

# Related Ministries - May 1976

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*"I feel so lonely in the ministry; they all share their needs and problems with me but where can I turn? I'm not sure of things any more. I have been unable to sleep properly with the pressure of it all. I cannot understand it because I know God has called me, and I suppose I should not even be talking like this. It's probably the devil trying to make me give up. At the ministers fraternal no one else seems to be going through it. I can't very well show them what is happening, so I don't bother to go any more."*

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How often I have heard this kind of thing in recent months. Do you see the problem and need of this man, lonely, pressured, insecure, condemned, hiding? What shall we say? "You are absolutely right, brother, it is the devil, so resist him and press on" or "What you need is two weeks holiday; you will be OK then"?

Such advice is bound to lead to an eventual breakdown, or to such frustration that the minister is going to labour on without any real sense of purpose or fulfilment. Soon we will be back to the old escape route for pastor and church: 'What we need is a change of minister', or 'What I need is a change of church', neither of which will solve the root problem. What then is the answer?

## God's measure of necessary insecurity

We have often been so conscious of the need to minister faith and assurance to the people to, enable them to become secure in life that we have felt insecurity to be utterly negative and wrong, whereas in truth there is a necessary measure of insecurity that God uses as a means to instruct us in a more perfect way. Paul initially felt so confident in His calling that he did not "go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me" (Gal. 1:17); but he later sought out the fellowship of these same apostles and writes of "submitting to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running or had run in vain." (Gal. 2:2)

It is the consciousness of our need, this necessary measure of insecurity that causes us to seek dependent fellowship with God, and to reach Out our hand of fellowship of our fellow ministers. The whole account of the early church leaders is of them functioning in deep relationship with each other. The purpose of God allows for no 'lone ranger' ministry.

We are introduced to a large group of men with varied ability in gift, completely different in their personalities, but working with the full consciousness of their need of God and each other. They were in teams of related ministries. Why is this so necessary? Are there

not some men who can work effectively and happily without needing to be related to other ministries? There are several reasons why we need to be related to others.

## Every man has limitations

We are so aware of our abilities that it takes time and often requires a situation to expose to ourselves our limitations. The knowledge of our ability gives us confidence and assurance in ministry, but it requires the awareness of our limitations to give us the sense of dependence on God and our need of the fellowship and abilities of our fellow-ministries in the areas of our personal limitation. Where I am weak or deficient, through my relationship and fellowship with other ministries I can draw upon their counsel, gift, and strength.

I can do this rather than come under the self-induced pressure of trying to 'come up with the answer' to every need myself. I can make room for other men in my church rather than feeling threatened at the thought of 'my people' seeing their giftedness and my weakness. It is obvious that only a heart of meekness will be prepared for such a relationship with other ministries.

## Encouragement

How often have we preached to the people "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near". (Heb. 10:25) Often this was used as a rod to chastise those in the flock who had been missing the midweek prayer meeting or Bible study lately. This, application completely misses the heart of the matter; it is not a text to encourage lots of meetings, but to exhort us as to the purpose of meeting which is for fellowship in encouragement.

There are some meetings best forsaken, for they do not bring any encouragement. If, however, we are exhorting the flock to gather frequently for fellowship in encouragement, how much more in these days should the leaders and ministers of the gospel gather for such a purpose. How frequently it is true that the initial promise and hope which was born in a man's heart when God 'called' him to 'this ministry' has become dim and clouded under the pressures of the people's needs and expectations, the administration of the church, the weddings, funerals, baptisms, business meetings, etc. What refreshment there is when we gather as a team of related ministries, in a fellowship of encouragement, stirring each other up in our sharing, prophesying and praying, to 'hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful". (Heb. 10:23) Amongst such men deep friendships form, and in the security of these friendships a new opening of our hearts takes place, so that I am no longer shut in with my own needs and problems, but am in such a secure relationship with my fellow ministers that I can open myself to their covering love and understanding in a time of need and pressure such as earlier described.

## God speaks directionally

How frequently we discover that it is in the context of related ministries worshipping that the Word of the Lord comes to them. It was in the gathering of prophets and teachers worshipping the Lord that God spoke of "separating Saul and Barnabas unto the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2) What a tremendous thrust for these two men to know they were not merely 'going out' but were being sent out of a corporate direction, with the awareness of the commitment of their related brethren in their ministry.

## Relationship gives balance

The question of circumcision, with which Judaistic teachers were troubling the Gentile churches, was resolved by ministries coming together and in their strong related fellowship being able to enter 'much debate' and finally received the mind of God and the blessing of the total company of apostles and elders and the church. What if they had not enjoyed such a relationship but were all away 'doing their own thing'?

There would surely have been a different and disastrous end to it all. Again, out of their relationship and fellowship Paul was able to correct Peter for showing a double standard of fellowship with Gentiles and Jews when men arrived from James. Our fellowship enables us to retain right attitudes, even when we do not always understand each other's point of view. Peter refers to some of the feelings about Paul as teaching things 'hard to understand' but not as heresy to avoid.

## Corporate strength and impact

Then, again, the life and testimony of a team of related ministries is so much more effective than that of individuals, however gifted they may appear to be. We read that such was the impact of the early church that the ministries were referred to as those who had "turned the world upside down". Again, what tremendous strength is implied in the words, "Peter stood in the midst of the eleven". Here he is surrounded by the fellowship and strength of his committed brethren while speaking to crowds that could very well be hostile, and Out of the issue came the first great in gathering at Pentecost.

The sense of belonging that comes from relationship with fellow ministers gives us the assurance that we are valued, appreciated, and cared for. In this very real sense we discover that God has provided, in our brethren, a covering, of care and love for our loneliness, of strength for weakness, of counsel in times of uncertainty, of correction in times of imbalance, of shoulder-to-shoulder fellowship in times of witness.

We are beginning to realise the meaning of Paul's words, "fellow-worker", "fellow soldier", "fellow labourer"; God grant we all respond to the call of the Spirit in our day to "come together".