

THE MINISTRY DRIVEN CHURCH:

**THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MINISTRY IN BOTH THE
SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL SPHERES, AND ITS IMPACT
ON THE RAPID MULTIPLICATION OF CHURCHES**

- A Biblical Theology of Social Ministry

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The Ministry Driven Church replicates the work of Jesus Christ,
the Apostles and the Early Church, explaining the rapid growth
of the Church in the first few centuries.

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<http://www.Agape-Restoration-Society.org/ministry.htm>

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ISBN 1-59872-605-6

Printed in the United States of America

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First printing: August 2006

by Instantpublisher.com

Revised: February 2008

(Scripture quotations are cited from the World English Bible unless otherwise noted.)

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Preface

What is the purpose of the Church? This book, *The Ministry Driven Church*, builds on the book *The Purpose Driven Church* to forcefully demonstrate that ministry is the purpose, the missing key in the formula for rapid multiplication of churches. Ministry in all its diverse meanings ties together the manifold aspects of a living, healthy and growing church. Many modern books on small groups, evangelism, missions, discipleship and church growth rely upon new methods, techniques and technology. This is not entirely mistaken, but they run the risk of ignoring the foundational truths of the New Testament for the sake of novelty. This work tries to adhere very closely to the New Testament teachings on “ministering to the building up of the Body of Christ.” It utilizes the inspired Word of God as the primary bibliographical source, and taps into other sources, old and new, only as secondary witnesses to God’s unchanging truth in Scripture.

The Ministry Driven Church covers the following twenty-one aspects of ministry as found in the Bible: fellowship (*koinonia*), making disciples (*matheteuo*), worship (*latreia*) and divine service (*leitourgia*), servanthood (*pais*) and bondservice (*douleuo*), practical service (*diakonia*), sanctification (*hagiasmos*), evangelizing (*euaggelizo*), proclamation (*kerygma / kerusso*), love (*agape*), joy (*khara*) and peace (*eirene*), moderation (*epieikes*) and self-control (*egkrateia*), liberation (*eleutheria*), wholeness (*teleiosis*), edification (*oikodome*), grace (*kharis*), truth (*aletheia*) and light (*fos*), intercession (*enteuxia*) and unity (*henotes*).

In doing so, *The Ministry Driven Church* draws today's minister back to first-century, revolutionary, world-changing practical ministry that shook the Roman Empire to its knees. It looks forward to and prepares for another great shaking: "For so says Jehovah of Hosts: Yet once, it *is* a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; and the Desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, says Jehovah of Hosts " - Haggai 2:6-7, MKJV.

About the Author: Robert was raised in a Christian home, a "middle child" among an older brother and four sisters. All six children are serving the Lord in foreign mission work or in U.S. churches. His mother's family descends from Edward Doty, who came to the New World on the Mayflower in 1620. Edward wasn't one of the Pilgrims originally, he was an indentured servant who had been sold to Stephen Hopkins, one of the Pilgrims. So you might say that Robert is the descendant of a "white slave." On the way across the ocean, the Pilgrims decided they shouldn't allow slavery in the New World, so they freed all their slaves, and Edward Doty became one of the Pilgrims. Edward Doty's

descendants also include Jonathan Edwards, leader of the First Great Awakening and one of the first presidents of Princeton Seminary, Roger Sherman, the only man who signed all four U.S. founding documents (Articles of Association, Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and U.S. Constitution), Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, poet and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Presidents Franklin Pierce, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush. Through them Robert is also related to Presidents Zachary Taylor, James Madison, Grover Cleveland, Martin Van Buren, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses Grant, Theodore Roosevelt and Gerald Ford. Robert's great-great-aunt is Susan B. Anthony whose grandmother's maiden name was Doty, who led the struggle for women's right to vote and is the first woman whose portrait is on U.S. money. Her uncle was James Duane Doty, governor of the Wisconsin Territory and founder of the capital city, Madison, where Robert and his wife Cheryl live when in the U.S.

Robert committed his life to Christ as his Savior and Lord in 1957, and about one year later, he received a vision as he stood on the balcony of a U-shaped apartment complex. A voice said to him, "Remember this plan: you will build it many years from now, when you're an old man." He asked, "Why do I have to wait so long?" Then he saw a map or outline of Russia in the sky, and also was given the clear impression that there was something very unusual and special about the stairways, but he didn't understand what it was. Immediately after receiving this vision he began studying about Russia. Over the course of years he drew these plans several times, even built his own house incorporating some of these ideas, but there were always problems with the stairways.

He has been a student of Russian and central European affairs since 1961 (diploma as a Russian interpreter, B.A. in Central and East European Studies), and has been actively working for freedom of religious confession and for mutual understanding among Christians in this area since 1969. He is fluent in Russian and German, has studied French, Spanish, Greek, Hungarian, Udmurt and Mari, and also has a third diploma in programming, knows over twenty computer languages and has about twenty-five years of experience developing computer software. Over the years he has written, translated or edited ten books in five languages, among them [*Agape-Biblia*](#), the first Russian Bible for Windows operating system. It is a revision of the Russian Bible for which he served as general editor. He has earned M.Min. and D.Min. degrees, and has lived in Russia since 1991. At the end of 1996 he became acquainted with a very talented handicapped young man in Russia, and immediately he understood what was wrong with his plans - those "stairways" should be ramps!

Introduction: Passover or Resurrection?

Ministry is founded on the nature of God. At one time Moses was a prince of Egypt, the future pharaoh. But you know the story, how he killed an Egyptian and had to run away into the desert in order to save his life. When he was wandering among the dunes, probably thinking to himself, “Hmm! Back then I was the prince, second only to Pharaoh! And who am I now? A shepherd-nobody. Hmm!” - suddenly a burning bush appeared in front of him, but that bush didn’t burn up. When a voice rang out, “Moses, Moses!” he answered, “Here I am” (Ex. 3:2-4).

Then the Voice told him to return to Egypt in order to deliver the people of Israel. Now, imagine for a moment that you are wanted for murder so you fled from Moscow to Siberia. Then some voice from somewhere, maybe in your head, says, “Return to Moscow!” Moses said, “Who, me? And by the way, who are you?” Then God replied, “**I AM**” (Ex. 3:11-14). You know, of course, what happened next: Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt, established the Passover, showing them how they must slaughter a lamb and consume all of it, and then Moses led them to the Promised Land.

Our being and purpose is defined in relationship to other people and to God, the Ground of Being who “came down” to Moses. When a person wakes from a head injury and has amnesia, he asks, “Who am I?” He then reconstructs his identity by his relationships as people close to him come to him and remind him who they are to him. When God comes down to us and we begin to have a relationship with Him, we find our true being and purpose.

Here in the phrase “**I AM!**” we discover a remarkable connection between grammar and philosophy: a subject + the intransitive verb “to be” but without a predicate. You doubtless learned that when you use the verb “to be,” you must place a predicate in the sentence, for example: “I was a boy (or a girl), but then I became an adult.” Both teachers and philosophers tell us that the predicate defines and limits the subject: “An orange is a round fruit, orange in color, juicy and sweet inside,” or “An apple is also a round fruit, often not quite as round as an orange, red or yellow in color, it is harder than an orange, also sweet but not as juicy.”

All of these predicates define and limit oranges and apples, the essence of which depends on their definitions. But when that Voice said, “**I AM!**” without a predicate, Moses immediately understood that He, this Voice, is the one unlimited Absolute, which is impossible to fully define and which does not depend on anything. He is the only self-sufficient existence. By the way, the word in Hebrew “Yahweh” or in English “**I AM**” is often translated “Lord” in the Bible. So when the atheist says, “Hah! What Lord? There is no God! Nobody lords it over me, I’m free!” you can ask, “And are you sure of that?” He will reply, “I’m absolutely certain that there is no God!” Then you say, “That means that you believe in some kind of absolute!” It is obviously absurd to say, “Everything is relative, and that’s the absolute truth.” Even if we don’t consciously acknowledge it, we presuppose some kind of absolute, a fixed point of reference, in order to express any intelligent statement. A person cannot even think logically without an absolute, and He is called “**I AM!**”

Our lord is whatever employer, commander, master or ideology we serve. Atheism, freedom, democracy or self-realization all make very insufficient lords, because none of them are self-sufficient. All of them pretend to be absolutes, but none of them fit the definition. None are the “**I AM!**” Therefore, none of them deserve the title “lord.” Only the “**I AM!**” deserves our service. When we encounter the “**I AM!**” we discover Him to Whom we must minister or serve, and thus discover our own meaning and purpose.

Approximately one thousand five hundred years later, when Jesus appeared on earth, He announced the beginning of His ministry with the words of the prophet Isaiah – “The Spirit of the Lord is on me; because he has anointed me...” (Luke 4:16-19). That is, “I am anointed by the Spirit of the Lord,” which means, “I am the Messiah.” Then He explained what He intended to do: “preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed.” He began to gather a band of followers (5:1-11) and showed them how this is done (5:12-16): He touched a leper and healed him. Then He healed a paralyzed man (5:17-26), then a centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10), and even raised from the dead the son of a widow (7:11-17).

Then He sent out His disciples (9:1-6), telling them, “Now it’s your turn: go proclaim the Kingdom of God and do the same things!” Every time He sent His disciples out, He commanded them to combine proclaiming the Kingdom with healing the lame, maimed and blind. But the

people didn't quite understand: who was He: a prophet, or a rabbi (teacher), or demon-possessed, or a magician (11:14-22)? After this as He was eating supper with a certain Pharisee (14:12-14), Jesus asked him, "When you throw a party what kind of people should you invite? The poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind." And again in the same chapter (14:16-21) He said to bring "the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind" into the Kingdom of God.

Here we notice an echo of the words that Moses wrote: care for the poor, the deaf and the blind. Why? Because "I am the Lord," that is, "**I AM!**" (Lev. 19:10 and 14) Because of the fact that God exists, we must tell people this Good News and care for "the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind." But Jesus' disciples still thought that it would be better to evangelize the rich, the healthy, the intelligent and the good-looking people, and bring that kind of people to Christ!

How many times in the Gospel of John did the Lord Jesus Christ say "**I AM**"? Eleven times! See John 6:35; 6:41; 6:48; 8:58; 10:9; 10:11; 10:14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1 and 15:5. The most important text, 8:58, shows that the Jews understood when Jesus said it this time, He was making Himself equal to God, which is why "they took up stones to throw at Him."

And how many times did the Lord Jesus foretell His impending death? In Mark 8:29-31 we read: "He said to them, 'But who do you say that **I AM**?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' He commanded them that they should tell no one about Him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." In Mark 9:12 we read: "How is it written about the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be despised?" And 31-32 states: "The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him. And after He is killed, He shall rise the third day. But they did not understand that saying and were afraid to ask Him." It was inconceivable for them to imagine that the "**I AM**" could die! In [Mk. 10:32-34](#), they were in shock (amazed), they were so afraid when He talked about His death! In Luke 18:31-34 where He tells them that He must go to Jerusalem and be put to death, "They understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they didn't understand the things that were said." We believers in the twenty-first century understand quite well the reason for His coming to earth, but why didn't the disciples understand? Hadn't they already been with Him for three years? When John the Baptist saw Him, he said – "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of

the world!” (John 1:29), and in v. 1:35, “Behold the Lamb of God!” The disciples must have been able to understand the idea of a sacrificial lamb! Why did they not understand?

It seems to me that they didn’t understand not simply because they had not yet been witnesses of His resurrection from the dead: Jesus had raised a few people from the dead during His earthly ministry. Here is why they didn’t understand: they were thinking like ordinary humans. In Mark 8:33 (GW) it states: “You aren't thinking the way God thinks but the way humans think.”¹ When the disciples were preparing the Passover supper in Matthew 26:17-19 and participated in it (26-28), it appears to me that they were thinking Passover was the reality, and the words of Jesus: “Take, eat, this is My body” and “this is My blood of the new covenant” were for them merely symbolic, an interesting commentary on the Old Testament Passover, as all the previous rabbis had commented on it. They didn’t understand that the Jewish Passover was merely a shadow of the future slaying of the Lamb of God.

When Jesus was praying in the garden of Gethsemane, in verses 26-44 of the same chapter, what happened? Jesus understood quite well that He would soon become the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God described in Isaiah 53:6-7 – “All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he didn't open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he didn't open his mouth.” This had been written by the prophet 700 years before Jesus, but not only did the Pharisees not understand it, even the Lord’s own disciples didn’t understand!

Jesus understood perfectly well what David prophesied about the Messiah in Psalm 22:14-18 –

I am poured out like water. All my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me. A company of evildoers have enclosed me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all of my bones. They look and stare at me. They divide my garments among them. They cast lots for my clothing.

And when He fell on His face in the garden, His soul was tormented – “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Mat. 26:38). Although He gave His disciples the order, “Watch and pray!” they fell asleep. Three times He asked God if there was any other way – “If it is possible,

let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire” (v. 39). Each time He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping: “We’ve had a good Passover feast, now it’s time to take a nap.” They didn’t realize that before their closed eyes the real, perfect Passover Lamb was being prepared for the slaughter. They didn’t know! And on the very cross Jesus shouted out – “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). All of them were thinking the way humans think, including His disciples.

Even after His resurrection, when He appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:18 and 21), they said that they had been awaiting a deliverer from the Roman yoke. Finally the Lord had to rebuke them for their thick-headedness – “Foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Didn’t the Christ have to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?” Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (vv. 25-27). The Lord had to open their minds²⁹ (31-34). Then Jesus revealed Himself to the remaining disciples ([44-49a](#)). Finally they understood: “Eureka! How could we have been so dense? How long was it that we just didn’t get it? All of this was laid out so clearly in the Scriptures!”

Finally, just before His ascension, He gave them their last assignment, which we call the “Great Commission” – “Now it’s your turn again: go, disciple others, teaching them to carry out the same things that I taught you to do!” (Mat. 28:18-20, my paraphrase) – that is, to preach the Good News and heal the lame, the maimed and the blind. He did not command them to merely preach and teach theology, He gave them orders to carry out what He had shown them how to do. The apostles did just what Jesus commanded them to do, starting in Jerusalem and from there to Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth, they preached, they healed the sick, and at the same time they trained others to carry out what Jesus had shown them how to do: in Eph. 4:11-13 it states that leaders in the church should “bring the saints to perfection in doing works of ministry.” In Greek, ministry is *diakonia*, and such ministers are deacons and deaconesses in the New Testament.

In conclusion I would like to make these final remarks – “Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Do you understand now

the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ for you personally? Can you say with the Apostle Paul – “I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Or must it be said of you what Paul wrote – “Foolish [non-understanding] Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth among you as crucified?” (Gal. 3:1). Are you still celebrating the old Passover?

But now you can cease celebrating the old way: the perfect Lamb of God has been sacrificed for you! As 1 Cor. 5:7 states: “Purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed in our place.” If Jesus Christ is really the “**I AM**” then He is worthy of our worship and service. Where do you stand on the path of discipleship, following after Christ? Are you still observing the old Passover, or do you celebrate the slain and resurrected Lamb of God? If so, take up your own cross, crucify the old ego and follow after the crucified and resurrected Jesus!

Endnotes to Introduction:

1. *God's Word*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

Chapter 1: Ministry as Fellowship/Community (*koinonia*)

In the preceding part we have seen how the Pharisees and even the disciples were locked into their old paradigms of thought. In ordinary Jewish thinking it was inconceivable for the “I AM,” Yahweh, to limit Himself to the dimensions of a human body, and above all to die, to voluntarily lay down His life in the gory, ignominious form that He did: execution by means of being nailed to a Roman cross. And *koinonia* means that we are called to join Him in the fellowship of His suffering, in order to experience the power of His resurrection in our lives. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* define *koinonia* as “partnership, that is, (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction: - (to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-), distribution, fellowship.”¹ Thus we see the Greek word has a very wide range of meanings. In this work we will use the concept of “semantic field,” exploring the wide range of meanings of a word, and the related words that are frequently used in the context of the given word.

In 1 John 1:3, 6-7 we are introduced to the central theme of the Apostle John’s letter: *koinonia*. Four times in three verses he uses this word in a poetic *chiasm*, forming the Greek letter *Chi* (X):

That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us. Yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ... If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and don’t tell the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

These are carefully laid out as a *chiasm* to catch the attention of the Greek-speaking audience:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| L: “ <u>fellowship</u> with us,” | R: “ <u>fellowship</u> with the Father, and with his Son,” |
| L: “ <u>fellowship</u> with him,” | R: “we have <u>fellowship</u> with one another,” |

...so that human fellowship goes from left on the top to right on the bottom, while divine fellowship goes from right on the top to left on the bottom.

Frequently people ask the question, “What is the meaning of life? Does life have any meaning at all?” St. John begins the chapter with the answer to this age-old question by making the bold claim that he and the other apostles had actually seen and heard the “Meaning (logic, word) of life” and their hands had physically touched God incarnate, Life, the *logos* of Greek philosophy! In the first five verses he describes the offer, then in the next five verses he outlines the

conditions: each of those verses starts with “if” – a condition. He states, “You can participate in this experience with us, and here’s how: walk in the light, and confess your sins.” *Koinonia* means that we can experience the meaning of life and share in this divine life, which results in having intimate communion with one another. John gives two positive conditions:

- 1) If we walk in the light, we have fellowship with each other and forgiveness of sins (v. 7),
- 2) If we confess our sins, he forgives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (v. 9).

But John also warns about possible negative pitfalls on the way to fellowship:

- 1) If we walk in the darkness while saying we have fellowship, we lie (v. 6),
- 2) If we say we have no sin, we are simply deceiving ourselves (v. 8),
- 3) If we say we haven’t sinned, we are calling God a liar (v. 10).

So it is quite easy to destroy *koinonia* by consciously lying, pretending to live a holy and godly life, or by unconsciously rationalizing our wrong behavior (deceiving ourselves), which thus accuses God of being untrue, unfair and unrighteous. If God says, “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) and we say, “Not me! I’m OK, you’re OK, everyone’s OK,” then we implicitly or explicitly blame God, claiming that His Word is false. We must guard against such pitfalls.

Notice the contrast between light and darkness. The New Testament has much to say about Jesus rising early to pray, our being children of the light, etc. Christians too often feel they ought to rise early to pray, but somehow they just can’t. The trick is to set your alarm clock for 6am, and don’t hit the snooze button - get up then. When you feel tired in the evening, go to bed. But the starting point should always be getting up early in the morning on schedule.

St. John has much more to say about many facets of ministry in his first letter, as we shall see later, but here he lays the foundation for ministry on *koinonia*, fellowship with God and with one another, which can only be experienced if the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all our sins (v. 9). In order for that to take place, we must confess our sins and cease deceiving ourselves by claiming not to have sinned, or blaming God, as Adam did when he said, “the woman You gave me made me do it” and as Eve did when she said, “the serpent You created made me do it.”

Now let us examine *koinonia* from the perspective of other Apostles: St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:9, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of his Son,

Jesus Christ, our Lord.” What is this *koinonia* of Jesus Christ that Paul writes of? We find the answer in 1 Cor. 10:16 (YLT) – “The cup of the blessing that we bless – is it not the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the blood of the Christ? The bread that we break – is it not the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the body of the Christ?”². The Greek word *koinonia* is translated in this verse as “communion” in the King James Version and several other older translations. And St. Peter states in 2 Pet. 1:4, “he (Christ) has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature,” using the word *koinonos* to describe this act of fellowship or communion. From these texts it appears that the Apostles believed they were partaking of the actual body and blood of Christ in the rite of communion, in some mysterious way beyond human ability to comprehend and explain. But, just as Peter did in Acts 5, Paul warns in 1 Cor. 11:29-30 of the dangers of abusing this *koinonia*: “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he doesn't discern the Lord's body. For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep.” Do modern evangelicals discern the Lord's body in communion?

From this we understand that *koinonia* is fundamentally a spiritual phenomenon, one that must be guarded and maintained by being honest to God, honest with one another and brutally honest with ourselves. We so easily deceive ourselves, rationalize and justify our behavior! In the next passages we will see the practical outworking of *koinonia* and how some early believers tried to deceive themselves and others, leading to a crisis in fellowship that took drastic measures to resolve so that the early church could continue its rapid growth. The same is needed today.

In Acts 2:42-47 we read how, on the Day of Pentecost, over 3,000 people were converted and:

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinonia*), in the breaking of bread, and prayer. Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together, and had all things in common (*koinos*). They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved.

Many Christian writers, including Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church*, have pointed to the five items in this passage – fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry and evangelism – as

being the essentials of a healthy, growing church: “In Acts 2:42-47, these five facets of growth are described in the first church at Jerusalem. The first Christians fellowshiped, edified each other, worshiped, ministered, and evangelized. As a result, verse 47 says, ‘And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.’”³

This is very true as far as it goes: Warren’s “purpose-driven” books are excellent for inquirers and new Christians, and lead up to “turning members into ministers,” the final step in *The Purpose Driven Church*. But as I will attempt to show, this is just the beginning. The above Bible passage is only one text out of the entire New Testament, which contains much more teaching and many more examples about what the true purpose and driving force of the church is: ministry. There are at least twenty different aspects of ministry, all contributing to the building up of the body of Christ, the church. So we shall first examine the above five aspects of ministry, and then discover the rest of them that are all related to New Testament ministry.

But before going on, I must point out two items in Acts 2:42-47 that are often overlooked. Why? Because our cultural blinders filter them out. They do not fit into our western, individualistic, materialistic paradigms of thought. First, this passage uses the word *koinonia* and its root twice: “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” referring to the *koinonia* we saw in 1 John 1. But the second usage is just as important, “All who believed were together, and had all things in common.” Here the author, Luke, uses the word *koinos* to intentionally underscore the concept of fellowship in its tangible, material outworking. Believers are to share their material goods. Acts 4:32-35 also uses the word *koinos* in stating that “they had all things in common.” And Luke, the author, is quick to point out, “With great power, the apostles gave their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace was on them all.”

This shocks the western evangelical’s conservative, anti-communist mindset. What, give up my possessions? Never! That’s unbiblical, or at least un-American! But if we examine this passage and other related passages carefully, we discover vast differences between New Testament *koinos* and twentieth-century communism. In the Book of Acts *koinos* was voluntary, gradual, and the owners retained stewardship over their goods. But under communism it was forced confiscation, immediate and total, and the state took control of all the means of production. This reached the point of absurdity: my first Udmurt language tutor in Russia told me how her father was considered a *kulak* (“fist”), a rich peasant who held on to his belongings, because he owned

a cow! So the Bolsheviks confiscated not only the cow, but their house, furniture and everything except the clothing on their backs. Only the grandmother who was sick was allowed to keep one blanket. When hearing such tales, it is no wonder we have such a strong reaction to communism!

But Rick Warren, in *The Purpose-Driven Life*, writes –

The first job God gave humans was to manage and take care of God’s “stuff” on earth. This role has never been rescinded. It is a part of our purpose today. Everything we enjoy is to be treated as a *trust* that God has placed in our hands. ...Our culture says, “If you don’t own it, you won’t take care of it.” But Christians live by a higher standard: “Because *God* owns it, I must take the best care of it that I can.”⁴

Having lived in Russia for over 15 years, since before the fall of communism, my wife and I have personally witnessed the social disaster of the communist system. “If everybody owns everything, nobody owns anything and nobody cares about it” was an ironic saying in the Soviet era. Common facilities such as yards, stairways, elevators and hallways were almost always strewn with garbage, defaced, dirty and unkempt. If a light bulb burned out in the stairway and we replaced it, someone would usually steal it within a day or two. The production of factories and even equipment were routinely stolen by workers, and alcoholics would strip the outside telephone lines and electrical wires from the poles and sell the copper to buy vodka.

In contrast, note carefully the biblical principle of stewardship in Luke 12:22; 1 Cor. 4:2 and Titus 1:7; and faithful servanthood in Mat. 24:45; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7 and 4:7. God entrusts individuals, not society at large, with the care of material wealth. And in the parable of the talents in Mat. 25:21-23, the Lord promises an abundant reward if His servants invest wisely the talents entrusted to them. Material abundance is the earthly fruit of godly living, and a steward is one who must make decisions for the benefit of his master, not simply for his own pleasure. It is like a person who has power of attorney for another person who is away on an extended trip: the former has the right to make whatever decisions he deems necessary, but only for the benefit of the latter person. This makes stewardship the most responsible use of material resources, much more than under socialism, and even more than the egocentric consumerism of capitalism.

Wendell Berry, in his book *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, points out that the Bible teaches several things about stewardship of the earth –

We will discover that we humans do not own the world or any part of it... There is in our human law, undeniably, the concept and right of “land ownership.” But this, I think, is merely an expedient to safeguard the mutual belonging of people and places without which there can be no lasting and conserving human communities. This right of human ownership is limited by mortality and by natural constraints on human attention and responsibility; it quickly becomes abusive when used to justify large accumulations of “real estate,” and perhaps for that reason such large accumulations are forbidden in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus. In biblical terms, the “landowner” is the guest and steward of God.⁵

The second overlooked item in Acts 2:42-47 that I must point out is one that, in *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren touches on in another context, under the heading “Churches Driven by Buildings.” He writes,

Winston Churchill once said, ‘We shape our buildings, and then they shape us.’ Too often a congregation is so anxious to have a nice building that the members spend more than they can afford. Paying for and maintaining the building becomes the biggest budget item. Funds needed to operate ministries must be diverted to pay the mortgage, and the actual ministry of the church suffers. The tail ends up wagging the dog.⁶

The fact is that in Acts 2:42-47 the Jerusalem church first met in a huge building complete with dining and residence facilities. This fact is entirely overlooked in every commentary I have read. Although Warren uses the quotation from Churchill to downplay the vital significance of buildings, the early church clearly met and worshipped in the Jerusalem Temple, which was a multi-purpose structure that had rooms for dining, and rooms where some priests and even the prophetess Anna resided. We need only study the detailed descriptions in 1 Chron. 28:11-12 and Ezek. 41:6-7 to learn about these auxiliary rooms surrounding the Temple courts. A multi-purpose ministry facility, if properly designed, can “shape us,” as Churchill said, but in a positive way that enhances the ministry of the body of Christ and at the same time greatly reduces the budget outlays for building and maintenance, thus freeing up funds for mission and ministry.

This concept of multi-purpose facilities carried forward into the Early Church: clergy-physicians frequently studied medicine along with their general and spiritual education. These priest-physicians served the court and wrote textbooks on medicine. As a result of this type of education, hospices were established. The most famous of these early hospices was the Basiliad established by St. Basil in Caesarea of Cappadocia. St. John Chrysostom established several of them in Constantinople. Usually, the hospices contained a house for the elderly, for disabled, for contagious disease, acute disease, and for travelers. Often a church or cathedral was part of the group of buildings where people came for healing and rest.⁷

But we must also beware of the potential dangers of *koinonia*: Acts 5:1-15 tells of Ananias and Sapphira who sold a piece of land and pretended to give all of the proceeds to the church. It is important to note Peter's explanation: "While you kept it, didn't it remain your own? After it was sold, wasn't it in your power?" (v. 4). He did not negate or in any way undermine the right to private ownership of property. But at the same time he accused them of lying to God and tempting the Spirit. Violating the rules for *koinonia* can bring down swift judgment.

In our first period of overseas missionary service, my wife and I lived with a team in Austria. Our son Rob had already been born in Canada, and then our daughter Tanya was born while we were living in Austria. We shared kitchen, dining, bath and toilet facilities with others on the team. One of the team rules was to take turns keeping these shared facilities clean. But one time several team members became quite sick, and it was finally diagnosed as hepatitis. As it turned out, a new mother, the wife of another teammate, had rinsed out her baby's diapers in the bathroom sink! What she thought was just a minor infraction of the rules could have been fatal for others on the team. In Deut. 29:18-19 the German Luther Bible warns –

That there not be perhaps a man or woman or clan or tribe among you whose heart has turned from the Lord, so that he goes and serves the gods of those nations, and a root may grow up to bear gall and bitterness, and although he hears the words of this curse, he still justifies himself in his heart and says, "It will go well with me if I do whatever my heart desires," so that the drunken and the sober are destroyed together.⁸ (my translation)

A little carelessness, a little greed, a little idolatry, a little lust, a little drunkenness – and not only the sinner but innocent bystanders can be drawn in and destroyed, physically or spiritually.

How is *koinonia* an aspect of ministry? In 2 Cor. 8:4 Paul writes: "...beseeching us with much entreaty in regard of this grace and the fellowship in the ministering to the saints" (ASV). Paul is writing here about the Corinthians' sending a love-gift to the Jerusalem church experiencing material hardship, and he states that fellowship (*koinonia*) is a form of ministering (*diakonia*) to other believers, and Paul uses the verb *diakoneo* again in vv. 19-20 to describe this act of *koinonia*. Once again he underlines this concept in 9:13 – "seeing that through the proving of you by this ministration (*diakonia*) they glorify God for the obedience of your confession unto the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution unto them and unto all." Sharing materially, which in 8:4 he identifies as *koinonia*, is thus a "proving" or a test of true *diakonia*. And in 13:14 Paul closes the letter with a Trinitarian benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen."

Thus he links *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit together with the material sharing of one's wealth, alluding to the spiritual basis for the material outworking of *koinonia*.

Paul again ties *diakonia* together with *koinonia* in Eph. 3:7 and 9 – “Whereof I was made a minister (*diakonos*), according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. ...And to make all men see what is the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ”¹⁰ (KJV). So Paul understands his role as a servant or minister (*diakonos*) to be that of sharing (*koinonia*) the mystery, the divine plan of God heretofore hidden but now revealed, that of sharing the Good News of God's grace with the gentiles. St. Paul writes to the Philippians, telling how he prays “for your partnership (*koinonia*) in furtherance of the Good News from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:5). And shortly after this he writes, “If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, make my joy full, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:1-2). In these two passages Paul again links the material and spiritual aspects of *koinonia*. But perhaps the hardest aspect to swallow is in Phil. 3:10 – “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship (*koinonia*) of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death.” The threat of his impending execution in Rome made the *koinonia*-sharing of Christ's sufferings very real to Paul.

The last quotation from Paul on this facet of ministry is in Phm. 1:6 when he describes how he prays for Philemon – “that the fellowship (*koinonia*) of your faith may become effective, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in us in Christ Jesus.” Here the KJV translates it as “communication” that indicates Paul prays for Philemon to communicate his faith effectively by doing good (*agathos*), applying his knowledge of Christ Jesus in practical ministry. The communion of the saints is a very practical, down-to-earth thing, as well as being the unity of all believers throughout all time and eternity (Luke 20:38).

The anonymous author of the letter to the Hebrews, perhaps Paul or Barnabas, writes: “But don't forget to be doing good and sharing (*koinonia*), for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (13:16). The author writes this in the context of identifying with Christ's suffering: “Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered outside of the gate. Let us therefore go out to him outside of the camp, bearing his reproach” (verses 12-13). So once

again we see the material aspect of sharing (*koinonia*) linked together with the spiritual aspect of the fellowship of Christ's suffering. In his wonderful book, *Discipleship*, J. Heinrich Arnold gives some very sound advice about community –

If we want to live in church community we must do it for the sake of God alone. Otherwise, even with the best will, we will be like parasites on the inner life of the church. Even if we work more hours than other members, even if we produce more income than others, our efforts will lie like a heavy weight on the rest of the community. We have an open door for all people, but we also expect each one who wants to stay with us to accept the challenge of full discipleship. Otherwise our community will go to pieces.¹¹

My wife and I have visited one of the “Bruderhof” communities founded and run by Arnold's followers. They manufacture there all kinds of equipment for rehabilitation of disabled children and adults. The lived-out community that we saw was a powerful dynamic for Christian ministry, witness and outreach.

Jean Vanier is founder of the world famous L'Arche communities for the mentally handicapped and their helpers. His book *Community and Growth* inspired my wife and me to launch into our present ministry, and later I had the privilege of meeting him personally when he was in Moscow a few years ago to give a series of lectures. He writes – “There is no ideal community. Community is made up of people with all their richness, but also with their weakness and poverty, of people who accept and forgive each other, who are vulnerable with each other. Humility and trust are more the foundation of community than perfection.”¹² We shy away from community because we fear letting people see we are less than perfect, becoming vulnerable, but then we are left to our own loneliness. In order to experience *koinonia*-community we need to admit our own weakness and accept others' weakness. This involves dying to the “rugged individualism” of self that says “I'm self-sufficient, I don't need you.” Next we will learn more about this call to full discipleship. Get ready to take up your cross, deny self and follow Christ!

Endnotes to Chapter 1:

1. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
2. *Young's Literal Translation* (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 49.
4. Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 57.

5. Berry, Wendell, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1993), 96-97.
6. Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church*, op. cit., 78-79.
7. Hosken, Cheryl, "Lecture # 003: Historical and Christian Perspectives of Disability," *Practical Ministries*, (www.agape-biblia.org/index04.htm).
8. *German Luther Version* (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
9. *American Standard Version* (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
10. *King James Version* (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
11. Arnold, J. Heinrich, *Discipleship* (Farmington, Pennsylvania, Plough Publishing House, 1994), 104-105.
12. Vanier, Jean, *Community and Growth* (New York, Paulist Press, 1989), 47.

Chapter 2: Ministry as Making Disciples (*matheteuo*)

The classic passage that describes making disciples is the Great Commission – “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go, and make disciples (*matheteuo*) of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mat. 28:18b-20). The number of sermons and books on this passage must be innumerable. First, notice that the source of all authority is not tradition, nor the Pope, nor the Bible, but Jesus Christ. He must be the central focus of our disciple-making. But how does disciple-making (*matheteuo*) relate to practical ministry?

Our modern paradigm of discipleship is to teach another person how to pray, study the Bible, how to memorize key Bible verses for witnessing, how to win souls, and how to raise funds so that we can go all over the world doing these things. Once we’ve done this, we are convinced that we have made new disciples of Jesus Christ. But are they disciples of Jesus, or are they just followers of our half-Gospel methods? Is that how Jesus made disciples? “Our existing paradigm acts like a filter,” writes Daniel Maxton: “Any data that does not fit the existing paradigm does not get through it. Because the filter has the effect of concentrating the information that does get through, the impression is created of even greater support for their paradigms than really exists.”¹ So the more books we read, the more sermons we hear about this form of disciple-making and the more we go to remote places, the more we are convinced this is the way Jesus did it!

But “the whole Christian faith,” continues Maxton, “is built around the concept of shifting paradigms. The word repentance, *metanoia*, means to change your mind or look in another direction.”² So let us now repent of our half-Gospel mistaken methods, shift our paradigms and change our minds to conform to the mind of Christ. How did Jesus Christ make disciples, and how did He command them to do the same?

In Mat. 10:1 and 7-8, we read – “He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. ... As you go, preach, saying, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Freely you received, so freely give.” Jesus clearly commanded

them to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom, but He also commanded them to cast out unclean spirits, heal all kinds of disease and cleanse the lepers. By the way, the verb “go” here and in the Great Commission is a participle (“as you go” or “going”), not an imperative: we are not commanded to be always jetting around the globe to some remote countries; rather, it could be translated, “wherever you go or happen to be, do (imperative) such-and-such. We waste huge amounts of jet fuel, time and money and we exhaust ourselves physically simply traveling around, imagining that by this we are ministering to the Lord! Modern technology can enable us to communicate the Good News and keep in touch with our coworkers, mission headquarters, family and friends, with an efficiency and effectiveness that was almost unimaginable even just thirty years ago. It is imperative that we use the Internet to proclaim the Kingdom of God; otherwise we will let this amazing tool go to the devil.

In all of the synoptic Gospels, whenever Jesus sent out His disciples, He commanded them to perform practical ministry as well as to preach the Good News (Mk. 6:7-13; Lk. 9:1-6; 10:17-19). Teaching these forms of practical ministry are part and parcel of making disciples! And in the Great Commission, He commanded His disciples to do the same. He did not tell them to only teach others soul-winning, Bible study methods, how to lead a worship service or to form small groups; He also commanded His disciples to “teach them (others) to observe (carry out) all things that I commanded you to do.” And what was it that He commanded His disciples to do? To do practical ministry right along with preaching the Good News! The word “observe” in the KJV and other translations gives entirely the wrong impression, that you can be a passive observer of Christianity, like a spectator in the stands of a sport event. It has been said the definition of a football game is twenty or so people running around on the field desperately in need of rest, and sixty thousand people watching from the stands desperately in need of exercise! Christianity is not a spectator sport. The word “observe” means to carry out, to fulfill, and to do what Jesus taught His disciples to do.

As we learn later in Acts 6, the Apostles became overworked when the Jerusalem church grew to number in the thousands, so they had to spin off part of their ministry by forming a new position, that of deacon. But this division of labor caused by explosive church growth does not mean that the rank-and-file disciple maker or the pastor of a small church can conveniently forget about teaching their disciples how to minister in a practical way. We aren’t all leaders of mega-churches with such a division of labor as in the huge Jerusalem church of the first century!

Another passage in Matthew's Gospel illustrating this relationship between discipleship and hands-on ministry is Mat. 9:37-38 – "Then he said to his disciples (*mathetes*), 'The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers (*ergates*) are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest.'" The word *ergates* means "a *toiler*; figuratively a *teacher*: - labourer, worker"³ So the disciple (*mathetes*) is commanded to pray for more laborers (*ergates*) like himself, i.e., he is to multiply himself in the lives of others by making disciples. St. Paul echoes this multiplication process in 2 Tim. 2:2 – "The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." Then he uses the analogies of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. The image of a farmer or field laborer that Jesus and Paul used is certainly one of a person who isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. How many twenty-first century disciple-makers would get their hands dirty by planting and harvesting crops, or cleaning manure out of a barn, or carrying a bedpan, or changing a diaper for an incontinent handicapped person? Wouldn't they prefer building a nice library full of books on three-point sermon preparation and leading touchy-feely groups, so they can sit in their leather-upholstered chair behind a mahogany desk in front of that impressive library and feel very important and holy? These passages cry out for a change in our paradigms!

Although the disciple must be a person who is ready to get his hands dirty in hands-on practical ministry, we must guard against anti-intellectualism and belittling specialized training. Higher education is important: it forms us as persons and opens our minds to new ways of understanding and ministering that the untrained mind can't quite grasp. But this higher education must include learning how to conduct practical ministry. Some people, even some Christian leaders, think that practical ministry is something anyone can do if they have enough life experience. This is not true! Jesus taught the multitudes in parables, but they couldn't understand: "Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the darnel weeds of the field'" (Mat. 13:36). So the disciples received additional instruction and education. Then Jesus asked them, "Have you understood all these things?" (v. 51) "Do you get it now?" – asked Jesus. They answered "yes," even though they didn't quite get it, and wouldn't until after His death and resurrection. But they were learning.

Then Jesus said, "Therefore, every scribe who has been made a disciple (*mathetes*) in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and

old things” (v. 52). Here we see that the disciple is compared to a scribe, a highly-educated person. He is skilled in relating the “old things” – Scriptural principles – to the “new things” – modern techniques of practical ministry. The English word “disciple” has the same root as the word “discipline,” and it requires intellectual and physical discipline to become a disciple.

Disciple-making is a process of sifting and winnowing. The wheat is sifted and the chaff is blown away. The educational process involves a certain attrition rate. Expect that some will drop out. In Mat. 16:24-26 Jesus spoke some hard words that had this sifting effect: “Then Jesus said to his disciples (*mathetes*), ‘If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his life? Or what will a man give in exchange for his life?’” These hard words cut across the grain of today’s easy-believism. Many people confuse free grace with a free ride. Yes, God’s grace is given freely, but accepting it involves the cost of discipleship: denying yourself, taking up your cross and crucifying the old fleshly nature.

In my *Agape-Biblia* revision of the Russian Bible, I use the words “forget about himself”⁴ instead of “deny himself” in these verses, because in the Eastern Christian mindset self-denial and asceticism can become a very ego-centered life that is quite proud of the achievement (*podvig* in modern Russian) of super-spirituality. The focus must not be on self, on how much wealth or status one has given up, but rather on Jesus. Joseph of Arimathaea is a good example of this:

When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple (*mathetes*) came. This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed (Mat. 27:57-60).

Here was a wealthy man who is called a disciple! This passage disturbs those super-spiritual would-be disciples who think that they must be poor, wear shabby clothes and smell bad in order to follow Jesus. This may simply be a mask for laziness, of which poverty is the natural result. But this Joseph was certainly not one of these. Although wealthy, he made the decision to follow Jesus and he had counted the cost – by going to Pilate to ask for Jesus’ body, he was putting his

own life on the line by sympathizing with an executed man. Then he offered up his own tomb for Jesus' burial. So Joseph had his eyes on Jesus, not on his own wealth or self-importance.

The book of Acts contains several turning-points in church history. One such crux of history is in Acts 11:20-26, when persecution arose after Stephen's martyrdom, some anonymous Greek-speaking Jews went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Until Antioch the disciples had shared the Good News only with other Jews, but while in Antioch they spoke to the "Hellenes," the Greeks, and some of them believed in the Lord Jesus. Thus the Gospel broke through the race barrier, which was accomplished by some disciples (*mathetes*) whose names we don't even know! When the Apostles in Jerusalem got wind of it, they decided to try to get the situation under their control, and sent Barnabas up to Syria, where Antioch was located. In fact, the Antiochian Orthodox Church is the oldest extant church in the world today. The mother church in Jerusalem vanished when the city was destroyed in A.D. 70, but the church in Antioch remains to this day.

As John Piper explains in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad!* this persecution was not necessarily bad for the church, because it led to spreading the Good News to the nations –

The lesson here is not just that God is sovereign and turns setbacks into triumphs. The lesson is that comfort and ease and affluence and safety and freedom often cause a tremendous inertia in the church. The very things that we think would produce personnel and energy and creative investment of time and money for the missionary cause, instead produce the exact opposite: weakness, apathy, lethargy, self-centeredness, preoccupation with security.⁵

But a very important phrase in this story is v. 26b: "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Why is this phrase so important? Until this time, the followers of Jesus Christ were simply called disciples. At this crux of history, the term "Christian" was invented, and was used in a derogatory sense: "little Christ-people." But over the course of centuries the meaning has shifted, and this semantic drift has distorted our paradigms. Today we speak of the "Christian world" referring to Europe and America (although even the term "post-Christian" is inaccurate because Europe and America have never been fully Christian in the true sense). A person can call himself a "Christian" in a vague sense of a respectable, church-going, good citizen. But to call oneself a "disciple" today seems to imply a higher level of commitment. The two terms, however, were synonymous in the first century. If you were a Christian, you were a disciple. We've developed a form of two-tier Christianity: on the lower level we have "just Christians"

who might go to church once or twice a month, or might not if the weather is too bad, or if it's too nice and sunny to stay inside. They might even put a few dollars or euros in the offering if they have some small bills to spare. Then on the higher level we have people called "disciples" who have "gone off the deep end" into some kind of "religious extremism," as the secular world may see it. But this dichotomy is completely false: a Christian must be a disciple! If you're not a disciple, you are not a Christian. It's as simple as that.

John MacArthur, in his outstanding book *The Gospel According to Jesus*, explains this further –

This dichotomy, like that of the carnal/spiritual Christian, sets up two classes of Christians: believers only and true disciples. Most who hold this position discard the evangelistic intent of virtually every recorded invitation of Jesus, saying those apply to discipleship, not to salvation.

...On the contrary, no distinction has done so much to undermine the authority of Jesus' message. Are we to believe that when Jesus told the multitudes to deny themselves (Luke 14:26), to take up a cross (v. 27), and to forsake all and follow him (v. 33), his words had no meaning whatsoever for the unsaved people in the crowd? How could that be true of One who said he came not to call the righteous but sinners? (Matt. 9:13).⁶

We who are truly disciples, followers of Jesus Christ, "little Christ-ones," must purge our minds of this false paradigm. Jesus calls us as sinners, but He calls us to repent and turn from our sinful, self-centered lives if we really choose to follow Him.

In summary, every disciple, every Christian, is one who participates in hands-on practical ministry, one who is not afraid to take risks. The Apostle Paul is a good example of this:

But some Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there, and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up, and entered into the city. On the next day he went out with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the Good News to that city, and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many afflictions we must enter into the Kingdom of God. When they had appointed elders for them in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed (Acts 14:19-23).

Paul's preaching was met with a hail of stones in Iconium, where he was dragged out of town and left for dead. But when the disciples came around, he picked himself up and went on to the next town, to preach in Derbe. There they made many more disciples, warning them that to

follow Christ would mean going through many afflictions. Then they made a loop back to the churches they had planted, and appointed elders in each church. So Paul's example of faithfulness through persecution and his exhortation encouraged them to "hang tough" in the faith when the going would get rough. That is the life of discipleship. But it is also important to notice here that the early church had a definite hierarchy of ministry: they appointed elders as leaders in each assembly. Even though every believer is a disciple and every disciple is to become a minister, this does not eliminate the need for structure and leadership. Remember the awful consequences of Korah's rebellion against the leadership authority of Moses (Num. 16:3). The style of leadership, however, is servanthood, as we shall see later.

Endnotes to Chapter 2:

1. Maxton, Daniel, *Parenting Daughter Churches: A New Paradigm for Medium-Sized Congregations in the Baptist General Conference*, (Pasadena, CA, doctoral thesis, School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1994), 245.
2. Ibid., 33.
3. Meyers, *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. Hosken, Robert, ed., *Agape-Biblia*, (www.agape-biblia.org, 2000).
5. Piper, John, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House Co., 1993), 97.
6. MacArthur, John F. Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 36.

Chapter 3: Ministry as Worship (*latreia*) and Divine Service (*leitourgia*)

“Therefore I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.” This text, Rom. 12:1-2, is one of the central passages on worship in the New Testament. The *Analytical-Literal Translation* uses the phrase “intelligent, sacred service”¹ and the KJV uses “reasonable service”² for *logikin latreian* in the Greek instead of “spiritual service.” The root word “service” is *latreia* in Greek, and *Strong's Dictionaries* define it thus: “*ministration* of God, that is, *worship*: - (divine) service,” and is derived from “*latris* (a hired menial); to *minister* (to God), that is, *render religious homage*: - serve, do the service, worship (-per).”³ So we see here that the original meaning of *latris* in classical Greek pertained to the labor of a hired menial, i.e., practical service, but by the first century *latreia* had taken on a wider meaning, including ministry to God. And St. Paul indicates with the adjective *logikin* that in addition to being spiritual, it must be carried out intelligently and reasonably.

The *German Luther Bible* translates *logikin latreian* here as “vernuenftiger Gottesdienst”⁴ and the modern usage of “Gottesdienst” means “worship service” such as on Sunday mornings. But the underlying meaning is “God's service,” so true worship is serving God, and serving God is true worship. Therefore worship that does not entail service or ministry is not true worship.

In contrast to *latreia*, the word *eidololatreia* means idolatry or the worship of images, false gods. In 1 Cor. 10:14 Paul commands us, “flee from idolatry.” In Gal. 5:20 he lists idolatry as one of the “works of the flesh” and in v.21 warns “that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Also, Paul urges believers to “put to death” the earthly traits, including “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Thus we see something deeply embedded in our fallen human nature that fights against and resists the worship of the one true God: any passion or pastime, hang-up or hobby demanding our ultimate allegiance or constant attention is idolatry. Greed (covetousness) is a form of idolatry, the passion for acquiring material things that replaces our passion for God. Today's materialism and consumerism, driven by captivating advertising, shoves aside worship of the one true God and replaces it with laboring to acquire shiny new cars, expensive toys and electronic gadgets. Paul warns us: ruthlessly kill that desire to acquire; put it to death: it is idolatry! God alone is worthy of our *latreia*, our worship and service!

Even religion, when it degenerates into mere formalism, becomes the enemy of true worship. Jesus said in John 16:2, “the time comes that whoever kills you will think that he offers service (*latreia*) to God.” This is exactly what took place with Israel (Rom. 9:4-5), “whose is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service (*latreia*), and the promises; of whom are the fathers, and from whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen.” (See also Heb. 9:1 and 6.) The Jews were totally convinced that they alone practiced true worship and thus were absolutely certain that they were serving God by crucifying Jesus, persecuting Paul and putting to death other early Christians. Today, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists sincerely believe they are serving their gods when they persecute and kill Christians. Can our response be to simply call for religious tolerance?

In their book *The New Tolerance*, Bob Hostetler and Josh McDowell write – “Today’s doctrine of tolerance ... goes far beyond the dictionary’s definition of tolerance. Webster’s defines *tolerate* as ‘to recognize and respect [others’ beliefs, practices, etc.] without sharing them’ ... But that’s not what the word means any more ... The new tolerance is defined as the view that all values, beliefs, lifestyles, and truth claims are equal.”⁵ Western relativistic pseudo-tolerance, the half-hearted teaching that “any god will do, just as long as you are sincere,” is no match for the zeal of violent religious extremism. Some world religions have very little tolerance of any worldview other than theirs, while they violently insist that all other worldviews should tolerate them. If you have a football game where one side insists on rules that permit it to score goals while the other side must go no farther than mid-field, guess who is going to win? But this isn’t just a game. Tolerance must be reciprocal, or not at all. Christianity teaches peace, love for one’s enemies and patient, steadfast faith under persecution, but it does not teach relativism, that any god will do. Such pseudo-tolerance is also idolatry. True *latreia*-worship belongs only to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Closely related to *latreia* is the Greek word *leitourgia*, which by the first century had come to mean “divine service” in its New Testament usage. In Luke 1:23 the KJV translates it as “ministration” as it relates about Zecharias after he had seen the Angel: “And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration (*leitourgia*) were accomplished, he departed to his own house.”⁶ But as Bruce Winter points out in his book *Seek the Welfare of the City*,⁷ the word *leitourgia* was used in ancient Greece to mean service to the *politeia*, to society in general.

Strong's Dictionaries define it as “*public function* (as priest [‘liturgy’] or almsgiver): -ministration (-try), service.”⁸ Thus we see that the term also has a definite sense of public service or practical ministry to meet human needs.

This is clearly indicated in Rom. 15:27 – “Yes, it has been their good pleasure, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, they owe it to them also to serve (*leitourgeo*) them in fleshly things.” Paul teaches us here that because the Jews have provided the Gospel of Christ (“spiritual things”) to all the nations, the Gentiles have a debt, a social obligation, to provide materially for the Jerusalem church (v. 25), where Paul was about to travel in order to deliver the offering he had collected in Macedonia and Achaia (v. 26). We see the same usage in 2 Cor. 9:12 – “For this service (*leitourgia*) of giving that you perform not only makes up for lack among the saints, but abounds also through many givings of thanks to God.” So *leitourgia* includes providing very practical, material help.

Accompanying this practical aspect of *leitourgia* is a self-sacrificial aspect. Worship under the Old Testament involved sacrifices of animals, but under the New Testament it involves the sacrifice of oneself. Acts 13:2 illustrates this – “As they served (*leitourgeo*) the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them.’” Notice how fasting, the self-sacrifice of foregoing food, accentuates worship. But even more powerful illustrations of self-sacrificial worship are found in Phil. 2:17 – “Yes, and if I am poured out on the sacrifice and service (*leitourgia*) of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all” and speaking of Epaphroditus in v. 30 – “because for the work of Christ he came near to death, risking his life to supply that which was lacking in your service (*leitourgia*) toward me.” Here Paul indicates he himself is ready to become a sacrifice in service to the faith of the believers at Philippi, and that Epaphroditus had already risked his life in service to them.

The priestly aspect of this word is shown in Rom. 15:16 – “that I should be a servant (*leitourgos*) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest the Good News of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” The author of the letter to the Hebrews also writes that Jesus is “a servant (*leitourgos*) of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle” (Heb. 8:2), and that “now he has obtained a more excellent ministry (*leitourgia*), by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant” (v. 6). In Heb. 9:21 we read how Moses “sprinkled the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry (*leitourgia*) in like manner with the

blood.” This was a figure or foreshadowing of Christ offering His own blood: “But now once at the end of the ages, he [Christ] has been revealed to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26b). Finally and very powerfully the author of Hebrews writes: “Every priest indeed stands day by day serving (*leitourgeo*) and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but he [Christ], when he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:11-12). Thus we see both in the letter to the Philippians and the letter to the Hebrews that the ministry of liturgy (*leitourgia*) is much more than performing rituals: the minister must be ready and willing to sacrifice himself.

Endnotes to Chapter 3:

1. *Analytical-Literal Translation*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
2. *King James Version*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. *German Luther Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
5. Hostetler, Bob and McDowell, Josh, *The New Tolerance*, (Carol Stream, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 125.
6. *King James Version*, op. cit.
7. Winter, Bruce, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 22.
8. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.

Chapter 4: Ministry as Servanthood (*pais*) and Bond-Service (*douleuo*)

Even more closely related than *latreia* and *leitourgia* are the two Greek words *pais* (servanthood) and *douleuo* (doing bond-service), so we will examine them together here. The key verse in the New Testament that describes *pais* is Mat. 12:18 – “Behold, my servant (*pais*) whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations.” St. Matthew quotes this from Is. 42:1, a text identified in the Targum even before Christ’s birth as Messianic, where it is rendered: “Behold my servant the Messiah....”¹ So Matthew perceived Jesus the Messiah as a *pais* – “a boy (as often *beaten* with impunity), or (by analogy) a *girl*, and (generally) a *child*; specifically a *slave* or *servant* (especially a *minister* to a king; and by eminence to God): - child, maid (-en), (man) servant, son, young man.”² This view of a minister is one of a servant-boy, one who carries out the menial tasks of his master. Another text illustrating this kind of servant is Mat. 8:6 – “When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, and saying, ‘Lord, my servant (*pais*) lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented.’” One of the most memorable impressions of my early missionary service was when our team leader, a man responsible for many millions of dollars annually of literature production and delivery behind the iron curtain, would take his turn on the roster to clean the toilets in our common living quarters. This is true servant leadership!

Not all first-century Jews would have understood *pais* in Is. 42:1 as referring to the Messiah, because Mary used the word *pais* in Luke 1:54 to refer to Israel: “He has given help to Israel, his servant (*pais*), that he might remember mercy.” Elizabeth used *pais* in v. 69 to refer to David: “and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant (*pais*) David,” and Peter also used *pais* to refer to David: “who by the mouth of your servant (*pais*), David, said, ‘Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing?’” (Acts 4:25). Regardless of whom it refers to, it is plain that the term *pais* used in Is. 42:1 and quoted in Mat. 12:18 signifies a humble servant who ministers to his master, and it is certain that Matthew understood it to refer to the Messiah.

The other term for “servant” is *doulos* and its verb form *douleuo*. It is quite interesting that the centurion mentioned above referred to his servant in Mat. 8:6 as *pais* but in v. 9 he says, “For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes;

and tell another, 'Come,' and he comes; and tell my servant (*doulos*), 'Do this,' and he does it." So here we have the two terms used as synonyms, referring to the same servant.

The word *doulos* means "a *slave* (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of *subjection* or *subserviency*): - bond (-man), servant."³ It often refers to a bondservant whose master had offered him freedom, but because he loved his master so much he voluntarily bound himself to his master for the rest of his life. This is the type of servanthood that ought to characterize the ministry of every Christian. The term *doulos* is used 127 times, making it one of the most common Greek words in the New Testament. We will not investigate each usage, but rather look at some of the different ways it is used.

One passage that fairly drips with the word is Mat. 18:23-35, the parable of the servant who owed 10,000 talents. Here it is used nine times including four times with the prefix "*sun*" meaning "fellow-servant." I use this term, *sundoulos*, almost always above my signature in letters, "Your fellow-servant," because it signifies that we are co-slaves of the same master. The servant in this parable is good for a bad example of the term *doulos*, because the point of the parable is that although he didn't forgive his fellow-servant, we all must forgive one another the debts, the petty offenses and grievances that inevitably will arise, since our common Master has forgiven each of us a million times more than those petty offenses. We are indebted to Him for our very souls, and we therefore acknowledge the fact of our bond-servanthood!

Another *doulos* parable is found in Lk. 14:16-24, the parable of the wedding feast. Here Jesus defines the role of the *doulos*: three times He commands the *doulos*-servant to bring people in to the wedding feast. The first group of people, being caught up with their wealth and their families, make excuses, so the master tells the servant to "bring in the poor, maimed, blind, and lame" (v. 21). But there is still room for more, so the master commands his servant: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (v. 23).

The ordinary usage of *doulos* in the New Testament is that of a servant or bondservant who is entrusted with his master's affairs, similar to that of a steward: Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22; 1 Tim. 6:1 and Tit. 2:9 are just a few instances. A *doulos* in the first century was often given great responsibility, but the master was still in charge of strategic planning. This is an important concept for Christians in the twenty-first century to grasp: we want to plan; we want to attain

success (as we ourselves define it). But a *doulos* of the Lord Jesus is not necessarily called on to plan or to achieve certain goals; he is called to do only what his Master has instructed him to do, leaving the “big picture” to his Master.

In the opening salutation of several of his letters, St. Paul takes upon himself the title *doulos* to show his willing subjection to his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ: Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1 and Tit. 1:1. James places himself in subjection as *doulos* to the Lord Jesus in Jam. 1:1; Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 1:1; and John does the same in Rev. 1:1. But perhaps the most striking usage of *doulos* is found in the beautiful words:

Have this in your mind, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (*doulos*), being made in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

If Jesus Christ, God incarnate, our Lord and Master, took upon Himself the form of a *doulos*, a bondservant, so should every disciple of Christ do the same!

The attitude of servanthood runs counter to the philosophy of unbridled freedom that is prevalent today. But St. Paul explains in Rom. 6:14-22 that there is no such thing as unlimited, absolute freedom. God's grace does not imply that we can do whatever we want; rather it frees us from the bondage of sin that leads to death, to willingly become bondservants (*doulos*) of Christ, with the end result of our sanctification and eternal life:

For sin will not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be! Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants (*doulos*) to obedience, his servants (*doulos*) you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas you were bondservants (*doulos*) of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered. Being made free from sin, you became bondservants (*doulos*) of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh, for as you presented your members as servants (*doulos*) to uncleanness and to wickedness upon wickedness, even so now present your members as servants (*doulos*) to righteousness for sanctification. For when you were servants (*doulos*) of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants (*doulos*) of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life.

St. Peter echoes this idea in 1 Pet. 2:16 – “as free, and not using your freedom for a cloak of wickedness, but as bondservants (*doulos*) of God.” So our freedom in Christ means the ability to freely choose to become bondservants of God. In reality, nobody is absolutely free, but we are able to choose whom we will serve: sin which leads to death, or God which leads to eternal life.

Endnotes to Chapter 4:

1. *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
2. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
3. Ibid.

Chapter 5: Ministry as Practical Service (*diakonia*)

Can a simple comma twist and distort the whole Christian message? I am convinced it has. And the guilty culprit in this fateful plot is found in Eph. 4:11-12, which reads in the *King James Version*: “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.”¹ The meaning we receive from this translation is that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers should perfect the saints, do the work of the ministry and edify the body of Christ. This places the whole burden of work on the ordained clergy, and makes the “laity” into a flock of simple sheep, passive hearers who merely receive teaching and pay tithes.

A much better translation is the *English Standard Version*: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”² Do you notice the comma is removed after “saints”? This translation tells us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers should equip or train the saints to do the work of ministry (*diakonia*) in order that they, the saints, should build up the body of Christ. The task of *diakonia* belongs to all the saints, and through their ministry the church will be built up and grow. As we have noticed earlier, when the apostles taught the Early Church to do this, “The word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly” (Acts 6:7). The result when all Christians are doing ministry (*diakonia*) is rapid church growth!

This rattles our traditional paradigms of the ordained clergy doing or controlling all of the work, and the congregation actively doing little or nothing, mainly warming the pews and putting their pennies in the plate. But is our above description scriptural? *Strong’s Dictionaries* define *diakonia* as follows: “attendance (as a servant, etc.); figuratively (eleemosynary) aid, (official) service (especially of the Christian teacher, or technically of the *diaconate*): - (ad-) minister (-ing, -tration, -try), office, relief, service (-ing),” and the definition of the noun form *diakon* is “Probably from *diako* (obsolete, to run on errands; compare G1377); an attendant, that is, (generally) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); specifically a Christian teacher and pastor (technically a *deacon* or *deaconess*): - deacon, minister, servant.”³ The latter definitions reflect the traditional church usage: the diaconate, a minister, pastor, teacher, deaconess or

deacon. But the first definitions are servant, one who runs on errands, an attendant, a waiter at table. “Waiter” describes exactly the *diakonia* that the apostles created: “The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables. Therefore select from among you, brothers, seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:2-3). Thus Scripture overrules tradition on this point! This was not like today’s deacons sitting in deacons’ meetings once a month until late at night, deciding who to hire to mow the church lawn or repair the furnace. It was a hands-on, get-your-hands-dirty-carrying-bedpans kind of ministry!

This also goes against the grain of our fallen human nature that seeks positions of honor and respect for itself. But this is exactly the issue that our Lord Jesus addressed in Mk. 10:42-45 –

Jesus summoned them, and said to them, “You know that they who are recognized as rulers over the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you, but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant (*diakonos*). Whoever of you wants to become first among you, shall be bondservant (*doulos*) of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served (*diakoneo*), but to serve (*diakoneo*), and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

If the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to serve (*diakoneo*) even by stripping down to a menial servant’s loincloth and washing His disciples’ feet before laying down His life, how then should we serve? We have already seen in Luke 14:13 and 21-24 that we are to minister to “the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind.” And the result will be opportunities for a powerful witness to society’s leaders and the common people alike: after Peter and John healed the lame man at the Temple gates, Acts 4:7 and 14 act like the bread of a sandwich with the “meat” of Peter’s powerful witness right in the middle: “When they had stood them in the middle of them, they inquired, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” And “Seeing the man who was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.” Here is another *chiasm*:

| | |
|--|--|
| A | B |
| v. 7 – “How on earth did you do that?” | v. 8 – Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit. |

Peter preached boldly that the lame man was healed by Jesus of Nazareth,
Whom they crucified, God raised from the dead, and that there is salvation
in no one else: only Jesus can save them!

| | |
|---|---|
| C | D |
| v.13 – Seeing Peter and John’s boldness, they recognized that they had been with | v.14 – Seeing the man who was healed, they couldn’t say anything against it. |

Jesus.

It is very clear that the author Luke is placing Peter's famous sermon in a frame of the astonished priests and Sadducees (A and D), and the power of the Holy Spirit Who represents Jesus after the Ascension (B and C). In other words, the high priest and other leaders asked, "Uh, how did you do that?" And after Peter's powerful preaching, seeing the formerly lame man standing before them healed, they couldn't say a thing against this message. Our good works done as *diakonia* are a powerful witness in themselves, and provide great opportunities for a spoken witness.

It is extremely important to notice that in Acts 6 when the apostles spun off the function of *diakonia*, the church selected seven who were "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (v. 3). And in v. 8, we read about one of the new deacons: "Stephen, full of faith and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people." Here we notice that the dividing line between so-called "ordinary service" and supernatural, miraculous acts becomes blurred. Why is that? It is because everything the first deacons did was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. When they distributed food or financial support, they accompanied it with prayer and a blessing. When we minister to the physical needs of handicapped people by massaging their crippled arms, legs or backs, or by exercising their weakened limbs, we always accompany it with prayer and calling down a spiritual blessing from God. When we do this, we see that God transforms our "ordinary service" into supernatural acts, and people are healed. Igor, who suffered a paralyzing stroke at age 45 and about whom the doctors said he would die or would never walk or talk again, is now walking and talking. So we must always do *diakonia* in the power of the Holy Spirit and with prayer!

We find two more examples of this back-to-back in Acts 9:33-42. First, Peter heals Aeneas who had been paralyzed for eight years, and "All who lived at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (v. 35): rapid church growth! Then in Joppa a certain disciple, a woman named Dorcas who "was full of good works and acts of mercy" (v. 36) fell ill and died, so the other believers sent for Peter, who prayed for her and brought her back to life. Again the result was rapid church growth: "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord" (v. 42). Another example, along with Dorcas, of a woman doing *diakonia* is Phoebe, who is described as "our sister, who is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1).

A second point is that after the apostles created this new office of deacon, they let the deacons do the work of practical ministry, while the apostles did their preaching and teaching. This is very important: once we've gotten someone trained to do *diakonia*-ministry, let them do the work! Often our tendency is to attempt to control by always looking over their shoulders or stepping in to do the "complicated part." The apostles recognized when it was time to let go of some of their responsibilities, delegate them to others, and give them the blessing and authority to do the work.

The position of deacon has historically been seen as a stepping-stone to higher office: that of apostle (in the general sense, a "sent one," i.e., a missionary), evangelist, pastor or teacher. In other words, before a person could assume one of these leadership roles he must first pass through the apprenticeship of doing *diakonia*-ministry. Therefore we should insist today that prospective leaders first complete the "prerequisite course" of actually performing practical ministry. The tragedy of today's church is that we consider *diakonia*-ministry to be women's work! My wife and I have been teaching courses in missions and practical ministries for several years in Russia, and the large majority of missions students are men, while the large majority of practical ministries students are women. But young men who have just finished Bible college or seminary are not qualified to become missionaries, evangelists or pastors until they have become experienced in *diakonia*-ministry, just as Jesus' twelve disciples did, as Stephen and Philip did, and as Peter, Paul and the other apostles kept on doing even after they assumed a higher office.

In Rom. 12:7, right after the gift of prophecy and followed by the gifts of teaching, exhorting, ruling, and comforting the afflicted, we read, "or [having the gift of] service (*diakonia*), let us give ourselves to service (*diakonia*)." St. Paul makes it clear in verses 4 and 6 that not all members of the body have the same function, therefore each believer has different gifts. The gift of *diakonia* or practical ministry, however, is probably the most widespread gift in all its various forms. Paul similarly writes in 1 Cor. 12 that various people have various gifts, and in v.28 he writes, "God has set some in the assembly: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, and various kinds of languages." God is still the "I AM" – the supernatural God Who delivered the Israelites out of slavery by signs and miracles. We believe in this same supernatural God: He hasn't grown old and retired, He still exists, He IS... able to heal and deliver today. Most of these gifts pertain to the spiritual or supernatural, but the gift of "helps" corresponds to the "ordinary service" of *diakonia*. Who

has the gift of helps (*antilepsis*, relief), i.e., who can help? Just about any disciple who has two healthy arms and two healthy legs can help, so that person has the gift of helps!

But this doesn't mean that just anyone can do *diakonia*, because the motivation must be Christ's example of *diakonia* and self-sacrifice. A few generations ago western societies, still under a strong Christian influence, decided that it would be good for society as a whole to take over from the church the functions of caring for widows, orphans, the poor, maimed, lame and blind. The churches' resources were being stretched thin, so churches abdicated this responsibility to the state. But increasing secularization of society has led to the loss of the strong Christian influence, resulting in the loss of motivation to really care about widows, orphans, the poor, maimed, lame and blind. Instead, a large percentage of people in modern society begrudge being taxed to pay for those less fortunate people. This is an example of "the law of unintended consequences" – what was originally viewed by the majority as a good idea has come to be viewed negatively, as a burden. Due to the secularization of society, the few people today who still believe it is good to care for the poor, elderly and disabled often do not have a sufficient philosophical basis for such actions. They believe it is a good thing to do good deeds, and we as Christians should encourage their actions. But we should gently point out that "doing good simply because it's good to be good" is circular logic.

It is indeed necessary to do good, but that reason is insufficient in and of itself. The only necessary and sufficient philosophical foundation for doing good works is God's grace that has been poured out on us: Paul writes in Eph. 2:8-10 – "for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them." We are saved by God's gift of grace, not by our insufficient good works; but we are being re-created and restored into the image of Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing *diakonia*, good works! In Tit. 2:11 and 14 Paul writes, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," and our blessed hope of Christ's second coming in glory motivates us to be transformed into "a people for his own possession, zealous for good works." And Paul continues this theme in Tit. 3:5 and 8 – "not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us," i.e., our good works that we do under our own power cannot save us, but "those who have believed God [must] be careful to maintain good works." All three of these passages illustrate that being good for goodness' sake is insufficient; it

is not the cause of our salvation, but rather the effect of God's grace that is transforming us. The grace of God is the only necessary and sufficient cause for doing good works. All other human reasoning or ideologies fall short of providing a sufficient, enduring basis for good works.

Another way to understand this phenomenon is "the law of the third and fourth generation." In many places in the Old Testament, God promises to bless obedience "to the third and fourth generation," and to curse disobedience "to the third and fourth generation." A generation is about twenty to thirty years, so three or four generations can be anywhere from 60 to 120 years. That is the length of time it takes for a society to lose the living memory and moral guidance of godly parents, grandparents and great-grandparents who taught their descendants by word and example how to obey God's commands. A second-generation family descended from truly Christian parents may teach their children to do good deeds, and they may even occasionally attend church when it is convenient for them. So their third-generation children grow up with a vague concept of God and a shaky foundation for doing good works. But this third generation's children will have little or no motivation for doing good works, unless they repent and return to the Lord. Otherwise the consequences are egocentric behavior and moral degradation for society. Is this not what we see today, after three or four generations of secular, post-Christian society?

It is not sufficient for society to pass laws requiring good, moral behavior. Even if the state tries to legislate a minimal, baseline morality, secular society's members do not have a sufficient motivating force to obey such minimal laws. Only the Holy Spirit can motivate us sufficiently to do the good works of *diakonia*. St. Paul describes this accurately in 2 Cor. 3:5-8 –

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as servants (*diakonos*) of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the service (*diakonia*) of death, written engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly on the face of Moses for the glory of his face; which was passing away: won't service (*diakonia*) of the Spirit be with much more glory?

So in conclusion, the good works of *diakonia* can be performed by any believer, man or woman, who is filled with and motivated by the Holy Spirit to perform this ministry. It is a high and holy calling that often leads to greater areas of service, as we already noticed with Stephen, and with Philip, as you can read in Acts chapter 8 and in Acts 21:8.

Endnotes to Chapter 5:

1. *King James Version*, op. cit.
2. *English Standard Version*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.

Chapter 6: Ministry as Sanctification (*hagiasmos*)

As we have just seen, only the power of the Holy Spirit can sufficiently motivate and enable us to do the work of true ministry (*diakonia*). As He was preparing His disciples for His death and departure, Jesus said in John 14:16-18 – “I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, that he may be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world can't receive; for it doesn't see him, neither knows him. You know him, for he lives with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.” After Jesus rose from the dead, each of the four Gospels tells how He hinted that His disciples would receive the Holy Spirit, and then Jesus commissioned them to preach the Good News and make disciples: “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations...” (Mat 28:18-19a).

The above passage in John identifies the Holy Spirit as the abiding presence and power of Christ, and in Matthew's version of the Great Commission He transmits this divine power to His disciples. In Mark's Gospel Jesus said, “Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned.” And later it says, “They went out, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen” (Mk. 16:15-16 and 20). It was the Lord's abiding Holy Spirit that worked with them and confirmed their message by miracles. In Lk. 24:49 Luke has Jesus say, “Behold, I send forth the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high.” And in Jn. 20:21b-22 John quotes Jesus as saying, “‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit!’” So both Luke and John are a bit clearer about the promise of the Holy Spirit.

But the disciples still had not actually received that power, and even at the time of Christ's ascension into heaven they couldn't quite grasp what was about to happen. Jesus told them very clearly, “Don't depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me. For John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:4b-5). But it seems this went right over their heads, because they asked (v. 6b), “Lord, are you now restoring the kingdom to Israel?” They were still hoping that He

would overthrow the Roman occupiers and restore the kingdom of David. So He told them very plainly, in the most explicit promise of the Holy Spirit, “It isn't for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set within his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth” (vv. 7b-8). The Russian text for verse 7 is very strong: “It's none of your business to know times or deadlines!” We must cease and desist theologizing about eschatology, proudly asserting that we know the course of future events, the end times, which we can't possibly know! If the angels and Jesus Himself didn't know, how can we presume to know? So even with this most explicit promise of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were still in the dark. Until they actually experienced it, they couldn't fathom what Jesus was talking about. Until you get in the water and take your feet off the bottom, all of your theoretical instruction about how to swim remains merely theory.

On the Day of Pentecost just ten days later, however, they experienced the baptism by the Holy Spirit, the church was born and it began its rapid growth. The noteworthy thing is that Jesus' giving the Great Commission to His disciples, the transfer of authority-power (*exousia*) and the command to make disciples in Mat. 28:18-19, did not in itself jump-start the rapid growth of the church. It was just theory until the disciples actually received the Holy Spirit's dynamic power (*dunamis*) promised in Acts 1:8. The Holy Spirit is given to make us holy, sanctified, and to empower us to minister (*diakoneo*), as we learn in Jesus' teaching in Luke 11:5-13 –

He said to them, "Which of you, if you go to a friend at midnight, and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him,' and he from within will answer and say, 'Don't bother me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give it to you'? I tell you, although he will not rise and give it to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will get up and give him as many as he needs. I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he won't give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he asks for an egg, he won't give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

This passage is central to the ministry of sanctification. The little parable at the beginning is about a man asking a friend if he could borrow three loaves of bread and the passage concludes

with the teaching that we should ask the Father to give us the Holy Spirit. At first it seems more than a bit self-centered to ask for some bread and to ask for the Holy Spirit. How does this relate to ministry? But note carefully (v. 6) that the man isn't asking to borrow some bread for himself, he is asking it for another friend. So Jesus is teaching here about ministering to the practical needs of others, and He concludes by telling us that we must ask, seek, and knock to receive the Holy Spirit in order to minister effectively to others. Otherwise we will either burn out or simply give up, if we try to do *diakonia*-ministry on our own power.

For the first few centuries after Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit was not fully grasped. Many thought of the Holy Spirit as simply the abiding presence of Christ after His ascension. This is because the Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself. Jesus said, "When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me" (Jn. 15:26). So the Holy Spirit will testify about Jesus Christ. We learn further (Jn. 16:13-14) that the Holy Spirit will not speak of Himself, but will glorify Jesus: "However when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming. He will glorify me, for he will take from what is mine, and will declare it to you." If the Holy Spirit doesn't call attention to Himself but rather glorifies Christ, we who ask, seek and knock to receive the Holy Spirit should do so not to glorify ourselves or to experience a super-spiritual "high," but to glorify Christ by becoming the kind of disciples He intended, by doing what He taught His disciples to do: minister to the poor, lame, maimed and blind.

Being filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit does not necessarily mean that you must prophesy, speak in tongues or perform miracles. I do not disallow the exercise of spiritual gifts, but neither do I insist that all must have the same gift. We have already seen how Paul teaches in Rom. 12:4-6 and 1 Cor. 12:29-30 that not every disciple has the same spiritual gift. Jesus never commanded His disciples to speak in tongues and teach others to do so, but He repeatedly taught them to minister to the poor, lame, maimed and blind, and commanded them to teach others to do the same. This should be the most widespread spiritual gift, but it often is the most neglected. And only if we are filled with the Holy Spirit can we exercise the spiritual gift of *diakonia*.

How does this come about? After we ask, seek and knock we should expect to receive Him. God wants to give us the best gift of all: not necessarily tongues, prophecy or miracles, but the Holy

Spirit Himself! The passage in 1 Thes. 4:3-12 starts out, “For this is the will of God: your sanctification.” God’s will for every Christian, every disciple (and the two are the same) is to experience sanctification, to be a saint! A saint is a holy person, and true holiness only comes from the Holy Spirit. In many of Paul’s letters he addresses his audience as “saints” or “called to be saints.” A disciple is a “saint-in-process.” Here Paul lists several steps to sanctification:

- a) Abstain from sexual immorality,
- b) Control one’s own body in a holy and honorable manner,
- c) Do not exploit or take advantage of other believers,
- d) Practice brotherly love and *agape*-love toward other believers,
- e) Lead a quiet life, mind your own business and work with your own hands.

This last point, “mind your own business and work with your own hands” is seldom considered as belonging to sanctification. But Paul uses the same phrases to describe it as he uses for the preceding steps, writing about the Christian’s “walk” (vv. 1 and 12) and “that you abound more and more” (vv. 1 and 10), another *chiasm*. Bruce Winter claims that Paul “is here proscribing the boisterous, political rabble-rousing behaviour by clients on behalf of their patrons.”¹ Then as now, people sought out patrons to sponsor them, but then they became the mouthpieces for their patrons who often used them in an effort to accumulate political power. In order to avoid even the appearance of being “bought” by outside influence, the Christian disciple must steer clear of being sponsored by those who might raise suspicions of unethical interference, and work with his own hands to support himself and other local believers who are in need.

In 1 Thes. 5:23, after warning against both extremes of quenching the Holy Spirit by belittling spiritual gifts, but also being careful to test them for genuineness, keep the good and reject the evil (vv. 19-22), Paul writes, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a process that includes our physical bodies, and in God’s sight is already perfected but in our earthly life it is still continuing: “For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). So we can be certain from these passages that God wills our sanctification, He wants us to be sanctified in spirit, soul and body, a process that will reach its completion when Christ returns.

This process is not without struggle. St. Paul teaches us in Gal. 5:16-25 that walking in the Spirit is a real spiritual battle:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts. If we live by the Spirit, let's also walk by the Spirit.

Notice that there are 18 things to avoid, “the works of the flesh,” but there are only nine things to strive for, “the fruit of the Spirit.” Once we are led by the Spirit, we are free from the dictates of the flesh, so it is then actually easier to walk in the Spirit than to do the works of the flesh.

Finally, we read in 1 Jn. 3:2-3 – “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is. Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure.” This is our goal, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and that is why we let God purify and sanctify us! As we shall see later, it is *diakonia*-ministry that brings us to this transformation.

Endnotes to Chapter 6:

1. Winter, Bruce, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, op. cit., pages 48-50.

Chapter 7: Ministry as Evangelizing (*euaggelizo*)

Sanctification means that we no longer live for ourselves, we do not operate according to the flesh but rather according to the Spirit, Who empowers us to do the ministry of *diakonia*, which in turn gives us great opportunities to share the Good News, as Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:15-18 –

He died for all, that those who live should no longer live to themselves, but to him who for their sakes died and rose again. Therefore we know no one after the flesh from now on. Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry (*diakonia*) of reconciliation.

Because God has reconciled us to Himself, we have been given the *diakonia*-ministry of reconciliation, of telling others that by Christ's death on the cross God has reconciled the whole world to Himself. Reconciliation is making peace between two warring parties, and Acts 10:36 says, "The word which he sent to the children of Israel, preaching good news (*euaggelizo*) of peace by Jesus Christ - he is Lord of all." The Greek word *euaggelizo* means to evangelize, to tell this Good News: the new creation is dawning, we are new creatures, all things have become new!

One starry night on the hills outside of Bethlehem, the angel of the Lord, perhaps Gabriel (Lk. 1:19), appeared to a band of poor shepherds, and they were terrified. Then the angel said, "Don't be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news (*euaggelizo*) of great joy which will be to all the people" (Lk. 2:10). Notice the target audience: poor, despised shepherds.

When Jesus announced the start of His earthly ministry He quoted from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news (*euaggelizo*) to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19). Again, notice the target audience: the poor, brokenhearted, captives and blind.

Later, when John the Baptizer was in prison, he sent some of his followers to ask if Jesus was really the one John had been announcing. Perhaps John was discouraged and was wondering if his preaching had all been in vain. Jesus instructed John's followers to go back and tell him what

they saw Jesus do and heard Him preach: “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached (*euaggelizo*) to them.” (Mat. 11:5). This should leave no doubt that the Gospel, the Good News, is especially aimed at the poor, the brokenhearted, the prisoners, the lame, the lepers, the deaf and even the dead. By now, this fact ought to be abundantly clear to us, unless we are still stuck in our old paradigms. One old paradigm is that we let a priest perform some mysterious rituals over us, and another old paradigm is that we say some mysterious words over ourselves; but the result is the same: we are convinced that we’re on the way to heaven, so we can get on with our own lives. We have bargained with the gods and have manipulated them to do our will.

Put in such blunt terms, the problem with these old paradigms is obvious: they rely on mystical jargon to appease the gods in order to get them on our side, to do what we want them to do for us, to attain self-fulfillment. But as Philip Steyne writes in his book, *Gods of Power*, that is the definition of paganism, not Christianity!¹ The *euaggelion*, the Good News, is exactly the opposite: it makes us new, so that we want to do for God what He wants. We no longer live for ourselves, for what we want in life; instead, we are made into new creatures, to desire what God wants! This is what it means to become a faithful servant of the Gospel.

When Jesus first commissioned His disciples, He “gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them forth to preach the Kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. ...They departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the Good News (*euaggelizo*), and healing everywhere” (Lk. 9:1-2 and 6). Here we see once again that preaching the Kingdom of God is equated with the Good News, which is to be accompanied by casting out demons, curing diseases and healing the sick. The Good News of God’s reign means that people are made whole both physically and spiritually. In fact, the Greek noun *soteria* means both “healing” and “salvation,” and the Greek verb *sodzo* means both “heal” and “save,”² It is no wonder that these two ideas so often occur side by side in the Gospels! Meeting people’s physical felt needs is a great door-opener for meeting their spiritual needs. A perfect example of these two meanings is in Acts 4:9 and 12 – “If we are examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed (*sodzo*), ...There is salvation (*soteria*) in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved (*sodzo*)!” It is clear that Luke, a doctor by profession (Col. 4:14), is deliberately linking

these two meanings. In effect Peter tells the ruling council, “Of course this crippled man needed to be healed physically, but you leaders must realize that you too need to be healed spiritually!”

The Great Commission is to “Go into all the world, and preach (*kerusso*) the Good News (*euaggelion*) to the whole creation” (Mk. 16:15). Often the verb form is translated simply “preach,” but also “preach the Good News.” We see both uses in Acts 8:4 and 25 – “Therefore those who were scattered abroad went around preaching (*euaggelizo*) the word (*logos*). ... They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the Good News (*euaggelizo*) to many villages of the Samaritans.” When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra, “There they preached the Good News (*euaggelizo*). What is this Good News all about? Acts 13:30-33a tells us it is about Jesus being killed and raised from the dead – “But God raised him from the dead, and he was seen for many days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people. We bring you good news (*euaggelizo*) of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled the same to us, their children, in that he raised up Jesus.” At Lystra a certain man sat, impotent in his feet, a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. He was listening to Paul speaking, who, fastening eyes on him, and seeing that he had faith to be made whole, said with a loud voice, ‘Stand upright on your feet!’ He leaped up and walked” (Acts 14:7-10). Here again we see preaching the Good News linked together with the ministry of physical healing.

It is critically important to always keep in our preaching and practice the two meanings of “salvation” and “healing.” Our human tendency is to slip into one form of dualism or another, focusing only on saving souls and ignoring the physical felt needs of people; or focusing only on healing the sick, helping the needy, and thus ignoring the ultimate, eternal question: what happens after we die? Either way, it is dualism. If we ignore the eternal question, there is no logically sufficient reason for doing good works. Having spent many years in computer programming, I have discovered that many people have great difficulty using the synthetic logic of “both-and.” Most people tend to think in “either-or” terms: it’s either preaching salvation, or doing practical ministries. But Christ always combined both, and we too must always combine both, ministering to people’s spiritual and physical needs.

In Acts 14:7-10 we saw the connection between evangelizing and healing. But there is another important aspect to this story: in vv. 11-15 the local people seized on the notion that Paul and

Barnabas were the pagan gods Mercury and Jupiter, and wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But the apostles rejected this, insisting they were human beings just like the locals, and were bringing the Good News (*euaggelizo*) that the one true God had now revealed Himself to all nations. Human nature, tainted by sin, so often desires to focus on spectacular manifestations of supernatural power, identifying it with pagan gods and trying to appease or manipulate the gods. The apostles, however, directed these people's attention back to the Good News. And today it is easy for us to become enchanted with supernatural acts of healing or wrapped up in practical works of mercy. But we must never forget the apostles' emphasis on proclaiming the Gospel!

After completing their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas reported to their sending church in Antioch about their efforts, then attended the First Ecumenical Council in Jerusalem, and returned to Antioch telling of the Council's approval of the mission to reach out to gentiles. In Acts 15:35 we read, "But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching (*euaggelizo*) the word of the Lord, with many others also." Why should Paul and Barnabas have evangelized the believers in Antioch who had already been evangelized? Wasn't that "preaching to the choir"? Remember, however, that Jesus Himself taught His disciples many of the same things over and over for three years, because at first they didn't quite grasp it, even if they thought they did.

The final passage in Acts that I believe we should consider is 16:9-10, "A vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing, begging him, and saying, 'Come over into Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go out to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*) to them." As soon as Paul received this vision, he felt compelled to cross over into Europe and evangelize there. Thank God Paul went to Europe, or we might still be bloodthirsty barbarians! The Gospel was Paul's motivating force. We began by considering 2 Cor. 5, where Paul says he had the ministry (*diakonia*) of reconciliation. In the surrounding verses, 2 Cor. 5:14 and 20, Paul exclaims, "The love of Christ compels us.... Be reconciled to God!" The Good News is not merely healing broken, hurting bodies; rather, it is supremely healing the breach between God and man. This is our driving force, our *raison d'être*. The Gospel of eternal salvation gives ultimate meaning to physical healing. Without the preaching of the Gospel, we are only putting band-aids over the fatal internal injury of sin. Not only is physical healing by itself ultimately

meaningless for the patient, it is also senseless for the one doing this ministry if there is no resurrection of the dead. Paul makes this quite clear in 1 Cor. 15: 1, 3-4, 14 and 32 –

Now I declare to you, brothers, the Good News which I preached (*euaggelizo*) to you, which also you received, in which you also stand.... For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.... If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain.... If I fought with animals at Ephesus for human purposes, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, then “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Without Christ’s literal, physical resurrection from the dead, and without our future physical resurrection from death into eternal life, we might as well eat, drink and be merry, because in the long run we’re all dead! Why did Paul fight wild beasts in the coliseum at Ephesus? Not merely for humanistic, altruistic purposes! Why did almost all of the apostles and myriads of thousands of early Christians gladly meet a bloody death for their faith in Christ, if they weren’t absolutely convinced of the reality of eternal life and of the imperative to preach this Good News? The Gospel of Christ’s physical resurrection is a literal, objective and historically true fact! And by accompanying the proclamation of this Gospel with physical healing in this life we give a sign and foretaste of the complete restoration of our bodies into the glorified state of Christ’s post-resurrection body. Without the resurrection, we are wasting our time healing the sick – we might as well practice “survival of the fittest” and abandon them to die. Indeed, that is what happens when our post-Christian society blots the Gospel out of its consciousness: doctors who have sworn to “do no harm,” to heal and save lives, resort to abortion and euthanasia.

Another passage illustrating this compelling imperative of preaching the Good News is Rom. 1:15-16 – “So, as much as is in me, I am eager to preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*) to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the Good News (*euaggelion*) of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes; for the Jew first, and also for the Greek.” Paul says he is “eager” (*prothumos*), which means “*forward in spirit, that is, predisposed; neuter (as noun) alacrity: - ready, willing.*”³ Paul is straining forward, champing at the bit and speeding ahead with alacrity, ready, willing and able to preach the Good News! Why? Because it is “the power (*dunamis*) of God” – God’s “dynamite” that can blow away our encrusted sins and save everyone who believes.

But Paul in Rom. 10:15 returns to the actions that must accompany preaching the Gospel: “And how will they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*) of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” Why this talk about “beautiful feet”? Adam Clarke writes in his commentary –

Dr. Taylor remarks on this quotation, which is taken from Is. 52:7, that “feet are variously used in Scripture, and sometimes have respect to things internal and spiritual. For as the life of man and the practice of piety are compared to walking, Ps. 1:1, so his feet may signify the principles on which he acts, and the dispositions of his mind. Eccl. 5:1: ‘Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.’ Agreeably to this, the feet of the messengers in Isaiah and of the apostles in this verse, may signify the validity of their mission - the authority upon which they acted, and any character or qualifications with which they were invested.”⁴

Thus the “beautiful feet” refer to the walk, the behavior or the character of the one who preaches. His actions must match his words. It doesn’t say “how beautiful are the words,” but “the feet.” Works of mercy and acts of kindness are what make the Good News beautiful.

We must neither rule out supernatural acts of healing, nor rely totally on them. Just as Jesus asked His disciples how many loaves and fish they had, He first expects us to do what we can do, then He will do what we can’t do. Paul writes in Rom. 15:18-20 –

For I will not dare to speak of any things except those which Christ worked through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of God's Spirit; so that from Jerusalem, and around as far as to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Good News (*euaggelion*) of Christ; yes, making it my aim to preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*), not where Christ was already named, that I might not build on another's foundation.

Notice how Paul balances “works” and “deed” with “the power of signs and wonders.” When we work and do what we can do, then and only then do we have the right to believe that God will do what only God can do. Often the greatest miracle is when Christians will get off their sanctified posteriors and start doing good works, acts of mercy! The dividing line between natural and supernatural then becomes invisible, as God heals through our hands when we massage and exercise lame or paralyzed limbs, and combine our actions with the prayer of faith.

Paul further explains the practical, down-to-earth aspect of the Good News in 1 Cor. 1:17-18 – “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*)--not in wisdom of

words, so that the cross of Christ wouldn't be made void. For the word (*logos*) of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are saved (*sodzo*) it is the power of God.” He emphasizes here the need for more than mere wise words that are devoid of action. By no means does Paul demean the value of education: he was not at all anti-intellectual, rather he was highly educated in the Law and skilled in logic and rhetoric. But the cross of Christ is more than mere wise words, although Christ in His earthly ministry certainly taught with great wisdom: the cross shows us His willingness to suffer with us, and to pay the ultimate price by taking our suffering and sins upon Himself. Again I want to point out the down-to-earth language used here: mere “preaching of the cross,” wise words about the cross are foolishness if a person is dying: he needs to see action! After we have demonstrated the Good News in action, then the dying person has seen its power and is ready to listen to our preaching. Are we willing to get our hands dirty and even risk our own personal well-being by involving ourselves in others’ suffering? Christ did! To us who are healed-and-saved (*sodzo*), the Good News is the power of God. People need to see this power in action, not merely hear wise theological words.

One of the most effective modes of evangelism is through bi-vocational work. A certain Kyrgyz pastor in Moscow was struggling to reach out to his fellow Kyrgyz people from Central Asia who came to Moscow to find work. The pastor’s tight financial situation forced him to get a job as a laborer, and now he has an audience of 150 Kyrgyz co-workers who see him as one of them rather than someone in the never-never land of religion, or worse – a person “bought” by outside agencies. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 9:16-18 –

For if I preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*), I have nothing to boast about; for necessity is laid on me; but woe is to me, if I don't preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*). For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward. But if not of my own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the Good News (*euaggelizo*), I may present the Good News (*euaggelion*) of Christ without charge, so as not to abuse my authority in the Good News (*euaggelion*).

How many preach the Good News without charge, and how many are in the ministry to have an easy job and a reasonably good salary? For most of our ministry life my wife and I have been self-supporting through secular work, and we operated a mission support agency in our spare time. Now our savings and pensions enable us to receive the minimum personal support that our mission will allow and still consider us as employees, so that the large majority of funds donated to our account can be used for ministry. Our Russian coworkers can see that we are living on an

economic level similar to their own, and they consider us one of them. On a local basis we heal the sick and teach others how to do the same. Through our website we've had over 1,400 visits per day by people from all over the world who read God's Word, download Bibles in seven languages, theological reference books, Christian music, sermons, or study our missions and practical ministries courses. In all of this we present the Good News free of charge.

The Apostle Paul in Gal. 1:6-9 issues a rather stern warning about those who would pervert the Good News of God's grace into an easy-believism of reliance on religious rituals for salvation or the "health-and-wealth gospel" –

I marvel that you so soon are being moved away from Him who called you into *the* grace of Christ, to another gospel (*euaggelion*), which is not another, but some are troubling you, and desiring to pervert the gospel (*euaggelion*) of Christ. But even if we or an angel from Heaven preach a gospel (*euaggelizo*) to you beside what we preached (*euaggelizo*) to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches a gospel (*euaggelizo*) to you beside what you have received, let him be accursed.⁵ (MKJV)

Paul makes it absolutely clear that only one Gospel is the truth, and that other religious-sounding talk which masquerades as good news is in reality very bad news both for the speaker and for the hearers, leading to their being accursed. Many people have been taught in churches that baptism – the New Testament equivalent of circumcision in the Old Testament – or taking the Eucharist, or raising their right hand and going forward will guarantee them free passage into heaven, or that God guarantees that true believers will all be healthy, wealthy and wise. Free grace does not mean we don't ever have to do anything useful, we can just sit in the pew (or in front of the TV) and God will simply pour money from heaven into our laps so we can live in luxury and never suffer or grow old and die. What utter nonsense! Real, saving faith works through love (Gal. 5:6), ministering to the real needs of hurting people, and faith without good works is dead faith (James 2:17). We must not preach an either-or half-gospel of either saving souls or social action, but both-and: the whole gospel for the whole person. At times we will lead out with evangelism, and other times we will lead out with good works: it depends on the local circumstances.

Not only did the church in Galatia do so, but Paul also warned Timothy that future churches would tend to dream up fables, misinterpretations of the Good News: "For the time will come when they will not listen to the sound doctrine, but, having itching ears, will heap up for themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn

aside to fables. But you be sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist (*euaggelistes*), and fulfill your ministry (*diakonia*)." (2 Tim. 4:3-5) The Gospel (*euaggelion*) is that God accepts us just as we are, forgiving our sins. But God's grace brings about change in our lives so that we don't remain just as we were. This means that sin is a hard fact: God doesn't ignore sin, pretending that it doesn't exist, that everything is fine with us when it's not. People most often do not want to hear the bad news, the other side of the Good News coin.

In these verses Paul instructs Timothy to "carry out fully your *diakonia*." When someone is sick, they need a correct diagnosis before proper treatment can begin. This means calling cancer "cancer," and calling sin "sin." It is no more helpful to tell a homosexual person that his behavior is okay just as it is, than to tell a nearsighted person that he doesn't need to wear corrective lenses when driving. Both behaviors can cause great harm or death to those persons and others. Similarly, when someone in the church needs material help, we should not just give money, but use "tough love" and inquire about that person's vocational and social skills, then help him or her improve those skills to become self-supporting. Thus being a minister (*diakonos*) of the Good News includes restoring people to God's image and likeness, helping them eliminate the distortions caused by sickness and sin.

Endnotes to Chapter 7:

1. Steyne, Philip M., *Gods of Power: A Study of the Belief and Practice of Animists*, (Houston, Touch Publications, 1989), 161.
2. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
3. Ibid.
4. *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
5. *Modern King James Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

Chapter 8: Ministry as Proclamation (*kerygma* / *kerusso*)

We have already begun considering Mark's version of the Great Commission, so let us examine it now in its entirety:

He said to them, "Go into all the world, and preach (*kerusso*) the Good News to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new languages; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will in no way hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. They went out and preached (*kerusso*) everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen (Mark 16:15-20).

Proclaiming (*kerusso*) the Good News means "to *herald* (as a public *crier*), especially divine truth (the gospel): - preach (-er), proclaim, publish."¹ Proclaiming or preaching is the effort to convince people of divine truth so that they will act upon it. Immediately we notice in the semantic field of *kerusso* the association with certain signs: casting out demons, speaking with new languages, being cured from poison, and laying hands on the sick so that they recover. When we proclaim the Good News in the power of the Holy Spirit, it should be confirmed by these signs. Each one of these signs can be viewed in a combination of ways, as both natural and supernatural acts, blending almost imperceptibly from one into the other.

Demon possession in the New Testament is interpreted in our secular age today to mean psychological disorders, but we must not discount the reality of negative supernatural forces. Volitional decisions leading to evil acts can open a person spiritually to these evil supernatural forces so that he forfeits control to them. Deciding to over-imbibe alcoholic drinks or to take narcotic drugs has both physical and spiritual consequences.

Considering the convergence of natural and supernatural from a positive viewpoint, I have studied hard to learn Russian and Udmurt languages, but I am no poet or musician, yet I've experienced times during worship when words in those languages came to me in rhyme and meter, and I jotted down songs far beyond my natural ability to write. This happened 10 and 15 years ago, and the songs are still being sung in Russia today. We have already commented on the laying on of hands during massage and exercise combined with the prayer of faith for healing.

According to Mark's version of the Great Commission, such signs should accompany proclamation (*kerygma*) to confirm the truth of the Gospel.

A very important part of proclaiming the Good News is calling people to repent. Preachers today are often afraid to name specific sins and urge people to repent: lying, sexual promiscuity, adultery, cheating on tests and on taxes, giving and taking bribes, misstating financial reports in business, greed and gluttony are all considered by many contemporary people as alright to do if the situation demands it. We must denounce such "situational ethics" as sin, and call people to repent of these acts. Jesus did this in His ministry: "From that time, Jesus began to preach (*kerusso*), and to say, 'Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.'" And a few verses later we read – "Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching (*kerusso*) the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people" (Mat. 4:17 and 23).

So Jesus' preaching was associated both with the call to repent and with healing disease and disability. When Jesus initiated His earthly ministry, He quoted from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news (*euaggelizo*) to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim (*kerusso*) release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver those who are crushed, and to proclaim (*kerusso*) the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). Again, proclaiming is accompanied by healing, which can occur when a person repents.

True repentance is more than mere words, "I've sinned and I'm sorry," it is a change of behavior. On our evaluation form that we use when interviewing new clients, after taking their medical history, analyzing their problems and developing a rehabilitation plan, we have the following:

"I want to be rehabilitated, and therefore I am ready to change my lifestyle.

Signature: I, _____, agree to follow this plan."

So many people, even after suffering a serious illness or injury, think that somehow everything will be "just fine" and they don't need to change. They think the government, or modern medicine, or God ought to take care of them, they don't need to take care of themselves. We

make them face the fact that only if they're willing to change and take responsibility for their life, only then will we help rehabilitate them. And only when a person truly repents and is ready to change his ways will God save him from the consequences of his sins.

We find this same emphasis on repentance in the preaching of His disciples: “He called to himself the twelve, and began to send them out two by two; and he gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ...They went out and preached (*kerusso*) that people should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed many with oil who were sick, and healed them.” (Mark 6:7 and 12-13, see also Mat. 10:1-8 and Luke 9:1-2). Mark emphasizes casting out demons, along with Matthew and Luke’s mention of healing the sick accompanying the proclamation of the Good News. After Christ’s resurrection, Peter was first to take this Good News to the gentiles when he went to Caesarea and proclaimed to Cornelius that Jesus “went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil” and “He commanded us to preach (*kerusso*) to the people and to testify that this is he who is appointed by God as the Judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him, that through his name everyone who believes in him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:38 and 42-43). Paul’s preaching included both healing and calling for repentance to receive remission of sins, and in this case it was accompanied by the sign of speaking in tongues.

From time to time we find ourselves asking the “so what?” question. Of course, Jesus and the apostles did those things, but so what? Why is it relevant today? What we need today is strong churches made up of young, healthy, wealthy and successful people! So why waste time on the elderly, lame, sick and blind? They can’t contribute to our building programs, and if they show up in church they’ll scare away all the normal people. Besides, it takes an enormous amount of time and money to work with those people! What did Jesus have to say about this? First, He taught that at His second coming He would separate people into two groups: those who ministered to the hungry, thirsty, lonely, naked, sick and prisoners thus ministered to Him were ushered into His eternal Kingdom, but those who did not care for these despised social outcasts performed no genuine ministry to Christ and were cast to eternal fire (Mat. 25:31-46).

Then a little later, when His disciples shouted – “Why this waste?” about the woman who poured expensive ointment on Him, Jesus replied to them: "Why do you trouble the woman? Because she has done a good work for me. For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always

have me. For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached (*kerusso*) in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her" (Mat. 26:10-13). Thus we see that Matthew identified ministering to the poor with ministering to Christ, and is accompanied by *kerusso*. By the way, John's version of this event tells us that it was Judas who objected to this "waste," because he was a thief and merely wanted to get his hands on the money (Jn. 12:4-6). We know what happened to Judas. What is our motivation: genuine ministry to Christ, or love of money?

The Apostle Paul outlines the entire process of preaching, gaining a response of repentance and faith, and having the person confess Christ publicly in Rom. 10:8-15a (MKJV) –

But what does it say? "The Word is near you, *even* in your mouth and in your heart"; that is, the Word of Faith which we proclaim (*kerusso*); because if you confess the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved (*sodzo*). For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses unto salvation (*soteria*). For the Scripture says, "Everyone believing on Him shall not be put to shame." For there is no difference both of Jew and of Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call on Him. For everyone, "whoever shall call on the name of *the* Lord will be saved (*sodzo*)." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without preaching (*kerusso*)? And how shall they preach (*kerusso*) unless they are sent?²

Bishop Barkley, the British philosopher, stated: "Belief is the disposition to act." Faith or belief, as we see here in Romans 10, is not "armchair faith," mere mental assent to logical propositions or doctrines; it is the disposition, the willingness to:

- a) Be sent (*apostello*) to a place where people don't agree with you,
- b) Boldly proclaim divine truth and try to convince those people to repent and change,
- c) Lead them to the point of salvation and healing (*soteria*), and
- d) Bring them to the point of unashamedly confessing their new faith to others.

Our faith must be more than something that is taught, it must be caught! We mustn't keep it to ourselves, we must transmit it to others in such a compelling way that they in turn transmit it to still others. That involves risking rejection, danger and failure, but going and doing anyway. It is safer to stay in one's comfort zone where we know we won't fail, to passively listen and consent

to truths we have already heard hundreds of times, than to get up and go into a hostile environment, and preach the Word. That is true success! We can't succeed unless we risk failure.

But this is not the worldly kind of success, where we strive to achieve wealth, power or fame for ourselves. Paul writes: "For we don't preach (*kerusso*) ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants (*doulos*) for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). The *doulos* strives to carry out his master's commands, not be involved in running after his own desires and goals. This is real ministry. Paul commanded Timothy to "preach (*kerusso*) the word; be urgent in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). The phrase "in season and out of season" is translated in the *Contemporary English Version* as "even if it isn't the popular thing to do."³ Urging people to repent isn't convenient or popular. We must balance reproof and rebuke with patience and teaching, in order to not drive away the flock of God. In all of this we seek to instill the character of Christ into others' lives.

Endnotes to Chapter 8:

1. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *Modern King James Bible*, op. cit.
3. *Contemporary English Version*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

Chapter 9: Ministry as Love (*agape*)

Probably the sharpest, hardest-hitting text in the Bible describing *agape*-love is 1 John 3:14-18 –

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love (*agapao*) the brothers. He who doesn't love (*agapao*) his brother remains in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. By this we know love (*agape*), because he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart of compassion against him, how does the love (*agape*) of God remain in him? My little children, let's not love (*agapao*) in word only, neither with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.

Giving of our material wealth and even giving our lives because of God's *agape*-love that fills our hearts and overflows into actions – “deed and truth” – is the proof of our words. It may be harder to lay down our lives in the daily sacrifice of life-long loving deeds, to die a thousand deaths to self one day at a time, than to die an instant death for another person just once. Even though the word “ministry” is not mentioned in this passage, the concept of ministering is certainly present here.

Strong's Dictionaries define the noun *agape* as “love, that is, affection or benevolence; specifically (plural) a *love feast*: - (feast of) charity,” and the verb *agapao* as “to love (in a social or moral sense): - (be-) love (-ed).”¹ Only once in the New Testament is *agape* used in the sense of a love feast, likely referring to the Lord's Supper itself or the fellowship meal following it: “These are hidden rocky reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you, shepherds who without fear feed themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn leaves without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 1:12). This tells us of false “pastors” (shepherds) who brazenly commit the sin of gluttony during the *agape* love feast. But let us leave behind us this negative aspect, and set our eyes on the goal before us: considering just a few of the New Testament texts where *agape* is translated as “charity” in the KJV, for a total of 28 times. The most well-known of these, of course, is 1 Cor. 13:1-4, 8 and 13 –

If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have [charity] love (*agape*), I have become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love (*agape*), I am nothing. If I dole out all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love (*agape*), it profits me nothing. Love (*agape*) is patient and is kind; love (*agape*) doesn't envy. Love (*agape*) doesn't brag, is not

proud. ...Love (*agape*) never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. ...But now faith, hope, and love (*agape*) remain--these three. The greatest of these is love (*agape*).

Eloquent preaching, the spiritual gift of prophecy, doctoral degrees testifying to intellectual skill and achievements, faith that removes huge obstacles, sacrificing our wealth and even our lives – all these are worthless if we don't have *agape*-love. When our spirit is motivated by *agape*-love we will be patient with the slow learner and the stubborn teenager, we won't envy others' possessions, appearance or accomplishments, and we won't show off or brag about our own. *Agape*-love endures forever, even after gifts of prophecies and tongues, eloquent sermons and vast knowledge have all faded away. Greater even than faith and hope is *agape*-love. This certainly brings into focus the motives behind our actions of practical ministry and self-sacrifice.

Although “charity” has a different connotation in today’s English language, the KJV use of the word “charity” conveys in an excellent way the sense of *agape* as ministry. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “charity” in various ways:

In a general sense, love, benevolence, good will; that disposition of heart which inclines men to think favorably of their fellow men, and to do them good. In a theological sense, it includes supreme love to God, and universal good will to men. ... Liberality to the poor, consisting in almsgiving or benefactions, or in gratuitous services to relieve them in distress. Alms; whatever is bestowed gratuitously on the poor for their relief. Liberality in gifts and services to promote public objects of utility, as to found and support bible societies, missionary societies, and others. ... A charitable institution. Charity-school is a school maintained by voluntary contributions for educating poor children.²

Paul, in writing to his young apprentice-pastor Timothy, gives us an excellent description of how “charity”-love fits into Christian ministry: “Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in [charity] love (*agape*), in spirit, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, pay attention to reading, to exhortation, and to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:12-13). It follows and describes a “way of life,” one’s habitual conduct, and is followed by “faith, purity, reading, exhortation, and teaching,” traits traditionally associated with a pastor. But *agape*-love comes near the top of the list, and shines its glow over all the other characteristics of a pastor. The Apostle Peter gives us another list of spiritual qualities: diligence, faith, moral excellence, knowledge, patience, self-control, godliness, “and in godliness brotherly affection; and in

brotherly affection, [charity] love (*agape*)” (2 Pet. 1:7). Here “charity” or *agape*-love is the capstone that crowns all other virtues.

In contrast, the Apostle John records the words of Christ to the church at Ephesus: “I know your works, and your toil and perseverance, and that you can't tolerate evil men, and have tested those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and found them false. You have perseverance and have endured for my name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you left your first love (*agape*)” (Rev. 2:2-4). All of our works, toil, perseverance, striving for virtue, against false apostles and evil men is of no value unless we maintain that burning *agape*-love for the Lord Jesus and for others. Our ministry to Christ and to the widows, orphans, poor, lame, maimed and blind amounts to nothing without *agape*-love.

The final passage using “charity” in the KJV which I would like to consider is Rev. 2:19-21 –

I know your works, your [charity] love (*agape*), faith, service, patient endurance, and that your last works are more than the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman, Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces my servants to commit sexual immorality, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

The Apostle John here places *agape*-love in stark contrast against sexual immorality. Works of charity are incompatible with fornication. Since the 1960s we have witnessed in the West the “sexual revolution” that excuses sexual immorality by claiming that it is “free love,” thus hijacking the concepts of freedom and *agape*-love to justify fornication. These people assert that cohabitation outside of marriage is acceptable “as long as they love each other.” The toleration and patience described in 1 Cor. 13 and elsewhere in the Bible is vastly different than the pseudo-toleration of relativism described in Rev. 2 that says anything goes if people “love” (feel passion toward) each other. The problem is that passion fades away, but true love endures: *agape*-love never fails.

When passion fades, the relationship falls apart, and statistics show the ex-sex-partners will very likely never establish a permanent marriage with anyone else. The damage to society in terms of abortions, abandoned children, single-parent households, venereal disease and population decline is incalculable. As we see in this passage also, having women in prominent positions in the church is not a new phenomenon. Here it manifested itself in two forms: teaching that sexual immorality

and idolatry are acceptable, and actually practicing sexual immorality. St. Paul makes abundantly clear in 1 Tim. 3:12 and Titus 1:6 that the qualifications for those who minister (*diakonia*) and pastors include monogamous marriage. People who are sexually immoral are disqualified from any type of ministry or *diakonia*. But as this passage shows, we should give them opportunity to repent, not immediately anathematize them.

The word *agape* is translated 84 times as “love” in the KJV. The most famous verse on *agape*-love, of course, is John 3:16 – “For God so loved (*agapao*) the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” This verse illustrates most powerfully the ministering nature of *agape*-love: God does not want anyone to perish; He cares so much for us that He sent His Son to become a human being, live among us, learn our weaknesses and our possibilities, then ultimately to die for us. What love! We know about the years of planning and preparation to become trained for ministering to people’s needs, both physical and spiritual. Before a person gives up during this process, he should imagine how many centuries it took God to plan and prepare each phase of Jesus’ birth, life and death!

Next, let us consider John 13:34-35 – “A new commandment I give to you, that you love (*agapao*) one another, just like I have loved (*agapao*) you; that you also love (*agapao*) one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love (*agape*) for one another.” These words make it abundantly clear that the most important thing and the primary identifier of Christ’s disciples is *agape*-love. We all know this, right? But do we only know it in our heads, stored away in a dusty corner of our brains as a nice little fact? Or do we know and feel it in our hearts? Look at the preceding verses, where Jesus told His disciples that He was about to be glorified (crucified) and would be going away, then just after Jesus taught them the new commandment about love, look at what Peter said: “Oh, no! Where are You going, Lord?” He had filed away those words from Jesus’ lips about love as a nice little fact, and promptly ignored them, focusing instead on the thought that he would be left alone when Jesus departed! One of the favorite icons in the Orthodox Church is that of Christ holding the opened Gospels, and if one looks closely and can read the Greek or Church Slavonic words, he sees that the Lord’s fingers are pointing to John 13:34-35!

Jesus had already begun teaching His disciples about the connection between being glorified and self-sacrificial love, as we read in the previous chapter, John 12:23-25 – “The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the

earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves (*agapao*) his life will lose it. He who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life.” So they should have understood what was about to take place and why the Great Commandment was so important. But alas, they were still thinking on the wavelength of ordinary human beings!

Further on the relationship between being glorified and *agape*-love, the Apostle John records the following words of Jesus just before His crucifixion –

In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples. Even as the Father has loved (*agapao*) me, I also have loved (*agapao*) you. Remain in my love (*agape*). If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love (*agape*); even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and remain in his love (*agape*). I have spoken these things to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is my commandment, that you love (*agapao*) one another, even as I have loved (*agapao*) you. Greater love (*agape*) has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you (John 15:8-13).

In John 13 we have seen that Jesus being glorified meant that He would soon lay down His life, and here He also speaks of laying down one's life. But this time He is speaking of His disciples implementing *agape*-love so completely that they too would be ready to lay down their lives for others. Jesus also speaks here about “bearing much fruit.” The first-listed fruit of the Spirit, Paul writes in Gal. 5:22, is *agape*-love. And this is the first and most important fruit we should bear in order to glorify the Father, even if it means laying down our lives as Jesus did.

We find more on glorifying God by paying the ultimate price to follow Jesus in John 21:15-19 –

So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*agapao*) me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection (*phileo*) for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (*agapao*) me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection (*phileo*) for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection (*phileo*) for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection (*phileo*) for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection (*phileo*) for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Most certainly I tell you, when you were young, you dressed yourself, and walked where you wanted to. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you, and carry you where you don't want to go." Now he said this, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. When he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."

Sermon after sermon has been preached on this text, pointing out that Jesus began by asking if Peter had *agape*-love for Jesus, and Peter replying that he only had *phileo*-love for Him. *Strong's Dictionaries* define *phileo* as “to be a friend to (*fond of* [an individual or an object]), that is, *have affection* for (denoting *personal* attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling),” juxtaposing the two loves. But *Strong's Dictionaries* continue – “while [*agape*] is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the *deliberate* assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety: the two thus stand related... the former being chiefly of the *heart* and the latter of the *head*).”³ So *agape*-love is not opposed to, but rather builds upon *phileo*. Paul uses both *phileo* and *agape* together in 1 Thes. 4:9; and Peter combines *phileo* and *agape* in 1 Pet. 1:22. So when Jesus asked Peter if he *agapao*-loved Him, He could see that Peter wasn't quite there yet, but Jesus knew he was on the way. And tradition tells us that eventually Peter did indeed glorify God by death, being crucified upside-down at his own request because, he told his executioners, he was not worthy to be crucified right side-up like His Lord.

St. Paul explains this concept of sacrificial *agape*-love in detail as follows –

Owe no one anything, except to love (*agapao*) one another; for he who loves (*agapao*) his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not give false testimony," "You shall not covet," and whatever other commandments there are, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love (*agapao*) your neighbor as yourself." Love (*agape*) doesn't harm a neighbor. Love (*agape*) therefore is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

But *agape*-love goes much further than fulfilling these negative commands, to “do no evil.” It is possible to obey these negative commands and still ignore or even despise our neighbor. The Russian verb “to hate” is “*nenavidet*” – literally, to not-look-at (ignore) someone. When we are motivated by *agape*-love, however, we seek to positively do good to our neighbor, to minister to him when he is hurting, and encourage him when he is discouraged or depressed. The Apostle Paul sums it up very well in Gal. 5:6 – “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision amounts to anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love (*agape*).” Observing the ritual Law of Moses, indicated by the word “circumcision,” or not observing those religious rituals is not the point: the point is whether we put our faith to work by practicing *agape*-love, or just talk it.

The author of the letter to the Hebrew Christians put it this way – “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love (*agape*) and good works” (Heb 10:24). Here again we see love in

action, *agape*-love that produces good works, and we should be thinking up ways to stimulate each other toward this goal of ministering to the building up of the Body of Christ!

Endnotes to Chapter 9:

1. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.

Chapter 10: Ministry as Joy (*khara*) and Peace (*eirene*)

Right after *agape*-love, joy (*khara*) is listed in Gal. 5:22 as the second fruit of the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy (*khara*), peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Joy is not just an old friend from high school, nor is it a dishwashing liquid; joy is even more than “feelings of great happiness or pleasure” as many people, even modern dictionaries, might define it today. Joy in *Strong’s Dictionaries* is “*cheerfulness*, that is, calm *delight*: - gladness.”¹ Thus we see *khara* as cheerfulness or calm, inner delight that does not depend upon external circumstances, whereas happiness and pleasure depend on them. In Rom. 14:17, the Apostle Paul describes it this way – “for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy (*khara*) in the Holy Spirit.” When we preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand, we bring people a message not of material things such as eating and drinking, but of inner joy in the Holy Spirit.

Both in Jewish worship and in pagan religious ceremonies, sacrificing and feasting on animals played a big part. The prophet Isaiah decried the reliance on this outward form of religion –

You have not brought me of your sheep for burnt offerings; neither have you honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with frankincense. You have bought me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened me with your sins. You have wearied me with your iniquities. I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins (Is. 43:23-24).

The point here is not that the Israelites had stopped bringing animal sacrifices. They kept right on offering them so that they could feast on the roasted meat! But they were not sacrificing them to Yahweh, only for their own enjoyment, for what they could get out of religion for themselves.

Our task as ministers of the Good News of sins forgiven is not to browbeat, bully or condemn people, but to build them up in the joy of the Lord: “Not that we have lordship over your faith, but are fellow workers with you for your joy (*khara*). For you stand firm in faith” (2 Cor. 1:24). In the context of this passage, Paul explains that he delayed coming to Corinth in order to spare the believers there, because one of them had fallen into one of the grossest of sexual sins, incest. Perhaps Paul might have lost control of himself if he had been there in person, whereas being able to collect his composure and his thoughts, he could write them a loving but firm explanation

of God's will for believers to maintain sexual purity in a lasting monogamous marriage. Ministering includes caring for others' spiritual, psychological, social and physical well-being, not beating them over the head with condemnation, but rather helping them experience true joy!

The Lord Jesus described joy very aptly in a one-sentence parable: "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy (*khara*), he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field" (Mat. 13:44). The Gospel should be such Good News to people, that when they discover this hidden treasure they will be so filled with joy, they would gladly sell everything they have to obtain it. We should minister to the poor, maimed, lame and blind with such joy that they will want to discover its source for themselves!

When writing his letter to the church in Philippi, the Apostle Paul was sitting in prison in Rome, awaiting trial and possible execution. With the thought of death in his mind, he wrote – "Indeed, I cannot decide between the two. I have the desire to leave this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. But for your sake it is better that I remain in this body. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will continue to live and be with all of you for the sake of your progress and joy (*khara*) in the faith" (Phil. 1:25). His desire was that they would increase their experience of this joy! This letter is often called "the epistle of joy." And later he writes – "Rejoice (*khairo*) in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice (*khairo*)!" (Phil. 4:4). Not only was he intent on increasing their joy, he was himself filled with joy – "But I rejoice (*khairo*) in the Lord greatly, that now at length you have revived your thought for me; in which you did indeed take thought, but you lacked opportunity" (Phil. 4:10). Now, imagine for a moment a man sitting on death row and awaiting execution: as the appeals process is winding down to an end, he writes to his friends how glad they should be and how glad he is! If we are rejoicing in the Lord and not in our external circumstances, we can feel at ease and full of joy even when death approaches.

In his book *The Purpose-Driven Life* Rick Warren writes – "The only time most people think about eternity is at funerals, and then it's often shallow, sentimental thinking, based on ignorance. You may feel it's morbid to think about death, but actually it's unhealthy to live in denial of death and not consider what is inevitable."²

Jesus Himself experienced this joy that overcomes the fear of death, so we should be – "looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy (*khara*) that was set before him

endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). And when we experience suffering, even when God sends physical pain our way to chasten and discipline us, we can rejoice because we anticipate the result – “All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous (*khara*) but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). The problem of suffering and death often comes up when ministering to handicapped, sick and elderly people. The answer lies in the trade-off: which would you rather have, a few years of health and wealth in exchange for an eternity in hell with equally miserable people, or a few years of sickness and poverty in exchange for an eternity of everlasting joy in the presence of God? Consider what Jesus said – “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire” (Mat. 18:8).

And if the reply is, “Why are there only those two choices?” – we answer that it is an extremely rare person who can resist the temptations that come with health, wealth or fame:

Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, "Children, how hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished, saying to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus, looking at them, said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:23-27).

Remember that we began by discussing the purpose of ministry: fellowship (*koinonia*) with God and with other believers, as described in 1 John, chapter 1. Right in the middle of that chapter is a real gem: “And we write these things to you, that our joy (*khara*) may be fulfilled” (1 John 1:4). Some older translations have “your joy” but many newer translations have “our joy.” John apparently had in mind our common (*koinos*) joy that we share with each other. The reason we communicate the Good News about Jesus is so that we can increase our shared, common joy! And this joy is discovered not in health and wealth, but amid persecution, suffering and hardship.

If joy is calm inner delight, then peace goes even deeper: it is the heart of the Gospel. The Good News is the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15 and Eph. 6:15). All of Paul’s letters begin with a blessing of peace, most often: “Grace to you and peace (*eirene*) from God our Father and the

Lord Jesus Christ.” It seems strange that the message of peace can actually cause conflict, but that depends more on the audience than on the message or the messenger. Jesus actually predicted this: “Don't think that I came to send peace (*eirene*) on the earth. I didn't come to send peace (*eirene*), but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Mat. 10:34-25).

Many people have learned from bitter experience to be skeptical: “If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!” – and they disbelieve. Others, when a son or daughter, sister or brother finds love, joy and peace in their heart through trusting Christ, will search for any possible fault in that person’s life in order to blame them: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye;’ and behold, the beam is in your own eye?” (Mat. 7:3-4). This is guilt projection, which people often use to deflect the call for repentance that implies the fact of sin. Even if a believer doesn’t mention the other person’s sin, that person may feel guilty and use guilt projection to try to minimize it. We need to consider these negative implications of peace right at the start, as it is a major objection that arises when we begin to talk about peace.

Strong’s Dictionaries define *eirene* as “*peace* (literally or figuratively); by implication *prosperity*: - one, peace, quietness, rest, set at one again.”³ When the angels appeared to the shepherds, Luke 2:14 tells us that they proclaimed – “Glory to God in the highest, and peace (*eirene*) on earth to people who enjoy his favor!”⁴ (ISV) We can hear the echoes of the Hebrew word *shalom* in the angels’ voices. Please notice, however, this peace is only for those who enjoy God’s favor. Those who reject His favor will not experience this inner peace: “‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (Is. 57:21). Only those who make peace are called God’s children – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Mat. 5:9). When the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them – “Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace (*eirene*) be to this house.’ If a son of peace (*eirene*) is there, your peace (*eirene*) will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:5-6). Thus we see again how the Bible teaches that the Good News being received in peace depends more on the audience than on the message or the messenger.

As Jesus rode down the Mount of Olives on a donkey colt into Jerusalem, the multitudes praised God – “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace (*eirene*) in heaven, and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38). In this instance, the audience of Jesus’ followers gladly received Him. But just a few days later, the Scribes and Pharisees would manipulate the crowds to demand His crucifixion. During that fateful week which we call “Holy Week” the Lord taught His disciples intensively in order to prepare them for what was about to happen – “Peace (*eirene*) I leave with you. My peace (*eirene*) I give to you; not as the world gives, give I to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful” (John 14:27). And He also told them – “I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace (*eirene*). In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In both of these passages we see that the peace Jesus promises is one that does not depend on circumstances in this world.

After His resurrection, Jesus greeted His disciples three times with the words, “Peace (*eirene*) be to you” (John 20:19, 21 and 26). He recognized their emotional state of fear. Their leader had just been executed, and they might be next. It is important that ministers of the Gospel be aware of others’ emotional state. It may be easy to “dump our load” of Gospel jargon on someone and not even take any notice of their body language or how they respond to our opening questions. In our haste to lead people to entrust their lives to Christ, we may actually drive them away. This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t share the Good News, but rather we must be careful that the way and the timing of presenting it take into consideration the emotional condition of our audience. It works the other way too: disabled people are especially sensitive to other people’s attitudes, and can often detect if we sincerely want to minister to them, or if we simply want to tally up points.

How does peace relate specifically to ministry in the New Testament? How does the word *eirene* fall within the semantic field of *diakonia*? We have already examined 2 Cor. 5:18-20 when we were considering ministry as evangelizing (*euaggelizo*), where God’s Word tells us that Christ “gave to us the ministry (*diakonia*) of reconciliation.” Although the word “reconciliation,” in Greek *katallage*, isn’t related etymologically to *eirene*, it shares the meaning of making peace. In fact, it is literally “bringing to peace” (*primirenje*) in Russian. But in another New Testament passage, the Apostle Paul uses both words synonymously –

For he is our peace (*eirene*), who made both one, and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man of the two, making peace (*eirene*);

and might reconcile (*apokatalasso*) them both in one body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby (Eph. 2:14-16).

Here Paul is writing about the hostility between the Jewish and Greek worldviews. The Jews had the Law of God revealed exclusively (they believed) to them through Moses, and the Greeks were to them merely gentiles, polytheistic pagans, hardly human if at all. But the Greeks were in their own view the peak of human civilization: they claimed some of the world's greatest philosophers and poets, they invented democracy, and the Jews were to them uncivilized prehistoric throwbacks. Paul writes that Jesus Christ has brought together these two conflicting worldviews into one Body through the cross! The Body of Christ, the Church, is to be a place where opposing worldviews – Democrats versus Republicans, socialists versus free marketers, can be reconciled.

How can we relate ministry to the poor, maimed, lame and blind to the task of making peace? In today's market-oriented society these people are considered uncompetitive in the marketplace, and they are often given short shrift. In socialist and communist societies, which purportedly aim toward the creation of a perfect social system inhabited by perfect people, although lip-service is paid toward caring for the disabled they are often ignored and left to fend for themselves or die. I have repeatedly heard old-line Russians refer approvingly to the policy of Sparta, the Greek city-state that abandoned its disabled children to the elements and wild animals. But Sparta vanished, because such a policy eventually consumes the entire society. If one generation eliminates the least fit 10%, and the next generation eliminates its least fit 10%, and so on, after a few more generations there will be no one left. The Darwinist worldview of the survival of the fittest leaves no room for compassion, and in the long run no room for its own survival.

But the Body of Christ must have a different approach to making peace with the handicapped and elderly, giving them a place of honor and consideration. How do we reconcile ourselves with them and stop neglecting them? Read what the Apostle Paul writes about the "weaker," "less honorable," "unpresentable" and "inferior" members of the Body of Christ:

The eye can't tell the hand, "I have no need for you," or again the head to the feet, "I have no need for you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. Those parts of the body which we think to be less honorable, on those we bestow more abundant honor; and our unpresentable parts have more abundant propriety; whereas our presentable parts have no such need. But God composed the body together,

giving more abundant honor to the inferior part, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. Or when one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:21-26).

Why are the seemingly weaker members of the Body of Christ necessary? Because they teach us how to love! I have seen churches that were competitive, cut-throat places just like the secular world where “believers” were jockeying to get into leadership roles, or be stronger, smarter, richer or prettier than the next person! In contrast, disabled people know how to receive *agape*-love because there is little they can do to earn it, while we who are strong mentally and physically often find it harder to accept God’s *agape*-love. Those who are well think they don’t need the Great Physician, but those who are sick or weak recognize their need. And by making peace with the sick and elderly, giving them places of honor in our churches, we recognize our own human frailty, that we were at one time helpless babies who needed loving care, and if we don’t die quickly by heart attack or auto accident, we will die slowly and again need loving care.

Are you at peace with having handicapped people in your church? While we are dealing with this passage, let us take note that Paul is doing away with prejudice against handicapped people that had its roots in misinterpretations of two Old Testament texts: Lev. 21:16-23 records how Yahweh gave Moses the rule that no Levite priest with a physical defect was to serve in the Temple, although he could receive a share of the sacrifices. This was because the priestly tribe of Levi was considered the “firstborn offering to the Lord” of the twelve tribes of Israel (Num. 3:39-51), and in Lev. 22:21-24 we read that the vow and peace offering animals were to be without defect. The New Testament makes clear that the Levitical priesthood is no longer valid, so these texts don’t apply to Christian church leadership. Another text causing this prejudice is 2 Sam. 5:6-8, where the ancient Jebusites taunted David that even their lame and blind could keep him from entering the city. Of course he captured the city, commanded his troops to wipe out the entire population including the lame and blind, and he renamed the place Jerusalem. But the simple folk of Israel made up a saying, “The blind and the lame shall not enter the house of the Lord.” This saying is an obvious distortion of what David intended, but it provided a rationalization for human prejudice, and the notion has remained, sadly, even to this day.

Thus we see that peace (*eirene*) means coming to terms and making peace with those who fall into our prejudices and outside the scope of our limited, finite worldview. It includes ministering

to the poor, maimed, lame and blind who “don’t fit in” our competitive or perfectionist modern society.

Endnotes to Chapter 10:

1. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Life*, op. cit., 49.
3. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. *International Standard Version*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

Chapter 11: Ministry as Moderation (*epieikes*) and Self-Control (*egkrateia*)

The verses that speak loudest to me about moderation are Phil. 4:5-7, 11-12 and 19 (MKJV) –

Let your moderation (*epieikes*) be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ... Not that I speak according to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ... But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.¹

The word *epieikes* can also be translated “gentleness” and many Bible versions use this word. But when we look closely at the above text, it becomes clear that Paul is writing about the attitude Christian believers ought to have toward needing material things: “Do not be anxious about anything,” “Not that I speak according to need,” “both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” and “my God shall supply all your need.”

It is true that we need a certain amount of material things such as food, shelter and clothing. But these basic needs easily slide into desires for More, Newer, Prettier, Bigger and Better. The advertising business has learned how to “create the need” for the latest, tastiest or most advanced things – clothing styles, flavored coffees, mobile phones, music players, digital cameras, computers and cars. As Wendell Berry writes in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, –

We live in a time when technologies and ideas (often the same thing) are adopted in response not to need but to advertising, salesmanship, and fashion. Salesmen and saleswomen now hover about us as persistently as angels, intent on “doing us good” according to instructions set forth by persons educated at great public expense in the arts of greed and prevarication.²

You are constantly bombarded by advertising. So you wake up one fine morning with the idea in your head, “I just have to buy a new _____ today!” Madison Avenue brainwashing has done its job on you. When we step back and think about it calmly and rationally, it becomes clear that more and more people on earth cannot continue consuming more and more things ad infinitum. Something is seriously wrong with this picture! Psychologists call it “cognitive dissonance,” but we ordinary people call it just crazy. He who dies with the most toys is nonetheless dead. There

must be higher values in life, something greater to live for than mere material things. The answer is found in the above passage: “The Lord is at hand.” Christ’s return is just around the corner. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, ready to burst into full view!

St. Paul uses the same term in Titus 3:2-3, instructing believers “to speak evil of no one, not to be contentious, to be gentle (*epieikes*), showing all humility toward all men. For we were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” When we look at the phrase “serving various lusts and pleasures” it seems clear that Paul has “to live in moderation” in mind for *epieikes*. In that case, the Greek word *praotes* that is translated “humility” should rightly be translated as “gentleness.” So Paul is writing essentially the same message to Titus’ church as he wrote to the church at Philippi: “live in moderation, showing all gentleness toward all men, don’t be driven crazy by desires for more, bigger and better things which will poison your relationships with people around you.”

Strong’s Dictionaries define *epieikes* as “appropriate, that is, (by implication) mild: - gentle, moderation, patient.”³ Thus, *epieikes* is living in a manner that is “appropriate” for followers of Christ. When Yahweh called Abram, He said, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). And God promises to bless us, His chosen people, but not so that we will squander it on ourselves; rather so that we can be a blessing to others. That is the appropriate way for God’s people to live.

There is another aspect to moderation – Deut. 8:6-20 records how Yahweh instructed Moses to warn the Israelites as they were going to enter the Promised Land overflowing with milk and honey that they must not forget Yahweh and think it was their own abilities that had gotten them all this wealth. If they began thinking that way, they would turn to idolatry! Yahweh gave them all of the abundant natural resources of the Promised Land so that He might establish His eternal covenant with Israel. God’s blessings have a material aspect that takes place in time and space, but their purpose is eternal, so that His people can be a blessing to others. To relate to material wealth in any other way degenerates into idolatry. Solomon put it very succinctly – “God, I’m asking for two things before I die; don’t refuse me – Banish lies from my lips and liars from my presence. Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little. If I’m too full, I might

get independent, saying, 'God? Who needs him?' If I'm poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God"⁴ (Prov. 30:7-9, MSG). This is an excellent description of living in moderation.

Conversely, the prophet Jeremiah issued a stern warning to Shallum, king of Judah, that he would receive a donkey's burial for his selfish disregard for the poor and needy –

“[Woe to him] who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cuts him out windows; and it is ceiling with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Didn't your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Wasn't this to know me? says Yahweh. ... He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:14-16 and 19).

Many rich nominal “Christians” in the West live in spacious mansions paneled in fine wood, and their children have grown up and moved away, but the parents are keeping a house that is much larger than they need “in case the kids come for a visit.” So two-thirds or more of the house sits vacant for 51 weeks of the year. What hotel or motel manager would keep two-thirds of his rooms vacant for 51 weeks of the year in case a convention might come to town? It would be far less expensive for those parents to rent a suite in a nearby motel for the kids and grandkids for a week. All that wasted space in empty-nester houses is wealth that could be invested in God's Kingdom, building ministry centers for poor and needy disabled people in town.

These rich nominal “Christians” may have raised their right hand or come forward for prayer as a teenager. They may even be good, law-abiding citizens, go to church, read the Bible, attend a home fellowship in their church, and sincerely believe they have eternal life. But what did Jesus say to the rich young man who asked Him what to do so that he could have eternal life?

Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except one - God. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder,' 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not give false testimony,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have observed all these things from my youth." Jesus looking at him loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me, taking up the cross." But his face fell at that saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus answered again, "Children, how hard is it for those who trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich

man to enter into the Kingdom of God." They were exceedingly astonished, saying to him, "Then who can be saved?" (Mk. 10:18-26)

Please note that Jesus "loved him" – He didn't condemn him, calling him a "filthy rich exploiter" or something of that sort. But at the same time, Jesus didn't condone the rich man's trust in his material possessions. Jesus gave the man an opportunity to choose between wealth and following Him, but sadly the young man chose to hold on to his riches. What great difficulty rich people have parting with their great possessions! And yet, one day they will most certainly part with them: naked we came into the world, and naked shall we leave it. We can't take one cent or even one kopeck, 1/26th of a cent, with us when we die! It is a sad but true fact that poor people are more generous givers, considering the percentage of their income that they sacrifice to the Lord, but rich nominal "Christians" tend to be rather poor givers.

How many other passages deal with our attitude toward material riches? Consider these – "For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits his own self?" (Lk. 9:25). "Carry no purse, nor wallet, nor sandals. Greet no one on the way" (Lk. 10:4). We know of one American "missionary" to Russia who left with a full load of luggage, but had to return in order to take another 16 pieces of luggage back to the U.S.! Perhaps most to the point is this –

For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly can't carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:7-10).

Having enough to eat and sufficient warm clothing to wear (it is -9 Fahrenheit outside as I write this in Moscow) is *epieikes*-moderation. Having more leads to temptation and many harmful lusts that can ruin your testimony and even destroy you! Greed has led many astray from the faith. So we must "be free from the love of money, content with such things as you have, for he has said, 'I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5).

The other Greek term we should consider here is *egkrateia* – self-control. St. Peter tells us that since we have become partakers of the divine nature – "...for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence; and in moral excellence, knowledge; and in

knowledge, self-control (*egkrateia*); and in self-control patience; and in patience godliness” (2 Pet. 1:5-6). The KJV translates this word as “temperance” which we usually associate with the limited use of alcoholic beverages, but in his commentary Matthew Henry defines it as “moderation about worldly things,”⁵ so we can rightly think of it as synonymous with *epieikes*.

The verb form of *egkrateia* is *egkrateuomai*, which we find in 1 Cor. 9:25 – “Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control (*egkrateuomai*) in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.” *Strong’s Dictionaries* define *egkrateia* as – “self control (especially *continence*): - temperance.”⁶ The other New Testament usages of this word are in Acts 24:25 when Paul was on trial before Felix – “As he reasoned about righteousness, self-control (*egkrateia*), and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified, and answered, ‘Go your way for this time, and when it is convenient for me, I will summon you,’” and in Gal. 5:22-23 – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (*egkrateia*). Against such things there is no law.”

Moderation and self-control, as we see in these passages, are important character traits for the Christian. But how do they relate specifically to ministry? They are the positive side of some negative behaviors the Apostle Paul warns against, when writing about qualifications for church ministry. In 1 Tim. 3:1-3 he writes – “This is a faithful saying: if a man seeks the office of an overseer, he desires a good work. The overseer therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, modest, hospitable, good at teaching; not a drinker, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle (*epieikes*), not quarrelsome, not covetous.” The office of overseer is *episkopos*, the equivalent of today’s pastor or bishop. In verse 8 (ISV) Paul gives some qualifications for deacons (*diakonos*) – “Deacons, too, must be serious. They must not be two-faced, addicted to wine, or greedy for money.”⁷ So in these negative phrases we find the opposite of moderation and self-control, thus they can be fairly called qualifications for ministry or *diakonia*.

We have already discussed moderation and self-control in relation to material things and money. Now let us consider these qualities in relation to eating and drinking. The above passages speak out against excessive use of alcohol, as we also find in several other texts: Deut. 21:20-21 places the death sentence on drunkards and gluttons, and Prov. 23:20-21 tells us drunkenness and gluttony lead to laziness and poverty. In the New Testament we read: “But give attention to

yourselves, for fear that your hearts become over-full of the pleasures of food and wine, and the cares of this life, and that day may come on you suddenly, and take you as in a net”⁸ (Lk. 21:34, BBE); “For we have spent enough of our past time doing the desire of the Gentiles, and having walked in lewdness, lusts, drunken binges, orgies, carousings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet. 4:3); “Let us walk properly, as in the day; not in reveling and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and lustful acts, and not in strife and jealousy” (Rom. 13:13); and “Now the works of the flesh are obvious, which are: ... envyings, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19a and 21). Here we see that gluttony (“orgies,” “carousings” or “reveling”) is on the same level as drunkenness, and the last passage cited tells us, “those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” On the same note, greed is on a similar list – “You know that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God, don't you? Stop deceiving yourselves! Sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunks, slanderers, and robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God”⁹ (1 Cor. 6:9-10, ISV). If such people will be excluded from the Kingdom of God, they should most certainly be excluded from ministry (*diakonia*) in the church, if they cannot or will not repent and turn away from these things.

We know of the enormous physical harm caused by gluttony: high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, as well as hip and knee joint failure due to being overweight. Each of these can bring a person to an early grave. Obesity and diabetes, closely related to each other, have reached epidemic proportions in affluent societies today. I have sadly watched how people near and dear to me, as well as people claiming to be in the Lord's work have crippled their bodies or even killed themselves by gluttony. Paul writes in Rom. 16:18 – “For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.” And in Phil. 3:18-19 he writes – “For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, as the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who think about earthly things.” The early church included gluttony in the list of seven deadly sins, right along with drunkenness, murder and adultery, sins for which a person can forfeit his soul. Gluttony = obesity = slow suicide. Christians do not have the right to commit suicide, not even with a knife and fork! The church throughout history has taken a firm stand against drunkenness, but the church today is largely silent about the “socially acceptable” sin of gluttony.

Michael Kanellos, editor at large at CNET News.com, wrote a fascinating column entitled “Killing me softly with salad dressing choices” in his March 12, 2006 blog –

Those who live in North America and Western Europe have more options in terms of food, careers, consumer items and everything else, said Barry Schwartz, Swarthmore professor and author of "Why Less is More" at PC Forum taking place in Carlsbad, Calif. this week. And that's the problem. The bewildering number of choices is paralyzing people with fear, unrealistic expectations, self-blame and regret. As a result, a trip to the electronics store becomes an opportunity to make a decision you could easily regret. The phenomenon is a big contributor of the significant rise in clinical depression, he said.

"Instead of liberating people, it paralyzes them," he said. "When human life was harder, people's expectations were pretty low. Now, it's not clear if anything will exceed expectations." A tour of his own grocery store underscored the mind-numbing degree of choice today, he said. There, he found 175 salad dressings, not including oils and vinegars, and 285 types of cookies. Studies back this up. In a grocery store experiment, a table loaded with 24 types of jams got many visitors, but sales were ten times higher when only six jams were offered.¹⁰

We need to return to the *epieikes*-moderation of the New Testament. The superabundance of food and other material objects (I refuse to call them “goods”) is definitely not good for us physically, psychologically or spiritually. Learn to “Just say no” to advertising hype, trust in the Lord, and be content with a moderate amount of food and other material things. What can we do to overcome overindulgence in food and drink?

First, I suggest praying and fasting: fast from meat, eggs and dairy products on Wednesday and Friday, drink lots of pure, filtered water or real fruit juice (with no sugar added), and devote more time to prayer. Once a month you can fast and pray the entire day on Friday. In Luke 2:37 we read about Anna, “who didn't depart from the temple, worshipping with fastings and petitions night and day.” Those were 24-hour times of fasting and prayer. Pray for restoration of the Body of Christ – including your own body – to the image and likeness of Christ. And pray that Christ will restore the Church to the ministry He practiced and taught His disciples to practice. But don't limit drinking lots of water or fruit juice to Wednesday and Friday only! You should drink about two quarts (two liters) of water or fruit juice every day.

Second, I suggest cleansing your digestive tract every three to six months using a good fiber such as psyllium, flax or bran mixed in a large glass of water or fruit juice along with a colon cleansing pill once a day for seven days. This will remove the sludge and toxins that have

accumulated in your intestines and change the microorganisms there to help you lose weight. You'll not only feel lighter, you will think more clearly and have much more energy! God wants our bodies to be holy: "Abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:22-23). We need to rid our bodies of the evil pollution accumulating in our waste elimination system! It took me a visit to the doctor with abdominal pain to realize I had a problem. He ordered x-rays, blood and urine analyses, and prescribed some pills for acid reflux. Then a week later I ended up in the emergency room with intense back pain, where the doctor there repeated the x-rays, blood and urine analyses, added a CT scan to run up the bill (that's the "technological imperative" – if they have the technology, they must use it in order to pay for the equipment!), and he prescribed me a bottle of laxative. After another week I researched my symptoms on the Internet, and finally realized that I simply needed to thoroughly cleanse my digestive tract. So with \$15 of over-the-counter fiber and colon cleansing pills, in a week the symptoms went away, I felt lighter, was thinking more clearly and had so much energy I could hardly hold myself back!

Third, get at least 20-30 minutes of brisk exercise every day, or 40 minutes of brisk exercise three times a week, raising your heart rate to where it's hard to breathe and talk at the same time. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit: "Don't you know that you are a temple of God, and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for God's temple is holy, which you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). At age 37, while working at a sedentary desk job, I ruptured a disk in my back after foolishly trying to lift too much when building a rock wall for our garden, and was paralyzed for two weeks from pain. I had to learn to walk again with a numb right leg, and I couldn't run or ride my bicycle on bumpy streets any more. By age 62, I couldn't walk more than 15-20 minutes due to increasing numbness in my right leg, so I finally had spinal fusion surgery to correct the problem. Now I do static exercises for 10 minutes every morning to stretch my back and leg muscles. I ride a stationary bicycle for 10 minutes or I take a brisk walk for 20 minutes after doing my static exercises to warm up. I'm trying to restore my body to wholeness!

Fourth, don't abuse your body by depriving it of rest: take one day off out of every seven days, and get seven or eight hours of sleep every night. "Six days shall work be done: but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no manner of work. It

is a Sabbath to Yahweh in all your dwellings” (Lev. 23:3). Jesus told His disciples – “You come apart into a deserted place, and rest awhile” (Mark 6:31). You need to “come apart and rest awhile,” or you’ll simply come apart! You have to give your body time at rest to restore itself. Don’t misuse your body, keep it clean and maintain it properly, so it can serve you – and the Lord – well for many years.

Little needs to be said about the harm caused to the body by the excessive drinking of alcohol: nearly every internal organ can be destroyed by it. But worst of all is the destruction of one’s eternal soul caused by drunkenness as well as gluttony. Those more experienced and proven in the faith should lovingly but firmly instruct younger servants (*diakonos*) to help them overcome these destructive habits if and when they appear, because the purity of the Gospel ministry (*diakonia*) most certainly depends on moderation and self-control.

Endnotes to Chapter 11:

1. *Modern King James Version*, op. cit.
2. Berry, Wendell, *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community*, op. cit., xi.
3. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. *The Message*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
5. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Entire Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
6. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
7. *International Standard Version*, op. cit.
8. *Bible in Basic English*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
9. *International Standard Version*, op. cit.
10. Kanellos, Michael, “Killing me softly with salad dressing choices,” (Future Tech Blog, http://news.com.com/2061-11128_3-6048784.html?part=rss&tag=6048784&subj=news, 2006).

Chapter 12: Ministry as Liberation (*eleutheria*)

Liberation, liberty or freedom – various ways the word *eleutheria* is translated – brings us to a vast semantic field of meanings and related concepts. For example, how does our freedom in Christ relate to God’s predestination of our lives? How does our freedom as citizens of God’s kingdom relate to our responsibilities as citizens of earthly governments? But most importantly, how do I integrate my freedom as a Christian with my being called to ministry (*diakonia*)?

We looked at Rom. 6:14-22 as we were considering ministry as servanthood (*pais*) and bond-service (*douleuo*). In v. 15 Paul asks the rhetorical question, “What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? May it never be!” Grace transforms our desires so that we don’t want to sin, we want to do God’s will. It is not an easy-believism that excuses sin by saying we’re not under the Law of Moses so we can do whatever we please. We also see in this passage that the word “free” is used three times. Paul uses it to form a *chiasm*:

A
“Being made free from sin, you became bondservants of righteousness.” (v. 18)

B
“For when you were servants of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” (v. 20)

C
“What fruit then did you have at that time in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.” (v.21)

D
“But now, being made free from sin, and having become servants of God, you have your fruit of sanctification, and the result of eternal life.” (v. 22)¹

Notice carefully the logic of Paul’s argument here: we are either (A) free from sin and servants of righteousness, or (B) free from righteousness and servants of sin. We have a choice, and if we choose (B) the result is (C) death, but if we choose (A) the result is (D) sanctification and eternal life – thus the X-shaped *chiasm*. There are no other choices available to mankind: as Joshua told the Israelites, “Choose this day whom you will serve!”

The fact is that we all serve someone or something, be it God, family, our country, wealth, career, an ideology or baser things such as sex, alcohol, narcotics, electronic gadgets, or our bellies. We are either servants of God, or servants of sin. Therefore such a thing as absolute liberty does not

exist: philosophers say it is not a “Ding an sich,” a thing unto itself, it is not an absolute self-existing category. We can’t do whatever we want whenever we want to, because we inevitably become enmeshed in, entangled with, or enslaved to whatever we become deeply involved in. The Apostle Paul is saying here that true liberty is the ability to break out of bondage to sin which leads to death, and be liberated to serve God which leads to transformation into Christ’s image and to eternal life. Paul concludes this passage by writing – “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Serve sin, and collect your pay – death; or serve God and receive the free gift – eternal life.

What exactly is liberation, liberty or freedom (*eleutheria*)? *Strong’s Dictionaries* define it as “*freedom* (legitimate or licentious, chiefly moral or ceremonial): - liberty.”¹ Here again we see the choice is between legitimate freedom and illegitimate licentiousness. A couple chapters later, Paul describes in more detail the glory of our final sanctification that is yet to come – “For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty (*eleutheria*) of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20-21). Notice carefully the wording here: it is translated correctly as “the liberty of the glory”² as *Vincent’s Word Studies* tell us, instead of “the glorious liberty” in the KJV. After Christ’s Second Coming, the glory of the children of God will shine forth because we will be free from the tendency toward death in our previous mortal bodies. I have seen how the fear of death holds people, even some Christians, in bondage. Personally, I get thrilled when I think about the opportunity of dying and going into the presence of God! But “the liberty of the glory” also means that we will be free to do, be capable of doing things that we weren’t capable of doing in our mortal bodies. Now we are not free or able to instantly be transported to another place, but in our glorious bodies we will be. We recall that Jesus in His resurrection body could pass through walls, appear and disappear at will. He could travel through time and space instantly. I am not free to do that now, but then I will be!

Remember that when Jesus announced His ministry, He quoted the prophet Isaiah – “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release (*aphesis*) to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to deliver (*aphesis*) those who are crushed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). The word *aphesis* is sometimes translated “liberty” so it falls within the semantic field of *eleutheria*, but it has some additional meanings: “*freedom*; (figuratively)

pardon: - deliverance, forgiveness, liberty, remission”³ according to *Strong’s Dictionaries*. Now let us examine another passage to see how *eleutheria* and *aphesis* are related –

Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, "If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (*eleutheroo*)." They answered him, "We are Abraham's seed, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How do you say, 'You will be made free (*eleutheros*)'?" Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin. A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever. If therefore the Son makes you free (*eleutheroo*), you will be free (*eleutheros*) indeed. (John 8:31-36)

Verse 32 is often quoted out of context – “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” But it is only by remaining in His Word, being faithful to His teaching, that we are truly His disciples. Then and only then can we experience true freedom. But what kind of freedom is Jesus talking about here? It is obvious that the Greek words are derived from the same root as *eleutheria*, but on closer examination we learn that they have rather different meanings. When Jesus said, “The truth will make you free (*eleutheroo*),” He used a word that means “to liberate, that is, (figuratively) to exempt (from moral, ceremonial or mortal liability): - deliver, make free.”⁴ But when the Pharisees (see v. 33) rebutted His claim, they said, “be made free (*eleutheros*)?” They were using a word that means “unrestrained (to go at pleasure), that is, (as a citizen) not a slave (whether freeborn or manumitted), or (generally) exempt (from obligation or liability): - free (man, woman), at liberty.”⁵ So we see that they were thinking on a secular level, about slavery to a master. But Jesus extended the meaning of freedom by saying in effect, “When the Son sets you at liberty from slavery, you will be made exempt from moral, ceremonial or mortal liability.” So Jesus was connecting *eleutheria* to *aphesis*, pardon from sin and its penalty.

We find that St. Paul brings out this point very clearly in Rom. 8:1-2 – “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in union with Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free (*eleutheroo*) from the law of sin and death.” Paul uses the same term that Jesus used, not the word the Pharisees used. They were talking about secular freedom, but Jesus and Paul are talking about spiritual freedom that leads into eternal life. Today people complain about infringements of their freedom and civil rights due to the war on terror, but the best reply I have heard is, “When you’re dead, you don’t have any civil rights.” Likewise, it doesn’t matter when you’re dead eternally if you had secular freedom or were a slave on earth.

St. Paul connects freedom (*eleutheria*) with glory again in 1 Cor. 3:17-18 – “Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (*eleutheria*). But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit.” First, notice the source of liberty: the Spirit of the Lord. Liberty is not a self-existent absolute; it depends on God’s Spirit in us. Note also the verb “are transformed” is present continuous tense, “are being transformed” in Greek and Russian. This is an ongoing process as we walk in the Spirit, Who makes us free from the law of sin and death, and Who gives us true freedom. In the preceding verses of this passage Paul explains that God’s glory appeared but then faded away when the Law was given to Moses. But under the New Covenant, it grows from one degree of glory to another degree of glory, from being free from sin so that we can serve the Lord, to the glorious transformation of our bodies when we see Christ face to face. How does all of this relate to ministry? In v. 9 Paul writes – “For if the service (*diakonia*) of condemnation has glory, the service (*diakonia*) of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.” When we minister doing *diakonia* to the poor, lame, maimed and blind, the glory of Christ shines through, because that is exactly the ministry Jesus Himself performed, taught His disciples to do, and then commanded them to teach others to do the same.

Again in Gal. 5:1-4 Paul links liberty together with grace, and bondage together with law –

Stand firm therefore in the liberty (*eleutheria*) by which Christ has made us free (*eleutheroo*), and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, tell you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. Yes, I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. You are alienated from Christ, you who desire to be justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace.

We must stand firm and constantly resist the pull of the flesh to revert back to a secular, worldly view of freedom: “You can do whatever you want; go ahead and sin so that grace may abound!” This is the pharisaical, hypocritical worldview. Then St. Paul makes a shocking statement: “If you want to be justified by the law, you are alienated from Christ and you have fallen away from grace!” Those are very strong words, but they aren’t mine, they’re from the pen of the Apostle. We can fall away from grace and cut ourselves off from Christ if we twist liberty into legalism or license. How can that be? This is the same Paul who wrote such comforting and assuring words of God’s foreknowledge of us and His predestination for us in Rom. 8:29-30 – “For whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the

firstborn among many brothers. Whom he predestined, those he also called. Whom he called, those he also justified. Whom he justified, those he also glorified.” God, he writes in verses 38-39, will not let anything separate us from His love – “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here we see clearly the free will/predestination dilemma.

Paul shows us both sides of the coin in 2 Tim. 2:10-13 – “Therefore I endure all things for the chosen ones' sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This saying is faithful: ‘For if we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful. He can't deny himself.’” First he mentions the “chosen ones,” God’s elect whom He has predestined from before the beginning of time for salvation and glory. But then Paul talks about the possibility of denying Christ to escape suffering for His sake, which would result in Christ denying us. In other words, Christ will never break His covenant with us, but we have the choice of our own free will to dissolve the covenant by denying Him. This is the most extreme form of faithlessness. A husband or wife may be faithless in marriage, but the marriage covenant remains in force until one of them gets a divorce. Paul writes in v. 13 that Christ will never “file for divorce,” He will never break His covenant with us, He will always remain faithful. John Wesley, who is usually considered to hold a free-will Arminian position, comments – “That is, though some believe not, God will make good all his promises to them that do believe. He cannot deny himself - His word cannot fail.”⁶ So Wesley interprets “we” in these verses to refer to two classes of people, unbelievers and believers, rather than only to believers who later recant.

A more difficult passage for “easy-believism” church people to deal with is Heb. 6:4-9 –

For concerning those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify the Son of God for themselves again, and put him to open shame. For the land which has drunk the rain that comes often on it, and brings forth a crop suitable for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and thistles, it is rejected and near being cursed, whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded of better things for you, and things that accompany salvation, even though we speak like this.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews clearly states that it is possible for a person who has tasted the heavenly gift and partaken of the Holy Spirit to later fall away, in which case the dissolution of the covenant is permanent and cannot be restored, just as God's Word forbids a person to remarry the same partner after getting a divorce from him or her (Deut. 24:1-4). And though the above author closes this passage with the conciliatory words "near being cursed," i.e., not already cursed, and "we are persuaded of better things for you," he has nonetheless posited an extreme resolution for the extreme case of falling away. This was not a nonsense statement or merely a hypothetical case: the author would not have written it if it was a theological impossibility; rather, it was day-to-day reality in the first century A.D. when Christians were tortured and killed if they refused to deny their faith in Christ and burn incense to Caesar.

There are many other passages that support one side or the other of this age-old dilemma about free will versus predestination, but these few will suffice. Both Calvinists and Arminians can trot out their proof texts to advance their own positions, and each will ignore or belittle the other's arguments and proof texts. How can we resolve this dilemma? If humans are to be held morally responsible for their decisions, they must have free will to make those decisions. God cannot punish someone if that person didn't choose to do wrong. On the other hand, God is sovereign and is ultimately in control of everything that happens in the universe. The very concept of a "universe," a unified and coherent system of galaxies, stars, planets, moons and comets makes no sense if there is no intelligent design, which requires an intelligent and omnipotent Designer.

For years in my early Christian life I struggled with these issues. Finally I resolved them in three ways. First, this is a man-made dilemma, one we humans have devised in our pseudo-clever little brains. It is on the order of the question Jesus' disciples asked about the end times that Jesus answered by saying that the angels of heaven and even the Son of Man (at least while in human flesh) did not know, or the question they asked after His resurrection about whether He would now restore the kingdom to Israel and He replied – "It's none of your business to know," or the silly question whether God can make a rock so heavy He can't lift it. Such meaningless word games are simply the wrong questions to ask. My philosophy professor in university said that you can't get the right answer if you ask the wrong question. Recall in our discussion of *agape*-love that after His resurrection Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love Me?" That is the right question to ask. Do you really love Jesus Christ? When Jesus then hinted to Peter how he would die, Peter looked over at the disciple John and asked, "What about him, Lord?" Jesus

replied, “That’s none of your business, you follow Me.” So the answer that became clear to me in my university years was this: if I really love Jesus Christ, I must follow Him very closely. Imagine a fiancée asking her betrothed, “When we get married, how many other men can I see and how far can I go with them before you divorce me?” We are the bride of Christ, and should never pose such a stupid question! I should not fill my head or trouble my heart with worrying about someone else being hypocritical or denying Christ, or hypothetical cases and trick questions such as “How close can I come to denying the faith before I lose my salvation?” Such a foolish question is similar to a little boy trying to see how close he can come to the edge of a cliff without falling over. Any loving parent will say to a child – “Keep away from the edge of that cliff, stay here by me and hold on to my hand!”

My second metaphor to resolve the free will / predestination dilemma is how computer operating systems work. Any computer operating system worthy of the name reserves for itself a certain set of instructions or commands that control the hardware (random access memory, hard disk, monitor, keyboard, etc.). These are called supervisor-level instructions. All other instructions are available for application programs to use. By this definition MS-DOS, which let application programs control the hardware, was not a real operating system; it was just a file system organizer and program launcher. A real operating system gives application programs a wide range of freedom to do whatever they want to do, except to run reserved instructions. If one tries it, the operating system terminates that application program. This metaphor illustrates how God grants us a wide range of freedom, from trivial choices such as what color socks to wear today, to more serious choices like what major field to study in university or what profession to select, to most consequential choices such as whether and whom to marry, or whether to believe in Christ. Some decisions have little or no consequences: if I wear a brown sock and a black sock no one may ever notice, and if they do they probably won’t care. But if I choose a course of studies that I can’t handle or a profession that goes nowhere, I have a real problem. Or if I marry a person who is unfaithful or simply wanted to use me for a ticket to America, it can make my whole life miserable. But if I decide to chase after wine, women or wealth and not entrust my life to Christ, I have forfeited my eternal soul. God’s sovereignty trumps human liberty, as the case of Esther illustrates:

Then Mordecai asked them to answer Esther, "Don't think to yourself that you will escape in the king's house any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will

perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther asked them to answer Mordecai, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:13-16)

God had placed Esther in a position of great status, but she had to make a decision: "Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" If she were to make the wrong decision in order to try saving her own life, Mordecai reminds her: "For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish." The only right choice she had was to go before the king and plead for mercy, even at the risk of his wrath. Thankfully our heavenly King is not wrathful and arbitrary! If, however, we refuse to do His will, He will bring "relief and deliverance" for perishing sinners, for the widows, orphans, poor, maimed, lame and blind, "from another place" but we will be punished or may even perish for our disobedience.

The third way I resolved this dilemma is as follows: Einstein struggled with a similar dilemma, the nature of light – is it matter, or is it energy? If a scientist sets up an experiment to prove that light is matter, the results of this experiment show that light is indeed matter. Conversely, if a scientist sets up an experiment to prove that light is energy, the results of that experiment show that light is indeed energy. Yet, light obviously can't be two different things at the same time, and it is absurd to imagine that light flip-flops back and forth between being matter and energy. How did Einstein resolve this dilemma? In his theory of relativity, he showed that it depends upon the point of view of the observer. Perhaps a future "Unified Field Theory" will better explain this phenomenon, but for now that is the best theory physicists have arrived at.

To apply this to our dilemma, it depends on the point of view of the observer, in this case, God or humans. From God's point of view (we theorize, because we cannot possibly see things from His viewpoint) He foreknows the end from the beginning because He stands outside of time. And being omnipotent, He is perfectly able to arrange the course of events that to us appear "random" and "by chance" so that they all work together for the good of those He has chosen and loves, His elect. From our point of view, however, we are confronted with moral choices for which we do not know the outcomes, and we must make decisions or else the choice will be lost. Not to decide is to decide. If we put off a decision until it is too late, we have decided by default. We inherently know that some choices have good consequences and others have bad consequences,

so we are aware of the moral nature of our choices. We cannot know any other point of view, being finite creatures located in space and time. We can only imagine God's point of view. We read in Heb. 3:14 – "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end." Notice the perfect tense of the verb "have become," and then the "if" condition: "if we hold fast... to the end." The paradox here is that an event in the past is conditional upon an event in the future! From God's point of view we already partake of Christ, it's a done deal. But from our point of view it is conditional upon our holding fast to the end.

We have no right to ever say that God is unfair. The true God is not "Yin-Yang," a combination of light and darkness; He is only light with no mixture of darkness (James 1:17; 1 John 1:5). God is righteous when He judges us according to the moral law of human freedom and the responsibility it implies. The Apostle James, very likely the brother of our Lord Jesus, describes this "law of liberty" and makes clear that we will be judged for what we do with what we believe, not just for what we believe. He writes –

So speak, and so do, as men who are to be judged by a law of freedom (*eleutheria*). For judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled;" and yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. (James 2:12-17)

Faith that doesn't work is dead faith, not saving faith. The good works that James describes here and in ch. 1:22-27 are the kind of *diakonia* that Jesus and His disciples performed, and what they taught the next generation of disciples to do. Thus, a living, saving faith must do *diakonia*.

The last aspect of freedom I think must be considered here is that of the Christian's freedom and responsibility in human society. Our freedom in Christ doesn't grant us carte-blanc to break the laws of civil society. We have already looked at parts of Rom. 12, which deals with our sanctification and spiritual gifts. But Paul in Rom. 12:14 turns to the topic of the Christian in society, and in Rom. 13:1-7 Paul writes –

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Do you

desire to have no fear of the authority? Do that which is good, and you will have praise from the same, for he is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn't bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil. Therefore you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For this reason you also pay taxes, for they are servants of God's service, attending continually on this very thing. Give therefore to everyone what you owe: taxes to whom taxes are due; customs to whom customs; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor.

So in the old USSR, Communist persecutors would taunt Christian leaders with this passage, saying that it commands Christians to obey the higher authorities, therefore they must tell who is attending church or who is bringing Bibles into the country. How would we respond in such a situation? This isn't just a hypothetical question, but rather one that was put to believers in our lifetimes and could well be put to us. I would ask my interrogator – “Do you think Paul's argument is logical and correct?” He must answer “Yes” because he just used Paul's argument on me. Then I would say, “You agree. Good! Then you must also agree that your authority is from God, and you should be God's servant to me for good.” The authorities overstep their realm of authority when they rebel against God or do evil. But this does not give Christians an excuse to break traffic laws, not pay taxes, or be disrespectful toward those who deserve our respect.

Let us compare this with 2 Cor. 10:3-6, where St. Paul relates our life in society to our life in the Body of Christ, the church –

For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience will be made full.

The tools or “weapons” we as Christians should use are spiritual, not fleshly: we use *diakonia*, persuasive preaching and teaching to tear down false worldviews that have exalted themselves against the existence of God and the idea that we can know God personally. One false worldview is the “democratic” notion that the majority is right. If we examine the idea logically, the only truism about the majority is that it is bigger than the minority, and in fact, the majority is quite often wrong – “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; neither shall you testify in court to side with a multitude to pervert justice” (Ex. 23:2). Only God is always right. If humanity were to take a vote on the existence of God and the majority came up with the decision that God doesn't exist, would God be obliged to go out of existence? How absurd! No, “let God be found true, but

every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). If the majority were to vote in favor of euthanasia, would it be right to kill off all the elderly, handicapped and otherwise unproductive people? If the majority of Philistines were to vote for a government run by lunatic murderers who have vowed to eradicate the people of Israel, does the “will of the majority” mean this would be legitimate and right? How foolish! And yet many people buy into this false worldview. When modern democracy is cut off from its Judeo-Christian ethical foundations, it becomes a rudderless ship cast adrift, swerving between anarchy and tyranny, as current events amply demonstrate.

The church ought to expect a higher level of morality from its members than from society in general, and should discipline its members by first correcting them privately, then rebuking them publicly in the congregation, then excluding errant members from ministry, then excluding them from communion, then a full and total exclusion from the Body of Christ. But the church may not use the powers of the state, “the sword,” to force its higher morality upon society, nor may the state use the church’s sanction of eternal anathemas to secure its secular domain. Otherwise the lines become blurred, the church becomes worldly and the world becomes “churchy,” with a pseudo-Christian veneer of propriety over its crass immorality. We shouldn’t confuse Christian ethics with society’s absence of ethics or with the state’s laws and sanctions. If society approves of adultery, abortion, euthanasia, homosexual acts, gluttony or drunkenness, it doesn’t mean the church must adopt the same low standards of conduct. “For you, brothers, were called to freedom (*eleutheria*). Only do not turn your freedom (*eleutheria*) into an opportunity to gratify your flesh, but through love (*agape*) make it your habit to serve (*douleuo*) one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Endnotes to Chapter 12:

1. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *Vincent’s Word Studies*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. *John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

Chapter 13: Ministry as Wholeness (*teleiosis*) and Fullness (*pleroma*)

The Old Testament gives us glimpses into God's glory, but as Heb. 7:11 tells us, the Levitical priesthood had not reached perfection – “Now if there was perfection (*teleiosis*) through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people have received the law), what further need was there for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be called after the order of Aaron?” Chapters 7-10 of Hebrews explain in great detail the Old Covenant's shortcomings. Christ, however, introduces the more perfect priesthood – “But Christ having come as a high priest of the coming good things, through the greater and more perfect (*teleios*) tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation” (Heb. 9:11). As Elizabeth said to Mary – “Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment (*teleiosis*) of the things which have been spoken to her from the Lord!” (Luke 1:45) Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, is indeed the perfection and fulfillment of the Old Testament's hopes and partially fulfilled promises!

Strong's Dictionaries define *teleiosis* as “completion, perfection, performance” and the adjective *teleios* as “complete (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); of full age, man, perfect.”¹ The concept of *teleiosis* relates to *diakonia*-ministry in the passage that is the central focus of this work, Eph. 4:12-13 (ESV) – “to equip the saints for the work of ministry (*diakonia*), for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature (*teleios*) manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness (*pleroma*) of Christ.”² There is one goal, as we see here, beyond that of “building up the body of Christ,” and that is for each and every Christian to attain wholeness, completion, perfection and maturity in Christ, and fullness in Him.

In philosophy the concept of cause is divided into two parts: “Ontology” which investigates and explains the nature and essence of all beings, their qualities and attributes, and “Teleology” which deals with the final causes of things. The Greek root of teleology is *teleiosis*, the German equivalent is “Ziel” and the Russian is “tsiel,” both meaning “goal.” All of these *teleiosis*-related words point to the idea of purpose or meaning. Thus we see that the purpose driven church is the ministry driven church that is aiming toward wholeness and perfection of each believer. The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of this in the Sermon on the Mount – “Therefore you shall be perfect (*teleios*), just as your Father in heaven is perfect (*teleios*)” (Mat. 5:48).

The Apostle John's vision of the heavenly Jerusalem encompasses this restoration to wholeness: "He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more. The first things have passed away. He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new'" (Rev. 21:4-5a). All illness, crying, death, mourning and pain pass away when Christ makes all things new. Notice the tense of the verb: "I am making all things new." This process of restoration to wholeness has already begun!

And the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Cor. 3:12-18 (ISV) –

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we speak with great boldness, not like Moses, who kept covering his face with a veil to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of what was fading away. However, their minds were hardened, for to this day the same veil is still there when they read the old covenant. Only in union with Christ is that veil removed. Yet even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Lord's Spirit is, there is freedom. As all of us reflect the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, we are being transformed into the same image with ever-increasing glory by the Lord's Spirit.³

In v. 18 we find again the continual present action of the Holy Spirit restoring and transforming us into the image of Christ. But it is important to be aware of a potential obstacle to wholeness: social pressure, as we see in vv. 12-13 – "...we speak with great boldness, not like Moses, who kept covering his face...." Why did Moses put a veil on his face? It wasn't because the glory was fading, but because the Israelites told him they couldn't stand to look at the glory (Ex. 34:30-35). People around us say, "Don't be a religious fanatic," and soon we internalize this message so that it becomes self-talk: we inhibit ourselves from striving toward wholeness. Thus, many of the limitations that we feel are inhibitions we have placed on ourselves: "People just don't do that," or "God doesn't act in that way anymore," or the seven last words of the church – "We've never done it that way before." We as disciples of Jesus, however, have such a glorious future hope that we can break out of these false paradigms, and speak and act with great boldness!

The Apostle Peter also writes that it is God's glory and virtue "by which he has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Pet. 1:4).

What a great comfort to the maimed, the lame and the blind as we minister *diakonia* to them! We know that our earthly suffering is not senseless and pointless, but rather it brings us toward perfection and sanctification: this is comforting to the hurting soul – “May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes. 5:23). True *diakonia* is ministering the whole Gospel to the whole person: “spirit, soul, and body,” aimed at restoring people to wholeness.

Along with wholeness (*teleiosis*), fullness is our goal: to attain “to the measure of the stature of the fullness (*pleroma*) of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). In Christ, history reached “the fullness (*pleroma*) of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in Him” (Eph. 1:10). And God the Father “gave Him [Christ] to be head over all things for the Church, which is His body, the fullness (*pleroma*) of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22b-23). Only in the Church, not as isolated individuals, can we experience the fullness of Christ. St. Paul then prays that “you” (plural, the church in Ephesus) will “know [experience] Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness (*pleroma*) of God” (Eph. 3:19). This amazing promise of experiencing “the fullness (*pleroma*) of God” can only be fulfilled when we are members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

But there is a price to pay for this wholeness and fullness. If we cling to material things we will never achieve wholeness and perfection, as the story of the rich young ruler explains – “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect (*teleios*), go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions” (Mat. 19:21).

Another aspect of the price to pay for wholeness and fullness is found in chapter 12 of the letter to the Hebrews. In the first two verses the author encourages us to “keep running with endurance the race set before us”⁴ (ISV) as we keep our eyes on Jesus. Then the author tells us that even Jesus learned obedience through suffering and being disciplined – “*paideuo*” which means to “teach, instruct, train up, discipline, punish.” So we also must accept discipline as God’s way of training up His children, bringing them to maturity. In the Russian Synodal Translation these verses use “punish” for every instance of *paideuo* in this passage, which lends a much harsher meaning to this text. Our *Agape-Biblia* revision of the RST uses all of the meanings of *paideuo*, “teach, instruct, train up, discipline, punish,” because each meaning fits in its given context. But

then we come to the portion on holiness, restoration to wholeness, and sanctification in verses 10-11, where it states that God disciplines us “for our good, so that we may share in his holiness.” The word “holiness” is *hagiotēs*, which refers to the final state of perfection and sanctity that we will enjoy with God in heaven. This is ultimate wholeness! But to reach that goal requires training and discipline, as we see in verses 12-14 (ISV) – “Therefore, strengthen your tired arms and your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not become worse but rather be healed (*sodzo*). Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”⁵ This describes specific actions to take to attain wholeness: using strength-building exercises to overcome weakness and muscle atrophy due to lack of use, contractures from a shoulder, or elbow or knee remaining too long in one position, and using means to help a person walk straight so that he can be healed, made whole. The next verse mentions “holiness” again, but it is *hagiasmos*, not *hagiotēs*, and would be better translated “sanctification” or the day-to-day pursuit of becoming holy, a work-in-process. So here we have practical advice for physical wholeness sandwiched between two instructions on spiritual wholeness, which is holiness!

How then can we attain wholeness and perfection? Recall what we found in 1 John 3:16-18 when we were considering *agape*-love: if we see our brother in need, we must not ignore him because that is in reality hating him. Rather we must open our heart of compassion to him and perform *diakonia*-ministry for him, because this is what genuine *agape*-love does. In the next chapter the Apostle John writes –

In this love has been made perfect (*teleioo*) among us, that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment, because as he is, even so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect (*teleios*) love casts out fear, because fear has punishment. He who fears is not made perfect (*teleioo*) in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother (1 John 4:17-21).

When we operate on the level of punishment instead of love, we are operating on the level of law. Punishment need not be enacted; its utility is based on the fear of punishment. If parents renounce the use of punishment (spankings), the child will soon realize that he can do anything and get away with it. When that child grows up, the only hope is that the law, the police will restrain him behind bars for a less serious crime before he kills someone! He hasn't learned to

fear the threat of punishment. I don't advise that parents should use physical punishment often, but it must be kept in reserve, in the background. In order to raise a child to maturity (*teleiosis*), parents must lead him through the stage of law before he is able to understand love. God loved the world so much that He gave His Son to take the punishment for our sins. This implies that the sinful nature of humanity, including our children, is a real problem! Paul writes in Gal. 3:24-25 (KJV) – “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”⁶ The law was a necessary stage in the development of human society before Christ could appear on the world stage, and law is therefore a necessary stage in every child's development.

Children need teachers or tutors because they have not yet internalized the disciplines of study. But law is only a “schoolmaster” to bring us to faith in Christ, which means to believe in and to accept the gift of God, eternal life. Only then can we begin the journey to full maturity (*teleiosis*), selfless, perfect (*teleios*) love that isn't based on profit-and-loss or on reward-and-punishment. Genuine, mature love is not a profit-based exchange of goods and services. Because I truly love my wife I will love her and be faithful to her when she is ill, when she grows old and isn't the same pretty twenty-one year-old person as when we met. I will love her for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. Why? Because that's just what love is!

A beautiful example of wholeness, although not using the word *teleiosis*, is when Jesus returned to land after calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee – “And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were perfectly whole”⁷ (Mat. 14:35-36, KJV). The King James Version is more accurate here, because the Greek word for “perfectly whole” is *diasodzo*, literally, “through” (*dia*) plus “heal-and-save.” Wholeness operates on the same two levels, physical and spiritual, as *soteria*, healing and salvation. Another example is in Acts 14:9-10, when Paul met a man who was crippled from birth – “He was listening to Paul speaking, who, fastening eyes on him, and seeing that he had faith to be made whole (*sodzo*), said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet!" He leaped up and walked.” From all of this we see that the *diakonia*-ministry of Jesus and the Apostles involves bringing people to physical and spiritual wholeness.

We should keep in mind, however, that we all live in “earthen vessels,” clay pots that some day will crack or break. Consider the demographics: western churches are “graying” faster than the general population, which means that in a few decades there will be a significant decline both in membership and in the total number of churches, unless we devise a strategy to better utilize our accumulated resources of life experience, wisdom and wealth. We can turn this trend around and restore the church to wholeness and growth if we boldly step out and adopt this new strategy.

There is much more that could be said about restoring people to wholeness and fullness. My wife, who holds an R.N. and B.S. in nursing and an M.S. in rehabilitation psychology, is a specialist in post-trauma and vocational rehabilitation, and has developed a six-semester interactive program entitled “Practical Ministries” on the fundamentals of rehabilitation, covering the spiritual, psychological, medical and vocational aspects for children, working-age adults and elderly people. It has recently been translated into Chinese and published. You can take it as an online course at www.agape-biblia.org/index04.htm in English and in Russian, and we also intend to publish it in Russian as a 900-page book. Take the course: learn to do practical ministries!

We begin this ministry by working with disabled people in their homes, rehabilitating them and restoring them to wholeness, both physically and spiritually. We pray with them and read the Bible to them. Then others among their family and friends become interested, and we can bring them to church. This is preparing the soil, earning their trust and learning if we can trust them. But it is just the beginning, as we will see next.

Endnotes to Chapter 13:

1. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *English Standard Version*, op. cit.
3. *International Standard Version*, op. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. *King James Bible*, op. cit.
7. Ibid.

Chapter 14: Ministry as Edification (*oikodome*)

Our goal is wholeness, but how do we get there? The answer is edification, and the central passage concerning edification (*oikodome*) is Ephesians chapter 4, which directly links ministry (*diakonia*) with edification. The *Good News Bible* makes very clear in v. 12 what the purpose is for God giving various kinds of leadership gifts: “He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service (*diakonia*), in order to build up (*oikodome*) the body of Christ.”¹ The purpose for doing ministry (*diakonia*) is in order to build up the Church, the Body of Christ! The word “edification” seems rather abstract and lofty, but actually has a very concrete meaning: according to *Strong's Dictionaries* it is “*architecture*, that is, (concretely) a *structure*; figuratively *confirmation*: building, edify (-ication, -ing)”² as when an architect plans and builds an edifice. What are your design plans for using *diakonia* in order to make the church grow?

As we will see, this edification or building up of the Body of Christ is both quantitative and qualitative. Paul writes – “Under his [Christ's] control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up (*oikodomeo*) through love”³ (v. 16, GNB). In both of these verses we notice that the church grows and is built up when all of God's people, the saints, do their works of *diakonia*. The third place in this text that mentions *oikodomeo* is v. 29 (GNB) – “Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up (*oikodomeo*) and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you.”⁴ This is qualitative church growth, literally “bringing grace to those who hear.” This doesn't mean using sugar-coated words to avoid dealing with real problems, but rather “speaking truth in love, [so that] we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, Christ” (v. 15). The way that we speak the truth is as important as the truth we speak! As we notice in v. 15, the ultimate goal of edification (*oikodome*) is wholeness, maturity, growing up into the image and likeness of Christ. Maturity means being able to take care of oneself, to carry one's own burdens. But as Paul writes in Gal. 6:1-5, getting there requires mutual help –

Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man thinks himself to be

something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each man test his own work, and then he will take pride in himself and not in his neighbor. For each man will bear his own burden.

When we rehabilitate a person from an illness, injury or from addiction to carbohydrates, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, drugs, sex, computer games, etc., we must be careful to build up (*oikodomeo*) that person by using loving but firm and true words and actions. Being rough verbally in psychological rehabilitation can repel the person and is often a projection of our own guilt onto the other person. Also, being rough in physical rehabilitation can injure that person and ourselves. The correct positioning of one's own body when lifting another person can avoid back and shoulder injuries to the one doing the lifting. Likewise, the position of our body – our body language – sets the tone and communicates our message at least as much as our words do. The goal of all this is to enable the other person to “bear his own burden,” to become a mature, responsible member of the church and of society in general.

It becomes evident that the Apostles clearly understood and made use of the dual meaning of “edify” (*oikodomeo*) and “edification” (*oikodome*) as we look at several texts. First, let us look at Mat. 16:16 and 18 (ISV) – “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!’ ... I tell you that you are Peter, and it is on this rock that I will build (*oikodomeo*) my church, and the powers of hell will not conquer it.”⁵ Peter (*petros*, a little piece of rock) confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and this is the *petra*, the massive foundation stone on which Christ will build His church (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6). Thus Matthew combines both the concrete and figurative meanings by referring to “rock” and “church” in the same sentence.

Luke explains that the “rock” is Christ’s teaching – “Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things which I say? Everyone who comes to me, and hears my words, and does them, I will show you who he is like.” It is extremely important to understand this: the point is not just to listen to sermons or study the Bible; it is to do what Jesus taught us to do. Jesus continues –

He is like a man building (*oikodomeo*) a house, who dug and went deep, and laid a foundation on a rock (*petra*). When a flood arose, the stream broke against that house, and could not shake it, because it was founded on the rock. But he who hears, and doesn't do, is like a man who built (*oikodomeo*) a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream broke, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:46-49).

When we as co-laborers with Christ build His church on the rock by confessing Him before the world as the Son of God, and by doing what Jesus Christ taught His disciples to do – *diakonia*, practical ministry to the poor, lame, maimed and blind, that church will stand! Church growth fads and techniques will wither and fade, but the church that is built (*oikodomeo*) on this rock of confessing Christ and doing *diakonia* will not be shaken.

Later, Luke chapter 14 records Jesus' call to discipleship that includes the risk of forsaking father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, then in v. 28 Jesus says – “For which of you, desiring to build (*oikodomeo*) a tower, doesn't first sit down and count the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it?” This teaching concludes with Jesus' call to renounce our possessions if we want to be His disciples (v. 33). So the concrete meaning of building a tower is an analogy of building our lives on Christ and following Him regardless of the cost.

The structure itself isn't the most important thing, as we see in Mark 13:1-2 – “As he went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Teacher, see what kind of stones and what kind of buildings (*oikodome*)!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings (*oikodome*)? There will not be left here one stone on another, which will not be thrown down.’” Recall what Rick Warren wrote – “Winston Churchill once said, ‘We shape our buildings, and then they shape us.’ Too often a congregation is so anxious to have a nice building that the members spend more than they can afford. Paying for and maintaining the building becomes the biggest budget item. Funds needed to operate ministries must be diverted to pay the mortgage, and the actual ministry of the church suffers. The tail ends up wagging the dog.”⁶ The edifice complex that seemed so glorious when the congregation held the first worship service in it later may become a boat anchor that pulls the congregation down from greater heights it might have reached with a more purposeful design. What is that purposeful design? The ministry driven church building should be designed specifically for the kind of *diakonia*-ministry that Jesus and His disciples did.

Many churches today have a fine foundation, but it seems as if they are still holding all of their worship services and Sunday school classes on the foundation, in the basement –

For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's farming, God's building (*oikodome*). According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder (*architekton*) I laid a foundation, and another builds on it. But let each man be careful how

he builds on (*epoikodomeo*) it. For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on (*epoikodomeo*) the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stubble; each man's work will be revealed. For the Day will declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself will test what sort of work each man's work is. If any man's work remains which he built on (*epoikodomeo*) it, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, but as through fire (1 Cor. 3:9-15).

By this I mean that they preach the Gospel of salvation only through faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only foundation on which the true Church can be built! They preach Christ, they teach their children about Jesus, they witness in public and to their friends and acquaintances, and they pass out millions of tracts and thousands of New Testaments. All this is very commendable, but we must be careful not to always live in the basement! Remember what Jesus said about sticking a candle under the bed or under a bushel basket: “Don’t do that! Put it up high on a candlestick so that the light shines all around, then people will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven!” The structure of the church building should be designed specifically for good works.

One more point on this passage: the “gold, silver and costly stones” are the good works of *diakonia*-ministry. If you design your church building to do *diakonia*, you’ll receive a reward, but if you pour your capital resources and invest your time merely in stained glass, gothic spires and ding-a-ling handbell choirs, all of that will burn on the Day of Judgment, it’s just “wood, hay and stubble,” expensive kindling wood. You’ll receive no reward; you may be saved, but with the smell of smoke on your white robe of Christ’s righteousness.

In Rom. 2:5-10 the Apostle Paul tells us that our good works, not just belonging to the right church or the right race, are also a determining factor in whether or not we get to heaven –

But according to your hardness and unrepentant heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, revelation, and of the righteous judgment of God; who “will pay back to everyone according to their works,” to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those who are self-seeking, and don't obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, will be wrath and indignation, oppression and anguish, on every soul of man who works evil, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. But glory, honor, and peace go to every man who works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Keep in mind that any earthly temple is just a small, weak reflection of God’s temple in heaven – “For we know that if the earthly house (*oika*) of our tent is dissolved, we have a building

(*oikodome*) from God, a house (*oika*) not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens”⁷ (2 Cor. 5:1, ASV). It must never become the central focus of our attention; it is just a temporary tool to do the job. Our earthly buildings will burn, our physical bodies will be dissolved, but our *diakonia* will last forever. Paul writes in Eph. 2:19-22 that the church, the Body of Christ, should be a place where strangers and outcasts are welcomed and feel at home –

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household (*oikeios*) of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building (*oikodome*), fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together (*sunoi kodomeo*) for a habitation of God in the Spirit.

The design of our ministry building should be accessible to the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind, which means that the apartments are financially within reach, all doorways are one meter (three feet) wide and without thresholds; there should be a ramp of no greater than 1:12 slope between floors (ramps are better than elevators because they help wheelchair-bound people get exercise and thus be healthier and more independent); all halls and rooms including bathrooms must have 1.5 meters (five feet) of free floor space at all places where a wheelchair might make a turn; and all shower stalls must have a minimal “lip” on the floor: no bathtubs.

What will be the result when we structure our ministry upon that of Jesus and His disciples? When we build up the Body of Christ in this way, the church multiplies! We read in Acts 9:31 (ISV) – “So the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace. As it continued to be built up (*oikodomeo*) and to live in the fear of the Lord, it kept increasing in numbers through the encouragement of the Holy Spirit.”⁸ What then should we do? “So then, let us follow after things which make for peace, and things by which we may build (*oikodomeo*) one another up” (Rom. 14:19). Specifically, we must make allowances for those who are weak, to build them up: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, to be building (*oikodomeo*) him up” (Rom. 15:1-2).

How many church buildings or ministry centers are specifically designed to “bear the weaknesses of the weak”? Yes, traditional buildings let you hold worship services, and that is all fine and good, but do they build up the weak? “‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are profitable. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things build (*oikodomeo*) up” (1 Cor. 10:23). The purpose of the building isn’t the structure itself, rather – “You also, as living stones,

are built (*oikodomeo*) up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). How can a church building provide for ministry that builds up the weak, and at the same time virtually pay for itself?

Our two-story design as shown includes 32 wheelchair-accessible apartments, on the second floor 16 apartments with a "loft", on the first floor a 54 ft. by 54 ft. (2916 ft.²) common area, three rooms for the altar, the deacon and the priest, and a sacristy (1296 ft.²); on the second floor a 1548 ft.² balcony and two large rooms (1080 ft.²); and a 24 ft. by 30 ft. (720 ft.²) hall in the “loft.” Because the building is wheelchair-accessible there are no steps leading into it, therefore the plot must be landscaped so that water flows away from the building. The living rooms of all the units can also be used for Sunday School classrooms or small group meetings. But most importantly, the design expresses the purpose of the ministry driven church where every member is a minister. It lets the church focus on ministering to people, not on struggling to maintain a budget-breaking building.

Other people can be members of this church and not of its “housing cooperative,” but the residents of this cooperative will be members that requires all adult residents of sound mind to affirm the doctrines and practices of the church. This guarantees the building’s perpetual Christian character by avoiding the problem of unbelievers in the second generation inheriting the units. A company that has built twenty-five such housing cooperatives in the Midwest U.S. for senior citizens, Realife, Inc., takes a similar approach. Here is what their website says –

What is a Housing Cooperative?

Housing cooperatives are a form of multifamily homeownership. Shareholders or tenants join together to form a not-for-profit cooperative corporation which owns the building in which they live.

Residents buy a share (membership) in the co-op, but the cooperative owns the building, land, and any common areas. Residents are entitled to live in a housing unit as part of their membership benefits. Members pay a fixed amount each month that covers basic expenses, including mortgage, property taxes, and more. As owners, members exercise control over their housing situation by electing a board of directors made up of other residents. This varies from a condominium or town home, where residents each own their individual housing units and are responsible for their own mortgage.

What are the Advantages?

Ownership: Members actually own the cooperative through their share ownership of the not-for-profit cooperative corporation; there is no equity investor or landlord.

Control: Residents govern the cooperative with assistance from the managing agent.

Cost of Operation: Occupancy charges are equal to only the actual cost of owning and operating the property. In a rental, rent generally goes up faster than actual costs because most landlords are in business to make a profit.

Individuality: Initial members are able to customize their dwelling units, including a choice of floor coverings, cabinet colors, and various structural changes.

Homeowner Tax Advantages: Mortgage interest and real estate taxes are tax deductible in a housing cooperative.

Equity Growth Potential: In a Realife Cooperative, members earn limited equity on their unit based on the amount of time they live in their home. The earning of limited equity keeps it affordable for the first members and future members.

Overall Value: Expenses in a cooperative are spread across the entire membership proportionately, making the cost of living generally lower than a comparable single-family home.

Three Steps to Your Cooperative Home

1. Reservation: By making a \$200 refundable deposit, you are assigned a reservation number. This determines the order we follow with home selection.

2. Subscription: This is the home selection process. It involves unit selection (including type and location in the building) as well as a review of the costs associated with membership in the cooperative (share price and monthly fee). There is an \$800 deposit that is required at this time to reserve the home you have selected.

3. Share Collection: We collect the shares prior to construction. This is similar to a down payment on a single family home. We are required to collect the shares before we begin construction in return for the FHA insurance on the mortgage. There is only one mortgage on the property and it is held by the cooperative.⁹

There are four stages needed to start such a housing cooperative: **First**, train a team of *diakonia*-ministers to visit and care for local disabled people in their homes. **Second**, invite their relatives and friends to come to the home of these disabled people to listen to what the Bible says about caring for the poor, lame, maimed and blind: they already know what you're doing, you just need to identify why you're doing it and they will believe! **Third**, when you have three or four of these home groups going (it may take a couple years to get to know and trust each other, so be patient!), introduce them to the idea of a housing cooperative. If you dump this idea on them before you've won their trust you could alienate them, and you need to be able to trust their sincerity as well. **Fourth**, when enough people are interested you will incorporate a non-profit housing cooperative, locate a piece of land and follow the three steps above: reservation, subscription and share collection. As you can see, this differs little from conventional church-planting, but it has the added plus of real, hands-on ministry integrated into it right from the start.

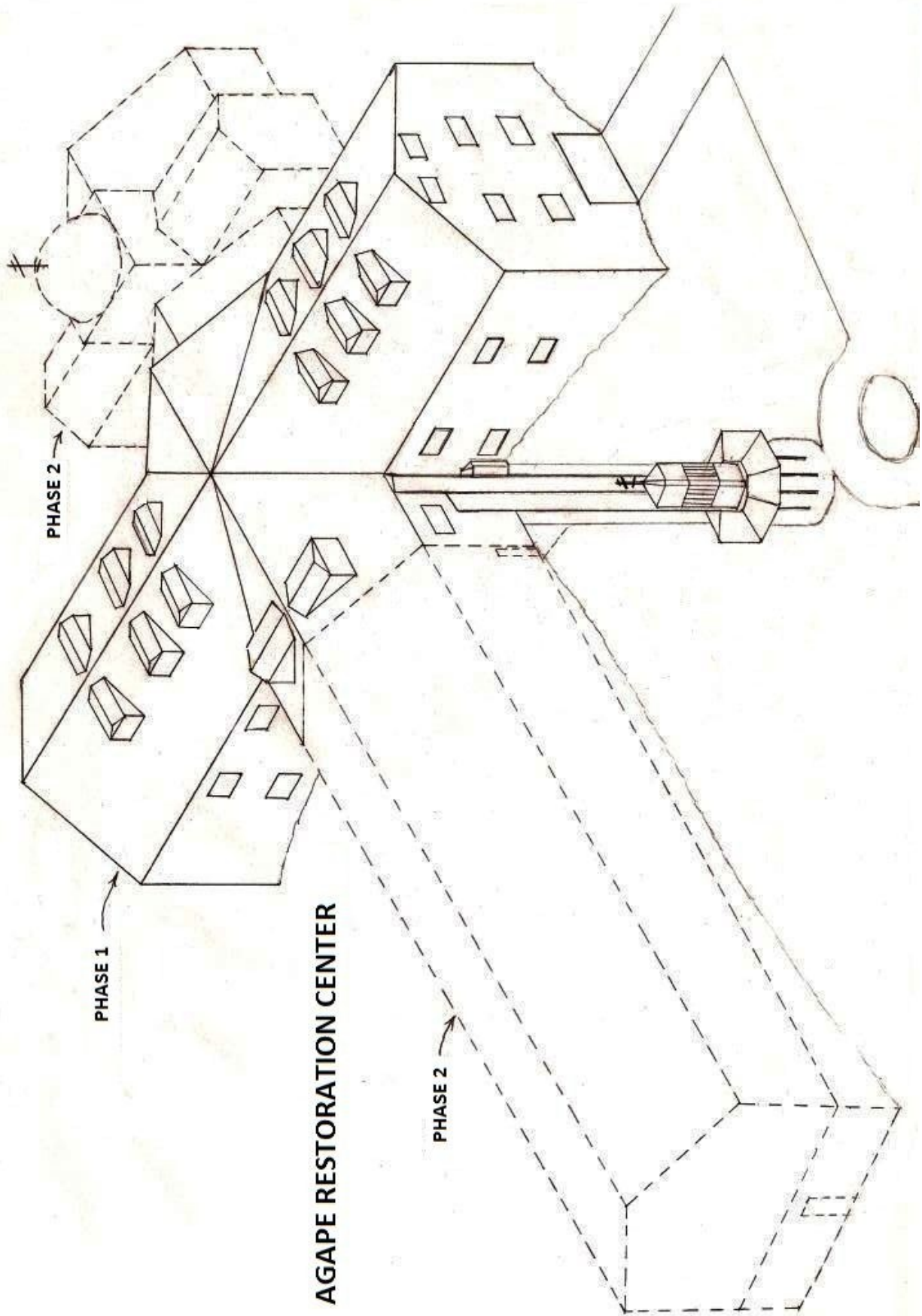
The cooperative will encourage twelve to twenty physically healthy families with an adopted or foster child to live in the center, along with twelve to twenty units for elderly or handicapped people and twelve to twenty units for trained *diakonia*-ministers. The larger church body must

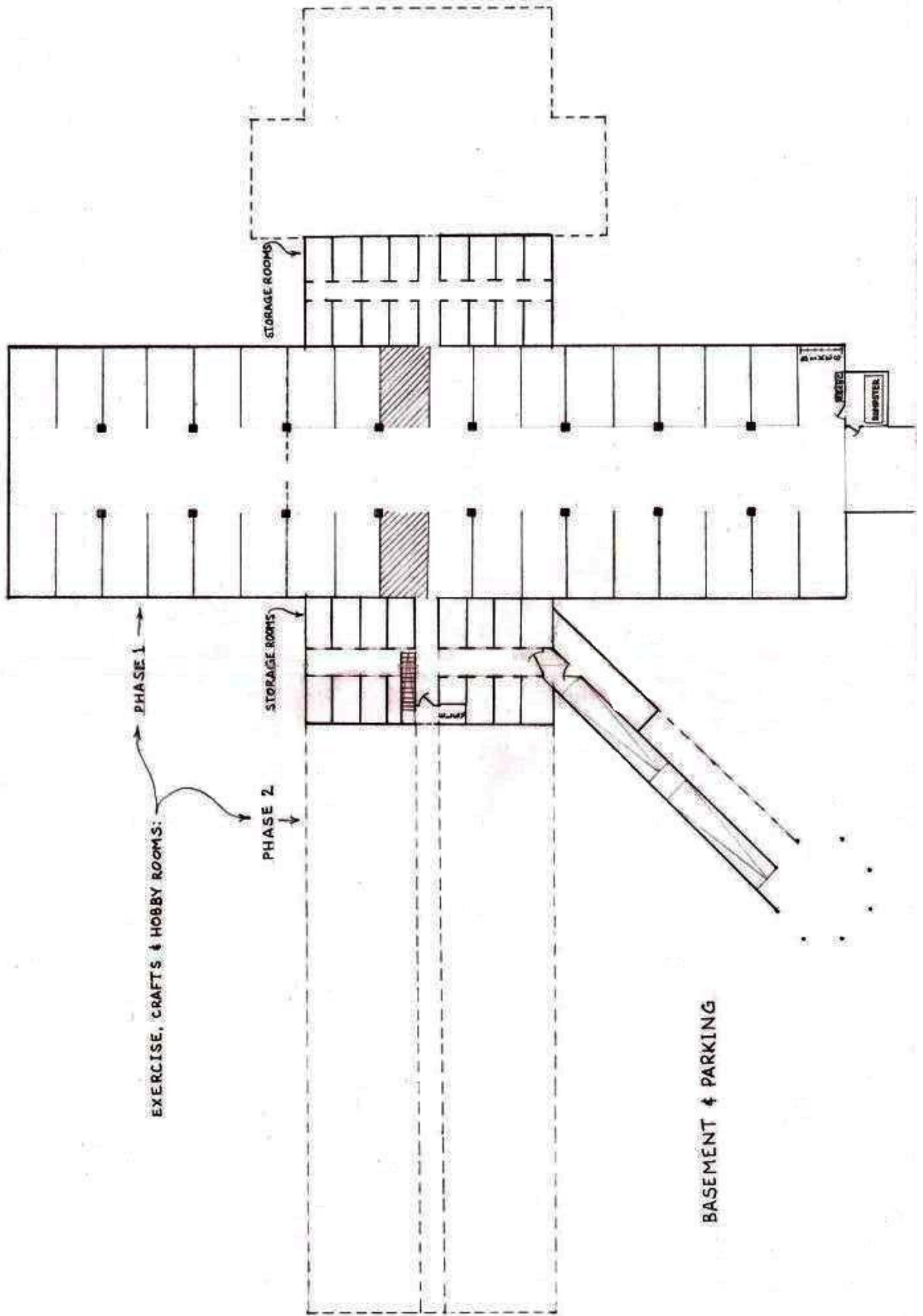
include mainly people who are capable of ministering, not just those who need to be ministered to. Having physically healthy younger families in the center also greatly helps the rehabilitation of disabled and elderly people and their socialization, because they want and need to be part of larger society. I have shown below 32 units including efficiency, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom units. But the design can be modified to as few as 30 units: 12 three-room units, 8 two-room units and 10 one-room units; or as many as 46 of the smaller units. The plans for the units are modular – the one-room unit is two-thirds the size of the two-room unit, and the two-room unit is three-fourths the size of the three-room unit.

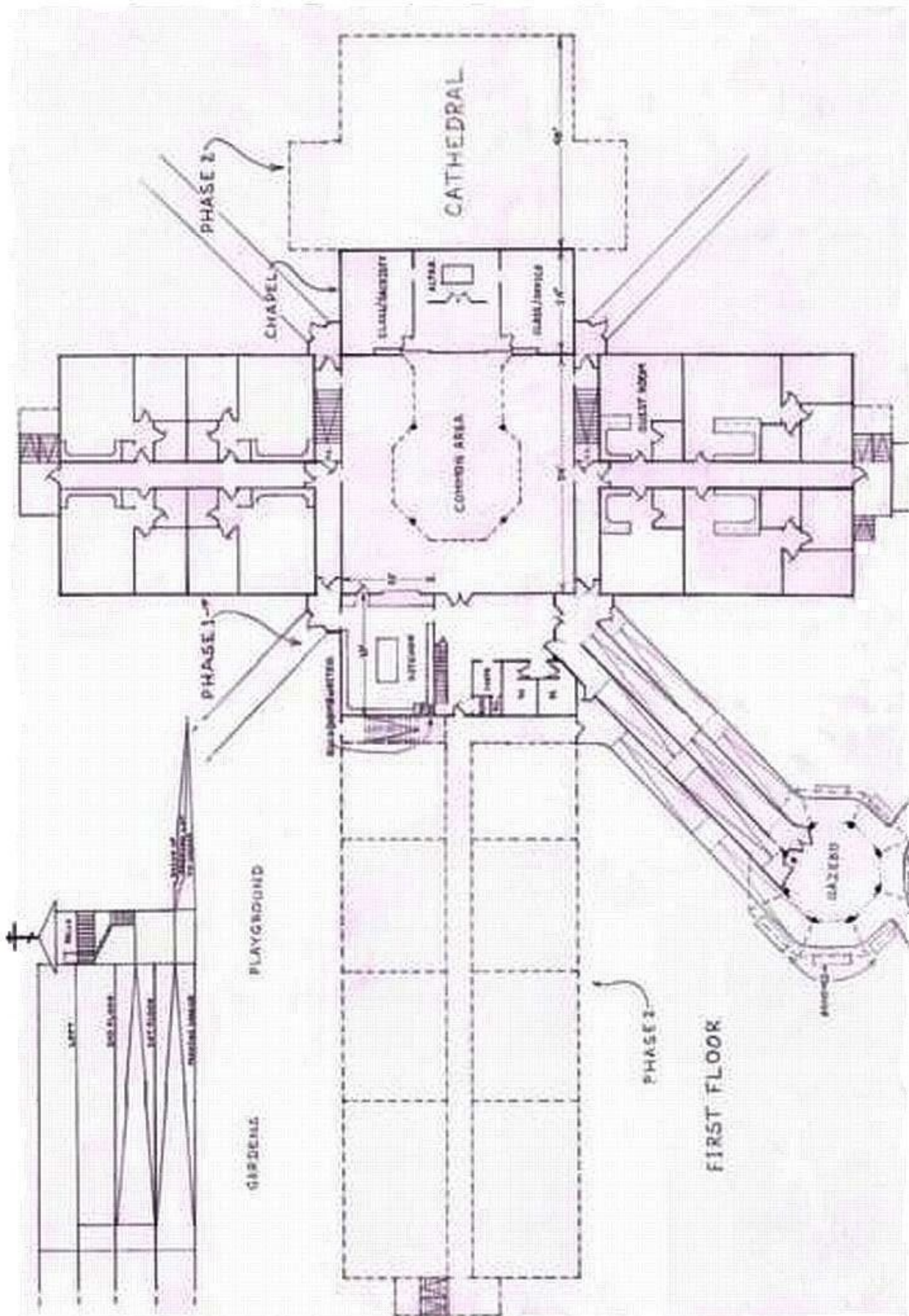
But we must now ask some serious questions: Why should you change your lifestyle and sell your own home that you are so comfortable in? Look at it from the other side: why should missionaries give up their comfortable living standards to live in cockroach-infested, run-down apartments in a foreign country, while the large majority of nominal Christians in the West live in luxurious homes far larger than they actually need? My wife and I can testify how convenient it is to be able to simply lock the doors of our condo and go to Russia without having to worry about mowing the lawn or shoveling the sidewalk. Think how you would be able to go away on a mission trip for a month or two... or six, without having to worry about such things. But living in a condominium like our present home is not nearly as good as living in a community such as a housing cooperative. We have witnessed the fellowship that is created when several families share common space together, enjoying the fellowship that comes from an architectural design that promotes this fellowship. “We shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us!” Think of the possibilities created by such a building for outreach to the needy, the disabled, the elderly and the lonely – widows and orphans – that you could have right in your own city! You don’t need to cross the ocean and learn another language to be a missionary; you can have a mission outreach right where you are just by crossing some socioeconomic barriers.

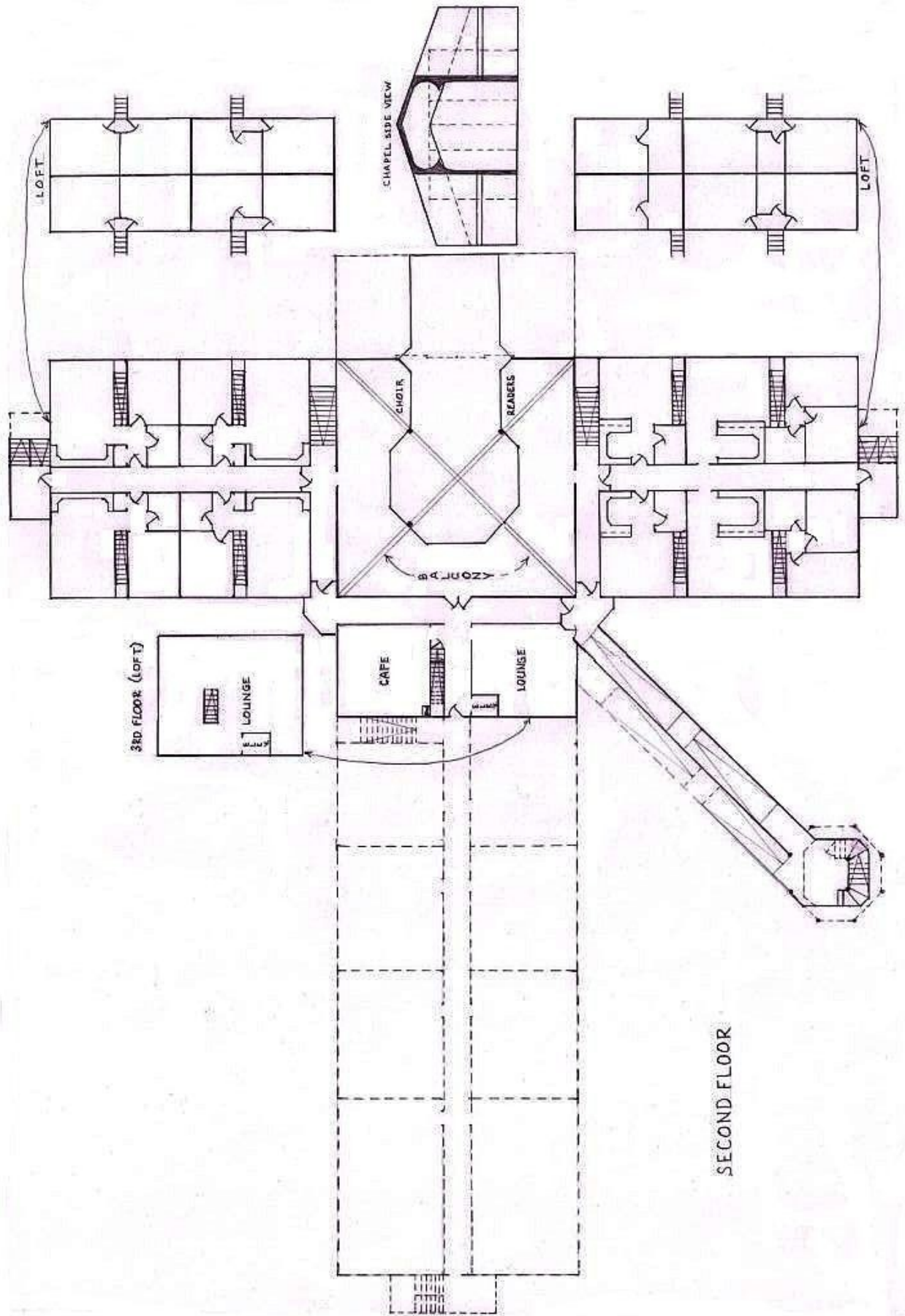
Please keep in mind that such a ministry center is not an assisted living center, nursing home or hospice: those require professional nursing staff to be on hand at all times. It is a residence for orphans and widows, elderly and disabled people who may have chronic conditions, but can live semi-independently in a specially-designed environment, perhaps with some supervision. In a Christian center like this, much of the supervision and care can be given by trained volunteers, perhaps “empty-nest” younger retired people who are called to this form of ministry. Residents who require meal preparation and/or supervision would make private arrangements to pay an

amount depending on the service required. But these costs should be considerably less than the \$3,000 per month that many elderly people pay to live in an assisted living facility in the Midwest U.S., and they will have the benefit of ownership instead of rental, which is simply pouring money down the drain. The result is that large sums of money are freed up to be used for local and world-wide ministry. The classrooms will be used to train people in *diakonia* as well as other courses of Christian instruction: evangelism, youth and family ministry, theology, missiology, etc. So this “Agape Restoration Center” (ARC) reaches out to the community and to the whole world! Below are the sketches for our proposed ministry centers. You can download or print these sketches at this webpage: <http://www.Agape-Restoration-Society.org/build.htm> - take a look!









Endnotes to Chapter 14:

1. *Good News Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
2. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
3. *Good News Bible*, op. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. *International Standard Version of the Bible*, op. cit.
6. Warren, Rick, *The Purpose Driven Church*, op. cit., 78-79.
7. *American Standard Version*, op. cit.
8. *International Standard Version of the Bible*, op. cit.
9. Realife Inc., "Cooperative Living," (www.realifeinc.com/cooperativeliving/what-is-a-housing-co-op/, 2006).

Chapter 15: Ministry as Grace (*kharis*)

What is grace, and how does it relate to ministry? As the Apostle Paul was visiting the church in Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem, he had a sense of foreboding that something bad would happen to him there, just as he had been imprisoned and beaten in other cities. He told the elders of the church – “But these things don't count; nor do I hold my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry (*diakonia*) which I received from the Lord Jesus, to fully testify to the Good News of the grace (*kharis*) of God” (Acts 20:24). We have already shown that the word *diakonia* is ministry in the widest sense, from waiting on tables, to healing and caring for the sick, to preaching the Good News, and we have seen in Acts 14:9-10 how Paul combined preaching with healing the man who was lame from birth. Here we read that Paul defines his particular ministry to be that of “testifying to the Good News of the grace (*kharis*) of God.” Proclaiming the Good News of God’s grace was central for him, but he often included healing in his ministry. Both aspects of ministry demonstrate “the grace (*kharis*) of God.”

Just a few verses later, in Acts 20:32 we read – “Now, brothers, I entrust you to God, and to the word of his grace (*kharis*), which is able to build up (*epoikodomeo*), and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (*hagiazō*).” What is grace, and how is it able to build up? *Strong’s Dictionaries* give a rather long definition – “*graciousness* (as *gratifying*), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figurative or spiritual; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including *gratitude*): - acceptable, benefit, favour, gift, grace (-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure, thank (-s, -worthy).”¹ Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that grace is the saving and sanctifying power emanating from God, which corresponds to *Strong’s* definition: “divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.” So grace is God’s power influencing our heart, our inner being, changing our life and enabling us to do God’s will.

The word *kharis* occurs 156 times in the New Testament, and 130 of those occurrences are translated “grace” in the KJV and most other versions. It is also translated as “favor,” “thanks,” “pleasure,” “acceptable,” “benefit,” “gift,” “gracious,” “joy,” “liberality,” “thanked” and “thankworthy” in the KJV,² but the overwhelming majority of times it is used as “grace.” The common definition is “unmerited favor.” God bestows on us, completely undeserving sinners, His free gift of salvation – “for by grace (*kharis*) you have been saved through faith, and that not

of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them” (Eph. 2:8-10). Nothing we had done, no amount of good works, could earn our salvation; it is all of grace, a free gift. In the preceding verses Paul writes that we were dead spiritually in trespasses and sins. What can a dead corpse do? – Nothing, except decompose. It certainly can’t earn anything! But when grace comes into our lives, it revives us and begins to transform us. Grace doesn’t demand good works; instead, it changes us so that we desire to do *diakonia*, good works. This is the purpose for which God has created us in Christ Jesus!

This is why it is utterly foolish to think that because grace is free we don’t have to do anything in response. As Paul wrote in Rom. 6:1-2 and 14-15 – “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace (*kharis*) may abound? May it never be! We who died to sin, how could we live in it any longer? ... For sin will not have dominion over you. For you are not under law, but under grace (*kharis*). What then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace (*kharis*)? May it never be!” If we are truly being transformed by God’s grace, His divine power poured out upon us, how could we even imagine reverting to our dead sinful nature? Such ideas are either planted in a believer’s mind by the old deceiver Satan, or else that person has never truly experienced the transforming power of God’s saving grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer begins his book *The Cost of Discipleship* with a chapter entitled “Costly Grace” –

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting to-day for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack’s wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price, grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian ‘conception’ of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, *ipso facto* a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.³

Sadly, there are many who have heard a false gospel of “cheap grace” easy-believism and have raised their right hands or filled out a decision card, but they have never really entrusted their whole heart and life to Jesus Christ. They warm the pew, put a few shekels in the offering if it’s convenient, and may even sincerely think they’re on the way to heaven because they’ve done what the preacher said they should do. But they still calculate a cost-benefit analysis; they constantly run a profit-and-loss statement in their head: “What can I get from this?” The fleshly nature is still firmly in control. God’s grace hasn’t begun transforming them.

How is it that so many people who consider themselves Christians, especially in the Western world, have this mistaken notion of “cheap grace”? I believe it arose during the Age of Reason, when secular philosophers and political theorists were positing the autonomy of human reason and will, juxtaposed against the almost totalitarian authority of the Roman Catholic Church. This occurred at about the same time as the Protestant Reformation, when Luther championed the concept of “salvation by grace through faith,” the priesthood of all believers and the ability of each person to understand and interpret the Scriptures for himself. Parallel to this, the Age of Reason taught that man is free and rational, therefore any logical decision he makes is valid, and only those things he can comprehend are real. This placed man in the center of the universe, displacing God. If man chose to believe in God, it was on the basis of equal partnership: “I will believe in you, God, if and only if you will do such-and-such for me.”

So a distorted concept of the Protestant Reformation provided a philosophical basis for bargaining with God using the twisted notion of “cheap grace.” The truth is, we are not autonomous and we cannot bargain with God. God is absolutely sovereign and we humans are utterly dependent upon His mercy and grace. We are totally bankrupt before God; it is completely senseless to calculate a cost-benefit analysis. God freely chooses to extend His scepter and pardon us, if we will cease our rebellious thoughts of the autonomy of human reason and submit to Him as king. Only when we acknowledge Him as truly God and sovereign Lord by receiving His gift of transforming grace, unmerited favor, will He receive us into His kingdom. When we receive His pardon, He redeems us from the prison of sin. “Redeem” means to “buy back,” and God, the Person who bought us, now owns us. We belong to Him. We are not our own, we have been bought with a great price, the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. This is how we should understand “grace.”

Let us now examine how grace, the saving and sanctifying power emanating from God, was at work in the Lord Jesus. The Apostle John described Jesus' Incarnation this way – “The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace (*kharis*) and truth. ... From his fullness we all received grace (*kharis*) upon grace (*kharis*). For the law was given through Moses. Grace (*kharis*) and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:14 and 16-17). When the Son of God was conceived by the Virgin Mary and was born as the baby Jesus, He was already filled with grace. In Luke 2:40, just before the story of His boyhood visit to the temple in Jerusalem, we read – “The child was growing, and was becoming strong in spirit, being filled with wisdom, and the grace (*kharis*) of God was upon him.” Jesus was so amazing, even as a young boy, that people couldn't help but notice His great wisdom and grace.

And in John 14:12 we find the answer to how God's grace was at work in Jesus, and we learn how we can receive grace (*kharis*) upon grace (*kharis*) – “Most certainly I tell you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and he will do greater works than these, because I am going to my Father.” Jesus explains that God's grace or power that He possessed to do great works of *diakonia* is available to any believer who is totally consecrated to God. The difference doesn't lie in the fact that He is the Son of God – although He is! – Jesus performed these great works while in His mortal human body that had limitations like we have; no, the difference is that Jesus was totally committed to do the Father's will, and that is why He was full of grace (*kharis*)! We can receive the same fullness of grace (*kharis*) if we will simply consecrate ourselves wholly and without reservation to doing the Father's will. A few verses later, in verses 16 and 26, Jesus promises to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, Who transmits God's power to those believers who are cleansed and consecrated vessels.

The Apostles experienced this same power after Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin not to witness in Jesus' name – “With great power, the apostles gave their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Great grace (*kharis*) was on them all” (Acts 4:33). Here we see that “great power” is used in parallel with “great grace,” making the two almost synonymous. In the preceding verses we read how, after receiving this threat and praying, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and preached God's Word with boldness.

Several other Scripture passages refer to grace in the context of ministry: Acts 11:23; 14:3 and 26; 15:11 and 40; and Rom. 1:5. But perhaps most striking is the way St. Paul begins every one of his letters with the blessing “grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” or some slight variation of those words. Peter, John and Jude all include a similar grace blessing at the beginning of most of their letters and in the book of Revelation. These passages all show that the apostles believed they were transmitting grace, the saving and sanctifying power of God, by their words. To put it more precisely, they transmitted saving and sanctifying grace by preaching the Word which is the gospel of grace – “Now, brothers, I entrust you to God, and to the word of his grace (*kharis*), which is able to build up (*epoikodomeo*), and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (*hagiazo*).” (Acts 20:32).

We have already looked at 1 Cor. 3:10, but it bears repeating – “According to the grace (*kharis*) of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder (*architekton*) I laid a foundation, and another builds on (*epoikodomeo*) it. But let each man be careful how he builds on (*epoikodomeo*) it.” Paul’s particular grace or gift of ministry was to plant new churches on the foundation of the gospel of grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Later, in writing to the Corinthian church on the topic of marriage vs. celibacy, he stated – “Yet I wish that all men were like me. However each man has his own gift (*kharisma*) from God, one of this kind, and another of that kind” (1 Cor. 7:7). The word *kharisma* shares the same root as *kharis*, and obviously has a similar meaning. Paul’s gift of celibacy helped to equip him for his missionary task, the grace of planting churches all over the Roman Empire. Still later, in 1 Cor. 12:4 Paul writes – “Now there are various kinds of gifts (*kharisma*), but the same Spirit. There are various kinds of service (*diakonia*), and the same Lord.” Here we again find a link between the grace-gifts and *diakonia*: The Holy Spirit’s power through the various *kharisma*-manifestations empowers us to perform our unique *diakonia*-ministry to one and the same Lord. It is erroneous and divisive to conclude that if we have different gifts and ministries we can’t work together in the same organization or church!

How should we employ these gifts of God’s grace, His saving and transforming power? St. Peter tells us – “As each has received a gift (*kharisma*), employ it in serving (*diakoneo*) one another, as good managers of the grace (*kharis*) of God in its various forms” (1 Pet. 4:10). Once more we find the grace-gifts linked with *diakonia*! The grace-gifts should be used to serve one another, not for self-gratification, just as freedom should be used to serve one another (Gal. 5:13). Also,

notice here how Peter is using *kharisma* and *kharis* as synonyms. The particular gift (*kharisma*) a person has is a manifestation of the grace (*kharis*) of God, His power poured out on us.

And how does a person receive a particular gift (*kharisma*)? Twice Paul instructs Timothy – “Don’t neglect the gift (*kharisma*) that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the elders” (1 Tim. 4:14). And also “For this cause, I remind you that you should stir up the gift (*kharisma*) of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). The laying on of apostolic hands, as we also read in Acts 6:6 about the first six deacons, confers a special grace, divine power for a specific task. As Paul tells Timothy, do not treat the gift lightly, use it or lose it. God gives His grace-gifts so that we can serve Him!

We have already examined Heb. 12 when we were considering wholeness-*teleiosis*. In that same chapter we find some important teaching on grace. The author, in the context of discipline and correction, exhorts us in verse 15 to be “looking carefully lest there be any man who falls short of the grace (*kharis*) of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby the many be defiled.” We must be careful not to let bitterness creep into our lives, which could cause us to fall short of continuing to receive God’s grace. In verse 25 the author warns against turning away from God, because we have the firm hope of an unshakeable kingdom (verse 27). And in verse 28 he links together grace and service: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace (*kharis*). By it, we may serve (*latreuo*) God acceptably, with reverence and awe”⁴ (HCSB). Again we see the continuing process of receiving the kingdom, which is itself unshakeable, but our receiving it is continuing and unfinished. So we must hold on to grace, God’s transforming power, which enables us to serve Him acceptably.

Our response to God’s antecedent, initiating grace is to worship and serve Him, writes Paul Hanson in his book *The People Called* –

Israel became a people because of divine initiative. Its birth rested on no human merit. It was explainable solely in terms of God's grace. The particular nature of the initiating act revealed the unique nature of the God Yahweh, a God who embraced the cause of the most humble and oppressed, making them a people with dignity and freedom. The notion of community that unfolds in the Bible can be understood adequately only by clearly recognizing its origin in the initiative of a gracious God. Israel became God's people by responding to divine grace. All the terms for the community of faith in the Old and the New Testament have this response quality; for example, *qahal* (assembly), *eda*

(congregation). *sod* (assembly), and *ekklesia* (assembly, congregation, church). In each case, God is understood as the One who has gathered the people.⁵

Here we see that God is the author, the initiator of *koinonia*-community through His act of grace. We become His people, His assembly, “by responding to divine grace.” And our response is also of grace as we make use of the grace-gifts we freely receive from Him to do the work of ministry and thus build up the Body of Christ. Grace is most certainly the free gift of God, but it is not cheap: it cost God His only begotten Son to give us this gift. And when we freely receive it, we place ourselves under the sovereignty of the Lord God Almighty to serve Him faithfully forever.

Endnotes to Chapter 15:

1. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *King James Concordance*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (translation from the German *Nachfolge* by SCM Press, London, SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd., 1948), 3.
4. *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
5. Hanson, Paul, *The People Called*, (San Francisco, California, Harper & Row, 1986), 24.

Chapter 16: Ministry as Truth (*aletheia*) and light (*fos*)

The English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861 - 1947) stated – “There are no whole truths; all truths are half-truths. It is trying to treat them as whole truths that plays the devil.” Once again we are treated to a paradox by one of this world’s wise men: if all truths are half-truths, then that statement itself isn’t entirely true! Human efforts to debunk all absolutes demonstrate their own absurdity – “There are no absolutes, and that’s the absolute truth!” And yet millions or even billions of people take these nonsense statements seriously.

The concept of truth is fundamental to higher mathematics and computer science. A bit is either “on” (true) or “off” (false) – there is no in-between state. To deny the concept of truth is to say that computers don’t make a bit of sense (pardon the pun). But it is indeed very difficult to discover what absolute truth is, one might even say it is humanly impossible. That is the dilemma modern man finds himself in: truth is necessary, but extremely elusive. How do we find our way out of this dilemma? We as Christians believe it is possible only through divine revelation – “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. We gazed on his glory, the kind of glory that belongs to the Father’s unique Son, full of grace and truth (*aletheia*). ... For while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth (*aletheia*) came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:14 and 17). Jesus Christ is full to overflowing with truth, and that is how we can know truth!

What is truth? That was the same question Pontius Pilate posed to Jesus in John 18:38. This world’s rulers and wise men have puzzled over this question for centuries and haven’t found the answer. *Strong’s Dictionaries* simply define *aletheia* as “true, truly, truth, verity.”¹ It is defined better in *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* –

Objectively: what is true in any matter under consideration, ... what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man, moral and religious truth, ... the truth as taught in the Christian religion, respecting God and the execution of his purposes through Christ, and respecting the duties of man, opposing alike to the superstitions of the Gentiles and the inventions of the Jews, and the corrupt opinions and precepts of false teachers even among Christians; subjectively: truth as a personal excellence, that candour of mind which is free from affection, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit.²

While these definitions are helpful, they are a little circular because they use in the definition the word being defined. What is truth then? It seems to be a rather elusive thing! But if we really

want to know what truth is, look closely at Jesus, because He said – “I am the way, the truth (*aletheia*), and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me” (John 14:6). And those people who follow Him experience truth and radiate it to others around them – “But whoever does what is true (*aletheia*) comes to the light, so that all may see that his actions have been done in God” (John 3:21). We must follow Him with an attitude of worship – “But the hour comes, and now is, when the true (*alethinos*) worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (*aletheia*), for the Father seeks such to be his worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (*aletheia*)” (John 4:23-24). The word here for worship is *proskuneo* which means “to kiss, like a dog *licking* his master’s hand; to ... literally or figuratively *prostrate* oneself in homage (*do reverence, to adore*); worship.”³ It is used in the Bible for homage given to God or to people of great honor. The quest for truth is rewarded with success only when we submit ourselves in worshipful service to our Master, Jesus Christ!

Now is the time to relate *aletheia*-truth to *diakonia*-ministry. We already have seen that worship (*latreia*) is linked to ministry. Our key passage for the ministry driven church, Eph. 4:11-13, teaches us that all of God’s people are to do the work of *diakonia*-ministry in order to make the church, the Body of Christ, grow. In the very next verses Paul warns us to watch out for pseudo-clever men whose self-appointed task is to deceive by sophistry, but instead we must speak the truth – “that we may no longer be children, tossed back and forth and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth (*aletheia*) in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, Christ” (Eph. 4:14-15). The ultimate goal of ministry is to help each other grow up into Christ’s likeness. Part of this involves telling the truth.

The world considers it socially acceptable to tell “white lies” for convenience, for example, you call your employer and say you’re sick, but actually you’re doing something else such as going to a job interview or meeting someone from out of town. Even Christians sometimes tell “white lies” to other Christians for similar reasons, but this destroys trust and fellowship in the Body of Christ. A few verses later, in Eph. 4:25, Paul writes – “Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak truth (*aletheia*) each one with his neighbor. For we are members of one another.” In order to minister to the building up of the Body of Christ, we must speak the truth to one another.

We once knew a mission leader who was a pathological liar. He would excuse it by telling me – “It’s easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission. I just say I’m sorry, I didn’t know.” The consequences, however, of constantly telling lies can be eternally fatal – “But for the cowardly, unbelieving, sinners, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). How do we pull up the weeds of lies in our life, and live in honesty and openness toward one another? We must daily drink deeply from God’s Word, the well of truth – “Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, ‘If you remain in my word, then you are truly (*alethos*) my disciples. You will know the truth (*aletheia*), and the truth (*aletheia*) will make you free’” (John 8:31-32). Jesus consecrated Himself to the truth, so that we also can be consecrated, made holy, in the truth – “Sanctify them in your truth (*aletheia*). Your word is truth (*aletheia*). ... For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth (*aletheia*)” (John 17:17 and 19). This leaves no room in the Body of Christ for half-truths and deliberate deception by not telling the whole truth.

Sanctification is holiness, consecration, being set apart. Holiness implies godliness and honesty because it comes from the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of truth – “When the Counselor has come, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth (*aletheia*), who proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26). When the Spirit of truth comes into our life, He will enable us to distinguish between truth and error – “However when he, the Spirit of truth (*aletheia*), has come, he will guide you into all truth (*aletheia*), for he will not speak from himself; but whatever he hears, he will speak. He will declare to you things that are coming” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit will give us a “sixth sense” for discerning truth in a jumble of news, misinformation and deliberate disinformation, and He will even enable us to foresee things that are yet to come.

But this requires that we walk in the Spirit, not in our own egocentric way, cleverly manipulating God’s Word for our own sordid gain; rather, using it to build up the Body of Christ – “But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by the manifestation of the truth (*aletheia*) commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul writes that God “desires all people to be saved and come to full knowledge of the truth (*aletheia*), ... to which I was appointed a

preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth (*aletheia*) in Christ, not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (*aletheia*)” (1 Tim. 2:4 and 7). It is striking how often the apostles use the word “truth” over and over, repeating it several times in the space of just a few phrases. It becomes clear to us that they were not careful to couch their words in “maybe” or “perhaps” or “in my opinion”; instead, they boldly asserted that the Good News of Christ is the truth. They did not say, “If you want to believe it, then it’s true for you; but if you don’t, then that’s okay too!” As we read the New Testament, it becomes strikingly obvious that the truth of the Gospel is not relative or subjective; it is objectively true everywhere and for everyone.

There are several warnings in the New Testament to beware those who try to distort the truth – “Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you not to obey the truth (*aletheia*), before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth among you as crucified?” (Gal. 3:1). Notice that Paul writes “obey the truth” and not merely “agree to the truth.” Truth is not just an abstract concept, it is the hard reality of those actions we are morally obliged to take when we believe the truth about Jesus Christ’s crucifixion for our sins. The Christians in Galatia had gotten off to a good start, but then some Judiazers came along and tried to convince them to follow the Law of Moses – “You were running well! Who interfered with you that you should not obey the truth (*aletheia*)?” (Gal. 5:7). Again Paul uses the phrase “obey the truth.” Truth isn’t a word game we play; it is reality.

The ultimate source of this deceit is the lawless one, Antichrist, who is empowered by Satan –

... even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, with all deception of wickedness for those who are being lost, because they didn't receive the love of the truth (*aletheia*), that they might be saved. Because of this, God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be judged who didn't believe the truth (*aletheia*), but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we are bound to always give thanks to God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth (*aletheia*) (2 Thes. 2:9-13).

In order to be saved, people must have a “love of the truth.” If not, God will send them error so they will believe a lie, to their own judgment. The fad philosophies of relativism and situational ethics are simply rationalizations for those who have “pleasure in unrighteousness.” But if someone loves the truth he is on the path of “salvation through sanctification.”

Many highly educated people are “always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (*aletheia*). Even as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so do these also oppose the truth (*aletheia*); men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:7-8). This brings to mind some university professors and even Oxford-educated politicians who are moral reprobates, who either reject the faith totally or cynically manipulate religion for their own ends.

Our response as servants of the Gospel is to “give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth (*aletheia*)” (2 Tim. 2:15), and to “stand therefore, having the utility belt of truth (*aletheia*) buckled around your waist, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14). Truth is the “utility belt” to which the soldier of Christ fastens all the rest of his spiritual armor. If we lack truth, none of the other items of our spiritual armor stay with us, they fall off.

Three times the Apostle John warns if our actions don't match our words, the truth isn't in us –

If we claim that we have fellowship with him but keep living in the darkness, we are lying and the truth (*aletheia*) is not in us. ...If we say that we do not have any sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth (*aletheia*) is not in us. ... The person who says, ‘I have come to know him,’ but does not continually keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth (*aletheia*) is not in that person” (1 John 1:6 and 8; 2:4).

So the positive side of the coin is to love the truth and live according to the truth – “For I was overjoyed when some brothers arrived and testified about your truthfulness and how you live according to the truth (*aletheia*). I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are living according to the truth (*aletheia*). ... Therefore, we ought to support such people so that we can become their helpers in spreading the truth (*aletheia*)” (3 John 1:3-4 and 8). The Good News we spread, combined with doing diakonia-ministry to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, is the truth from God lived out in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, His apostles, in the lives of those they discipled, and it must be lived out in our lives!

How does truth relate to light? The Apostle John links truth (*aletheia*) together with light (*fos*) in 1 John 1:6 and 8 as we saw in our study of *koinonia*, and again in ch. 2:8-11 –

Again, I write a new commandment to you, which is true (*alethes*) in him and in you; because the darkness is passing away, and the true (*alethinos*) light (*fos*) already shines.

He who says he is in the light (*fos*) and hates his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He who loves his brother remains in the light (*fos*), and there is no occasion for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and doesn't know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

It shouldn't surprise us that truth and light are used synonymously. We have already seen them together in John 3:21 – “But whoever does what is true (*aletheia*) comes to the light (*fos*), so that all may see that his actions have been done in God.” In both of these passages, St. John tells us that truth and light describe what we do, not merely what we know. The Apostle Paul also emphasizes the idea that our “walk” must match our “talk,” as we see in our central passage, Eph. 4: 1 and 17-18 –

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called... This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their hearts.

In contrast to walking in darkness, we are to put on the new man and relate to one another in truth, as we have already seen in Eph. 4:25. Then St. Paul continues to describe how Christians ought to behave or “walk,” and in Eph. 5:2 he writes – “Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you.” And in Eph. 5:8-9 we find – “For you were once darkness, but are now light (*fos*) in the Lord. Walk as children of light (*fos*), for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth (*aletheia*).” Thus Paul develops the concept of light (*fos*) in the context of ministry (*diakonia*). Next, Paul describes in Eph. 5:11-15 the specific actions we should take when we encounter darkness and evil:

Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them. For the things which are done by them in secret, it is a shame even to speak of. But all things, when they are reproved, are revealed by the light (*fos*), for everything that reveals is light (*fos*). Therefore he says, "Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Therefore watch carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise.

This is one of those difficult passages, not because it is hard to understand, but because it is difficult to obey! In our modern live-and-let-live culture, we are taught to think that we should simply ignore other people's immoral and even criminal behavior. If a neighbor or coworker is continually breaking the law and refuses to change his actions when we mention it to him, these verses teach us that we ought to reprove, i.e. expose them to the light. Unconditional love for our neighbor means that we accept the sinner as a human being Christ died for, but we do not accept

his sins. Instead, we try to help him overcome them by the grace of God, who accepted me just as I am, but does not expect me to remain just as I am.

One former worker, a Christian I recruited for a responsible position, when I would try to counsel him about his problems of behavior, would say to me – “God accepts me just as I am, so you must accept me just as I am too!” He would come to work an hour or two late, then sit at his desk drinking tea and eating cookies all day. Try as I might, I could not bring him to understand that God expected him as a disciple of Christ to lead a disciplined life, to come to work on time, to accomplish his assigned tasks, and to control his appetite for food. Finally I had to terminate our working relationship, after having invested several thousand dollars in him.

Another former coworker often bragged to me how he had received so many traffic tickets for speeding and drunk driving that the police revoked his driving license, but he continued to drive his car! After talking with him several times about how he was risking the lives of other people by his drunk and reckless driving, he still kept on driving without a license. Finally I felt obligated to report him to the police, who arrested him as he was starting to drive his car.

On a certain consulting assignment I was managing a project for rewriting a software system that processed about one billion dollars per year of insurance claims. As I was finishing the project (it balanced to the penny), I was made aware that the insurance company where I was consulting was falsely coding government health insurance claims for abortions as “miscellaneous procedures.” This meant that I was in effect sharing a common purse with murder, as well as helping that company violate U.S. law that prohibited government funding of abortions. When I confronted them, they denied falsely coding any claims, so I had to end that consulting assignment and refused to take another assignment with that company when they asked me to return. Afterwards my consulting firm offered me a couple more consulting assignments that they knew would violate my morals: I refused to accept them and therefore resigned from the firm to return to full-time mission work.

Christians have become so intimidated by phrases such as “You can’t legislate morality” and “Don’t force your religion down other people’s throats” that we often hide our faith and our morals. But look at what the Lord Jesus says about this – “You are the light (*fos*) of the world. A city located on a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring

basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light (*fos*) shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 5:14-16). If we let our light shine, it will overcome the darkness – “In him was life, and the life was the light (*fos*) of men. The light (*fos*) shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it” (John 1:4-5). If, however, we hide our light under a basket due to social pressure, the darkness will overcome the light. Light must be allowed to shine in the darkness! It will then expose the evil works of darkness, as we read in John 3:19-21 –

This is the judgment, that the light (*fos*) has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light (*fos*); for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light (*fos*), and doesn't come to the light (*fos*), lest his works would be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light (*fos*), that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.

There exists a struggle between light and darkness, good and evil. We already saw in Eph. 5:14 – “Therefore he says, ‘Awake, you who sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine (*fos*) on you.’” St. Paul wrote similarly to the church at Thessalonica –

But you, brothers, aren't in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief. You are all children of light (*fos*), and children of the day. We don't belong to the night, nor to darkness, so then let's not sleep, as the rest do, but let's watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunk are drunk in the night. But let us, since we belong to the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and, for a helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thes. 5:4-8).

Here Paul is clearly connecting our being “children of light” to leading our lives in the daytime, not staying up late into the night. Children of light sleep at night, but “those who are drunk are drunk in the night.” Mark writes about Jesus – “Early in the morning, while it was still dark, he rose up and went out, and departed into a deserted place, and prayed there” (Mk. 1:35). Staying up late at night virtually guarantees that we won't be able to rise up early to pray. We may feel we ought to rise early to pray, but as we learned in our study of *koinonia* about walking in the light, if we try to go to bed early when we're not tired so that we can get up early, it often won't work. We just lie in bed wide awake because our body clock isn't set to feel tired. So we don't get to sleep until past midnight, then we sleep past 8am... and feel even guiltier! The trick is to reset our body clock by going to bed at the regular time, setting the alarm clock for 6am, and get up then, don't hit the snooze button. Then we will begin to feel tired earlier the next evening and it will gradually reset our body clock. It will take at least three or four weeks to learn this new

habit, so be consistent in getting up when the alarm goes off, and then simply go to bed in the evening when you feel tired. Remember, the starting point should always be getting up early in the morning on schedule. God wants to have fellowship with you, and I'm sure you want to have fellowship with him. This is just a simple technique to help that happen.

In Mat. 17:1-2 we read of Jesus' transfiguration – “After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light (*fos*).” Peter, one of those three disciples who witnessed this transfiguration, writes – “seeing that his divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and virtue; by which he has granted to us his precious and exceedingly great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). And Paul writes that as we spend time in His presence, we too are transfigured and begin to reflect His glorious light – “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). Choose this glorious light!

Jesus said – “I am the light (*fos*) of the world. He who follows me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the light (*fos*) of life” (John 8:12). And we read in John 12:35-36 that He said – “Yet a little while the light (*fos*) is with you. Walk while you have the light (*fos*), that darkness doesn't overtake you. He who walks in the darkness doesn't know where he is going. While you have the light (*fos*), believe in the light (*fos*), that you may become children of light (*fos*).” Every human being is born with a spark of light in him from Jesus, “the true light (*fos*) that enlightens everyone was coming into the world” (John 1:9). This is God's part. But much also depends on each one of us: will we decide to seek the light – goodness – and become children of light, or will we choose to seek the darkness – evil – and become children of darkness who hate the light? God has done His part, now the choice is ours. Choose light and life!

When Saul of Tarsus was on the road to Damascus in order to seek and destroy followers of the latest false (in his thinking) Messiah, he was struck with a blinding light and a voice – “As he traveled, it happened that he got close to Damascus, and suddenly a light (*fos*) from the sky shone around him. He fell on the earth, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you

persecute me?" He said, 'Who are you, Lord?' The Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:3-5). Just as we read in John's Gospel, we see here that Jesus is the light! We might think that in this case God chose Saul, but Saul also chose to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and obey His voice. Later renamed Paul, he reiterates this story in Acts 22 and 26, testifying before religious and secular authorities that Jesus is this dazzling light.

While in exile on the Island of Patmos, the Apostle John received the revelation to the seven churches of Asia, introduced by a vision of the exalted and glorified Christ –

I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. Having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands. And among the lampstands was one like a son of man, clothed with a robe reaching down to his feet, and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace. His voice was like the voice of many waters. He had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining at its brightest (Rev. 1:12-16).

When I was a new Christian, one morning as I was praying the exalted Christ appeared to me in a vision in dazzling light, just as He appeared to St. John. Christ became so very real to me that I myself faded into insignificance. Later, while studying philosophy in university and beginning to question the existence of God and my Christian faith, I remembered the awesome, overwhelming reality of that vision I had experienced and decided once and for all that I would rather doubt my own existence than to doubt the existence of Christ as God. I sincerely hope and pray that this awesome, glorious light of Jesus will be just as real to you!

Endnotes to Chapter 16:

1. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *Thayer's Greek Definitions*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.

Chapter 17: Ministry as Intercession (*enteuxia*)

Paul instructed Timothy – “I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions (*enteuxia*), and giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). This is the classic passage on the various kinds of prayer, including intercession. *Strong’s Dictionaries* define intercession as “an *interview*, that is, (specifically) *supplication*: - intercession, prayer.”¹ But by far the best definition I find for intercession is in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* – “to assail anyone with petitions, to urge, to interpose on behalf of a person.”² So we see that intercession is specifically prayer or interposing on behalf of another person.

When we considered the topic of sanctification, we looked at the passage Luke 11:5-13, in which Jesus teaches us to “ask, seek and knock” by introducing it with a short parable – “Which of you, if you go to a friend at midnight, and tell him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him?’” (verses 5-6). The point often missed here is that the person asking to borrow three loaves of bread isn’t asking for himself, but for another friend. That is intercession! We are to “ask, seek and knock” in prayer not for our own desires, but pray persistently on behalf of another, for his needs. That is the spiritual ministry which must accompany our practical *diakonia*-ministry for the disabled and needy people of this world.

The verb form of *enteuxia* is *entugchano*, which we see in Rom. 8:26-27 and 34 –

In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weaknesses, for we don't know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself makes intercession (*hyperentugchano*) for us with groanings which can't be uttered. He who searches the hearts knows what is on the Spirit's mind, because he makes intercession (*entugchano*) for the saints according to God. ...Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession (*entugchano*) for us.

When we intercede in prayer, we are undertaking a priestly ministry. A priest is a go-between, an intercessor between God and man. That task may seem overwhelming, but here the Apostle Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit makes “hyper-intercession” over and above our intercession. The word “for” is also “*hyper*,” so the verb prefix is repeated as a preposition to emphasize this verb, which occurs only once in the entire New Testament. Thus the weak little prayers that we barely manage to utter are straightened out, magnified, and made “hyper” and interpreted into a divine

language that we can't comprehend as the Holy Spirit and Christ both intercede before God the Father for us. As we do the spiritual ministry of intercessory prayer for others, the Holy Spirit and Christ are doing the same ministry for us on a higher plane!

Sometimes the concept of intercessory prayer is indicated by the context, even if the Greek word *enteuxia* or the verb form isn't used – “As they served the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate Barnabas and Saul for me, for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). Also – “Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God is for Israel, that they may be saved” (Rom. 10:1). In both of these passages believers prayed for other people, in the first case for Barnabas and Saul who were being sent out as missionaries and in the second case for unbelievers.

Paul takes his line of argument forward in the next chapter of Romans by using *entugchano* in an almost negative sense – “God didn't reject his people, which he foreknew. Or don't you know what the Scripture says about Elijah? How he pleads (*entugchano*) with God against Israel: ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have broken down your altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life’” (Rom. 11:1-3). Elijah was interceding against the false prophets of Baal and the king of Israel who supported them, but for the common people of Israel. At times we need to intercede against wickedness, corruption or just plain neglect in high places in order to “interpose on behalf of” the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind.

So we see that *diakonia*-ministry for disabled and neglected people should include intercession on the social level of “interposing” as well as on the spiritual level of “interceding.” At times we must interpose at social bodies such as agencies for handicapped people to ask how we can work with them on behalf of a specific disabled person, or interpose at an educational institution to help a disabled person enroll and take courses in order to begin a new profession more suited to his condition.

Because of our cultural context in Russia, we must examine the question: Can the saints in heaven intercede for those on earth? A few passages in Revelation support this idea that is held by Orthodox and Catholics – “Now when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls full of

incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8). Incense is often associated with intercession and atonement in the Old Testament.

The fact that the saints in glory are not simply asleep until Christ’s Second Coming is evident in Rev. 6:9-10 – “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed for the Word of God, and for the testimony of the Lamb which they had. They cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” The location of these saints’ souls under the altar and their cry for their blood to be avenged reminds us of the Old Testament sacrifices on the altar. But the pertinent fact here is that the saints are conscious and are crying out to God.

The third instance is in Rev. 8:3-4 – “Another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer. Much incense was given to him, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.” Again, incense is associated with the prayers of the saints, presumably those in heaven if we take into account where this action is taking place.

We learn in Lev. 16:12-13 that incense was intended to make atonement (very similar to intercession) – “He [the high priest] shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before Yahweh, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: and he shall put the incense on the fire before Yahweh, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the testimony, so that he will not die.” Also, after Korah’s rebellion the Israelites complained to Moses that Yahweh had killed the rebels, Yahweh’s wrath broke out against the complainers, so – “Moses said to Aaron, Take your censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and lay incense thereon, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from Yahweh; the plague is begun” (Num. 16:46).

Thus we have two passages in Scripture that point to incense being used for atonement. Does all of this mean that the glorified saints do indeed intercede for the saints on earth? Although these texts may point in that direction, they do not give conclusive proof. In fact, there are dozens of passages in the Old Testament that tell us of incense being offered by the wrong persons, or the

incorrect incense being burned to Yahweh, or incense being burned to idols. For example, the prophet Jeremiah confronted the Israelites for worshipping the queen of heaven, to which they retorted – “But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked all things, and have been devoured by the sword and by the famine”³ (Jer. 44:18 MKJV). Thus we see that one must be very careful with applying such an idea, considering this contrary evidence.

Orthodox and Catholic theologians point out that asking a departed Christian to pray for you is no different than asking a Christian on earth to pray for you. But Evangelicals may reply that in practice Orthodox and Catholic people often don’t ask departed saints to intercede for them, they are actually praying to the saints. In discussing such differences it is vitally important not to “mix apples and oranges,” comparing “our” glorious doctrines with “their” mistaken practices. Keep in mind, Orthodox and Catholics can find more than enough greed (which is idolatry), deceit, immorality, gluttony and disunity among Protestants too! Orthodox theology clearly teaches that anyone who prays to a saint or an icon is not truly Orthodox: they should ask the saint (depicted in the icon) to pray for them. We must be careful not to mix categories, we must compare our doctrines with their doctrines, not our apples with their oranges.

In his book *The Three Great Churches*, Kerby Rials sets forth seven reasons why it is not correct to pray to the saints, giving a full explanation for each point –

1. There is no special category of believer called a saint.
2. There are no examples of praying to saints in the Bible.
3. Jesus taught us only to pray to the Father.
4. The Old Testament warns against prayers to others than God.
5. Early church fathers opposed prayer to departed Christians.
6. God has established a separation between living and dead Christians.
7. The Bible says there is only one mediator between us and God.⁴

The first five points have already been adequately addressed here. On the sixth point, the Orthodox will reply with Luke 20:38, that all the saints are alive to God. The seventh point above bears looking into further. We read in 1 Tim. 2:5 “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” The word “mediator” (*mesites*) here is literally “go-between” and can be translated “intercessor.” The one mediator we have is Jesus Christ, the God-Man. And 1 John 2:1 (ESV) states – “My little children, I am writing these things to you so

that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”⁵ Here we find another word, “advocate” (*parakletos*), which means “defense attorney” or “go-between” and can also be translated “intercessor.” Christ is our all-sufficient intercessor, advocate and go-between before God the Father for us.

The New Testament example is that intercessory prayers are directed to Jesus Christ Himself – “Therefore he [Christ] is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, seeing that he lives forever to make intercession (*entugchano*) for them” (Heb. 7:25). Adam Clarke explains how “the Jewish high priest made intercession for the people on the Day of Atonement, and which was a type of Christ’s intercession in heaven. He made it, not by offering of prayers for them in the most holy place, but by sprinkling the blood of the sacrifices on the mercy-seat, in token of their death.”⁶ This was a type or a shadow of what was to come in Christ, Who offered His own blood as the perfect atonement for our sins once for all. He is the perfect intercessor, never too busy, always attentive to our intercessory prayers for the needs of others.

But also, we read in 1 Tim. 2:1, “I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions (*enteuxia*), and giving of thanks be made for all men.” And in [James 5:13-20](#) we read that the prayers of a righteous man are capable both of having others' sins forgiven and of bringing about their physical healing. So we see that righteous Christians can and should intercede for the less-righteous ones. An earthly intercessor or go-between is just what a disabled person needs, in order to help him make headway in our self-centered society that cares little about those who can’t compete. We can and must intercede for them not only out of compassion, but also because we have come to realize that in God’s sight we are all spiritually disabled and in need of an advocate or go-between to intercede for us before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous One.

Endnotes to Chapter 17:

1. *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, op. cit.
2. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).
3. *Modern King James Bible*, op. cit.
4. Rials, Kerby, *The Three Great Churches*, (Lansing, Michigan, Redeemer Publishing, 2005), 101.
5. *English Standard Bible*, op. cit.
6. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*, op. cit.

Chapter 18: Ministry as Unity (*henotes*)

The Apostle Paul begins his discourse on *diakonia*-ministry in Ephesians chapter 4 with an impassioned plea for unity, to walk worthy of our calling, “being eager to keep the unity (*henotes*) of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one (*heis*) body, and one (*heis*) Spirit, even as you also were called in one (*heis*) hope of your calling; one (*heis*) Lord, one (*heis*) faith, one (*heis*) baptism, one (*heis*) God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all” (Eph. 4:3-6). After introducing his theme of unity (*henotes*), Paul makes a seven-fold appeal to oneness in the Body of Christ, three of them being the persons of the Trinity, the tri-unity:

1. one (*heis*) body,
2. one (*heis*) Spirit,
3. one (*heis*) hope,
4. one (*heis*) Lord,
5. one (*heis*) faith,
6. one (*heis*) baptism,
7. one (*heis*) God.

Paul’s appeal to unity at the beginning of his discourse is matched by a similar appeal at the end of this discourse, explaining that Christ gives spiritual gifts “to equip the saints for the work of ministry (*diakonia*) for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity (*henotes*) of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood (*teleios*), to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”¹ (Eph. 4:12-13, ESV). These two verses in Eph. 4 are the only places where *henotes* is used in the New Testament, and here we discover that *henotes*-unity links back to ministry (*diakonia*) and links forward to mature (*teleios*) manhood, restoration of wholeness. Thus “unity” is the unifying concept between ministry and wholeness.

Our fallen human nature would like to minister to the rich, the healthy, the well-educated and good-looking people in churches today. The minister strokes them with nice, soothing words saying what fine, upstanding citizens they are, and they stroke him in return with a nice fat salary. These people, the minister and the congregation alike, don’t need restoration to wholeness because they already have it all, or so they think. The problem is that, like the church in Laodicea, they don’t see their real condition in God’s sight – “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and

naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see”² (Rev. 3:17-18, ESV). Ignoring the condition of the materially poor, lame, maimed and blind cuts us off from them, destroying the unity of the Body of Christ, and it also makes us spiritually “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible makes some very important points regarding unity –

Now to endeavour or study to keep and preserve this, supposes that this union does already exist; that it is very valuable, as making much for the glory of God, the mutual comfort and delight of saints, and is worth taking some pains about; and that it is very difficult to secure, there being so many things which frequently arise, and break in upon it, through the devices of Satan, and the corruptions of men's hearts: but though it is difficult, and may sometimes seem to be impossible, yet it becomes the saints to be diligent in the use of means to keep it up....³

Because God’s Word instructs us to “keep the unity of the Spirit,” it must already exist, at least in God’s sight. It grieves our heavenly Father when brothers and sisters in Christ separate from each other because of ethnic, cultural or socio-economic differences, and so destroy the Body’s unity. In the first century, Jews had a hard time accepting Gentiles as members of God’s family. But Paul writes that Christ unites them – “For he is our peace, who made both one (*heis*), and broke down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that he might create in himself one (*heis*) new man of the two, making peace; and might reconcile them both in one (*heis*) body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility thereby” (Eph. 2:14-16). Here again we find peace and oneness linked together. We must strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In contrast, a power-seeking or self-centered spirit causes division that disrupts unity – “Now I beg you, brothers, look out for those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them. For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent” (Rom. 16:17-18). Such people come across as smooth, and may even be highly-educated in theology, but usually their objective is to gather a loyal following who will fawn over them, hanging on their every word, and/or support them in a lavish lifestyle. Paul warns against this divisive spirit in 1 Cor. 1:10-13 –

Now I beg you, brothers, through the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those who are from Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Cephas," and, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?

This type of party spirit fractures the unity of the Body of Christ, when we say – “I follow St. John Chrysostom,” or “I follow St. Augustine,” or “I follow Francis of Assisi,” or “I follow Martin Luther,” or “I follow John Wesley,” or “I follow Francis Schaeffer.” Were any of these men crucified for our sins? Did any of them rise from the dead for our justification? Were any of us baptized in the name of St. Chrysostom, or St. Augustine, or St. Francis, or Luther, or Wesley, or Schaeffer? True Christianity is not a cult of personality. How foolish, even idolatrous, it is to put these mere men in the place of Christ!

Why is there disunity in the Body of Christ? It is because Christians are not walking in the Spirit, but in the flesh. Their behavior is the direct opposite of sanctification (*hagiasmos*), love (*agape*), wholeness (*teleiosis*), peace (*eirene*), moderation (*epieikes*) and self-control (*egkrateia*):

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God⁴ (Jam. 4:1-4, ESV).

Disunity is therefore caused by the lack of many of the qualities of ministry that we have examined here. The way to maintain the unity of the Spirit, then, is to humble ourselves before God and let His Spirit build these qualities in us! Some might say that unity is unrealistic, that people will always find fault with others, break away from them and start a new church or denomination. That line of reasoning is rather like a man saying, “Someone is going to sell alcohol and tobacco to the fools who will buy it, so I might as well be the one who makes the money from it!” Or – “If I study about ministering to the disabled and then don’t minister to them, I would be sinning greatly, so it’s better to just ignore them and not learn how I can help them!” Well-educated, healthy, able-bodied people have actually said such foolish things to me. They actively offend or passively turn a blind eye to the suffering of others. They do not remove

the architectural barriers that exclude disabled people from society or cause them to stumble. What did Jesus say about this “who cares?” attitude of self-centered willful ignorance?

Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire (Mat. 18:7-9).

Jesus most certainly is using hyperbole here, He doesn't want us to physically mutilate or abuse our bodies. The Lord Jesus Christ cut right to the heart of the issue: discord and offenses arise because people seek their own well-being – power or self-gratification – rather than deny self and identify with the maimed, crippled or blind, not closing our eyes to them and ignoring them. (See Mat. 18:6 and 10.)

I have had to make difficult choices in my life: should I accept a nomination to an honor society, university scholarships and honors programs, a career in the diplomatic corps, or promotion in my profession, even advancement up the ladder of leadership in missions, if they will mean turning my back on the qualities of *diakonia*-ministry we have examined here? I have chosen to deny myself the worldly prestige, power and wealth these things might bring, things that destroy unity. How can I be faithful to God if I seek glory from men (John 5:44)? Most church splits are not really over doctrinal matters, but rather over people trying to defend their turf or build their own little fiefdom. Sadly, some of the most shameless power-seeking and self-centered behavior I have ever seen has been among people who claimed to be serving the Lord! Such behavior contradicts true servanthood ministry that builds up the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We ought to seek ways of serving the poor, lame, maimed and blind together with Christians of other persuasions, and then, when the spirit of servanthood is established, perhaps we can find ways to reconcile those age-old disagreements, such as whether venerating pictures of the saints (*proskuneo*) is equivalent to worship (*latría*) that belongs to God alone. Idolatry (*eidololatreia*) is a matter of the heart (Ezek.14:3-7): have we taken anything into our hearts, be it pictures or possessions or power or prestige, which displaces the true worship that belongs to God alone?

Eberhard Arnold in his excellent book *God's Revolution* writes –

When people believe in unity, it creates a very strong bond. It is a deplorable fact that some who call themselves Christians are so very disunited, not only in the various world Churches but also among those who try to be real Christians. And it is no help at all to decide to be silent about those subjects people don't see eye to eye on. Many a one feels: Today is the day for worship, the day to go to Church, to serve God, tomorrow I will be at my job and lead my personal and family life. How will such a person ever find unity and harmony within, let alone with others?

There is nothing that surpasses perfect unity. That is God's mystery – joy and unity in His creative Spirit. So the question now is: Do we really believe in God? Do we really believe that He will triumph in His intent to bring about unity? Do we believe that it will happen here and now, provided we want nothing but God and His way?⁵

It can and will happen, otherwise the words of our Lord about unity would simply be nonsense syllables. In John chapter 17, the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father that His followers would be one. The whole chapter ought to be studied, memorized and meditated upon, but I will let you do that on your own. Allow me to quote just two verses – “Not for these only [His disciples] do I pray, but for those also who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:20-21). How will the world believe that Jesus is sent from God? The world will believe when it sees our unity. But there are unfortunately many divisions within Christianity. Which church is the right one? All of them have problems, because they all consist of human beings who, although they may be trying to follow Christ, are still saints-in-process. The church is not yet without spot or wrinkle, ready to be presented to her husband as a bride dressed in glistening white. So which one of the many types of churches should we serve with? I must answer, the one that seeks unity, not the lowest-common-denominator kind, or the hierarchical structure kind of unity, but the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and the unity that preaches the Good News of the Kingdom and in actual fact performs *diakonia*-ministry to and is at one with the poor, the lame, the maimed and the blind, in order to build up the Body of Christ, so that we will finally come to the unity of the faith and be made whole.

Endnotes to Chapter 18:

1. *English Standard Version*, op. cit.
2. Ibid.
3. *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, (www.e-sword.net, 2004).

4. *English Standard Version*, op. cit.

5. Arnold, Eberhard, *God's Revolution*, (Farmington, Pennsylvania, Plough Publishing House, 1997), 39-40.

Conclusion

In this brief study on the Biblical basis of ministry, we have examined a whole constellation of “semantic fields” dealing with over twenty Greek words or concepts that all relate to ministry. Many of these Greek words are found in the New Testament passage that is central to this study, so let us review it here –

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists (*euaggelistes*), the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints (*hagios*) for the work of ministry (*diakonia*), for building up (*oikodome*) the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity (*henotes*) of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature (*teleios*) manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth (*aletheia*) in love (*agape*), we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ¹ (Eph. 4:11-15, ESV).

All of the concepts we’ve studied here cluster around one word, ministry (*diakonia*). This word has the very practical, down-to-earth meaning of serving others, doing the menial tasks that a servant (*pais* or *doulos*) would do. This runs counter to the notion of a minister as a clergyman in a long black robe, or an important government official.

A very significant concept found right beside “ministry” is the word *oikodome* – “building up” or “edification.” We saw how it is used in both the material sense of a “building” or an “edifice,” as well as in the spiritual sense of “encouragement and confirmation in the faith.” Far too often people create a false dichotomy, saying that the Body of Christ is spiritual, it should be built up simply by preaching and teaching, and that practical ministries or physical buildings detract from this central purpose. But we must always remember that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels”² (2 Cor. 4:7, KJV): our spiritual nature happens to reside in earthen vessels, very physical bodies that eventually wear out, and often get sick or are injured.

But we have become quite adept at ignoring the obvious. Our obsession with health care, living long and having a huge retirement account and all the materialistic creature comforts we want has deluded us into thinking that we will somehow live forever on this earth. Some say that our modern preoccupation on longevity has caused the “death of ideology” – people no longer are focused on eternal questions because they have convinced themselves they will keep on living, on and on and on, fading away into the sunset. Like Esau, however, modern Western civilization has traded its eternal birthright for a bowl of bean soup. We have exchanged our heavenly reward

for our pension fund. When people ask me when I'm going to retire, I reply, "You know what Rev. 2:10b says about that: 'Be faithful unto retirement, and I will give you a nice fat pension with 100% health benefits.'" No, the Bible says nothing at all about retirement! I plan to continue working as long as the Lord gives me health and lets me stay on this earth. But I also realize that people may become unable to work and yet remain on this earth, and I may join them in the wheelchair parade.

The Christian understands that real life, eternal life, begins in this body but is not limited to this body, as George Eldon Ladd writes in *The Gospel of the Kingdom* –

Eternal life has to do with the total man. It concerns not only my soul but also my body. When we finally inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50), that which is mortal – our physical, frail body – will be swallowed up in life. Eternal life includes the redemption of our bodies. The inheritance of the Kingdom of God means the transformation of these bodies of flesh and blood (1 Cor 15:52-53). All of us, even though we have received the gift of life, are dying. With some, the descent to the grave will be a long, gradual, painful one. With others, it occurs with shocking suddenness. Some will enjoy a large measure of vigour until the very end. But we are all on our way to the grave, for we are dying, mortal creatures.³

Yet while we are on this earth, all of us need a material place to live, and Christians whose bodies are sick, injured or worn out need a special place to live. By combining *diakonia*-ministry with *oikodome*-building-up we can create a very special place for equipping the saints for the work of ministry so that the Body of Christ will be built up, a building that enhances rather than detracts from the true ministry of the church and doesn't bust the budget, instead it pays for itself. Such a building will include rooms for exercise, massage and other treatments as well as classrooms for training people to reach out in spiritual and practical ministries.

Several years ago the lapel button "WWJD?" was popular among Christians in the U.S.A. I'm very happy with the fact that many people asked what it meant, thus providing the wearer an opportunity to explain that he tried to ask himself in daily situations or especially in difficult circumstances – "What Would Jesus Do?" But the question is rather too open-ended, because we can't know with certainty exactly what Jesus would do in a given situation. Two different people could come up with opposite answers. So I'd like to propose a new lapel button: "WDJD?" It stands for "What Did Jesus Do?" This question is much easier to answer, because we know from the four Gospels precisely what Jesus did: He announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, He preached the Good News and He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, cast out demons and

raised the dead. He showed His disciples how to do it, and then sent them out to preach the Good News of the kingdom, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons and raise the dead. Lastly, after His resurrection from the dead He commanded them to make more disciples and teach those new disciples to do the very same things. On the back of this new lapel button would be “DWJD!” – “Do What Jesus Did!”

Out of all the passages in the New Testament that teach us who will be included in the Kingdom of Heaven and who will be excluded, only a few deal with doctrinal issues, what we believe, and those issues are the most basic ones: we must believe and be baptized (Mark 16:16), confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3), and confess Jesus Christ as our Lord (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 14:3). The Nicene Creed provides an excellent baseline definition of what Christians must believe. The passages we have examined, however, about who will be included and who will be excluded all deal with our actions, what we do (Luke 6:46-49; Rom. 2:5-10; 1 Cor. 3:9-15; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-23; 1 John 3:14-18; Rev. 21:8). But keep in mind the parables in Luke 15 about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son – all these teach us that our task is not the exclusion of those who wander off the straight and narrow path, but their restoration!

Perhaps the most pointed passage on what we must do is an entire chapter containing the words of Jesus Christ in Mat. 25. In the first 30 verses He tells the parable of the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins waiting for the Bridegroom to come to His wedding feast, saying that the ones who were unprepared were foolish and were excluded from the wedding feast. They may have been singing, clapping their hands and having a great celebration earlier, but they didn't do what they needed to do. Then He tells the parable of the talents: the servants who received five or two talents and made good use of them are praised with the words, “Enter into the joy of your Lord.” But the servant who received just one talent and did nothing useful with it, who may have thought, “I’m just a simple worker, I’m not bright or rich, and so I’ll just have to get by until I die!” – he is condemned to outer darkness where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then our Lord gives this shockingly blunt and straightforward teaching –

But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will tell those on his right hand, “Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me.” Then the

righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?” The King will answer them, “Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Then he will say also to those on the left hand, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.” Then they will also answer, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?” Then he will answer them, saying, “Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.” These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Mat. 25:31-46).

Here the Lord lays the emphasis not on what we say we believe, but on what we do about what we believe for the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned. If He is our Lord, then we are His servants and we must serve Him. Real ministry means service. In summary of all we've learned from these studies, let's review what Jesus did and what He wants us to do –

Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest” (Mat. 9:35-38).

Do you see what Jesus did? Do you feel the compassion that Jesus felt? People were hurting, so He healed them; people were lost and scattered, so He laid down His life to save them. And today He needs more workers who will heal the hurting and save the lost, who will minister the whole Gospel to the whole person. So pray that the Lord of the harvest will motivate Christians to train and send out workers into His harvest, then... “Do What Jesus Did!” Don't just think about it, or talk about it, or preach about it. Just do it.

Endnotes to Conclusion:

1. *English Standard Version*, op. cit.
2. *King James Version*, op. cit.
3. Ladd, George Eldon, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 69.

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