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Series 2. Understanding the Church

Episode 8. Ministries

Intro

In the previous episode the fact was made that all kingdoms have both *authority* and *power*. In the Kingdom of God all *authority* and *power* has been given to Christ who now sits at the right hand of the Father. And now Christ, is relegating this ***authority*** to govern the Church upon the earth to the *elders* of every local church; and He is bestowing this ***power*** through the Holy Spirit to accomplish His purposes upon this earth to every believer in the form of some particular *ministry* (or service), and with the manifestation of *spiritual gifts* to be used as weapons for spiritual warfare and as spiritual tools for the building up or edifying of the Church. And so, the *power* to accomplish God's work upon the earth, and in the Church, lies in specialized *ministries* given to every believer and *spiritual gifts* of the Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12.7-11) to be used in ministry.

“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.” Eph. 4.8

Prior to the ascension of Christ into heaven, God’s dealings with man down through the ages has always been in an attempt to bring forth the best out of natural man, who was yet still in his fallen nature. Whether with the patriarchs and promises of a land and a great nation, or with Israel having gained the promise land and given the Law to live their lives by, the relationship between man and God has always been outward, in obtaining physical blessings and well-being such as a special land, a great nation, abundance of crops, absence of plagues, long life for obedience to their Covenant with God, and/or the loss of well-being and discipline for their disobedience. This is a “religious” Covenant involving keeping commandment, doing certain rituals, observing holy days, and performing specified sacrifices. This covenant is succinctly given in Ex. 19.5 *“**Now if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession out of all the nations.**”*

When He ascended on high. The opening clause of Eph. 4.8 changed all of that: *“When He ascended on high.”* The ascension of Christ is described in Acts 1.9-11,

*“**9**Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. **10**And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, **11**who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”*

Thus, following Christ’s crucifixion and burial and His resurrection from the dead, He walked this earth in His newly glorified body, conversed with His disciples, even appearing to over 500 brothers at one time. (1 Cor. 15.6) And now, moments before His ascension into heaven, He is talking with some 120 disciples at Jerusalem and making the promise, Acts 1.4-5 *“He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; **for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**”*

Two things are obviously amazing with these passages of scriptures. The first is the disciples were able to see, hear, touch, and eat with the resurrected Christ. Remember Christ was fully God, being the Son of God, and also fully man, being the Son of Man. This human part of His nature is no longer in flesh and blood but is now resurrected into a new, eternal spiritual body. It is through Christ’s spirit that He is able to commune with the Father, and it is in His resurrected body He is able to commune and relate to man. Christ will forever be our mediator, our High Priest, between us and the Father. It is Christ in His resurrected glorified body now ascended and seated at the right hand of God, Heb. 7.25,

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

The second amazing fact relating to His ascension is the nature of that *intercession* being made on our behalf and the fulfillment of His promise of sending the Holy Spirit, Jn. 14.15-17,

“15If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever— 17the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you do know Him, for He abides with you and will be in you.”

In this passage of scripture Christ is promising, upon His resurrection and ascension, to send the Holy Spirit to actually indwell His disciples. This is the promise in the New Covenant cut in His blood sacrifice. Henceforth, disciples of Christ, even while yet in these unredeemed bodies, will have access to fellowship with God the Father through the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is the very Spirit of Christ. Hallelujah! The resurrection and ascension of Christ is vital to the salvation of our souls, as it is written, 1 Cor. 15.17, *“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”* The resurrection and ascension validates, beyond any doubt, the sacrifice of the cross and total redemption for man in Christ’s blood alone. Thus, Heb. 10.12-14 reads,

“12But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

No religion upon this earth, no matter how historic and multitude of believers, has this promise of being made perfect before the Heavenly Father through the sacrifice of Christ.

He led captivity captive. Moving on to the second clause of our opening scripture, *“He led captivity captive,”* it cannot be concluded whether it refers to taking captive the devil and his demons who have taken mankind captive down through the ages, or if it means leading captive those of us who once were held captive in sin and death. The first might best be interpreted by Col. 2.15, *“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”* Jesus Christ gained authority over the devil and his principalities and powers and is now relegating this *authority* and *power* to the Church for pulling down of his strongholds. This is a valid interpretation.

However, I equally favor the second interpretation, that we believers, who were once held captive in sin and death, are now being led captive by Christ. According to 1 Cor. 6.19-20 *“19Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and **you are not your own?** 20For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.* Thus, we are now and forever more of Christ, set apart for His purposes and fellowship.

And where did He *lead this captivity to?* It stretches the mental capacity of the human mind to understand Eph. 2.6-7, *“6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages He might display the surpassing riches of His grace, demonstrated by His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”* This cannot be reasoned out logically, but it may be apprehended and understood by faith alone. As with Jacob’s ladder, the feet of us believers are presently upon this earth, but at the top of the ladder, our spirits are in the heavens with Christ. This fact must be apprehended by faith and rested upon all the days of our lives.

And gave gifts to men. The final clause in our opening scripture of Eph. 4.8 is, “and gave gifts to men.” We know that the greatest singular gift is to us by the Father, which is Jesus Christ. Jn. 3.16 “16For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life;” and there is a singular gift of the Holy Spirit promised to every believer, Acts 2.38 “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” But the word in this verse is plural, *gifts*, and these are given by the Holy Spirit to “us” who are the Church, the functioning Body of Christ.

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Ministries

The root meaning of the word *ministry* is “to serve tables.” Thus, a ministry is a particular service ordained, brought forth, and set into the Church by the Spirit of Christ, who is the Head of the Church. The Body of Christ has many distinct members, and each has an anointing, a function, or service to the Body. For example, an automobile has many parts for it to fulfill its purpose as providing a comfortable, safe, transportation vehicle. All parts are not the same, though the car may have two headlights and four tires, but only one brake pedal. Sometimes more than one ministry is needed within a Church for it to properly function.

Spiritually, Eph. 4.11 lists the main ministries that drive the Church, “11And He Himself gave some to be **apostles**, some **prophets**, some **evangelists**, and some **pastors and teachers**,”

In the example of an automobile, what is known as the “drivetrain” is a group of parts that work together to move the vehicle by delivering “*power*” from the engine to the wheels. In other words, the engine may purr like a kitten, and all other parts function as they should, but you are not going anywhere without the drivetrain that consists of the transmission, driveshaft, axles, and wheels. These parts are most critical to transfer the *power* of the engine to get you where you are going. In similitude, if Christ is represented by the engine, the only source of power, the five ministries spoken of in Eph. 4.11 are the drivetrain, the critical *ministries* to get the Church going to where Christ needs it to go. They are not the only *ministries* but the most critical to move the Church forward. I would say that the *elders*, described in a previous episode as the governing part of the Body, are the steering wheel that

steers the Church in the right direction, keeps it safely on the road, and avoids potholes and other destructive obstacles.

These same ministries must yet be active and functioning to build up the Church. In their absence man turns to religion and builds the church with business-like organization with man-appointed offices, education and training, bylaws, and structured meetings—all with the Gospel woven into it. But the spiritual Church functions under these five ministries:

Apostles— The name was originally applied to the twelve apostles that had been with Christ and had received a direct charge from the Lord for the building up of His Church. They functioned in Godly wisdom, often with the signs and wonders and mighty deeds accompanying their ministry (2 Cor. 12.12). Paul later claimed equality on the ground of his own special mission to the Gentiles and revelations from the same Lord. Apostles function under direct charge of the Lord and their scope of mission is universal, some of which is to organize and confirm churches (Acts 15.41).

Prophets— Distinct from all other ministries, the prophet receives direct revelation from God unveiling the mysteries of Old Testament prophecies and often bringing a fresh word of revelation from God to the Church. Sometimes a future prediction of what will come to pass is given in an extraordinary revelation.

Evangelists— The central calling of the evangelist is to preach the Gospel to the heathen or the unconverted, responding to the call of Christ: Mt. 28.19 *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”*

Pastors— Literally pastors are “shepherds;” they are to exercise the same watchfulness and care over the people of their charge which a shepherd does over his flock. Pastors are fixed to particular churches and provide for the well-being of those people making true the Gospel and protecting them from false prophets, teachers and doctrines.

Teachers— Teachers establish the church doctrine, the content of the Christian belief system. They examine and extract detail interpretation of Bible passages and identify and explain false doctrine from entering the Church.

It is important to note the difference between teaching and *preaching*. Acts 15.35 *“Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, **teaching** and **preaching** the word of the Lord, with many others also”*; the two verbs should not be taken as having the same meaning.

The Greek verb "*didaskó*" primarily means to **teach** or instruct. It is used in the New Testament to describe the act of imparting knowledge, often in a formal or authoritative manner. This term is frequently associated with Jesus' ministry, where He taught the crowds, His disciples, and individuals about the Kingdom of God, moral living, and

especially about the Christ and His fulfillment of the Scriptures. Rabbis were esteemed as teachers of the Law, and Jesus was often addressed as "Rabbi" or "Teacher," indicating His role as a respected instructor of spiritual truths. Because of its "authoritative" nature only men were considered to be teachers.

Preaching the word of the Lord here means to *preach the glad tidings of the word*. The Greek verb "euaggelizó" primarily means to announce or proclaim good news, specifically the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is used in the New Testament to describe the act of preaching or spreading the message of salvation through Christ. In the New Testament, this term is imbued with profound spiritual significance, as it refers to the proclamation of the Gospel—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the salvation He offers. The early Christians adopted this term to describe their mission of spreading the message of Christ to all nations, fulfilling the Great Commission. All members of the Body of Christ, men and women, are encouraged to become *preachers* of the word.

Over the years these five-fold ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have gradually melted away, blended together, or morphed into hybrid ministries. However, **what was said of the first age of the Church is true of all ages and is true for today's Church**. We must by all means prayerfully seek to have these ministries revitalized and restored to the Church in fullness and power; otherwise we too have become like the Pharisees who modified the Law of the Old Covenant to suit current conditions and their self-reasoning of how commandments and service should apply, veering away from God's intended way. And we know that Jesus did not have many kind words to say about the Pharisees. (Mt. 23.27)

All are to have ministries in the Church, with much varied types of individual service. Once again, referring to the example of the automobile with Christ supplying the power and driving force of the engine, the five ministries being the drivetrain moving the car forward, and elders as the steering wheel giving direction, we must consider the rest of the automobile. Depending on its size, an automobile can have 30,000 to 40,000 components—all are necessary for the automobile to be complete and function normally. It is normal for one to think the term "ministry" applies only to those in Church leadership positions, but this is absolutely not the case. Clearly, every member of the Body of Christ has a particular ministry—some are outward and noticeable, others are quieter and not as apparent. Note Eph. 4.16.

*"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the **effectual working** in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."*

Note the individual clauses, *fitly joined together... every joint supplies... effectual working... and edifying of itself in love*; all are significant clauses. **Fitly joined together** more technically means "bonded together." The Body is one in Christ, as it is written, Col. 1.17 *"And He is*

before all things, and in Him all things consist (better, hold together.) This is in contrast to each one being an individual member of a congregation, which conveys the mindset of individualism, having only our faith in common. Actually, we are bonded together even as the natural family is held together with an invisible bond and functioning relationship.

Every joint supplies should more perfectly read, “*by every contact with the supply*” (of nourishment) from the Head, meaning Christ. As each member of the Body is linked directly to the Head first, and receives spiritual sustenance from the Head, he or she is also linked to the other members of the Body and supplies that nourishment to others. In all cases, we must first consider our personal fellowship with Christ first, as He is the vine, and then consider our fellowship with others as we are the branches that carry the life-giving sustenance throughout so as to bear fruit. (Jn. 15.5)

Effectual working means that “each part” contributes to the growth of the whole body in proportion to the “*measure*” of each part; in other words, every part labors to produce the resulting growth of the Body; no one is idle; no one is useless. The Body growth is proportional throughout; the hand does not grow disproportionately larger than the foot, etc. With Christ as its Head, the Church is progressively being built up with a power proportional to the measure of Christ in you that you may contribute to the whole.

Edifying of itself in love describes the functioning Body of Christ. We are knit together, bonded together as one by the Spirit of Christ; we are sustained by the flow and essence of life from the Head (Christ) into each and every member, but this alone does not answer the question, “what actually gives ‘growth’ to the Body?” Science says our natural body growth is regulated by genetic, nutritional, environmental, and hormonal factors. These are factors that work together for its growth, but science has no explanation for what “growth” itself is, just as it has no answer for the principle of life, what it is, where does it come from, and where does it go?

Thus, there is a mystery to vital principles like life and growth... and why do things hold together and not just fall apart. Just as science uses the principle of “gravity” in many explanations, scientists do not know what gravity “is”—they only know how it behaves. And so spiritually speaking we only know that Godly *love* is a force, the essence behind this increase in growth and maturity of the Body of Christ. The uniting and life-giving power of love is called in Col. 3.14, the “*bond of perfection.*” What does it mean, *the bond of perfection*? There are two principles at work here, the *bond* and *perfection*. Let’s look at *perfection* this way—if we are to put on virtues as commanded in the previous verse of Col. 3.12-13: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; and bearing one another, and forgiving one another, these are all virtues to be emitted from our character for the benefit of others. It not only pleases God, but others are blessed by these actions towards them. Love is the highest, that which binds all these virtues into one making them complete, or *perfect*. Thus, love is the bond of Christian perfection. Without love all the individual virtues of character would not unite together into that one harmonious action in which perfection is manifested.

Hypocrisy, which is only having a pretense of these moral virtues, can mimic Christian virtues, but Godly love alone performs them in Christ-like perfection. If love is lacking, all other good acts make their quick appearance and rapidly dissolve in flashes of vanity. The man without love is in effect the man whose very virtues are selfish—or unto himself, his pride and sense of benevolence. Even human love (Gk. *phileo*) is selfish wanting to satisfy one's own affection for another. *Phileo* love is the highest of human emotions, just as lust is the lowest. But, there is a selfless love independent of the "likeability" or "attractiveness" of another. God's love (Gk. *agape*) is Christ-like, it is born of the Spirit, in that it is only consumed with the well-being of others.

Regarding the second principle, bonding, contemplate the following quotes from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato: "two things cannot be held together without a third; they must have a bond of union". And, "the fairest bond is that which most completely fuses and is fused into the things which are bound." Philosophers can only speak vaguely and ideally of these things, but they become a reality in Christ. *Agape* love of God is that third thing that bonds together believers in Christ to form that organic unity called the Church, the Body of Christ. And that *love* is the force that is fused into and throughout the members of the Body.

These are very lofty thoughts, because they touch on the highest spiritual Godly principle, *love*. But, God would never ask or design something for us if it were not attainable. And, the way into it is also spiritual. It is only when one passes through the death of the old nature, who can proclaim with Paul, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Gal. 2.20, This new life in Christ can know and experience this love, as shown in 1 Jn. 3.14,

"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death."

S2.E8. Questions for Discussion

1. The central focus of this message is on Eph. 4.8. Explain the significance of the opening clause, "*When He ascended on high.*"
2. What are two interpretations of the second clause, "*He led captivity captive?*"
3. To the best you can, describe the relationships as ministries in the many member Body of Christ to the many component parts of an automobile. Why are the five ministries of Eph. 4.11 compared to the drivetrain of the automobile?

4. How are the terms *authority*, *steering wheel*, and *elder* are related to one another in this article.
5. Explain how *love* is the “*bond of perfection*,” as stated in Col. 3.14; and how does it relate to the previous verses, Col. 3.12-13?