

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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Ministry and Government

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Introduction

In our last issue we discussed the Framework of the Kingdom beginning with the foundation of the government of the Kingdom and continuing through the supporting framework of peace, justice and righteousness. In this issue we need to distinguish between ministry, authority, and government and the place of each in the Church and in the Kingdom.

It is clear from Scripture that the Church and the Kingdom of God are not the same thing; they are not synonymous terms. [See [The Kingdom and the Church](#) for a complete discussion of the difference.] However, our modern institutional church teaching sees no difference and as a result relates all Kingdom scriptures to the Church. Even those who see a difference in theory, actually behave as if they are the same in practice. This causes many Truths of the Word to be obscured and our understanding to be confused.

Primarily when we look at the Word we find that the Kingdom relates to **doing** while the Church relates to **being**. Kingdom relates to the work of the Father while Church relates to the Household of God. We function as citizens of the Kingdom; we function as sons and daughters in the Family of the Lord.

Structure and Function

Jesus spoke repeatedly of the Kingdom of God and almost nothing of the Church. He continued to speak of the Kingdom after His resurrection. He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the coming of the Holy Spirit. After He came on Pentecost, the Scriptures begin to tell us about “church”. The Holy Spirit has been sent to individuals and He functions within each of us. However, the individual members function together through the Holy Spirit as “church”. So, we need to understand the function of the Holy Spirit within us individually and corporately.

Primarily the scriptural church is identified in two ways—by its structure and its function. While the church is certainly not bricks and mortar, it does have a God designed structure. The

structure has a purpose that is defined by its function. A church with no structure has no function and is worthless everyone including God.

The people of God have accepted so many things as scriptural that have only been the traditions and teachings of men. The fact is that we have little or no idea of what the church should be. The definition of church in the Scripture is really not very clear. We understand it only by inference from the actions of the believers in Acts and the discussions in the Epistles. The Bible makes no effort to define what the church is in God's eyes other than the Body of Christ. For that reason, we are all totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit to establish the church according to the directions of Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "I will build my church". He is building it through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. If we ignore or reject the Holy Spirit, we will not be built together into the eternal structure called the church, the body of Christ.

God has an eternal purpose for His Church that is completed in the Heavens but is still unfolding in time. The Church must function in our earthly realm as a spiritual power that has practical application. John, in his first epistle, gives us the practical aspect of the true church—love one another; keep the commandments of God; love each child of God; overcome the world. The Church cannot function in this manner if it has a structure like any earthly structure. Church cannot be one of many. Our God is not like any other god and His church is not like any other structure; neither is His Kingdom like any other kingdom.

The structure of the Church is *organic*; that is, it is structured as a Body, the Body of Christ. It is made up of joints and ligaments and grows as each provides what has been given to the building up of the Body. The function of the Church in this age is to come into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that is, to grow up, come to maturity.

The structure of the Kingdom is *governmental*; that is, the King rules and those appointed by the King rule with Him. The Kingdom is a nation, a society, a culture of the people of God. We function in the Kingdom according to the plans and purposes of the King who appoints us to our work according to His good pleasure. The function of the Kingdom is to fulfill or accomplish the will of the Father so that the will of the Father is always done at all times in all places.

The governments of this present world system are destined to be replaced with the government of Jesus, the Kingdom of God. All of the world system governments, including the democratic ones, are unworkable because of the fallen nature of man. Therefore, those in the Church, which will administrate the things of the Kingdom, must be very different in nature than the people who administrate the world governments. Within the church we learn to put off the old man and put on the new man, which is being conformed to the character of Christ. To participate in the government of the Kingdom requires people to be "transformed by the renewing of the mind". Our transformation occurs within the Church preparing us for our function in the Kingdom.

Order and Government

Separating Kingdom function from Church function results in the idea that order and government are aspects of the Kingdom and "ministry" (as defined in the Scriptures) is an aspect of Church. The import of the practical application of this understanding will become clear as the Holy Spirit brings enlightenment.

We need to be very clear that there is always "government" in the church and in the Kingdom. Whenever we find God's order, we will find God's government. Whenever we find God's

government, we will find God's order. The Kingdom of God is the government of God in manifestation and permeates both the Kingdom and the Church.

The bible is clear about "government" and it also tells us that we need to submit to government including the government in the church. We see in Acts 15 the example of the proper functioning of Church government resolving issues. It is the government of Antioch consulting with the government of Jerusalem within the context of the Kingdom of God. The government of Antioch was representing the local church at Antioch concerning the doctrine of circumcision.

Local Government

Most groups accept the idea of "the universal church" but then can't exactly define what the "universal church" means. With the concept of "universal church" also comes the idea of the "local church". Most would agree that the local church is the church in one geographical area. For example: the local church at Ephesus or at Rome or at Corinth. In each geographical area there can only be one church because Christ only has one body. The error comes when we designate our denomination as "the local church" and require other people who want to become a part of the "local church" to come and join us. The true local church must be made up of all those who are fully given to Christ and walk under His Lordship. It is the denominations that confuse the concept of the local church. Is it possible to have different headquarters, different leaders, different doctrines and still be part of the same body of Christ?

Each local church has a government of local elders. These elders are appointed and have certain qualifications that indicate that they are really elders and not popular personalities elected by a political campaign. For example, an elder must be able to teach and he must be above reproach as Paul told Titus when he laid out an elder's qualifications. [*Titus 1:5-9 NASB*]

Notice that Titus, according to Paul's instructions, was to appoint elders, plural, not a "pastor". In the King James New Testament the word "pastor" is only used once and that is in Ephesians 4:11. In King James' day, this word meant "shepherd" which is the correct translation of the Greek word that is used in the original. However, we have latched onto the word "pastor" and built it into something different than the Scriptures intended. Adapting the world's authority structure, we have installed the pastor as the head of the local Church. [*Jesus does not share headship!*] Again, following the world's methods, we place requirements on a pastor such as seminary or other educational degrees without concern about his call and anointing. We have created an atmosphere where a person can become a professional pastor by following the world's methods for a career without the person even being born again by the Spirit!

The functioning and government of elders has been familiar to God's people throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The Scriptures seems to imply that elders are God's permanent form of government. The concept of elders starts in Genesis and goes all the way through Revelation where we read about the elders in Heaven who are worshipping God night and day. We have to think of this concept of elders as something that God has established as part of His permanent form of government. [*For more about the leadership structure of the Local Church see "[Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?](#)"*]

While there is only one Head, all other leadership is plural. Everywhere that elder is used in the New Testament, it is plural. This is God's safety feature for His people [*Prov. 11:14; 24:6*]. Because no one person has the right to force his decisions on the local church. Plurality causes

the elders to seek God for unity of decision. This gives the Lord the practical, functional headship that the Scriptures present. Until agreement is reached through the Spirit, no decision is forthcoming.

Elders are shepherds who oversee the flock. They bear the greatest responsibility for the local brethren and are, therefore, the highest governmental authority in a local Church. [*One has authority only over that for which one has responsibility.*] There is no one "over" the Elders except the Lord.

Ministries

We have looked at government and have seen its function—to provide order according to God's purpose. The King rules His Kingdom through His government, which is both local and trans-local through the Five-Fold Ministry—the “doma” gifts of Jesus to His people. The governmental function of the Church is linked to its relationship to the Kingdom. However, there is another aspect of the Church that is its primary function and that is “ministry”, which is service to the Lord and each other. **The function of government and the function of ministry within the Church are different.**

The government functions to promote unity, protection, direction, corporate goals in accord with the purposes of God, and to maintain an atmosphere of peace, harmony and order. The “government” may function at any time of day or night. Ministries function for the edification, instruction and maturity of the saints so they will all grow into the ministries. This will provide a continuity of ministries as needed to meet the requirements of the moment. It is beyond the function of government to edify and mature the saints until they all come to the unity of the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. It is beyond the function of ministries to maintain order and harmony in the assembly. That is the responsibility of government.

Ministry is outside of the arena of government. Someone who is in the government may also minister but his ministry is outside of government. One's place in government is based on Jesus selecting one as a “doma” gift to His people. One's place in ministry is based on one's calling, anointing and gifting by the Holy Spirit, and one's placement and function in the Body of Christ. Because one is an elder does not mean that one has a ministry in the Body. A functioning elder will still have to establish his own ministry—being an elder does not necessarily give him a ministry. Mixing the government with the ministry, where the ministry must have the permission of the government before it may minister, is outside the concept of "body". The government of the church has no function during ministry unless something goes wrong or gets out of order. Ministry has no function in the government even though someone who ministers may also be an elder. The operations are in two different realms and for two different purposes and ideally function at different times.

The whole church is the source of all the "ministries". Since an elder is part of the local church, he also should have a ministry within the local church. His ministry is not based upon his work within the government as an elder but upon his membership within the body. The church is the "body of Christ" with every member functioning in their calling. There are no unnecessary members. The government is not based upon "ministries" and the ministries are not based upon government.

We can divide the ministry of the church from the government of the church but we can't divide

the body into two groups. A person may be an elder in the government of the church but in a meeting of the believers he must develop his ministry like everybody else. He is just one believer among all the others. Just because he is an elder doesn't automatically give him a "position" in the ministries of the body.

The assembly of believers focuses on ministry to one another, "body ministry".

1Co 14:26-33 NKJV

- (26) How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
- (27) If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.
- (28) But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.
- (29) Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.
- (30) But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.
- (31) For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.
- (32) And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.
- (33) For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

When the believers come together in assembly, the "government", ordinarily, has no function. Every member is to function in the ministry that God has given. The purpose of assembling is so that each member can be edified. "*But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*" [1 Cor. 12:7 NASB] If one believer has the ministry of prophecy in the local assembly and another who has the same ministry gets a revelation, the first is to sit down and permit the other believer to do his ministry. The ministry of prophecy is not "an office in the government" but is a ministry within the local assembly. When these ministries, that God has distributed through out the whole assembly, begin to function "as government" they have perverted their ministry. When "the government" insists upon functioning as ministries in the local church, the government has perverted it's function. Of course, an elder in the government may also be anointed and have ministry as a member of the local body, but he must function as a member and not as a "elder or leader".

Now, if something goes wrong during the assembly and someone causes a disturbance, the government must restore order. The government should be present during the assembly but normally would have no function unless a problem arises. "The assembly" is believers ministering to believers to edify the whole body. When an elder, even one who is called a "pastor", stands up and preaches and everyone else sits and listens, the divine order has broken down.

While we may agree with these Scriptures and even hold to them as doctrine, in practice our meetings have little or no resemblance to this type of function. Why is that? Could it be because the "leader" is concerned that too many crazy or off the wall things will happen that will humiliate or embarrass him. The safe thing is to maintain control by getting up to preach while

everyone else listens. If no one else gets to an opportunity to function, that's just the price to keep everything in line and in order; however, there is little difference between that type of church and a cemetery where the graves are in line and there is an abundance of order and quiet.

Artificial Synthesis

We have become victims to an artificial synthesis of ministry and government that operates in a manner that is separate from the body and is not subject to the body. It is a self appointed and self perpetuating hierarchy of "leadership" that functions as a combined "office" of ministry and government.

In the body type church there must be relationship and communication so the whole body can move together and is aware of what is happening. Each member must have the authority to impart life to his or her function according to body life. Each member must have the authority to follow the instruction of the Head in the carrying out of his function. We must leave room for each one "to be taught of God" as the New Covenant promises. Of course, each member must function within the harmony of the whole body and not against the body and not in an adversarial manner. In the hierarchical type church, where there is no distinction between government and ministry, no member can function in ministry that does not first get the permission of the leadership.

In the body type church the guidance and anointing of the Holy Spirit is enough. Every member is absolutely essential, otherwise there would be no point in them being there. Every member is connected to the other members and every member has a function. This is clear through the picture given of a natural body and the spiritual body in 1 Cor 12 and Rom. 12: 3-8.

When the assembly comes together to worship, praise and learn, both government and ministry may be present but the ministry of one "member" to another is primary. The focus is upon a team or body rather than upon government. All may participate. However, in actual practice this kind of meeting sometimes turns out to be a disaster because of the immaturity of the "ministers". For that reason we have scrapped the whole idea of body ministry because of strange and confusing "ministry". Even though it is safer to pattern the church after the control model of government, it kills "body life".

Theory and Practice

Our modern institutional church has focused upon the scriptures as "theory" that doesn't work in actual practice. We have the idea that they may have worked at one time, when people wore sandals and rode on donkeys but in our modern time it is not a provable reality in actual practice. If we approached the scriptures as absolute reality and totally applicable and workable, we would at least attempt to bring them into our experience. As long as we approach the scriptures as theory we will not arrive at the Kingdom reality. In fact, if the scriptures are just theory there need not be Kingdom reality, just Kingdom theory. We can preach the "doctrine of the Kingdom" without it affecting our life at all. The Kingdom must become personal reality before it can become a corporate reality. Until it becomes a personal reality, it will remain a theory.

The church government may set and promote the basic goals of the corporate group but it cannot legislate the implementation of the process of reaching those goals. The implementation of the basic functions must be inspired by the ministries. However, the ministries cannot appoint the

individual functions but inspire members to seek God for their function. Church government must function in one realm while the church ministries function in another. When the government within the church becomes bureaucratic it tends to stagnate growth, development, inspiration and creativity of the ministries and the members. When the guidance ministries become bureaucratic they have the same effect upon individual ministries.

Every citizen of the Kingdom must function in the practical basics of the Kingdom, which means a lifetime of learning, change, correction and discipline. No one can minister Kingdom truth who is ignorant of the Kingdom, how it works and why. The Kingdom is not romantic or idealistic. It is pragmatic and practical. Kingdom pragmatism means that the Kingdom is defined and understood by the practical application of Kingdom truth as lived out in the experience of the individual and corporate group. In other words the Kingdom is seen and understood by personal testimony. We must show how it works in our life. We are not interested in Kingdom theories or speculation but the demonstration of Kingdom power and life in everyday situations.

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