

MINISTRY IS NOT A ONE-MAN JOB

18 ¹³The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning until evening. ¹⁴When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵Moses answered his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to know God's will. ¹⁶Whenever they have a dispute, they come to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and I inform them of God's statutes and laws." ¹⁷Then Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear yourself out, both you and the people who come to you. The work is too much for you; you cannot do it by yourself alone. ¹⁹Listen to me and I will give you advice, and may God be with you. You be the peoples' representative before God and bring their disputes to God. ²⁰Teach them the statutes and the laws and show them the way in which they are to walk and the duties they are to perform. ²¹Furthermore, select capable men from among the people—men who fear God, men of integrity, men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, officials over hundreds, officials over fifties, and officials over tens. ²²Have them serve as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every difficult case to you, but let them decide every small matter by themselves. In this way it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this and God so commands you, you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their homes satisfied." ²⁴Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he said. ²⁵So Moses chose capable men from all Israel and appointed them as leaders over the people, officials over thousands, officials over hundreds, officials over fifties, and officials over tens. ²⁶They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but every small matter they decided by themselves. ²⁷Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went back to his own country. (Ex. 18:13-27)

Introduction

Even a great general like George S. Patton knew that he could not do it alone. He needed help. He needed to delegate duties. He needed to utilize the talents and skills of others.

When Patton was a cadet at the West Point Military Academy his instructor once gave the class this assignment: without the use of a ladder, measure the length of the flag pole located in the courtyard. The students had one week to work on this baffling assignment and then report back to class with their answers.

Measure the length of the flagpole without using a ladder. How would you go about solving this problem? The cadets in Patton's class made a valiant attempt to solve the problem posed by their instructor. One suggested measuring the shadow cast by the pole at a given hour of the day. Another suggested measuring the height of the flag, pulling the flag up the pole in increments equal to the height of the flag, and

then counting the number of increments and multiplying them by the height of the flag. Yet another suggested climbing a nearby tree until you were parallel to the top of the flag pole and then measuring the height to which you climbed.

When the cadets assembled for class the next week they submitted their answers to the instructor. After reviewing all the various solutions offered by the cadets assembled before him, he announced that Cadet George S. Patton had the answer for which he was looking.

In answer to the question, "How would you measure the length of the flag pole without using a ladder?" Patton had written one brief sentence, "I would order the master sergeant to find somebody capable of doing it."

That was the correct answer because it understood the point being made by the instructor: even the greatest of officers does not have the time or the ability to do everything, he must recognize the importance of delegating responsibilities to others.

This is the very lesson Moses needed to learn and of which we need to be reminded: The ministry of God's church is more than any one man can handle alone. Because of the magnitude of the task of ministering to God's church, you must recognize the need for delegation and personal involvement.

I. Recognize the Role Assigned to the Pastor

Consider what Moses was doing: each day he sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning to evening (vs. 13.)

Now listen to Jethro's analysis of this situation. Addressing Moses, he asks, "*Why do you alone sit as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?*" (vs. 14.) Here is his evaluation of the situation, "*What you are doing is not good*" (vs. 17.) It may appear to be a noble and heroic effort on the part of Moses to personally minister to all the people of Israel as they had need, but Jethro defines it as "*not good.*" Jethro goes on to explain, "*You will surely wear yourself out, both you and the people who come to you. The work is too much for you; you cannot do it by yourself alone.*" (vs. 18.) Both Moses and the people would eventually suffer "burn out" if Moses were to continue ministering as he is presently doing.

Now consider Jethro's counsel to Moses, (i.e., the job description he outlines for Moses.) "*You must be the peoples' representative before God and bring their disputes to him*" (vs. 19.) Jethro is recommending a ministry of prayer, intercession, and seeking the wisdom of God. Note the ministry of Samuel: "*Then Samuel said, 'Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with Jehovah for you'*" (1 Sam. 7:5.) Or, again, we hear Samuel say to the people, "*As for me, far be it*

from me that I should sin against Jehovah by failing to pray for you. And I will instruct you in the way that is good and right.” (1 Sam. 12:23.)

Next, Jethro instructs Moses, *“Teach them the statutes and the laws”* (vs. 20a.) This is the same two-fold pattern of ministry (prayer and Bible teaching) that was implemented by the apostles to set the precedent for the New Testament church: *“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God ... ⁶we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word’”* (Acts 6:2-4.) Consider the apostle Paul’s counsel to Timothy:

... devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching ...¹⁵Be diligent in these matters, give yourself wholly to them ... (1Tim. 4:13,15)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one who is approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

Note, too, the apostle Paul’s teaching concerning one very important function of the pastor/teacher

... [the Lord gave pastors and teachers] *in order that we should no longer be children, being tossed back and forth and being blown about by every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men working in craftiness for the deceit inherent in error. ¹⁵But by practicing the truth in love, with regard to all things let us grow up in him, the one who is the head, that is, Christ* (Ephesians 4:14-15.) The Lord’s intention is that we become more Christ-like in every area of our life, and this happens as the Word of God is ministered to us by our pastors and teachers and put into practice by us.

Jethro further counsels Moses, *“show them the way in which they are to walk and the duties they are to perform”* (vs. 20b.) Moses, as the leader of God’s people, must be an example and model for the people, compare Paul’s counsel to Timothy, *“set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity”* (1Tim. 4:12.)

Finally, Jethro counsels Moses to *“select capable men from among the people... and appoint them as officials”* (vs. 21.) Jethro counsels Moses to delegate responsibility to able men who will assist him in the ministry. He is speaking of competent men whom he defines as *“men who fear God, men of integrity, men who hate dishonest gain”*—i.e.; men of principle and integrity. Consider the biblical requirements for church officers as they are presented in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9,

Now the overseer (or, elder) must be above reproach, the husband of only one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not one who drinks too much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (1 Tim. 3:2-7)

An elder must be blameless, the husband of only one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not one who drinks too much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain; ⁸rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:6-9)

As we consider Jethro's counsel to Moses, we also come to recognize the biblical role assigned to the pastor, as it is outlined in the New Testament: 1) the special emphasis on prayer and the ministry of the Word of God; 2) the importance of being an example; and 3) the need to delegate the responsibilities of ministry to able men who will assist him.

II. Recognize the Role Assigned to The Christian Layman/Laywoman

Jethro instructs Moses, *"Show the people the way in which they are to walk **and the duties they are to perform**"* (vs. 20c.) The people of Israel were to take an active part in the worship and service of God; they had their own duties of ministry to perform. They were not to merely be consumers of a religious service or ministry, they were to actively engage in worship and service to God, and so must each of us as New Testament Christians and members of Christ's body, the Church.

Consider what the apostle Paul says about the function of the pastor/teacher and how it relates to those who are the recipients of that ministry: *"[the Lord] gave some to be ... pastors and teachers ¹²to prepare the saints for the work of ministry for the purpose of building up the body of Christ"* (Eph. 4:11-12.) One of the tasks of the pastor is to prepare *"the saints"* (i.e., the people of God) for active service to Christ and to one another. The Greek word translated *"prepare"* (καταρτίζω) is used in Matthew 4:21 to describe the fishermen's work of restoring their nets, preparing those nets for useful work. Thus, one of the key tasks of the pastor/teacher is to prepare the people of God for useful work in the church of Christ and for the sake of Christ. By way of illustration: As a Christian layman you must not view yourself as a tourist on a luxury liner, lying on the deck in a

lounge chair, absorbing the crew's professional service and enjoying the cruise. On the contrary, you must see yourself as a navy pilot aboard an aircraft carrier, being equipped by the ship's crew for your next mission.

The service for which the pastor/teacher must prepare the people of God is defined as *"the work of ministry."* The Greek word translated *"ministry,"* διακονία, means humble service to others, the type of service performed by a servant. Thus, by means of the pastor/teacher's ministry, the people of God are being prepared to be more like the Lord Jesus Himself: *"whoever desires to be first among you must be your servant,²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served (διακονέω), but to serve (διακονέω), and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:27-28.)

As Christians, we are to especially perform works of service towards our fellow Christians: *"You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature [to express itself]; rather, serve one another with love* (Gal. 5:13.)

As biblically defined, a major part of the pastor/teacher's task is to prepare the Christian layman/laywoman for active service. By way of example: You come to the pastor for counseling with a heavy burden and the pastor is able to relieve you of that burden; ...not so you can get on with the living of your own self-centered life, but rather so that you can get on with the work of ministering to others more effectively. Or again, whenever you are exposed to the pastor's ministry of the Word of God, one question you might prayerfully ask is: How will this help me to grow in grace and more effectively engage in active service for Christ and to His people?

One very effective way you can carry on your ministry of service is by the use of your spiritual gift(s). Each individual Christian has received at least one or more spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole body: *"Now there is a variety of gifts, but it is the same Spirit [who gives all of them].⁵ And there is a variety of ministries, but it is the same Lord [who appoints all of them] ...⁷ Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the common good"* (1 Corinthians 12:4-5,7) The Apostle Peter explains that, as you use your spiritual gift, you will actually be ministering a portion of the multi-faceted grace of God: *"Just as each one has received a [spiritual] gift, [so use it], ministering to each other as good stewards the manifold grace of God"* (1 Pet.4:10.) As you use your spiritual gift your Christian life will not only become more profitable, but also more exciting as you become involved in the work of Christ and see Him using you. Familiarize yourself with the various spiritual gifts (see the passages below,) seek to discover your gift, and put it to use for the glory of Christ.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.⁷ If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;⁸ if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it

is giving, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do so cheerfully. (Rom. 12:6-8)

... to one there is given by the Spirit a word of wisdom, and to another [there is given] a word of knowledge through the same Spirit; ⁹to yet another [there is given the gift of] faith by the same Spirit, to another [there is given] gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another [there is given the ability to perform] works of power, to another [there is given the gift of] prophecy, to another [there is given the ability to] distinguish between spirits, to another [there is given the ability to speak in different] languages, to another [there is given the ability to] interpret languages. (1 Cor. 12:8-10)

Recognize the role assigned to you as a Christian layman or laywoman. There is spiritual work for you to do, work that requires the use of your service and the use of your spiritual gifts.

Conclusion

This is the message to us from Exodus 18:13-27: Because of the magnitude of the task of ministering to God's church, we must appreciate the need for delegation and personal involvement.

When the New Testament apostles implemented the very counsel Jethro gave Moses, (namely, that Moses should concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word as first priority and delegate responsibility to others,) look at the result: *"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly"* (Acts 6:7.)

Our attitudes and outlook should not be to maintain the status quo, but to advance the kingdom of Christ—among ourselves in terms of spiritual growth, and in the community in terms of evangelism. The best way for us to get the job done is for each one of us to concentrate on our God-given responsibilities and so do our part faithfully.