

The Kingdom of God The Government of God - Apostles Part 1

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To equip the saints, God gave five gifts. That's what Ephesians 4:11-12 say. These gifts are meant to equip the saints, so that the ministry that God intends to conduct through the life of every believer might reflect both the maturity of Christ's character and His power. Everyone has a ministry, because your ministry is the manner in which Christ intends to live through you. Now, unless Christ does not intend to live through you; then you have no ministry. It's common today for people to believe that the ministry is for those who are in the pulpit. But it specifically says here in Ephesians 4:11-12, that these five gifts were given for the equipping of the saints. If you are one of the saints, you are to be equipped to do the work God called you to do. The equipping of the saints is to prepare them for the way that God intends to live through them. These five gifts are indispensable.

As I mentioned at an earlier time, today we see an emphasis on some of these five gifts, but practically no emphasis on others and there are whole denominations that do not even believe that many of these gifts exist today, let alone that they are necessary. There are some who say two things: Number one that once the written word came about, the need for the five gifts ceased. Now, I cannot imagine something less biblical than that. What is offered as the foundation upon which when the written word was written there was no longer a need for these five gifts. It's actually quoting the book of 1st Corinthians the 13th chapter to say that it says that. In I Corinthians 13, at the relevant part, the end of the chapter says, "Now we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." And the thought is that when the word was written, and it seemed to be saying by that, that what they had before was imperfect or partial, but once you write it down it became 'the perfect'.

What I'm doing here is I'm addressing the question of the need for the five gifts for the equipping of the saints. I'm saying that according to Ephesians 4:11 and 12 you have to have five gifts to equip your character for the works of service. But it's common for religion today to say, "You don't need the five gifts because you have had the written Word to replace the gifts of apostles and prophets. Now, oddly enough, these same people, these same denominations, admit to having evangelists and teachers; some admit to having pastors. The reason why some don't call them pastors but call them ministers, is

because they don't want to be confused with other religions, other groups that call their ministers pastors.

Truth of the matter is, whoever administers the grace of God is a minister of the grace of God. And there is a biblical term called 'poimen', that's the Greek word and it means 'shepherd' or 'shepherds'. A shepherd is someone who takes sheep out into a pasture and is called, therefore, a 'pastor'. So whether you prefer 'minister' or 'pastor', the word is biblical. But what we are seeing is that there are those today who believe that they are evangelists, because everyone believes people should be brought in, and there are those who believe that they are pastors, people need to be taken care of, and there are teachers but typically they mean Sunday school teachers though other groups are saying, "Well, some peoples giftings are teachers." But almost no groups recognize and admit to the need for apostles, prophets, together with evangelists, pastors and teachers. And the reason, some offer, is that when the perfect came the partial was done away. The perfect was the Word, the written Word; the partial was the spoken word.

Now, here is how idiotic that point of view is. Everything that the church was, for close to the first century of its existence, came about as a result of the spoken and not the written word. The word wasn't written until much later, but all that was done, was done without one sentence of it being written, obviously because it's all about events that occurred, the writing is all after the fact. Now if the spoken word, of which subsequently there came to be a written record, if that were imperfect and that's the substance of what's written, then what's written is just as imperfect because it recalls imperfect incidences. To merely change the form from spoken to written does not confer a completeness to the written that was absent with the spoken, because everything that was written about came about before a sentence of it was written; it was written up after it had occurred.

So if you can rely on the substance of what is written, it's because you can rely on this fact: that when it was not written but merely spoken, it was as complete as it would be when it was written down. So, it's rubbish to suggest that the perfect is the written and not the spoken. The written would have to be just as imperfect as the spoken because the written is only written about what was done while it was spoken. It's so obvious. Why people would make such an idiotic argument is only indicative of the prejudice against the Spirit of God who spoke the things when they were spoken.

The same Spirit who spoke through Peter on the day of Pentecost, I mean where did Peter read the script for the day of Pentecost? Was it not that the Holy Spirit came on him and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Did that event produce the church or produce the first ones to be called out? Yes. But it wasn't something written down. Is that a reliable occurrence? Of course it is. Why is it reliable? It was the work of the Spirit. The fact that we could read about it now and know that it was true is not what makes it perfect. It's not the written form that makes it perfect. It

was the Spirit who was doing it that caused the thing that was done to be absolutely reliable. If this were just a matter of some guys thinking up of some things to say then perhaps both the spoken and the written would be imperfect.

But the point is, that what was done, was done; and what was written, was written about what was done. It was done first in spoken formats; it was done subsequently by written formats. What was spoken into being, was subsequently recorded. That's all that it is. So, it's as valuable for our edification when it was spoken as when it was written. Written just means that the same persons do not have to be around from generation to generation, from century to century. The written format allows it to go forward in the same fashion, that is, to allow the information to be conveyed that was done back then from one generation, to another, to another and the ones that were speaking it do not have to live for two thousand years speaking it in every generation. It's that simple. Now, so, the written word did not replace the need for the apostles.

The second argument that is made is: "Well, there can't be apostles today. After the original twelve died, then those who were around then and met the criteria spoken in Scripture for apostles, when they died the class closed. Therefore all that constituted the work of apostles had to have been finished by the time those twelve apostles died." Well that too is foolishness. But, don't take my word for it. I'll show it to you in Scripture. Now, because the Scriptures say, you see, that it takes five gifts to equip the saints; does that mean that it took five gifts to equip the saints in the first century when the twelve apostles were around? Because one of the five gifts to equip the saints is the gift of apostles and that once they were equipped, then from then on the record of their being equipped is enough to equip us. Is that the argument? If God said it takes five gifts to equip the saints, it takes five gifts to equip the saints. What's hard to believe about that? To invent an argument that circumvents this truth is to pervert the Scriptures.

Let's walk right into it and look at it for what it is. Are there apostles today? The majority of people will quickly say to you, there were two criteria that Peter set forth for the selection of the replacement to Judas and that nobody today could possibly meet those two criteria. What were the criteria? The first one was that you had to have been a follower of Jesus from the day that He was baptized by John and seen all of His ministry. And the second criterion was that you had to have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. Namely you should have seen Him after He had been raised from the dead.

I will admit that if those are the two criteria for the selection of apostles today, that nobody today could possibly meet those criteria. And the argument would have to be true then that only the first century Christians could be equipped by the five gifts. But I maintain that until we are perfect, until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, we need the five gifts because it says so in Ephesians 4:11. If we're saying that the written word conferred that perfection, then we

presently, as the body of Christ, stand in the world in the full measure of the stature that belongs to Christ. Now, I don't know anybody who will say that that's true. Since that's clearly not true, we must have the five gifts to equip the saints.

So then, what do you do with the argument that says the two criteria set forth by Peter in Acts 1, for the replacement of Judas, would make it impossible for anybody today to be an apostle? Well, let's deal with the two criteria. Again they were: you had to have been a witness of Jesus' ministry from the time that He was baptized by John, and the second criterion, you had to have been a witness of His resurrection. Now, before we get into it, let me ask these two questions. The first is: since Jesus Himself had appointed the twelve and Judas had fallen, why did you need to replace Judas? I mean, Jesus didn't say to Peter, "Replace Judas." What was Peter's motivation for replacing Judas? Why did he not just leave the number at eleven?

But while you are thinking about the answer to that, let me ask you another question. There were two, Barsabas Justus and Matthias, there were two who met the criteria set forth by Peter. Barsabas Justus met it, met the two criteria, and Matthias did. Now, since they were both obviously capable of replacing Judas because they met the criteria, why not appoint both? Why cast lots to select one? So, either leave the number at eleven or select two additional ones. There did not appear to be an overabundance of apostles at that point. So it couldn't be eleven, if they had left it alone there would have been eleven, Judas had died. And it couldn't be thirteen. Two were qualified; they selected one of the two. It seems that the relevance was with the number twelve, obviously. What was the importance of the number twelve? Well, according to the Jewish Beth Din, their legal system in the days of Jesus, the days of the apostles; when twelve witnesses testified to a matter, it was conclusively presumed to be true. Its where, in American jurisprudence and in English common law, we get a jury of twelve. That is its history. Twelve witnesses testifying to a matter allowed for there to be a conclusive presumption that the issue in controversy was true.

Now, we see the twelve on the day of Pentecost functioning as witnesses and that's what they said. They said, "This Jesus you took, crucified Him with your wicked hands, and God raised Him from the dead whereof we," the twelve, Peter stood up with the other eleven Acts 2 says, "we are all witnesses." Witnesses. The two criteria set forth by Peter were designed to select one more person to fill out the required quotient of twelve witnesses. That's why it was not eleven and that's why it wasn't thirteen, because the work was to bring the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost and that required twelve. Peter knew it and of course the Holy Spirit knew it. And when Judas fell, the Holy Spirit made provision, by Peter's lots, for Matthias to replace Judas, and they even said so in the preamble leading up to the selection of Matthias.

Now, here is the point: after the day of Pentecost, the number of Jewish apostles did not

remain at twelve. How do we know that? Well, it is simple. Paul writes in Galatians 1, that he went up to Jerusalem and he met with none of the other apostles except Peter and James the brother of the Lord. Now, you will recall that James, the brother of the Lord, was not one of the original twelve. There was James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, and James the son of Alphaeus, but not James the son of Joseph. And yet, Paul not only calls him an apostle, "I met with none of the other apostles except Peter and James the brother of the Lord," who would be James the son of Joseph but we see him functioning as an apostle in a conspicuous fashion.

In Jerusalem, in Acts 15, when the counsel of apostles and elders met to decide the terms for the admission of Gentiles into the church, the counsel was presided over, he wasn't just an attendee, an observer; but the counsel was presided over by James the brother of the Lord. And he was the author of the decision of the counsel concerning the terms of the admission of Gentiles into the church. And they sent this letter to the Gentiles, in Antioch, by the hand of Silas and Barnabas, the same Barnabas who became the traveling companion of Paul as he set out on his first journey. So we find James, the brother of the Lord, functioning as an apostle and he is called an apostle by no other than Paul himself.

Now, there were not only more than twelve Jewish apostles, but none of the Gentile apostles, none of the apostles to the Gentiles, met either of the criteria that Peter set forth for the replacement of Judas. Paul didn't meet those criteria. When he said, "Have I not met the Lord?" he was speaking about meeting the Lord on the road to Damascus, but the criteria that Peter set out was not that kind of encounter. Peter said that you had to have been a witness of everything Jesus did, which means that Paul would not have qualified because he was not around in that day, and you had to have seen the Lord after He had been resurrected. That means, while He was walking around on the earth, you had to have seen Him. But the event involving Paul seeing Jesus, would not qualify as seeing the Lord because at the same time that Paul saw the Lord on the road to Damascus he was in the company of a number of others traveling with him, none of whom saw the Lord. So, if Paul were to testify that he saw the Lord and this may be verified by others, he couldn't verify it that way. But did he see the Lord? Yes he did, but it was not meant as a fulfillment of that criterion, it was meant as a confirmation of Paul's own call to the things to which God had called Paul.

But we see in passages like I Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 1, it's written by Paul, Silas and Timothy. Chapter 2, of the same book, verse 7, says "as apostles of Christ". Who were the authors? Paul, Silas and Timothy. "We could have commanded you," they said.

Similarly in Acts 14:14, speaking of Paul and Barnabas it says, "Now when the apostles, Barnabas and Saul." You will recall that neither Paul nor Barnabas were in the list of the twelve. None of the Gentile apostles met the criteria and yet the Scriptures are replete with apostles. So, what is the answer? The answer is that the criteria set forth by Peter,

were criteria to establish witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus and to testify to the Jews because that was what they required.

Now, there were apostles in the New Testament and there are apostles today. How did the apostles in the New Testament get to be apostles and how do apostles today get to be apostles? Well, that we will have to pick up in another discussion. So I hope you will join me as we explore further, not only the fact that there are apostles today, but the necessity for them in the equipping of the saints so that you may have God's character while you conduct the business of the Lord. You must not only do the works of God but you must do them in the way that is reminiscent of the character of the Lord himself. We'll continue to pursue the government of God and I hope you will join me. I'm Sam Soleyn, God bless you and I'll see you then. Bye bye.