

## **MINISTER, MINISTRY**

A distinctive biblical idea that means "to serve" or "servant." In the Old Testament the word servant was used primarily for court servants (1 Kings 10:5; Est 1:10).

During the period between the Old and New Testaments, it came to be used in connection with ministering to the poor. This use of the word is close to the work of the seven in waiting on tables in the New Testament (Acts 6:1-7).

In reality, all believers are "ministers." The apostle Paul urged the true pastor-teacher to "equip the saints" so they can minister to one another (Eph 4:11-12). The model, of course, is Jesus, who "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). His service is revealed in the fact that He gave "His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

Jesus' servanthood radically revised the ethics of Jew and Greek alike, because He equated service to God with service to others. When we minister to the needs of the hungry or the lonely, we actually minister to Christ (Matt 25:31-46). And when we fail to do so, we sin against God (James 2:14-17; 4:17). In this light, all who took part in the fellowship of service were ministers.

The concept is strengthened when the use of the Greek word *doulos* is noted. This was the term for a bondsman, one who was offered his freedom but who voluntarily surrendered that freedom in order to remain a servant. This idea typified Jesus' purpose, as described by Paul in Phil 2:7. This passage alludes to the "servant of God" teaching of Isa 52-54. Truly Christ fulfilled this exalted calling, because His life was dedicated to the needs of others.

Following our Savior's example, all believers are bondsmen of God (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Col 4:12). We are to perform "good deeds" to all men, with a responsibility especially to fellow Christians (Gal 6:10; Heb 10:24).

Our unselfish service should especially be rendered through our spiritual gifts, which are given by God to the saints in order that they might minister to one another (1 Peter 4:10). These gifts consist of both spiritual and practical gifts (1 Cor 12:28). They are distributed to various members of the church so that the union of believers can be expressed in loving service. In Eph 4:7-11 the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc., are described as divine "gifts" to the church. This is the one place where the officers of the church might be linked with the term minister. In a special way these officers do "minister" to the church—the apostles through their inspired leadership; the prophets through their inspired preaching and even foretelling; the evangelists through their traveling missionary work; and the pastor-teachers through their service in local congregations. Yet their primary service was to equip all saints for ministry.

The concepts of minister and ministry must be broadened today to include all the members of a church. The common concept of the pastor as the professional minister must be discarded, because the biblical pattern is for him to be the one who trains the congregation for ministry. All the saints are responsible for loving and ministering in various ways to one another, using the spiritual gifts distributed to each by the Holy Spirit.

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