



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 13.18 – The Doctrine of Church and Ministry

The Rightful Work of the Church

The rightful work of the Holy Christian Church and all of its members (all believers in Christ) is ministry. This ministry (or service) is the ministry of the Word, that is, the ministry of the Gospel, the ministry of the keys. Thus, the Church has one task: the preaching of the Gospel. This requires the preaching of God's law as preparation for the preaching of the Gospel, and also the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. This ministry is given to every individual Christian and to every group of Christians.

In the New Testament every Christian is a priest. For the apostle Peter wrote to the Christians dispersed in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1): "**You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**" (1 Peter 2:5). "**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 were once 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).

Everyone who has been called out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of faith in Christ is privileged to proclaim the praises of his Savior-God. To proclaim the praises of God is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, announcing to all what great things God has done. He has sent His Son Jesus Christ to save sinners from their sin and its consequences: guilt, the power of the devil, and eternal death.

Thus, each Christian man, woman, and child is encouraged to use the loosing key and spread the Word that there is forgiveness of sins for all because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus said to His disciples: "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). "**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**" (Matthew 28:19). On Easter Sunday evening, when Jesus gave the keys to His disciples, the eleven apostles were not the only ones who were present.

Every believer in Christ is called on to confess Him "**before men**", for Jesus said: "**Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven**" (Matthew 10:32-33). Jesus has promised His blessing also on groups of Christians that carry out this ministry, no matter how small these groups are, saying: "**Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them**" (Matthew 18:20).

This ministry is described by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians: "**All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He has made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain**" (2 Corinthians 5:18 – 6:1).

Notice that God is the One who did the reconciling of the sinful world to Himself through Jesus Christ. He laid the sin of the world on Jesus, and in return He gives us in Christ the righteousness of God. Our

sins have been taken away. The ministry of reconciliation is given to Christians to speak the word of reconciliation: to tell sinners what God has done for them in Christ. Christians practice this ministry when they tell others in Christ's name, as His ambassadors or representatives, what Christ has done for them, pleading with them to receive God's gift of forgiveness in Christ, to receive the reconciliation that Christ has won for all.

The book of Acts is the record of how some of the early Christians carried out this ministry of reconciliation, this ministry of the Word. The number of Christians who returned to Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension was "**a hundred and twenty**" (Acts 1:15), and this number included the apostles, Jesus' brothers, His mother Mary, and some of the other women that followed Jesus. It was to these men and women that Jesus poured down the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The prophet Joel's prophecy was fulfilled. "**Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy**" (Acts 2:17-18).

The record shows that these believers in Christ became deeply involved in working with Christ's Gospel, and the Lord blessed their testimony so that in a short time the group of believers in Jerusalem numbered in the thousands. We read in Acts 6:1 that "**the number of the disciples was multiplying.**" The chief occupation of the apostles was "**prayer and ... the ministry of the word**" (Acts 6:4). But the apostles were not the only ones involved in preaching the Gospel of Christ. Two of the seven helpers chosen by the congregation to distribute food to the poor, Stephen and Philip, became involved in preaching the Gospel, and God blessed their labors. Then we are told that when "**a great persecution arose against the church which is at Jerusalem, ... they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles**" (Acts 8:1). Were these scattered Christians silent about the Gospel of Christ? Not at all! "**Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word**" (Acts 8:4).

And so this ministry has continued to the present time, and all Christians are involved in this ministry in one way or another. Our Lord even accepts the praises of small children, as we learn from what happened on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:15-16).

The apostle Paul calls the preaching of the Gospel "**the ministry of the Spirit**" (2 Corinthians 3:8), because it is the Holy Spirit who works through believers to proclaim the Gospel and make it effective in the hearts of the listeners. He also calls it "**the ministry of righteousness**" (2 Corinthians 3:9), for the Gospel offers the perfect righteousness of Christ in exchange for the sin that was given to Christ on the cross. In contrast to God's law, which Paul calls "**the ministry of death**" (2 Corinthians 3:7) and "**the ministry of condemnation**" (2 Corinthians 3:9), Christians are "**ministers of the new covenant**" (2 Corinthians 3:6), which is the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ.

Questions

1. What is the rightful work of Christ's Church?
2. To whom has this work been given?
3. How can individual Christians participate in this work?
4. How can groups of Christians participate in this work?
5. Give some examples of how this work was carried on by early Christians.
6. What is meant by the ministry of reconciliation?
7. Show that the apostles were not the only ones involved in this work.
8. How did God use the persecution of Christians to spread the Gospel?
9. What is the difference between the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness?
10. How can little children contribute to the work of the Church?
11. How can you share in the work of the Gospel in your locale?