

Ministry

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

"By love serve one another." ~ Galatians 5:13

Ministry is often equated to things. For instance, you are said to have a ministry if you are functioning within the system of organized religion; and there is much for you to focus upon: there is the "bus ministry," the "visitation ministry," the "radio ministry," the "music ministry," the "Sunday School ministry," the "printing ministry," etc. If we have served the institution or organization well, we usually feel that we have served the Lord well.

Yet ministry is really our personal service to people. As members of the Body of Christ we are to "by love serve one another." We have not been called to merely serve an organization – we are not here to serve things, however noble they may appear to be.

Do not misunderstand; things can be used as tools to help minister effectively to others. However, very often we lose sight of the purpose of our ministry (which is to others) while placing our focus on the structured activity of an organized institution. Frequently what is called "ministry" is the service of the organization; it is simply busy-work which satisfies Adamic flesh. (Such "service" is repeatedly the means of recognition for a job "well done," while those who serve other members of the Body on a very personal level receive little, if any, public recognition.)

The Definition of Ministry

Lawrence O. Richards provides for us a good working definition of ministry.

"... When the New Testament speaks of ministry ... it is a ministry of all believers to each other ... The ministry is to be mutual. The ministry is the function of the whole people of God. ... 'The ministry' is thus divided among all the members of the body of Christ."¹

1. Lawrence O. Richards, *A New Face for the Church* (p. 98-100).

Noah Webster gives the etymology of our English word as:

“to serve, wait, attend; to give; to afford; to supply.”²

Among the Greek words used to translate our English words, James Strong³ uses such definitions as:

“Attendance (as a servant); aid; service; to be an attendant, *i.e.*, to wait upon; to run errands; a waiter; under oarsman; assistant”

The various Greek words for ministry are translated as follows: administered, administration(s), deacons, minister(s), ministered, ministering, ministration, ministry, office, office of a deacon, relief, servant(s), serveth, service and serving.

Organizational Ministry

“Status (‘rank’ or ‘level of importance’) ... is ascribed on the basis of organizational performance. ... We tend to think of a ‘good Christian’ as one who attends church Sunday morning and evening and on prayer meeting night, who teaches, or serves on a board. Dedication to Christ is measured by the number of nights a person is out involved in church activities! ...

“As long as Christians define themselves by their role in an organization rather than in their basic role as a Christian, they will not become what they are in Christ. Growth will remain stunted.”⁴

Biblical Usage of the word “Ministry”

Now let us briefly look at how the Bible uses the concept of ministry. Here are some of what the Bible teaches:

Domestic ministering to guests

(Matthew 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39; 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26, 27; John 12:2)

Supplying the needs of life

(Matthew 25:44; 27:55; Mark 15:41; Acts 6:1, 2; 11:29; 12:25; 19:22; II Timothy 1:16-18; Romans 15:25; II Corinthians 8:4, 19, 20; 9:1, 12, 13, Philippians 2:25; Philemon 13)

2. Noah Webster, *The American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828.

3. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.

4. Lawrence O. Richards, *A New Face for the Church* (p. 48-49).

Sharing the Word of God

(Luke 1:2; Acts 6:4; II Corinthians 4:1; I Peter 1:12)

Use of spiritual gifts “to profit withal”

(Romans 12:7; I Corinthians 12:5; Ephesians 4:12, Colossians 4:17; I Peter 4:10,11)

Paul’s apostleship and message to the gentiles

(Acts 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; II Corinthians 5:18; 11:8; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23, 25; I Timothy 1:12; II Timothy 4:11)

As seen in all of the above references, ministry is again and again shown to be directed toward PEOPLE:

“I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied” (I Corinthians 16:15-17).

“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10).

May each of us reconsider our service to and for God. Are we simply busy with the structure of man-made institutions or are we really ministering?

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