

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians

by Oliver B. Greene

Copyright @ 1963

The Gospel Hour, Inc., Greenville, South Carolina

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN -

THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Ephesians 4, verses 7-11

"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."

It will be a victorious day in the lives of some believers when they acknowledge the Bible fact that GOD is the One who appoints spiritual leaders in the New Testament church, and GOD gives gifts to individuals according to the measure of their ability. A lot of church division and unrest among believers would not exist if each and every person in the church would allow The HOLY SPIRIT to lead them in what they should do, and if they would allow The HOLY SPIRIT to appoint the leaders in the local assembly.

There is entirely too much politics in the church today. Many times people are put into positions of authority because of their social, educational, or monetary standing rather than because of their spiritual standing. I do not say this with a hateful spirit - but if a millionaire is converted, in less than six months he will be on more boards and appointed to more offices than any five men could handle and do the job right.

GOD forbid that I judge - but in many churches the men who have money and social position hold office when some spiritually minded brother who could do the job much better sits idle. I wonder what the Lord JESUS thinks when He looks down upon a situation such as I have just mentioned? Certainly JESUS taught the varying measure of talents in the parables He gave, especially the parables of the talents and the pounds. Study carefully Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27.

Always bear in mind that it is not the quantity (how much you are doing) but the "sort" (the quality) of stewardship, and the spirit with which you discharge your duties. GOD looks on the heart. GOD is not concerned with names and fleshly show; He is concerned about fruit that produces results to the glory of GOD - not to the glory of individuals.

We learn in verses 8 through 10 that JESUS has a perfect right to bestow these gifts upon whom

He will, because He is the One who triumphed over all His foes and ours. He conquered what we could never have conquered, from the lowest depths to the highest heights. JESUS "led captivity captive." The evil powers that once held believers captive are now made captive by CHRIST through His victory over death, hell, and the grave. He now possesses the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and Blood, He (JESUS) also Himself likewise took part of the same (that is, He took the flesh part of man, He did not take man's Blood. His Blood came from GOD - Acts 20:28); **that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; AND DELIVER THEM WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE ALL THEIR LIFETIME SUBJECT TO BONDAGE"** (Hebrews 2:14-15).

JESUS CHRIST came into this world to take a body of flesh, in order that He might taste death for every man, and through death destroy the devil who then had the power of death. JESUS came to deliver those who lived in fear and bondage because of Satan's power; but now JESUS has the keys of hell and death.

During the earthly ministry of JESUS, the Pharisees asked for a sign. JESUS told them that He would give them only one sign. He said, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; SO SHALL THE SON OF MAN BE THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE HEART OF THE EARTH**" (Matthew 12:39-40).

When JESUS died He descended into the Paradise side of hell. At that time Paradise was in the heart of this earth. JESUS actually descended into hell . . . not the torment part of hell; He went into the Paradise side. According to Luke 16 there was a great gulf between the fire, and the Paradise where the righteous were. We read, "**For David speaketh concerning Him (JESUS), I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope, because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption**" (Acts 2:25-27).

You will find these same words in Psalm 16:10. These words referred to the Lord JESUS CHRIST, GOD's "**Holy One**."

When JESUS died, His spirit entered into the heart of this earth, and when He arose He brought all of the spirits out of the Paradise in the center of this earth, and carried them with Him to the Paradise far above the first and second heavens. The righteous are now resting with JESUS in the third Heaven (II Corinthians 12:1-3).

It is a clear Bible fact that when a righteous person dies, the spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord. Paul said, "**For to me to live is CHRIST, and to die is gain**" (Philippians 1:21). "**Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.**" (II Corinthians

5:6-8).

The doctrine of soul-sleep is foreign to the Word of GOD. No such doctrine can be found in the Scriptures.

The beggar died and went immediately to Abraham's bosom - the place of rest (the bosom is a symbol of rest . . . a baby rests lying upon the mother's bosom). The beggar went to Paradise. Paul was caught up into Paradise, into the third Heaven, and he saw and heard things not lawful to tell on earth (II Corinthians 12:1-3).

JESUS said to the dying thief who had requested to be remembered by the LAMB of GOD, "**Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise**" (Luke 23:43). Regardless of what you have heard or read, to be absent from this body is to be immediately present with the Lord JESUS. He purchased this glorious fact and made possible this glorious provision through His death, burial, and resurrection. JESUS, who ascended far above all heavens after His resurrection, first descended into the lowest part of this earth . . . the heart of the earth. As Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, JESUS spent three days and three nights in the heart of this earth; but He came forth early in the morning, on the third day after His death as He had promised.

Many of the saints who came out of Paradise with Him walked the streets in Jerusalem and appeared unto many.

Perhaps someone is asking what happened to those saints after they "**appeared to many.**" The answer is easy: When JESUS went on to the third Heaven He carried those saints with Him. But let me give you the Word of GOD:

"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew 27:51-53).

Note: The bodies (not the spirits) slept in the grave. The body goes back to dust, the spirit returns to GOD who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The bodies of the saints came out of the graves. The spirits which had been resting in the lower part of this earth entered the bodies - and they walked the streets of Jerusalem, appearing unto many people in that city. Regardless of what any religion or "ism" teaches, the Word of GOD is clear. Believe it, and junk all else.

Verse 11 needs to be studied and preached in the average local church. JESUS CHRIST "**gave some**" . . . that means He appointed, ordained, or set aside individuals for specific ministries. First, apostles. Next, prophets. Then evangelists, and then pastors and teachers. Please notice: The HOLY SPIRIT leaves no untied ends, no unfinished business. The Word of GOD does not say He gave some "apostles and prophets." There is no connecting conjunction between those two words . . . He did not appoint "apostles and prophets" as one. He did not appoint "prophets and evangelists" or "apostles and evangelists." He appoints individuals to specific ministries until he reaches the most important appointee (or worker) in the New Testament church: Pastors and teachers.

A pastor can be a good, efficient pastor and a teacher. But dearly beloved, I do not believe there is an evangelist on the face of this earth who, if he is a God-called, God-sent evangelist, can successfully pastor a church, teach the people and lead them into the deeper spiritual experiences set forth in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.

An evangelist has a specific and peculiar ministry. Sad but so, most churches have completely outlawed evangelists. I realize that in some cases this is justified. There have been (and still are) evangelists who are not what they should be by any means - but not all evangelists are counterfeits. There are some pastors who are not what they should be - but we cannot judge all pastors by those who are not GOD's pastors. The same is true in the ministry of the evangelist.

The apostles are all gone - Paul was the last. We have no prophets in the church today. The entire New Testament is ours, we have received the perfect law of liberty (the entire Word of GOD). In I Corinthians 13:10 Paul tells us " . . . **When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**" The apostles performed their ministry; the prophets performed their ministry. Today GOD is using evangelists, pastors and teachers to carry on the work of the ministry in the church.

A New Testament church should have at least three special meetings each year:

1. A Bible Conference - where Bible teachers (not evangelists) should be brought in . . . deep men of GOD, seasoned men of GOD - men who have been with GOD and are capable of teaching.
2. An Evangelistic Campaign. A Bible teacher should not be called in to conduct evangelistic meetings. GOD's evangelist should be brought in . . . a man who can stir the people with the pure Word of GOD. An evangelist has a singular ministry. He is not called of GOD to teach deep spiritual truths. He is called to stir the people.
3. A Missionary Conference. GOD's missionaries should be brought in to enlighten the people in regard to the field of missions. Sometimes a missionary-evangelist may be used . . . or just a teacher from a mission school. Perhaps a doctor or a nurse from a mission hospital might be called in. The missionary speakers should be missionaries - not pastors, not evangelists on the home front . . . but missionaries from the foreign field. If we are to have a missionary conference, missionaries should be the speakers at that conference.

Since a grocery store sells groceries, certainly a filling station sign should not be hung over the door; and if we are having a Bible conference, it should be held by men who know the Word of GOD and who are capable of teaching the Word of GOD. If we advertise a missionary conference, we should have a missionary conference; and people who attend should hear a message on missions, delivered by someone who knows what he is talking about. When we advertise an evangelistic campaign, we should hear an evangelistic message.

This is GOD's program - but sad to say, in too many churches today GOD does not have anything to do with the program. The pastor, the board of deacons, trustees, and committees draw up the program, and they choose the speaker they want. They do not let GOD Almighty have any part in it. I am not judging. I have been traveling for many years and I have learned a few things in the years I have been in the evangelistic ministry.

Yes, it pleased GOD to set in the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers; and if churches are to follow the New Testament pattern in conducting their services, that is the pattern they should follow.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
