

Fractured Building Blocks

Or, Where the Apostles and Prophets Movement Failed

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The apostles and prophets movement is perhaps best known for its flamboyant and outlandish “apostles” and “prophets” who traveled extensively with “armor bearers” as personal servants and bodyguards, arriving in flashy cars and spouting things about the kingdom of God or their own special importance to the kingdom. Even as this portion of the movement flourished among the gullible and ignorant and produced its many celebrities and books, many recognized that this was not the whole of the movement and some, many by personal experience, recognized clearly that this was not even the real kingdom of God.

The apostles and prophets movement, like all other movements before it, was built in reaction against previously established religious practices. The “personal pastor” system had largely failed (though some people still clung to its precepts) and now apostles and prophets were being told that their position was slightly (or greatly, depending on the source) more important for the body of Christ. As a result, everyone suddenly wanted to be a prophet or apostle and somehow, magically and instantaneously, they simply became just what their hearts desired. The source of any special insights they had or miraculous power they exercised and the source of all the money that poured in for their travels and projects was simply presumed to be God. And perhaps some of it was of God – but their misuses of God’s resources for their own agendas and carnal lifestyles will certainly add to their judgment.

The apostles and prophets movement, in many places originated within house “churches” because apostles and prophets, frankly, were not welcome at the established, institutional, mainstream “church.” The only way to remain welcome at such a place required one to speak wondrous praises to God, encouragement and edification to the attendees of the particular “church” they were in *and* confirmations of the “pastor’s” “vision” and “work of God.” But if you dared to speak about what really needed to change at “church” so that the people of Christ might experience liberty and start to grow to spiritual maturity, it was time to move on down the road! Thus, the only available place for many apostles and prophets was found in house “churches” that used their gifting as a drawing card. In too many house “churches,” though, truly God-graced prophets and apostles weren’t even welcome there and were forced to withdraw into “the wilderness.” Some have endured but most compromised in one way or another or simply died out there.

The apostles and prophets movement is built on the simple discovery of the list of Paul’s “giftings” in the book of Ephesians, the so-called “fivefold ministry.” “[God] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers.” (Eph. 4:11) From this simple list, however, flowered intricate descriptions and categories of personality descriptions to fit each gifting that were more psychological than spiritual, descriptions that did not fit *all* the people who were truly gifted by God in the various functions listed. For every description, there was someone who differed from the building block definition given but that did not stop the adherents to the movement from pressing on as if the intricate definition were the absolute and complete gospel truth.

The Fivefold Ministry

In order to understand this, let us examine the “fivefold ministry.” Paul lists the “ones” of our life in God: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God

and Father of all, who is above and through all, and in us all. (Eph. 4:4-6) From this oneness springs the manifold grace which Paul describes by saying, “But [from this One-ness] to each one of us grace was given according to the measure by which Christ gives it.” (Eph. 4:7)

Paul then goes on to say that Christ gave some to be specific expressions of His grace – listing here apostles, prophets, heralds, shepherds and teachers (Eph. 4:11) and using other labels in the lists in his other writings. This is the quintessential proof-text verse for those who espouse the idea of the “five-fold ministry.” There are indeed five categories of how God dispenses His grace in this particular listing though some Greek scholars like to divide this list into four. Arguments for both four and five are valid. Some have even come up with a particular rule of Greek syntax (which cannot be found anywhere in ancient Greek texts but only in modern New Testament Koine Greek textbooks) that “proves” that the last two are really one thing. But few have seemed to consider that Paul may have simply had traveling workers in mind for the first three and local workers in mind for the last two. But whether this is a list of four or five or whether this is a list of local and trans-local giftings is only a distraction away from the main point that God gives His manifold (many-sided, multi-faceted) grace to people for a specific purpose. It is equally certain that those who have transliterated these Greek words and turned these expressions of God’s grace into modern ecclesiastical “offices” (especially that of “pastor,” “apostle” and “prophet”) in order to wield power over other believers are perhaps the most deceived of all.

Paul wrote,

“To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace [that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel] was given, that I should [become a servant according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power and] preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the ekklesia to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” (Eph. 3:6-12)

God’s gift of *grace* (mercy and power) caused Paul to be an apostle (messenger) of Christ Jesus. The same manifold wisdom of God that gives us these expressions of His grace is to be demonstrated by the ekklesia to the angelic beings the New Testament calls principalities and powers. This *is* the mystery of the gospel of Christ among men! This is the power source and method by which the more mature believers are to serve their younger brothers and sisters in Christ and this is the manner in which God has chosen to show the angels just how wise He is.

The primary task of the people given God’s specific gifts of grace is to simply express the grace of Christ as given to them (see 1 Cor. 15:10, etc.) and share this *life* in this specific expression with those people around them and, in so doing, equip the body of saints to do the work of service to Christ, to His body and even to the world. (Eph. 4:12) They are, by sharing the grace of Christ, empowering the saints (putting them in contact with the power and life of Christ and God through their work and life) so that the saints are then able to attend to the orphans and widows and the least (poorest, most insignificant) of Christ’s brothers (Jas. 1:27,

Mt. 25:40, 45) and to love one another as He commanded. (Jn. 13:34-35) When these people with their specific expression of God's grace, actively express the grace (mercy *and* power) that comes from their oneness with Christ and God and fulfill this work of equipping the saints, then – ***and only then!*** – will we begin to see among believing people the unanimity of the faith, the unanimity of our knowledge of the Son of God, true spiritual maturity and a tangible and visible similarity and resemblance between our lives and that of Christ Jesus. (Eph. 4:13)

Since a picture is worth a thousand words, let me draw a diagram of what I am saying. And just as Hebrew must be read from right to left, this diagram must be read from the bottom to the top.

Apostles - - - SAINTS - - - Heralds
Prophets - - - Shepherds
Teachers
- - -
Servants
Elders/Overseers

The picture formed is that of a cup, a goblet, in which the more “vulnerable” saints, those people who are not yet mature in the Lord or who do not possess leadership giftings, are supported and upheld securely by the more mature, the two lowest categories of servants and elders/overseers. An elder is simply an older man solidly experienced in the faith and the servants are the younger servants who assist the older man in serving the people. Any fivefold ministry gifting, then, can in maturity be either a deacon or an elder, depending on his spiritual maturity and calling.

This simple picture, however, was not enough for many of the talking heads of the apostles and prophets movement who then went on to fabricate complicated versions of their own stratified pyramid structures and created systems of house “churches” that served their need for supporters and followers and cash. The system, though more complex perhaps than the institutional “church,” is really not at all different.

When we recognize that this picture of the cup, the goblet, is the Lord's original plan of leadership, then it is not really difficult to see that the corruption of this leadership, as accomplished primarily in the “church,” is the cup the Great Prostitute “Babylon” drinks from. The “cup” is the perverted leadership who drains the blood of the saints and deposits it in a cup from which she drinks to excess. (Rev. 17:6, 18:6)

Anyone who believes the validity of the movement's “building blocks,” the intricate descriptions and categories of personality descriptions of each gifting, must surrender yet again all their knowledge to God and be cleansed. Only God can separate how much of what comes out of the movement's infatuation with apostles and prophets was actually truth, how much was error and how much was some strange mixture of the two. But anyone who takes the contaminated, inferior, fractured building blocks of the movement and presses on to try and build or enter into the kingdom of God will find that absolutely nothing of Egypt or Babylon – and these substandard building materials certainly come from one or both of these – will be welcome in the New Jerusalem and they will be rejected. Nothing – ***not one thing*** – of Egypt or Babylon will be welcome in the New Jerusalem. Count on it.

The people who rely on these fractured building blocks may seem to be intellectual but spiritually they are dry or contaminated. Or their motivation is not divine agape love but rather

their own goal or agenda. For example, one can be motivated by the need to “build the kingdom” and never realize that it is impossible to build God’s kingdom apart from obedience to Him (Mt. 6:10) and never realize that one’s underlying true but hidden motivation is to be seen as an eminent scholar or leader and benefactor of men. (see Lk. 22:25-26) – as a result, such a one will only build yet another contaminated version of “church” even though he calls it “the kingdom.” Some have indeed received revelation from God in the past but that has become corrupted and mingled with knowledge gleaned from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:17, etc.) Only fruit from the Tree of Life (the Lord Jesus Christ – Rev. 22:2, etc.) will produce eternal and abundant life. The knowledge gained from the tree of independent knowledge will only bring forth death. As the end of the age closes, we will find ourselves strangely brought right back to the same kind of choice which Adam and Eve faced. The only difference is that there will be only one Tree which we are commanded to eat from – the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ – and eating from any of the other trees may well result in our eternal death. The end times are perilous indeed!

Leadership in the body of Christ and the kingdom of God is not primarily about authority and it is certainly not a position that gives one brother the right to tell the other brother what to do or how to live. True leadership is all about conformity to the Person and character and Spirit of Christ and God. The one more like the Master, who from His position of greatness, stripped Himself of everything and took the lowliest position (Jn. 13:3-5) is a better leader than is the one who demands special treatment or deference just because he or she has entered the room. Lowly humility or arrogant superiority will be the primary difference between the wheat and the tares – the wheat, because the plant carries a true crop, will bow over in humility whereas the tare, because it is only an empty weed, stands erect and visible. Leadership that takes care to rescue the 100th sheep (Mt. 18:12) is much more in tune with the heart of the King than is any “ministry” that draws in crowds just to separate the fools from their cash or to prop up the image of the supposed “man of God.” The former has at least something of God whereas the latter is merely a tool of Satan!

Knowledge or obedience, humility or arrogance, love or self-centeredness, care or control, all these and more are the traits by which we can evaluate whether any particular man or “ministry” is functioning in the interests of the kingdom of God or in the interests of the kingdom of Satan. But we must wean ourselves from the need to have any man or “ministry” directing our lives. We need to hear and follow the Spirit of Christ and God – His sheep must hear *His* voice (Jn. 10:27) – or we will be tossed back and forth by the cunning schemes and craftiness of greedy men who are more interested in sacrificing the souls of their audience than in helping them attain to eternal life. (Eph. 4:14, 2 Pet. 2:3) There is only one safe place to hide from errant leadership – the shadow of the Almighty!

Let he who has ears hear!

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