



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 7 – The Ministry of the Gospel**

VII. The Ministry of the Gospel

Our Lord Jesus has established the ministry of the Gospel so that sinners may be saved. Through the ministry of the Gospel the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. All those whom the Holy Spirit has called out of darkness into His light declare His praises and thus share in this ministry as priests of God. To accomplish the work of the Gospel, the Lord enables Christians to establish congregations as well as other groups (sometimes called synods or denominations).

The believers within congregations and church bodies have the privilege of providing the public proclamation and teaching of God's saving Word by calling pastors and teachers to whom God Himself has given the necessary gifts and abilities. These called servants are instruments of God, chosen and prepared by Him to act on His behalf as well as on behalf of the Christians who have called them. They are given the splendid privilege of publicly declaring the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the Word and Sacrament.

This service is called the "public ministry" which is carried out by those whom Christ gives to His Church and who are properly called by the Church for this work. These ministers of the Word are thus occupying a divinely instituted office. The specific area of the work of these public ministers is determined and defined in their respective calls by the assembly that has called them. There is no distinction in rank or power in the public ministry, even though there is a diversity of gifts and responsibilities. Eligibility for a call to the public ministry is determined by the directives of God's Word (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

We further believe that when called ministers of Christ, in accordance with their respective calls, deal with us by Christ's command, He works through them.

1 Timothy 2:11-14 teaches that women are not to be called to the pastoral ministry. This clear section also informs us that women are not to function in any position in the church in which they teach or have authority over men.

1 Peter 2:9-10: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Ephesians 4:11-12: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Acts 20:28: Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Luke 10:16: Jesus said: "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."

Hebrews 13:7: *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

1 Timothy 2:11-14: *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*

Comments:

The Holy Spirit does His work of bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. **“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21). The Gospel of Christ seems powerless and “foolish” because it is just words; it is just a story about God’s sending His Son to live and die for our sins and rise from the dead. But this message is, as Paul says, **“the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”** (Romans 1:16). Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: **“God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our Gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2: 13-14). Therefore, when Paul went on his mission journeys, he went from town to town preaching this Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit worked through this Gospel to bring people to faith in Jesus. In this way little groups of Christians were gathered together in the towns Paul visited to form Christian congregations. These congregations were made up of persons who were brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin and eternal death. Even in Athens, where most rejected the Gospel as foolishness, the Holy Spirit brought some to faith through the Gospel. **“Some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them”** (Acts 17:33).

In the days of the Old Testament God chose the descendants of Moses’ brother Aaron as the priests of the people, authorized to carry out the sacrifices and worship in the tabernacle and temple. But in the New Testament God declares all believers in Jesus to be priests. The apostle Peter wrote to the Christians in his care: **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”** (1 Peter 2:9-10). All Christians are priests. We call this the priesthood of all believers in Christ. It means that everyone who has been called out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith has the privilege to proclaim God’s praises, that is, to tell others about God’s love and what Jesus has done to save the world. In this sense, every Christian is a minister of the Gospel. Every Christian is a missionary to spread the good news around the world. Therefore, every congregation or gathering of Christians in a certain place, is a mission congregation to broadcast and publicize the good news, using various means to make the Gospel known.

The first New Testament congregation was gathered by the Holy Spirit in the city of Jerusalem, but very soon there were congregations of Christians in other towns and cities. This is clear from the book of Acts. Since these congregations all agreed in their teaching, they joined together in their work. For example, when there was a question about how to handle the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, the Christians held a meeting (Acts 15) in Jerusalem to discuss this question. Christians from Antioch (and perhaps other places) came to this meeting. Later on, many of the congregations founded by Paul in Greece and Asia Minor worked together to gather money for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

In our days it is customary for congregations who agree in their teaching to form church bodies or associations of congregations known as synods. The purpose of a synod is to carry out certain tasks in connection with the Gospel that are not easily accomplished by a single congregation working by itself. The Church of the Lutheran Confession is made up of individual congregations in the United States and Canada. These congregations have agreed together to support Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary in Eau Claire as a school for training young people in God’s work and will, as

revealed in the Bible. The congregations, working together, also support mission work in the US as well as in other places in the world, as God provides opportunities and support.

In Scripture God has not given any rules about how to organize congregations or synods. For this reason, Christians through the ages have used many different types of organization. The main thing, of course, is to teach and practice in agreement with God's Word in all of the associated congregations, and to do all things "**decently and in order**" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The only Head of the Christian Church is Jesus Christ, and therefore all Christian congregations and synods should regard Jesus Christ as their Head also. The New Testament teaches us that Jesus has given special gifts to His Church on earth, both to individual congregations and church bodies, to assist them in their Gospel work: "**And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ**" (Ephesians 4: 11-12).

Christ's apostles still teach us today through the New Testament. Christ gave the prophets to the early churches to bring them a direct word from God in the days before the New Testament was written. Christ still gives evangelists to His Church, along with pastor-teachers, and other leaders with various gifts and talents. Every group of Christians may call such persons into what we call "the public ministry" as the congregation in Antioch of Syria called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to bring the Gospel to other places (Acts 13:1-4). The Bible makes it clear that when Christian congregations or synods call individuals into special Gospel work, it is actually the Holy Spirit who is calling these individuals through the Christians who are the calling. We see this when the Bible says in Acts 13:4 that Paul and Barnabas were "**sent out by the Holy Spirit.**"

Likewise, when Paul addressed the elders (pastors) of the congregation at Ephesus, he told them that it was the Holy Spirit who had called them into their special ministries: "**Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**" (Acts 20:28). When Christians call individuals to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments as their representatives, they need to pay attention to the guidelines the Holy Spirit Himself has given, especially in the pastoral letters that Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus (for example: 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

It is essential for all such persons called into the public ministry to carry out their duties faithfully. These duties are assigned to them by the Christians who called them. They must above all be faithful in every way to the Church's Head, Jesus Christ. When called ministers teach God's Word faithfully, their words should be honored as the words of God Himself. Jesus said to His apostles: "**He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me**" (Luke 10:16).

Those whom God has called as public ministers of the Word should be honored and remembered by those who listen to their teaching. It is also important to remember Jesus' teaching that the laborer is worthy of his reward, as Paul says: "**Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel**" (1 Corinthians 9:14). Wherever God has supplied the means, the people should financially support those whom they have called to serve them with God's word. Paul himself chose not to use this right. Instead he became a tentmaker to take care of his own needs and the needs of his associates. Hebrews 13:7 teaches: "**Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.**"

The New Testament clearly teaches that we are all equal with respect to our salvation. We read in Galatians 3:27-28: "**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" In Colossians 3:11 we read: "**There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.**"

At the same time, however, our Lord has established the principle that we are to choose only men as teachers of the Christian assembly and leaders in His Church. Jesus shows us this by example and by His commandments. He Himself chose only men to be His apostles, although there were many women who supported His ministry faithfully. The qualifications for spiritual overseers given in 1 Timothy and Titus imply that only men are to be chosen as leaders, although women may serve as helpers (deaconesses). In particular we have God's Word in 1 Timothy 2:11-14: **"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."** The same teaching is affirmed in 1 Corinthians: **"Let your women keep silent in the churches... for it is shameful for women to speak in church... The things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 14:34-37).

It is for this reason that in our church body we do not have pastors or church officers who are women, nor do women exercise authority over men in our congregations by having an equal vote with the men in church matters.

Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit bring people to faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Give some examples of the Holy Spirit's work from the book of Acts.
3. Why does the apostle Paul call the Gospel of Christ "foolishness"?
4. What is meant by the priesthood of all believers in Christ?
5. What are some of the ways in which the early Christian congregations worked together for the Gospel?
6. How do the congregations of the CLC work together today?
7. What are some of the special gifts the Head of the Church gives to His Church today?
8. Why do we say that it is God who calls pastors and teachers in His Church?
9. What is the difference between the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry?
10. What are the duties of Christian pastors and Christian members?
11. In what way are men and women equal in the Christian Church?
12. In what way has Christ established a difference between men and women in His Church?