

Message 2

The Second Level—The Ministry of the New Testament Economy

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:17, 25; 2:42; 20:24; 21:19; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 9:17; 12:5; 2 Cor. 4:1; 3:3, 6-9; 11:2; Eph. 3:2, 9; 4:11-12, 15-16; Col. 1:25; 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:4-5; Rev. 21:14, 18-20

- I. **The second level of meaning of God’s New Testament economy is the ministry of the New Testament (2 Cor. 4:1); the ministry of the teaching of the apostles brings in justification and gives life (Rom. 5:18); what we have received is this unique ministry.**¹
- II. **The New Testament ministry is the dispensing of the unsearchable riches of the all-inclusive Christ into the members of God’s family for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—Eph. 3:2, 8-9; Col. 1:25; Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1a; Eph. 4:12, 15-16:**
 - A. The economy of God has become the stewardship of God given to the apostles and to all the believers—Eph. 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17:³
 1. The Greek word *oikonomia* bears two denotations; in relation to God, it denotes God’s economy (Eph. 3:9); in relation to us, it denotes the stewardship (v. 2).
 2. The stewardship of God is the dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God in Christ into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated people so that He may be their life, their life supply, and their everything for the building up of the church as the unique Body of Christ to be His corporate expression—Eph. 3:14-21; Col. 1:25; 3:4, 10-11.
 3. The Greek word for *steward* (*oikonomos*) means “a dispensing steward,” “a household administrator, who dispenses the household supply to its members”—1 Cor. 4:1-2:
 4. God’s desire is to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into the members of His family through a sweet and intimate stewardship—2 Cor. 13:14.
 - B. Out of the stewardship comes the New Testament ministry, and this ministry corresponds with God’s economy; that is, it corresponds with God’s dispensing of Himself into His chosen people for the building up of the Body of Christ— Col. 1:25; 2 Cor. 4:1; Eph. 4:16.
- III. **The New Testament ministry is uniquely one and corporate—Acts 1:17, 25; 2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6a:**
 - A. In the eyes of the Lord there is just one ministry in the New Testament age—Acts 1:17, 25:
 1. During the New Testament age God’s unique intention is to build up the Body; for this purpose, God has one operation with one ministry.
 2. The ministry in the New Testament economy is a corporate ministry that includes thousands of gifted people; Paul, his co-workers, and the other apostles all had this ministry, the one ministry in the New Testament—2 Cor. 4:1a; 1 Tim. 1:12; 1 Cor. 3:5:
 - B. Although many verses reveal that the ministry in the New Testament is corporate, certain other verses seem to indicate that the ministry is personal—Acts 20:24; 21:19; 2 Tim. 4:5; Col. 4:17:
 1. We need to realize that all the believers are members of the one Body; as a whole, the Body has one corporate ministry, not many ministries.
 2. However, because this ministry is the service of the Body of Christ and because the Body has many members, every member has its own ministry; thus, according to the members, there are many ministries—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:5.
 3. The many ministries of the members of the Body are not separate ministries but part of one corporate ministry; all the ministries of the members added together equal the corporate ministry—Eph. 4:12.
 - C. We should not receive ministries that damage the Body:
 1. Because of the degradation of the church and the existence of many divisions, there are now apparently many ministries.

2. We in the Lord's recovery, who share in the unique ministry, the continuation of the ministry of the apostles, cannot accept the ministries of the denominations and the divisions; if we accept them, the recovery will be damaged.
- D. We need to minister the same thing from different angles; we all need to speak the same thing (cf. Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:10); this one thing is the recovery of Christ as life and everything to us for the building up of the church (Col. 3:4; 2:6-7, 16-17, 19; Eph. 4:15-16); it is a blessing to speak the same thing.
- E. We need different ministries, yet they must be layer upon layer—Rev. 21:14, 18-20:⁵
 1. The twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem are different stones with various colors; each layer is different from the others; the reason for this is that the apostles had different ministries—vv. 14, 18-20.
 2. However, these twelve foundations are not laid side by side; rather, they are laid one on top of another; all twelve layers lead to and support the unique testimony in the unique expression—v. 18:

IV. We need to see the intrinsic essence of the New Testament ministry:⁶

- A. We should not think that any of our abilities qualify us for some part of the New Testament ministry, for our abilities are not a part of the New Testament ministry and have nothing to do with the New Testament ministry.
- B. In the Lord Jesus we see a fivefold standard as a pattern to us concerning the New Testament ministry; in carrying out God's New Testament ministry, the Lord Jesus never did anything out of Himself (John 5:19), He did not do His own work (4:34; 17:4), He did not speak His own word (14:10, 24), He did everything not by His own will (5:30), and He did not seek His own glory (7:18).
- C. If we are short of these five points, whatever we do will be divisive and will cause division; but if we have entered into these points, we are in the New Testament ministry of God.

V. The genuine ministry stirs up the believers' love for the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom—2 Cor. 11:2; Ruth 3:1-2, and footnote 1⁷

VI. The unique New Testament ministry is based on the teaching of the apostles; it takes the teaching of the apostles as its content and boundary—Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9:⁸

- A. The deciding factor in determining the right ministry, which is the ministry of God's New Testament economy, is the teaching of the apostles.⁹
- B. A person's work is in the New Testament ministry if he teaches the teaching of the apostles; if he does not teach according to the teaching of the apostles, his work is not participating in the ministry of the New Testament economy—Eph. 3:8; Gal. 1:6-9.
- C. Whatever we minister must be of the nature of the New Testament ministry; whether or not a particular ministry is part of the New Testament ministry can be proved by applying three governing principles:¹⁰
 1. The principle of the processed Triune God being dispensed into His chosen people—John 1:1, 14; 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 13:14.
 2. The principle of Christ and the church—Col. 2:2, 9-17; Eph. 3:4-6; 1:22-23; 2:13-22.
 3. The principle of Christ, the Spirit, life, and the church—Acts 2:36; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Col. 3:4; Matt. 16:18.

VII. The New Testament ministry is for the building up of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:12:¹¹

- A. God's New Testament ministry is for the accomplishment of His New Testament economy, which is to gain a Body for His Son to be the expression of the Triune God—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 16.¹²
- B. Ephesians 4:12 indicates that the building up of the Body of Christ is the work of the ministry.
- C. According to the revelation in the New Testament, the church is not for the building up of the ministry; instead, the ministry is for the building up of the church;¹³ a worker should not work with the intention of bringing the church under the control of his ministry.¹⁴