



A Ministry of Love

In today's market of ministry applicants the definition of what makes a minister, is relatively standardized and falls very short of New Testament definition. A High school education, bachelor's degree from a bible college, a Master's degree from a seminary, and hopefully working on a PhD from another seminary, are qualifying essentials. In other words, intellectual knowledge is the highest criterion for entrance level ministry.

Then, if one is going to be successful at ministry he needs a Dale Carnegie "How to win friends and influence enemies" course, a Zig Zigler "How to motivate and sell people on your winning ideas and church vision," a John Maxwell course in advanced CEO leadership in the Church as a business model, and several regular motivational conferences and seminars to keep the Senior Pastor on the cutting edge of modern business leadership.

If he learns to be a great administrator, to love managing people, is a good motivator, has a scintillating personality, is intelligent, energetic, and has a strong charisma, he is virtually guaranteed a congregation of at least 2000 and a yearly income of at least \$80 to \$100 thousand.

If however, he fails in any one of these basic requirements he will struggle, be disillusioned, and find joy in ministry is as elusive as an exotic Amazon butterfly.

But...is this Jesus' definition of leadership? Is this how He would define the characteristics and preparation of a man or woman of God? Not at all...!

A recognition that none of these elements are necessary, and in fact are likely a hindrance to what He would define as true leadership, is indeed a sad commentary on the modern church.

Wisdom, grace, mercy, strong godly character and love... These are the elements Jesus speaks of and communicates through his apostles.

He has no interest in a worldly business model for His church. This doesn't mean He won't work with "what is," but it means that when men and women truly seek Him He won't lead them towards that approach.

He's looking for small simple fellowships of hearts that are hungry for Him, His ways, His words, and His life. His leaders are called to brokenness and love, and nothing short of this will accomplish a revelation of His purposes.

Leaders are called to see Jesus, and to hear Him. Anything short of this will inevitably result in a man centered form of leadership and will build a man centered concept of church. In a word...what's the use??? Why take all the time, all the energy, and spend all the money to create something that will burn up in the presence of His holy perfection of love?

But, beyond the fires and disappointment, where is our concern for what concerns Jesus? If He knows the only thing that can accomplish His goals in people's lives is the outworking of His love, and that love is a love that is wholly defined by His heart moving in and through His people, then anything less will not achieve the desired results. He won't be glorified and it will all burn up.

Jesus deserves a people who define leadership as He does. Leadership can be condensed down to a very few words, which He Himself spoke to His disciples of.

John 5:19 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

John 5:30 "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

These pretty much say it all. Where is this emphasis in our seminaries? Who gives out plaques which read "The right reverend so-and-so has adequately demonstrated to this body of ministry evaluators that he consistently sees and reflects what he sees in Jesus, and hears and speaks only what he hears in Jesus, and thus reverend so-and-so is, to our way of seeing things, virtually transparent, and accurately reveals the Lord Jesus to everyone he comes in contact with. We consistently see the love and wisdom of Christ revealed through his life and character."

Can you even imagine a seminary making this the criterion for ministry certification? Such things aren't even considered in those environments. The notion that Jesus can be seen and heard, is entirely questioned, and virtually replaced with a cerebral man centered approach to life and ministry. What could be more tragic? Need we look any further for an explanation of why historical Christianity has developed as it has?

I can see how "wrong" all that stuff is. I can write voluminously of the failures of both the modern and historical Church, but just seeing their errors doesn't qualify me to lead. It doesn't give me a voice worth hearing.

Only one thing matters, and it is Jesus incarnating Himself in the lives of His people, revealing His love and wisdom to those hungry for it. Anything else is simply a distraction from the real.

Until I can face the daily trials of marketplace ministry, where I'm confronted with men and women who lie, cheat, steal, manifest ugly attitudes, value immorality over virtue, and live as if this were all there is, and consistently reveal His love and wisdom in the toughest of life situations, I'm nothing. I have nothing to offer them. I'm useless and little more than dead wood in the midst of a culture that can spot religious hypocrisy at a hundred paces.

Until my relationships with my wife and daughters and those who gather with me before the Lord reveal the tenderness, compassion, grace, and wisdom of God, I have nothing to add to their lives, no matter how many degrees I've achieved or seminars I've attended.

We love to read 1 Corinthians 13, as if were the quintessence of biblical poetry, but just listen to what Paul has to say:

1Co 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1Co 13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

1Co 13:3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1Co 13:4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant

1Co 13:5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

1Co 13:6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

1Co 13:7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1Co 13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

1Co 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

1Co 13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

1Co 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1Co 13:13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I don't know about you, but in just this week I've violated several of these qualities and it deeply concerns me.

It is one thing to clearly see the errors of theology and practice of past generations, and be able to articulate those errors to those who desire to know and those who should desire to know, but it is an entirely different thing to reveal the pure love of Christ and change hearts in His way. We who have seen the truth of past errors of Church theology are particularly lethal in the kingdom, not because we haven't actually seen the truth, but because we have seen it outside the context of the love of Christ. We can be quick to challenge, confront, and argue with those who are walking in error, but if we do so, void of the love of God, then all our knowledge is useless.

We are less called to correct and fix others and more called to address the issues of the heart that have motivated men and women throughout the ages to develop man centered theologies and Church ecclesiology. Until I care more about what is distorted in their concept of God, and themselves in Him, I will waste their time and mine, and will do more to commit them to their error than unsettle them from it. Jesus tells us that it is out of the heart that the issues of life proceed, yet how quick are we to address the issues of their lives apart from sensitivity to their hearts. Do we not care what has gone into their hearts to cause their hearts to embrace the error we so clearly see? Are we not interested in touching the root system of their lives, or only interested in pointing out how unacceptable their fruit is?

Men and women continually approached Jesus, with all their questions and ideas of things, but He rarely, if ever, actually answered the questions they posed to Him. He always answered the questions they should have been asking Him, but were too wounded to know to ask Him those. Until we are able to do this our leadership is merely human leadership. It doesn't proceed from the throne, it is void of His heart, it addresses mental images and misses the image of God.

God help us to abandon fleshly methods of ministry, and learn to walk in the Spirit of His love and wisdom.

