use me to bring a series of teachings on this topic..." If God sets aside a special time, that is the order of the Spirit until it is finished. The brother continues to labor until the message God is working in him is delivered. We need to set aside time for it to continue to unfold. It shouldn't be one message, then another one two or three weeks later, or it doesn't build. We should also know that what God is working through a brother in this way harmonizes with the other ministry. The ministry and the oversight should be responsible to evaluate the Spirit's moving.

If a man lets it be known that he will minister more than just one time, hearts can be prepared to receive that message. There could be times when it is important enough for understanding in a certain area to call a week of meetings. But we must always keep it open to what the Spirit of God wants to do in our time of meeting, without getting into a "program." God might want to do something else, and we should let the Holy Spirit move through each one to bring what He wants. If we don't do this, then we do get into a form, and there are many who would move toward a completely "spontaneous ministry" quicker than they would a "grounding and settling" teaching and breaking of the word, because it tends to meet an emotional need for the moment. But God is moving in a full-rounded of ministry in all of our lives. It is not "lopsided," and it will produce the purpose God has in mind.

If you come to a meeting with something burning in your heart, but you see that the Spirit of God wants to do something else, you don't want to press past what He is doing. You can wait. Any of us can

wait. You don't have to give that ministry "right now." I believe that if a brother stands up and says, "I must give this right now..." he is in himself. When we are building for eternity and we are here week after week, we know each others' lives. If we say we have to give this message "right now," we're not building. We're moving in our feelings. When a man is building, he sees and builds with purpose, bringing forth a revelation God has given him, building over a period of time. You don't build in lives in just one message. So we can wait on God and we can wait on each other, and we can still look for the perfect timing of God. Then, when we know that a message is what God wants now, we can move in it with confidence, assurance, and understanding.

Here's another situation. Let's say a brother is seeing something, and he sees the need for it in the body. He goes before God and asks God to show him how it can be given to others so they can partake of it. He ministers once and it is not received—others don't see it. I feel that he should go back and ask God to break it on his heart again, and to give him a new way to present it. But what if he comes again and the brothers and sisters still don't see it, and the brother is still convinced it is true and needful? Maybe he has shared it with other brothers and they started to see, and agreed that it was true, and what God wants. But the overall brotherhood or the overall congregation does not see. Then he should start to get different brothers to pull together, to pray together, and work together in it, and he comes again with further instruction, with one purpose: to allow those that are hearing to partake of that truth he is presenting.

We need spiritual knowledge and wisdom to know how to continue with any particular area of ministry, not just repeating the same things over and over, but actually building, time after time. When we build in people's lives, we don't stop with one message. One message can stimulate us, give us truth, and start us off, but more building is needed. Ministers need spiritual understanding to know how to continue laboring in one area and not weary people.

As ministers learn to function together, we need to learn confidence in one another, confidence in ourselves with what God has given us, and not to be in a hurry, yet be "on time" with God. We should say what God is saying and move as He moves, in union with Him, and then sit down and be still. If you only have a twenty-minute message and that's what God is saying, say it and leave the impact of the message! Don't try to carry it on and on, just to take up time. We're here to build with knowledge and understanding, and we should gain these wherever God gives us the opportunity.

MINISTRY FUNCTIONING TOGETHER

Ministry pulls together

Ministry should always be pulling together, working together, like a team of horses yoked together. All of the ministers should be seeing the overall plan and moving toward the goal in harmony. In fact, every brother should be pulling together. In order to function together, we must be underneath the authority of the Head. We must be able to recognize Christ's authority, submit to it, and function under it. We function in union with the Spirit, who is in control of every time of gathering.

No matter how many voices it comes through, there should be one message coming to the assembly. It must be the voice of God! It cannot be one brother getting up "with a shotgun" and shooting this way, and another brother getting up and blowing that way—everyone just getting up and ministering as he sees fit. No, the unifying voice of God must be heard through individuals as well as the whole ministry. The church should sense that there is a unity and a message that dominates our life together.

Members are to be brought up to be able to see everything the minister sees. The minister's responsibility is to lose his ministry.⁴ It's like the eyes in the body, which, if they are single, make the body full of light. If the ministry is moving with singleness of revelation and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the body will be full of that revelation. The ministers are not a special little group over the body. They are members among other members who have an ability to function and get others to see what God's full purpose is. It is done in varying degrees of grace, by the different gifts God has laid out. God has chosen the gifts to accomplish certain things and each one has its own function. All do not have the same responsibility.

As we have fellowship, as we are seeing the same things, we minister in the capacity or ability that God has given, but we do not try to be something we are not. We cannot minister more than God has given us. Sometimes we try. One might try to meet needs without the capability, and someone else might have that capability. That's why the ministry needs fellowship. We need to have freedom to minister in the burden God has given to us individually, yet have the confidence that the whole ministry moving together is doing what God wants it to do.

This moving together is not an easy thing. It's not enough to "see the revelation." That's part of it. If you don't see anything, you can't minister anything. If you don't let what you see affect you, you still can't minister anything. If your life is not in accord with the qualifications, you're still quiet. But when we get to the point where we can speak and fulfill the responsibility God has given us, we'll still need to work at this, and we can only work at it "in God." It's not something you can go to school and learn in your head. It's fellowshiping and moving together so that we can move as one.

I've moved in a measure of this, and I know it can be done. One brother doesn't affect the other brother to change what God has given him, but this fellowship does give you a oneness, a brotherhood in the

4 Bro. Gordon did not expand this statement here, but the idea is central to this teaching, so a simple explanation follows (in case the meaning is not clear). A minister's responsibility is to impart what he sees to others in such a manner that they can continue on without him, and he himself is no longer important. The focus should never be on the minister, or when he is taken away, the work will crumble. The proof of a man's ministry is that each member is left connected to the Head, depending on Christ alone. Therefore, a minister is successful when he is no longer needed! He labors to lose his ministry.

understanding of what God is saying. The other man has his ministry, and you have yours. You can't be what he is, or bring what he's bringing. God has given it to him, and he is moving by the measure of grace and faith that God has given him. But you are trying to move together.

If a minister is seeing anything, I believe his desire will be to impart that to others, not keep it for himself. This should be the aim of every minister, to impart every bit of spiritual knowledge he has, not only to the gathering, but also to other ministers. It will take some work when we start to get into fellowship. We'll need to let down the little "gates" we may have put up—our differences. We will start to encourage each other, question one another, read and study, and start to see alike in God's purposes. This does not take away from the main revelation: Christ speaking to our hearts individually.

For those that minister together, there may be differences in doctrinal belief that are laid aside for the sake of unity in more important things. This does not mean we compromise in areas that will later be detrimental, but there are certain things you can lay aside in order to labor together—things that don't have much meaning. If a brother has a living experience of Christ today, I don't divide from him just because he believes in eternal security and I don't. If he's got a living experience, but I discount him, how can we have fellowship? How can we affect each other? We need to move in the life of God. We should know what we can overlook for the time being, if we each have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

You can read about men throughout the ages who had differences. Many tried to hold together and allow God to work out those differences. Some could not allow themselves, so they broke off and went another way. Sometimes errors in their understanding and doctrinal beliefs were detrimental, and they had to be severed. There are some things that we cannot overlook. They immediately bring a division and a break in the Spirit. In our desire to labor together, we cannot overlook sin, or errors that would be detrimental to God's ultimate aim, such as "The resurrection is past," or "Jesus is not coming again," or "He has already come." Things like this would be detrimental to our one revelation and what God is doing in our hearts: the blessed hope that is within us. These things we cannot overlook; they must be affected. If a brother's basis of ministry were so faulty, his ministry would have to be curtailed—he would have no ministry. He would have to wait; he would have to let God speak to him. God has given government, those in the midst who watch over these things, desirous for the assembly to grow, watching the ministry that comes in, and being very careful that it would not hinder or fail what God wants it to do.

For what God is doing, we must have a love and a desire to move together, because if we don't have this desire, we'll only come as individuals who feel we have a specific gift from God, and we will not minister together. We will not see a singleness of purpose, or the aim of God. I believe that as we read the epistles, we can sense the relationships between Paul and Peter, James and John. There should be a pulling together, a singleness. We should be aware of other brothers in the midst that have a ministry, and we should all want to have the same aim.

If there are differences, I believe that if we humble ourselves, God will give us the ability to overlook. There will always be differences, I believe, even as there were between spiritual giants of the past. We don't compromise, or try to minister what others are ministering, and sometimes we may not see exactly as others see, but we continue striving to see alike—because if we can't see clearly, we won't move. We don't move just because someone said to move; we move only in response to God. But as a

brother speaks to you, the life of God comes out from him to show you certain things, and you see more clearly. So we can always encourage each other!

If the body is not functioning, if we have members who only come to “warm a pew,” then the ministry is failing. There can be many reasons for its failure. We may blame it on individuals or we may take some of the blame on each of us. We can take the blame for not pulling together, or there may be a few pulling together but they are not seeing alike. But if we really see the basis of ministry, we will lay aside some of the differences and allow God to work out the rest. We can get discouraged too easily. It takes perseverance to exhort one another and continue to encourage. It takes humility to work with one another, to open up our hearts, to be pliable and workable, able to speak freely to one another and fellowship in the revelation. It takes a great working of God’s grace. God must deal with us, and He is faithful to do it.

Honoring grace in others

The spirit of our whole gathering and fellowship together should be to honor grace in others. We’re looking to agree, not disagree! If someone is wrong, I believe God will move to correct it, if our hearts are right. If we’re approaching one another with humility before the throne of grace, I believe God will use others to correct us and bring us back on course. But we should appreciate one another in the Lord. This truth is very prevalent in the word of God and has much meaning, if we’re going to progress with God and grow in grace and the fellowship of the Lord.

This moving together is what the Spirit of God wants. This means that every one who has a gift is actively engaged in the message that’s coming forth. As we stay in the love of God, we will stay properly committed to the message. We don’t care who the message is coming forth from, because we recognize that other brothers have grace moving to affect the body. When a brother stands to minister, we’ve had enough fellowship to know God has put a burden in his heart, what measure he is moving in, and what area he is addressing. We know what God is speaking to his heart, and we are there pulling with him, actively engaged with him in the ministry. We may not open our mouths that day, but we’re engaged with him, pulling, praying, sharing. He may have some unclear areas, and we may see things to share with him, but we still see that the Spirit of God wants to use him. We’re pulling with him; the ministry is pulling together. I don’t think the Holy Spirit ever does anything in which He does not bring us together. That’s why I say that to be able to function in the Spirit, we must function together.

“Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves...” This is so important! Brothers, our lives need to be knit together. Our hearts need to be knit together. That doesn’t mean familiarity. Every brother has a gift. We need to recognize and respect every brother that God has called and what He is doing in his life, in order to receive from Christ. The brother is a vessel, and we must recognize and respect that. We are not honoring people in the wrong way; we’re honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is bringing a “fervent charity” among us, *“...for charity covers a multitude of sins”* (I Peter 4:8). We can overlook certain faults. The love of God that cleanses us from all sin also covers a multitude of sins.

We’re not dependent upon persons, yet we must honor and respect them in order to receive through the vessel. There are things we can do to affect this, and it needs to be worked out continually, in order to

have this proper honor. It's not a one-time work. When we gather together, every heart in the whole assembly must be moving in this direction with expectancy, so that there is nothing to keep us from hearing what God is saying.

Philippians 3:17-19: *"Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now I tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetites, whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."* These verses speak about a "pattern." Where do we get the pattern? Some might say, from the word of God, and from God. That is true, but Timothy and other brethren received it from those God had sent, because they recognized the grace of God coming through man. They didn't worship man, and neither do we. But we honor and respect the grace of God that is flowing. If God cannot establish this in our hearts, then as an assembly we will not be able to make disciples, because there will always be a "division." We need to come to a common understanding in the Lord. God must reveal it to our hearts, for us to go on. We must be followers and learners, constantly listening at the feet of Jesus as we hear the word of God imparted to us.

Agreement in the word

In I Corinthians 14:20 (referring to the manifestations of the Spirit), Paul exhorts: *"Brethren, be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice, be ye children, but in understanding, be men."* In understanding, be men—be mature. In I Corinthians 14:37 he says: *"If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."* This pertains to oneness of ministry and agreement in the word. The only place we can agree is in the word of God—not in your interpretation or my interpretation, but in what the Lord has revealed to us. That is all we can agree in.

There are times when we may take a scripture and interpret it according to our past teaching or past thinking, and get tied up emotionally with what we believe. As ministers, we cannot be ministering our opinions, or soon we will sow discord or division and minister doubt. We should minister with a singleness of purpose in what we see and in the ability God has given us. If we don't have the unity in our midst that is needed, then we need to work at it. We must desire to work the differences out. There should be an agreement in the word, and Paul is asking for this agreement when he says, *"If any man thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge the things that I write..."* If there is no agreement, a statement should be questioned and tested by the word of God.

Too often, we let things go by in ministry that we do not agree with, but we do not ask questions or get answers. Instead, we break off our fellowship in the revelation. We don't agree, but that is where it stops. We hold our own views, and then the next time we hear the ministry, no matter who is speaking, we think, "I don't agree," and shut off the flow. But we've got to keep those channels open. Our spirits must stay open if we're going to grow in the things of the Lord. This is why we're here. We're not here to play games!

In II Thessalonians 3:14, Paul was so bold as to say, *"And if any man obey not our words by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed."* He's asking for agreement. Every man may not be able to do this, but Paul had great authority, grace, and anointing in what

God had called him to do. There may still be men today somewhere in the world that have this same ability to say, *“If any man obey not our words...”*

If we’re seeing anything, brethren, we can have discernment. As we read the book of Revelation, we see that there were unspiritual churches that could discern who were apostles and who were not. I believe it doesn’t take a great spiritual giant to discern what is true and what is false. But we need to discern, and if the word of God is being brought forth, we should want to agree. We should come together to agree. When the word of God is speaking to my heart, I want to agree, and when it’s flowing and it’s truth, we want others to agree also.

If it’s not truth, then reject it. Why let it linger on if it’s not truth? If a brother brings something that is not in keeping with the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, why let him continue to labor in that area? He should be approached in the love of God and others should say, “Brother, we don’t see this,” and sit down to have fellowship in God’s word. God doesn’t call us to be “wishy-washy.” If a brother believes he sees something, he needs to stand in what he sees until God shows him and convinces him differently through the word of God. We don’t convince anybody through arguments—only by the word made alive.

We’re not trying to change each other. We’re fellowshiping in the revelation. If the way we express something is causing hindrances, we don’t change to sound like another brother, but we need to change so that we will bring forth “the same sound.” We know that each one of us has a personality. God’s gift is what comes through the minister, but if the message is being hindered by our words, I think this is our responsibility as ministers. The words we use to convey our thoughts is very important. If we can change, if we can be constructive with each other, it should be very easy to lay words aside if need be, and find other words that are more effective.

Sometimes terminology can be misunderstood. Two people can be saying the same thing, but using different terms. You understand what you say. I understand what I mean by what I say. But are the listeners understanding us? When we come together in fellowship, I may discover I am saying something the wrong way, even if I am basing it on scripture. I know what I mean, but as we fellowship together, I may see how to say it in a different way, and it will have more meaning, so I will say it that way.

In my ministry, there have been times when we would question one another, even in the middle of a message: “Brother, restate that. Tell me what you’re talking about...” I believe we need to “loosen up” our meetings to benefit more from teaching. If a brother has something to add, he shouldn’t be afraid to interrupt. The interruption may be needed. If God is in control, I don’t worry about interruptions. There may be a question, or another brother may have something to add at the right time. We need to learn freedom with each other and see how we can do this. A brother may raise his hand and put it down, so the minister sees him and knows he is waiting. He may go ahead and finish his thought, and then ask, “Do you have something to add?” The minister is not interested in what he is saying; he’s interested in what God is saying.

We need to build this confidence in each other and break down the stiffness that can develop in our meetings. Stiffness or formality does not contribute to pulling together in what God wants. I believe we need to have more fellowship, and we need to have confidence in each other. We need to have respect. We need to press forward and get answers to anything that hinders, so that the demand can be put upon

the people through ministry moving together. It shouldn't make any difference who ministers. Ministry flows because we have all come prepared. Ministers have not only prepared their own hearts, but they have come together and prepared themselves before God and before each other. I know this can be done, and it doesn't hinder any brother from bringing what God has given him. This moving together does nothing but enhance what God wants to do through ministry.

Moving together to meet needs

To move together means to move to build up, and this is to meet the needs. That's what the Spirit of God will be doing. It is not unspiritual for God to show needs to the ministers, and then for us to move together to meet those needs, with the measure of grace that functions in different ones for various kinds of needs to be met. Now we must learn how that works. The Holy Ghost will work it out. We're going to fellowship and understand some things because of God's dealings with us, but none of us is going to work this out. If the Holy Ghost is not doing the work, we're in a "program." The only program we want is the "Holy Ghost program." We need to know the principles, but the Holy Ghost does the work.

If we just preach through a book of the Bible, it may have no meaning. We need to see the needs in the body of Christ. Ministry is not just going through and seeing what that book says. We should minister to the need, and the needs vary. It may not make any difference which book we study, because God has something for us in every one. But we need to find out how it will meet a need. The Holy Ghost will meet the needs as you go through it. Ministers should meet together, pray together, share burdens together, and find out what they are seeing in the scripture. You may even use what another brother has shared with you when you minister. But the important thing is that you have fellowshiped with God in it, and you're seeing the same thing. Then after all of this has taken place, when you're actually in the gathering of believers, you should leave it open for questions to come forth and needs to be met spontaneously. The Holy Ghost will give that anointing because you are prepared.

We can't work this in the natural. It must be worked by the Holy Spirit. But there are certain things we can do in our own individual lives, preparing our hearts and coming together on that basis. There can be an open working, discussing, praying, and talking about the burdens. Ministers can share the direction they are taking, and see whether it is meeting the need. If it seems that needs are not being met, other ministers may ask, "How can we help you?" This is not a one-man or two-man ministry.

As we continue and God gives us understanding, ministry coming through the ministers together, over a period of time, in different ways (not just one way), will create an atmosphere in which listeners can ask questions, and needs can be met in that way. But the presentation must be patterned in such a way that people can ask questions. Once they start to ask, questions may be answered in the proper way, and we will see the benefits and the demands, and as people go away stirred in their souls, we will move on! The fruits of what we are doing will encourage us to move on. We need an overall ministry meeting needs. We need a ministry that is putting demands upon people, and we must move in life. This automatically does away with the formalism that tends to come in Sunday morning meetings, when we find ourselves just coming together to have "services."

We sometimes do not see the real freedom that we have in ministry. If we don't use the freedom God has given us, we will lose it by our own doing. It seems like we want that freedom, but if we do not

exercise it and move in the plan of God, making disciples, getting into oneness and agreement, and starting to have the same judgment and understanding, soon there will be no freedom. It won't be because someone has come in and usurped it. It will be because we have given it away by not moving in truth. Only as we move in Christ, in the complete death of the cross to our self-life, can we ever see what God wants to do. This is the constant demand of ministry.

Witness and evaluation

We ought to want our ministry confirmed by the other brothers in the midst. We need a witness. We want the word to be received. Are we concerned with what other people think about our ministry? Are we concerned about the other brothers who minister the word? Do we know what each one's ministry is? Do we appreciate their ministry? Do we complement each others' ministry, or are we pulling apart? If we're pulling apart, brethren, the body is being pulled apart. We should want the approval (the witness) of others ministering in the word. We are pulling together, building together, not separately. We have seen something in Christ Jesus, and we're building for oneness. If our "eye is single," we're moving together in that vision.

When we come together as an assembly, we're here to see what God has for us, and to let Him use the ones He wants to use. We're not hiring one man to preach to us every Sunday or expecting one person to captivate the whole ministry. We're looking for the Spirit of God to move upon those that God is working in and speaking to, the vessels that are set aside to be instruments for the ministry of the word. We are looking for our souls to be satisfied. When this is not so, it sows discord and division, because it brings death. Anything of the flesh defiles the body—the whole assembly—so we must be concerned.

If we get out of line, we are usually the last ones to know, so we need the other brothers. Peter got out of line one day, just in his actions (not in his words), and those actions spoke loudly. Paul had to rebuke him. None of us is beyond rebuke. God might send someone along from outside the church, or use someone in the midst to set a brother right. As ministry moves together in the scriptural way we have been exploring here, this is a safety factor in the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit continues to cause His life to grow in those He has called. If we were just looking to one man, paying him to preach sermons to us, this subject wouldn't be nearly as important. But we are looking for the ministry of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, so we need this.

I believe we should evaluate our own ministry. We should also get confirmation by talking to other ministers who are more experienced or older in the Lord. We should try to work with them and ask their counsel. There is a need for submitting and working together in the revelation of the Lord. This is not a natural or "blind" acceptance of what another brother says, but rather there should be a flow of spiritual life back and forth, and a common purpose and aim for each one of us, recognizing that we can be helped in such a way that it will keep us from error.

As ministers, I believe we need to know what God wants us to do, and we need to minister with an aim in view. Every time we stand to speak, I think we should have something burning in our heart. We should spend enough time before the Lord that we know what God is saying to us, and then we should take the responsibility God places upon us to formulate the thoughts and express what God is saying to us. If you go back and look at the exhortations Paul gives to different brothers, you will see that Paul

knew what he was doing, in every place, and he was also conveying the vision to others, so that they also might know what they were doing.

We know that ministry first begins in seeing. You do not have a ministry unless you're seeing something. But we cannot stop there. We must realize that how we convey what we see and how we function together also have meaning to those who are hearing. It's not just the words that have meaning. As Jesus said, *"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life"* (John 6:63). If we are not conveying life through our thoughts and our words, people will be confused. We must be single-eyed in what we see and what we give forth together, and this is not natural but spiritual.

Now, as we begin to be used of the Lord, we should ask others, "Brother, how am I doing? What am I seeing? How does it witness with you? Are my words life?" It may be difficult to ask these things. When ministry is good, we can say, "Praise the Lord, I enjoyed that." But we must come past this to get into the working of life. Is your ministry bringing life? If not, why not? Try to ask advice: "How am I doing? Am I communicating what God is speaking to my heart?" There are many areas in which other brothers can help us—that is, if we're not too proud, thinking we stand alone and the anointing is enough. To be able to communicate what we see, we must have the right words and an ever-increasing understanding. Even when we think we have understanding, we must be open to correction. If we get off track, we need to be brought back.

I believe that we must lay our hearts open to one another. We need to come together after ministry is brought, to share back and forth, question each other, and see if we're really fulfilling our aim in God. It may seem a little strange at first, but as we go on, I think we'll find it's a place of real fellowship. One may think he is doing something, yet another may see he is not, and they can go on to work together so that God can use what is being said. We will find a place of functioning which is not natural functioning (someone telling you what to do and when to do it), but seeing together, moving with that freedom which we must have, moving together under the direction of the Holy Ghost. I think this begins in fellowship, gaining confidence in each other and what others see, then sharing the burden, sharing what we see, sharing the needs. These things must come about.

The value of this fellowship will be evident. If our fellow ministers do not understand what we are saying, how can we expect it to be clear to the rest of the body? If our words are not conveying the meaning we intend, we should throw them out and find better words that do have meaning. If we are doing anything that is detrimental, I have found that with a little fellowship it is very easy to lay these things aside and go on in some other way. Brothers should fellowship until they get an understanding together, not just for the sake of words, but for the sake of ministry and what we're trying to do, because we are all building together. We want to drive some nails into the building. We want to build in people's lives so that when the trials do come, they obey God—they know God for themselves. Ministry brings them up to that place of obedience.

When we are called to ministry and when we take the liberty to stand and instruct others, I believe each one of us is open for judgment. The other brothers in the midst can judge our ministry, and question whether it be the word of God. I believe our ministering must be based on a scriptural foundation. If what you minister is only your feelings, or what you think is right, rather than being based on the scripture, it is open for judgment. You may have a revelation, light which has come to your heart, but it

must match up to the written word of God or it has no meaning. Also, even if you are experiencing God, you cannot minister your experience. The only basis of ministry is the word of God—not the dead letter, but the living word. Our fellowship in the revelation, both giving and receiving, must be based on the word of God.

God does deal with us individually, but our relationships, our fellowship in the mystery of God, and our working together will always have meaning. Paul spoke of Timothy as the only one who was “like-minded.” They worked together; they shared the same things. Timothy knew the life of Paul, and Paul knew the life of Timothy. We should know each others’ lives, because we don’t judge a man on just one statement. Too many times when differences come up, we don’t stop to consider the testimony of a man’s life. What is his life walking out? Does he have a history with God? We cannot allow divisions on the basis of one statement. We should know one another and have patience with one another. We should be open, and each brother is responsible in some measure, even if it is only to pray for those who minister.

Accountability and correction

To see the full working of ministry, the balance of ministry, we need to be able to move in this area: *“With gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will”* (II Timothy 2:25-26 NAS). As we have already said, there must be a brokenness, a humbleness in those that minister, and there must be fellowship amongst them in the revelation. We must be concerned about what God is saying. We don’t try to change a brother or take away from what God is showing him, but as vessels that are human and fallible, we should guard against weaknesses (the flesh) that can creep in and defile the word. There are many who have had a “revelation” that was not a revelation from God, and there are times when we need to be corrected. We may stumble sometimes, for none of us has attained. We’re all in this working.

I believe one of our safest places is right in the brotherhood. Here is a place where our revelation can be challenged in different ways. This is not necessarily open judgment in the assembly. Sometimes we can even correct in ministry without a direct confrontation. If we are all open, and a brother says something wrong, another brother can come right behind and correct with ministry that doesn’t lower the other brother, but lifts him up. It can be done, if we are moving with knowledge. We can bring a clear sound.

I believe that in our assembly life, if questions are in our hearts when the ministry comes to an end, we should take the opportunity to ask them, either at that time or at a later time, depending on the situation. (I think that maybe in the beginning of God’s church there were times for questions to be asked, so people could get understanding.) If we do not take this liberty, we may fall into this attitude: “It doesn’t make any difference. I’ll just take what I want and leave what I don’t want.” Yet this does not show a concern for one another. If something is false, or it has no basis, it needs to be challenged. There needs to be instruction, and guidelines given, and we must be open. If we are not humble and willing to take this instruction, I think the word of God gives a place for the ministry of any brother to be judged.

Again, if there are difficulties, or if we don't see alike, brethren, the love of God must cover this. There must be a sharing. Let us move on in what we do see and work at what we don't see. As brethren, we can get together and question each other. We should talk and pray about areas of differences, in order to move on together with singleness of heart. When we come into the assembly, our spirits must be right.

However, at times an individual vessel might be in error, having a wrong spirit, wrong doctrine, or building on the wrong foundation because the revelation is hazy. Someone may stand to just to "chat." Or he may line up scriptures one after another, and tell his thoughts about them. There may be true words spoken, but no ministry of the word of God that brings life. He is not coming to the site to build. This can be caused by many things: a wrong basis, no foundation in the scriptures, depending on opinions or feelings, and so on. I believe that the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Spirit flowing through a minister work hand in hand, giving the ministry of the word a good solid base in the scriptures. If this is true, then each of us says "Amen" in our spirit as the ministry comes forth. But if the ministry starts to come forth with someone just speculating or getting into an area not based in the scriptures, our spirits don't say "Amen." We start to close down. Sometimes if we don't recognize this, it keeps going, getting worse and worse as each person starts to close down. This is normal for Spirit-filled members. The Holy Spirit is in the midst to bring us to a singleness of witness. We don't deceive the Holy Spirit.

If a brother is speaking and suddenly the Spirit breaks in on him and says, "Brother, you're not doing any good," wouldn't it be better for him to say, "Brethren, I guess I got off on the wrong foot. Let me sit down." Everybody could just continue from that point, and I think we'd be much better off. Sometimes I think we feel we need to "save face" before the congregation, but if we start to labor in the "dead letter"—perhaps something we don't understand, or we're not able to convey what God has spoken to us, and it's not meaning anything—it's better to sit down and let God work on us some more. If we're not seeing, we're defiling! It takes a real work of God in our midst to bring us to this place.

In the 20th chapter of Acts we read Paul's final charge to the elders at Ephesus. The word of God reveals that the elders (or overseers) are to watch over and care for the body. If anyone rises up to try to draw the members away, the first line of defense is the elders. They are to question and to challenge every minister, so that there can be a clarity of revelation. If our hearts are right, we will desire this, so that we can move on together, having the same aim and the same love one for another, and so we can encourage our brothers in the ministry God has given them.

This doesn't mean that everyone is judged or questioned on each tiny thing. As the Spirit of God moves, and as God causes us to become more uniform and united in what He is doing, there will be a greater freedom in fellowship, and there should be very little need for open correction. But some ministry can be very detrimental, and if a brother is going on in an area that is harmful, and he doesn't know that he is ministering death, he needs to be brought down. I would want to be brought down by somebody who has that ability to say, "Brother, I think you're in the wrong spirit." Now, that doesn't come from everybody, but it could happen, and we need to understand this. Some people feel they have the right to do anything they want to do in the body of Christ. But while everybody can't call down Peter (Galatians 2:11-14), there are brothers who are responsible to call down certain things. If our

words or actions are detrimental, we should want to be stopped, and not feel “hurt.” Of course, love must work this, and bring us to this place.

Someone may feel that what God has given him, the anointing on him, supersedes anything else, and nobody has a right to challenge it. But I have always believed, whether I’m in my local gathering or somewhere else, that the revelation God has given to my heart is open for questioning. It is open to be judged. I have nothing to hide, and I want brothers, if they have questions, to question what I’m saying. I want to share it with them. In many places I have visited, I have shared with those in authority what God was revealing to me, before I would feel free to bring it to the people I was to minister to. I want my ministry tested.

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (I Corinthians 3:13-17). I believe this refers to the temple of God in the church, not our individual temples, and the possibility of a man defiling this temple with his own works. Paul told Timothy, “Take care about your doctrine,” because the right doctrine, if it’s in revelation, will save your soul. If teaching is not right, if it is not grounded in the life of God, it can defile, and it can cause problems like dissatisfaction, wrong ministry, divided ministry, division, and a harshness in our spirits.

If you begin to sense a problem in the Spirit, I think you first have the responsibility to pray and to seek God. It could be the minister that is wrong, or it could be that only you (the hearer) are wrong. Both the vessel that’s being used to minister and the vessel that is here to receive must be right. If the person sitting in the pew listening to the ministry has mixed emotions or wrong emotions, it cuts off their receiving. They’re “dead,” and they don’t receive. The ministry doesn’t mean anything, and in fact, it makes them harder. Even the best ministry can make someone harder if they don’t want to move in it. They may have emotional hindrances toward people, or be tied up in their own thinking. If they don’t have a renewed mind, if they cannot see the purpose of God and labor at that purpose, the ministry will only harden and make them more indifferent.

We must be wise about the devil’s devices and the human element that can creep in—wise enough to start to labor before God in this, binding up the hurt places and building up the walls that were broken down, as the Old Testament says. We need a good expression of God’s love toward one another, and a real quickening, so that there is an openness in each one of our hearts.

II Timothy 3:13 says, *“Realizing, brethren, that evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* If you’re seeing something wrongly, you will build on that wrong revelation. If you’re seeing something wrongly, you are deceived and will be more deceived, because everything that is built will be on the wrong foundation. We could go on to verse 16, *“All scripture is inspired of God, and they are profitable for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God might be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* A brother or a minister that will be profitable in the work of God must be convinced that the scriptures are inspired by God. Not just some of them, but *all* of them are inspired by God and are profitable. We do not correct

out of “what we think.” We correct out of the word of God. We do not teach “what we think is right.” We teach out of the word of God. Correction is brought out of the word and should have agreement in the word and with a spiritual fellowship or brotherhood.

It is always possible for any of us to err. But, praise God for the brotherhood—if it is functioning properly—that can bring us back to a sound place of understanding and fellowship. In a good condition, I think each one of us wants this. It is only when we are not so “healthy” in the Spirit of God that we resent someone bringing us back into a good understanding. But we should all be convinced of the inerrancy of scripture and that the men God sets in the midst will continue to increase in the knowledge of the Spirit.

Some possible hindrances

If we are not seeing results in our midst—namely, more oneness in the ministry and in the church—then something is wrong, either in our ministry or in our hearts. It can be in either one. Sometimes we are too prone to blame the ministry for something wrong, and sometimes we are too quick to blame the hearts, so we must find out where the trouble is. But if ministry is not producing what the word of God leads us to expect, we had better “check in” with the Lord and see if our hearts are right, whether we are open to receive, or what is hindering us from receiving. Each minister must constantly be aware of himself and examine his own heart before the Lord.

As ministers we can have defects, weaknesses, “hang-ups” in our thinking, and we can hinder the word of God, with serious effects. We can cause the body of Christ to be divided if our thinking is not proper in the Lord. If we’re on a tangent, going to one side or another, we’re not able to manifest the word. Our minds are impaired in some way, and if we’re not thinking in God, it definitely hinders our ministry.

Emotional ties can also hinder the word of God. Emotions have their proper outworking, in ministers and in the congregation, but when we’re tied together not in the Spirit but in our emotions, in a fleshly, natural fellowship, it can hinder and cause the ministry to suffer. We’ll be looking at the outward, not sensing the living word coming from the Spirit of God. The word can be almost completely blocked in the midst when we have natural emotional ties.

Also, impulses can come from emotions, and our thoughts can be interjected. If we go by our feelings, they can counterfeit the leading of the Spirit of God. We can start to see another revelation that’s close to the revelation but misses it. There is no ministry of life, only a ministry of ideas. This also can bring the word flowing in our midst to almost a complete halt. Any words or any experience that comes from our soulish experience will defile the body of Christ. We must be concerned, and mindful, that all things are done unto edification. These things can defile, and they can hurt someone, or shut someone down. Even if the one speaking does not mean to do it, if he is not moving in what God is saying, he can defile.

If our minds or our emotions are unsettled, if we have questions in our hearts or turmoil in our souls, we cannot be led by the Spirit of God. We need to look at the scriptures; we need to look at our experience in the living word. At least this is what I see, and what I’ve experienced. When I’m in turmoil, when I have questions, when I’m emotionally tied to a situation, I cannot sense what God is

doing. I must get quiet first. I must lay these things aside. I must get peace about them. Even though I may not understand, I must lay them aside to be able to get the leading of God's Spirit.

If I'm going to minister effectively, these things cannot be affecting me. I cannot minister my own ideas or my own opinions. Even if I use scripture, if I have an end in view which is not Jesus Christ, I may be just trying to prove a point, not seeing what God wants or being led by the Spirit. This is why we must be open to correction if we're going to press on and ask God to give us the full, rich ministry that we desire.

Seeing the goal and laboring for fruit

Each one of us should have a goal, knowing what we are striving for, even if we're not called to be ministers. The listeners should have a goal to be open to receive the ministry. We all must see the ultimate goal clearly, but mainly those who minister must be convinced of it. Our lives must be settled in it. Everything must be brought underneath that captivating truth God has brought to us in Jesus Christ. If not, as we go along the way, we will deviate from it. We must be convinced of the ultimate aim of the Lord and what ministry is to do. A minister must minister only in the grace that God has given him, but every minister is building to the same end.

We should always ask ourselves: "What is the goal? What am I aiming for?" just as we ask ourselves, "What am I raising my children for?" One thing, for God! I look toward the future, not just this moment. Everything is governed by what I see as the ultimate goal. Discipline, correction, training—all is done as we move toward that goal. This takes the grace of God! None of us can say we've "got it all together." But as we see more, we need to move in it.

I find myself more and more looking at that goal, at what I'm aiming for. When I act, it is with that goal in view. This is what ministry must do. We must see what God wants, and then we must move toward the goal. We can't give up, no matter what happens. We just go back to God and get "lit up" again, with the word of God that brightens the whole inner working of our hearts and thrills us. Then that thrill may touch others. If we're getting in touch with God, the light that's coming into our hearts can't help but shine out through us. Get alive in God! Our fellowship together will also do this, as we encourage and exhort one another. With love holding us together, it will all work for His purpose.

We should look for the fruits that come from a unified ministry that is really moving under a burden and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Over a period of time, if ministry is not bringing the gathering to a oneness of faith, if we are functioning properly under the anointing, then we will have to take more time before God in prayer, and even fasting. Whatever it takes, we need to see evidence. We cannot go week after week and not see the evidence of what we say we are here for, as ministers. If we see no fruit, we will become discouraged, and before long we will sit back. But God has given the ability to do the work, and if we move according to that ability, with all the knowledge God gives and with power behind it (our time of prayer with God), and still do not see fruit, we should begin to fast and pray for a breakthrough. Then we have done all that we can do. But if we haven't done that, I don't think we've gone far enough. Unification may not take place even after all this has been done—but then, judgment will come.

If we're not seeing the goals of ministry accomplished, we need to seriously consider the matter with our hearts open, to make some rational decisions based on the revelation moving in our hearts. All of us must learn to be constructive without being critical. Nobody's trying to govern, but we want God to have His will done. We should come together and use knowledge, being constructive.

Every minister can make a mistake. It is always possible to be out of the timing that God wants. But we don't let this limit us. We continue to strive, knowing that God will lead us and that we are ministering in faith. If we are not going forward, we are standing still—and if we are standing still, we are going backward! God is constantly putting on us His demand of love to move on, through exhortation, through others' lives, and through ministry of the word to bring us to oneness.

As long as we are in this world, the Holy Spirit will continue to teach us more and more about what ministry really is. There is no end to how the Lord will bring this about. What God has for us to do will continue to grow, we will see greater places of service, and we will realize more and more that it must all be the supply of the Spirit. God will be working in us, and the supply will be His life.

BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY

Oneness is in the heart of God

Oneness is in the heart of God. His greatest desire is that we might be *one* with Him and with each other. When we come into the working of God, we find out we're not individuals any longer. Although we are saved as individuals, the moment we come through the door, we're in the family of God. Our lives are affected by others and we affect them. Now we have responsibility. Every member in the body of Christ has a responsibility to the life of God and the love of God.

A true corporate ministry will show evidence in our gathering by a "thermometer" we all can sense: a unified love of the brethren. True ministry brings us into a fuller expression of Christ, who is love. If ministry is moving in the life of God, the results will be manifest, as we give forth a testimony of love. The fruit of the Spirit will be evident.

The Spirit baptizes us into one body. We have all been made to drink of one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13). But the expression of this will suffer if ministry is weak. This doesn't mean God will fail. God continues to try to speak to us, and the work will only fall apart if it is built by man. But if true ministry in life and the word of God is coming forth, God will strengthen our areas of weakness if we have hearts to hear the word. The word brings enlightenment so we can move out of our weaknesses into strength. Taking hold of the word of God brings real strength.

We will always be growing, but each of us should see something together of the end working of God's purpose. Without this, we are not unified! If we all have the life of God, that must work something. If we are all partakers of the same Spirit, we will move in the same direction. If we don't see together to some degree what God wants, something is wrong. We need to be convinced by the word of God that there is only one body, or the devil can "shoot us down." We cannot compromise. We don't choose who is in that body—God puts them into it. We may not understand it all right now, and we may not see how God will work all things to that end when we see so much division in the world, but we must still be convinced that there is only *one body*.

The vision that we see will dominate and master us, and bring us under the lordship of Christ. As we are mastered by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God who is here to build us into a habitation for God, we are unified. Paul says that now we "*endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit.*" The unity of the Spirit is already here, but now we must enter into it. Ministry by those God has called will bring an expression of completeness—not just because we have the same life, but because we are now seeing alike, seeing together, seeing the same purpose of God.

I Corinthians 1:10 says, "*I beseech ye brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you...*" God has given grace to each one, and each minister sees something, but it is always within the overall revelation. This is the "same thing" that we all are seeing. We minister in the grace God has given us, but we may minister in different areas of the revelation. God may move strongly in the heart of a minister with something He wants to get across to the body. Another brother moves in God, not with the same thing, but to complement that ministry. We pull together in the Spirit of God. This is the full working of the body of Christ. If we're wrong, we're corrected. When we're right, we're pulling together. I believe this is what Paul is saying here: "...and

that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Paul is speaking about the whole church, but the church can’t come into this unless the ministers are there. We go on to grow in this, and a year from now, if the Lord tarries, we are in *more* oneness. We see God’s purpose more clearly and we’re laboring toward it.

The vision must increase

If we believe that God is working to bring oneness, we need to move together because we are one in the body. Although we are individuals, we are one. God can’t work with a bunch of individuals. We were baptized by the Spirit into one body—so we are now connected. Now God wants us to function, and functioning takes the ability of God. We can’t function on our own or in the natural, and we can’t minister in the natural; we must minister in the Spirit of God. We need to move in the life of God together. God also wants us to come together with understanding. We may not know at the time we gather exactly what God has for us, but we already know there are certain things God wants to work and is working. Then we leave it open for God move in the hearts of those to whom He has given a ministry.

If we see together and agree in certain things, we can pull together in the Spirit. Each one of us is moving in the grace God has given us. Each one has a functioning place in the body of Christ, whether we are ministers or members. Wherever God has placed us, we are functioning and we are important in the body of Christ, no matter how “small” our place seems to be. We will realize why we are here. Together, we make up the whole. If one is not present, something is missing.

As ministry comes forth and brings the body of Christ into more oneness, it enables the body to see more clearly the vision of God held before them. The less there is of the vision in each of our hearts, the less we see, and the more we are divided. Division is unavoidable if there is no vision. But the brighter the vision of God beams, the fuller the ministry in that vision, the greater the oneness, and the greater the expression of God’s love in each member. So the vision in a minister’s life is one of the most important things. Knowledge of the vision of God must continue to increase. It can only increase as we look to the Lord and as we move together. A continued vision requires a continued ministry. If the ministry does not continue to pull together in some measure of oneness and with the same purpose in view, the vision will slowly die. Even if the vision burned brightly at the beginning, if we don’t start to move and pull together in it, the vision will slowly fade away, and eventually there will be no vision.

If the vision of God is bright, it gives us the ability to begin to labor, to be channels for the flow of God’s life to meet needs, and to begin to bring in His purpose. The closer we move to God’s end purpose, the more oneness, the greater the vision. The vision begins to take form in the members. We *become* the vision, we *become* the purpose of God, and it is not just within four walls. Ministry reaches out. Ministry has an effect upon everything God wants to do in the world today. Those who go forth will do so because the vision is burning brightly, and because we have singleness of heart. Then God can speak, and reveal Himself in lives, and bring us to more oneness.

So each one of us has a function in the body of Christ, and the body of Christ is not just when we come together. We belong to that one body and we function seven days a week. We function in the world, and with our brothers and sisters. We esteem our brothers and sisters in the assembly, those who are in the faith. We are working in God’s purpose, and we are not afraid to declare our purpose. The closer

we get to this oneness, the greater our witness for the Lord Jesus Christ will be. The closer we get to spiritual seeing and moving, the greater the power of God will be upon our assembly, and the greater will be the power of utterance for the revelation. Where God's people are united in oneness, God is present, and He continues to bring understanding in His possessing overall purpose: that we may be brought to the place where Jesus Christ is all in all.

“For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (I Corinthians 15:27-28)

Editor's Note

A few words about Bro. Gordon's style of speaking and writing may help a new reader benefit more readily from his message. From many years of listening to his ministry and also working for him for 17 years (typing correspondence, editing tracts and booklets, and other assorted tasks), I eventually noted that his style was somewhat unique. Although he did follow an outline or notes, it usually did not seem to be a linear progression of thoughts leading to a conclusion. His theme would be stated near the beginning, sometimes in the first sentence, and he would then build around it, enlarging upon the basic truth. It seemed rather like viewing a building from different angles, circling around it repeatedly to gain fresh points of view. Each new angle adds to your eventual full comprehension, but as you listen or read, you shouldn't imagine you're on a road, traveling to a destination—or at least, not a very long road. Generally speaking, you're already there! I don't know if everyone needs that hint or if it was just something that helped me, but for what it's worth—that's how I listen to Bro. Gordon.

After many years of experience and working together, Bro. Gordon trusted me more and more to edit his writing for better clarity, readability, and understanding by those who were new to the truth he labored hard to share, without altering the message. Still, it was difficult to approach this project knowing he wouldn't be here to read it when I was finished, "just in case" I missed something. So I worked very carefully, examining each sentence to understand its meaning, and I edited as lightly as possible, often choosing to leave a sentence a little obscure rather than taking the chance of misunderstanding his meaning. I have depended on the Lord to help me, and also trusted Him to guide and help readers, because these things will never be understood by the natural mind.

After the initial transcription, I rearranged paragraphs extensively, following an outline that gradually developed. I felt that truths would be more effectively grasped if they were grouped and concentrated into sections with simple headings. Bro. Gordon's style makes it fairly easy to do this, because many paragraphs and even sentences seem complete in themselves. However, the style is still quite conversational (partly because it was informal teaching, with questions, interruptions, and detours), and there is still more repetition than may seem necessary. I chose, at least for now, to leave it that way, rather than omit many colorful turns of phrase that characterize Bro. Gordon's speaking style, add depth, and remind us of the man we loved and respected. Certainly he repeated his messages very often, and would not apologize for that. He saw value in repetition and reinforcement (always under the guidance of the Spirit!).

I daresay he wouldn't mind me quoting from the Phillips translation (which we both enjoyed), something he would heartily agree with: *"I shall not fail to remind you of things like this although you know them and are already established in the truth. I consider it my duty, as long as I live in the temporary dwelling of this body, to stimulate you by these reminders. I know that I shall have to leave this body at very short notice, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. Consequently I shall make the most of every opportunity, so that after I am gone you will remember these things"* (2 Peter 1:12-18). It sounds rather like something Bro. Gordon would say! And I believe he would be pleased with the result of our efforts, hoping that the Lord would use it in any small way He sees fit.

Diane Sheats (daughter of David)