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EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS, JUDE 3

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THESE MINISTRIES ARE WHAT I SAW AS "COUNSELORS" IN "ISAIAH 1:26" 8/14/2016 AS THE LEADERS UNDER CHRIST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH UNTIL THE "RAPTURE" IN "1THES 4:16-17"

THE MINISTRY GIFTS OF THE CHURCH

Eph. 4:11 *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."*

THE GIVER. Eph. 4:11 lists the ministry gifts which Christ gave to the church;

- (1) for the equipping of God's people for works of service (Eph 4:12); and
- (2) for the spiritual growth and development of the body of Christ as God intended (Eph 4:13-16).

APOSTLES. The title "apostle" is applied to certain leaders in the N.T. The verb *apostellō* means to send someone on a special mission as a messenger and personal representative of the one who sends him. The title is used of Christ (Heb 3:1), the twelve disciples (Mt 10:2), the apostle Paul (Ro 1:1; 2Co 1:1; Ga 1:1), and others (Ac 14:4,14; Ro 16:7; Ga 1:19; 2:8-9; 1Th 2:6-7).

(1) The term "apostle" was used in the N.T. in a general sense for a commissioned representative of a church, such as the first Christian missionaries. Hence, in the N.T. the term referred to any messenger appointed and sent as a missionary or for some other special responsibility (Ac 14:4,14; Ro 16:7; cf. 2Co 8:23; Php 2:25). They were men who manifested extraordinary spiritual leadership, were anointed with power to confront directly the powers of darkness and to confirm the gospel with miracles, and were dedicated to establishing churches according to apostolic truth and purity. They were itinerating, risking their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the advancement of the gospel (Ac 11:21-26; 13:50; 14:19-22; 15:25-26). They were Spirit filled men of faith and prayer (Ac 11:23-25; 13:2-5,46-52; 14:1-7,21-23).

(2) Apostles in this general sense remain essential to God's purpose in the church. If churches cease to send forth Spirit-filled people, then the spread of the gospel into all the world will be hindered. On the other hand, as long as the church produces and sends forth such people, it will fulfill its missionary task and remain faithful to the Lord's great commission (Mt 28:18-20).

(3) The term "apostle" is also used in the N.T. in a special sense, referring to those who saw Jesus after His resurrection and were personally commissioned by the resurrected Lord to preach the gospel and establish the church (e.g., the twelve disciples and Paul). They possessed a unique authority within the church that relates to divine revelation and the original message of the gospel that can no longer exist in anyone today (Eph 2:20). Thus, the office of apostle in this specialized sense is unique and unrepeatable. These original apostles have no successors (1Co 15:8).

(4) A primary task of the N.T. apostles was to establish churches and to ensure that they were founded on sincere devotion to Christ and the N.T. faith (cf. Joh 21:15-17; 1Co 12:28; 2Co 11:2-3; Eph 4:11-13; Php 1:17). This task involved two main burdens:

(a) An urgent God-given desire to maintain the purity of the church and its separation from sin and the world (1Co 5:1-5; 2Co 6:14-18; Jas 2:14-26; 1Pe 2:11; 4:1-5; 1Jo 2:1,15-17; 3:3-10).

(b) A continuing burden to proclaim the N.T. gospel and to defend it against heresy and false teachers (Ro 16:17; 1Co 11:2; 2Co 11:3-4,13; Ga 1:9; 2Pe 2:1-3; 1Jo 4:1-6; 2Jo 7-11; Jude 3-4,12-13).

(5) Although the first apostles who laid the foundation of the church have no successors, the church today is still dependent on their words, message, and faith. The church must obey and remain faithful to their original writings. To reject the inspired revelation of the apostles is to cease to be a church according to the Biblical pattern and to reject the Lord Himself (Joh 16:13-15; 1Co 14:36-38; Ga 1:9-11). On the other hand, to believe the apostolic message, obey it, and guard it against all distortion is to remain true to the Holy Spirit (Ac 20:28; 2Ti 1:14) and to guarantee the continued life, blessing, and presence of God within the church (Eph 2:20).

PROPHETS. Prophets were men in the church who spoke under the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit and whose main motivation and concern were with the spiritual life and purity of the church. Under the new covenant they were raised up and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring a message from God to His people (Ac 2:17; 4:8; 21:4).

(1) The O.T. prophet provides a basis for understanding the prophetic ministry in the early church. The O.T. prophet's primary task was to speak a word of God by the Spirit in order to encourage God's people to remain faithful to their covenant relationship. He also, at times, predicted the future as the Spirit revealed it to him. Christ and the apostles serve as examples of the N.T. ideal (Ac 3:22-23; 13:1-2).

(2) The prophet's function within the church included the following:

(a) He was a Spirit-filled proclaimer and interpreter of the Word of God, called by God to warn, exhort, comfort, and edify (Ac 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 1Co 14:3).

(b) He was to exercise the gift of prophecy.

(c) He was at times a seer (cf. 1Ch 29:29) who foretold the future (Ac 11:28; 21:10-11).

(d) It was the N.T. prophet's task, just as it was the prophet's task in the O.T., to expose sin, proclaim righteousness, warn of judgment to come, and combat worldliness and lukewarmness among God's people (Lu 1:14-17). Because of their message of righteousness, the prophet and his ministry can expect rejection by many in the churches during any time of lukewarmness and apostasy.

(3) The prophet's character, burden, desire, and ability include:

(a) a zeal for church purity (Joh 17:15-17; 1Co 6:9-11; Ga 5:22-25);

(b) a deep sensitivity to evil and the capacity to identify, define, and hate unrighteousness (Ro 12:9; Heb 1:9);

(e) a keen understanding of the danger of false teachings (Mt 7:15; 24:11,24; Ga 1:9; 2Co 11:12-15);

(d) an inherent dependence on the Word of God to validate his message (Lu 4:17-19; 1Co 15:3-4; 2Ti 3:16);

(e) a concern for the spiritual success of the kingdom of God and a sharing in the feelings of God (cf. Mt 21:11-13; 23:37; Lu 13:34; Joh 2:14-17; Ac 20:27-31).

(4) The prophet's message is not to be regarded as infallible. His messages are subject to the evaluation of the church, other prophets, and the Word of God. The congregation is required to discern and test whether the prophet's witness is from God (1Co 14:29-33; 1Jo 4:1).

(5) Prophets continue to be essential to God's purpose for the church. A church that rejects God's prophets will be a declining church, drifting toward worldliness and the compromise of Biblical truth and standards (1Co 14:3; cf. Mt 23:31-38; Lu 11:49; Ac 7:51-52). If the prophet is not allowed to bring words of reproof and warning, words prompted by the Spirit, words exposing sin and unrighteousness (Joh 16:8-11), then the church will become a place where the Spirit can no longer be heard. Ecclesiastical politics and worldly power will replace the working of the Spirit (2Ti 3:1-9; 4:3-5; 2Pe 2:1-3,12-22). On the other hand, if the church, with its leaders, hears the voice of the prophets, it will be moved to renewed life and fellowship with Christ, sin will be forsaken, and the presence and holiness of the Spirit will be evident among the faithful (cf. 1Co 14:3; 1Th 5:19-21).

EVANGELISTS. In the N.T., evangelists were men of God who were gifted and commissioned by God to proclaim the gospel, i.e., the good news, of salvation to the unsaved and to help establish a new work in a city. When proclaimed, it always carries with it the offer and power of salvation.

(1) The ministry of Philip the "evangelist" (Ac 21:8) gives a clear picture of the work of an evangelist according to the N.T. pattern.

(a) Philip preached the gospel of Christ (Ac 8:4-5,35).

(b) Many were saved and baptized in water (Ac 8:6,12).

(c) Signs, miracles, healings, and deliverance from evil spirits accompanied his preaching (Ac 8:6-7,13).

(d) He was concerned that the new converts be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ac 8:12-17; cf. 2:38; 19:1-6).

(2) The evangelist is essential to God's purpose for the church. The church that fails to encourage and support the ministry of the evangelist will cease to gain converts as God desires. It will become a static church, void of growth and missionary outreach. The church that values the spiritual gift of the evangelist and maintains an earnest and ongoing love and care for the lost will proclaim the message of salvation with convicting and saving power (Ac 2:14-41).

PASTORS. Pastors are those who oversee and care for the spiritual needs of a local congregation. They are also called "elders" (Ac 20:17; Tit 1:5) and "bishops" or overseers (1Ti 3:1; Tit 1:7).

(1) The task of pastors is to proclaim sound doctrine, refute heresy (Tit 1:9-11), teach God's Word and exercise leadership in the local church (1Th 5:12; 1Ti 3:1-5), be examples of purity and sound doctrine (Tit 2:7-8), and take care to see all believers remain in divine grace (Heb 12:15; 13:17; 1Pe 5:2). Their task is described in (Ac 20:28-31) as safeguarding apostolic truth and the flock of God by being on the alert for false doctrine and false teachers who arise within the church. They function as a shepherd of which Jesus as the good Shepherd is a model (Joh 10:11-16; 1Pe 2:25; 5:2-4).

(2) The N.T. pattern is a plurality of pastors directing the spiritual life of a local church (Ac 20:28; Php 1:1). Pastors were chosen, not through politics, but through the Spirit's wisdom given to the body as it examined the candidate's spiritual qualifications.

(3) The pastor is essential to God's purpose for His church. The church which fails to select godly and faithful pastors will cease to be governed according to the mind of the Spirit (1Ti 3:1-7). It will be a church left open to the destructive forces of Satan and the world (Ac 20:28-31). The preaching of the Word will be distorted and the standards of the gospel lost (2Ti 1:13-14). Members and families of the church will not be cared for according to the purpose of God (1Ti 4:6,12-16; 6:20-21). Many will turn away from the truth and turn aside to fables (2Ti 4:4). On the other hand, if godly pastors are appointed, believers will be nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine and disciplined for the purpose of godliness (1Ti 4:6-7). The church will be taught to persevere in the teaching of Christ and the apostles and thus ensure salvation for itself and those who hear (1Ti 4:16; 2Ti 2:2).

TEACHERS. Teachers are those who have a special, God-given gift to clarify, expound, and proclaim God's Word in order to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

(1) The special task of teachers is to guard, by the help of the Holy Spirit, the gospel entrusted to them (2Ti 1:11-14). They are faithfully to point the church to Biblical revelation and to the original message of Christ and the apostles, and to persevere in this task.

(2) The principal purpose of Biblical teaching is to preserve truth and to produce holiness by leading the body of Christ into an uncompromising commitment to the godly lifestyle set forth in God's Word. Scripture states the goal of Christian instruction is love "out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1Ti 1:5). Thus, the evidence of Christian learning is not just in what one knows but how one lives-i.e., the manifestation of love, purity, faith, and sincere godliness.

(3) Teachers are essential to God's purpose for His church. The church that rejects or refuses to hear those teachers and theologians who remain faithful to Scriptural revelation will cease to be concerned about the genuineness of the Biblical message and the correct interpretation of the original teaching of Christ and the apostles. The church in which such teachers and theologians remain silent will not continue steadfast in the truth and holy faith. New winds of doctrine will be uncritically accepted and religious experience and human ideas, rather than revealed truth, will be the ultimate guide to the doctrine, standards, and practices of the church.

On the other hand, the church that listens to godly teachers and theologians will have its current teachings and practice measured by the fundamental testimony of the gospel, its false ideas exposed, and the purity of the original message of Christ handed down to its children. The inspired Word of God will become the test of all teaching and ideas, and the church will be ever reminded that the Holy Spirit's inspired Word is ultimate truth and authority, and as such, stands over the churches and their institutions.