

TEAM MINISTRY in the Local Church

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“ 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, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:11-13

FIVE FOLD MINISTERS WORKING TOGETHER

In all aspects of leading the Church, the Five Fold Ministers (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) are to be collaborative and mutually submitted to each other in stewarding the Vision of the Church.

TEAM MINISTRY IN ATHLETICS

For men to play on a football team, much more is required of them than to pass a physical fitness test. While a strong physique and great endurance are very important, their real strength lies in how efficiently they will work together as a team according to the rules of the game.

Without the closest co operation and total harmony, that team will not go very far.

Likewise, it is not enough that a person acquires some Bible knowledge, and then starts ministering. From the teachings of our Lord, we see it is most essential that we learn and practice ‘Team Ministry’ among all levels of the leadership in the body of Christ.

There are different principles which one man follows in the study of any subject in the Bible. One of these principals is called the ‘first mention’ ‘principle; this means the way a person of subject is first introduced, so he or it will function throughout the Scriptures. The only exception to his principle is when the Lord distinctly makes a change. In the Old Testament people lived under the law. In the New Testament people live by grace.

In his first appearance, Satan came to Eve as a liar and a deceiver. That is how he has dealt with man down through the ages.

In the first chapter of Genesis, God appears as the giver of life. Everything He did was very good. He continues to give life and do good until this day. He gives eternal life to all who receive his Son as their Savior and Lord.

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

It is not to be denied that God honors faith wherever it is found, however it is expressed, and to what measure it is exercised. But Paul did say, I show you a more excellent way. This indicates some methods are more effective and more productive than others.

Luke told Theophilus that he wrote in his gospel of all that Jesus began, “both to do and to teach.” Acts 1:1

Following the first mention principal, is there something we can learn from the way Jesus first introduced the subject of ‘Team Ministry.’?

JESUS EXAMPLE

Jesus said to twelve men, “Come after me and I will make you to BECOME fishers of men.” Mark 1:17. By example, Jesus trained these men to do what he did.

The ratio of all our teaching, and men ‘becoming’ is very much out of balance.

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If a boy is to learn to fish, we do not give him a rod, a reel, a line, a sinker, a hook and some bait, and tell him to “Go do it”. No! We take him out to the lake, show him how to put the gear together, how to bait the hook, how to cast the line, when and how to pull in the fish.

It is not enough to tell people how important is it to become a fisher of men, nor to inform them of the techniques by which to catch the fish. The important thing is to show people, by example, how to reach people.

All men who play on a football team know their primary objective is to score touchdowns. They must learn to protect the quarterback as he brings plays into action. They must learn to make a way through the opposing line for their ball carrier. They must learn to protect and support the man who makes end runs, and the man who catches the forward passes.

For all of this, every man must fully understand the function of his position, how to relate to the other members of the team, what to do if a man makes a mistake by overplaying his position, or not doing his part fully. He must know how to meet his opponents, and how to respond to those who cheat or do not play fairly.

Men in Team Ministry in the body of Christ must know the function of their position, and how to relate to their partner in his position. They must know how to fill-in if a partner makes a mistake, goes beyond his responsibility, or fails as some point. Above all things, they must love, and maintain a right attitude of heart in every situation, regardless of what the partner does.

Leadership must give demonstration to team ministry, not only in reaching unsaved people, but in every area of ministry in the church.

Having a vivid realization that all men must be saved, one would suppose that Jesus would have called many more than twelve men. He must have understood in how many he could effectively multiply himself at one time. One man can preach too many thousands at one time and lead them into salvation. To lead people on into maturity, one can only minister effectively to a small number at one time.

Jesus said, “come” to twelve men, and lived with them in daily, personal, intimate relationship. After three years he said, “go” to those men, and sent them out, two by two, to preach the gospel. Mark 6:7 Later he appointed other seventy, and sent them out also, two by two. Luke 10:1

WHY TWO?

Why did Jesus limit himself to teams in the face of such tremendous need everywhere? He could have covered twice as much territory by sending men out one by one to different places. Deuteronomy 32:30 tells us that two have five times as much strength as one.

Two can give a more complete demonstration of the Christian life than one.

Two can minister more effectively to special and difficult needs than one.

Two can minister more effectively to special and difficult needs than one.

Two can support and uphold one another under pressure.

Two can be checks and balances to each other.

If one becomes negative in his attitudes the other can check him.

If one begins an undue emphasis on certain truth the other can challenge him.

If one begins to fall prey to temptation or error the other can correct him.

If one begins to take on another spirit the other can caution him.

If one fails to respond to correction, so that disciplinary action becomes necessary, two or more people are required as witnesses so that every word may be established.

Page | 3 Matthew 18: 16.

Even in as simple a matter as borrowing a colt for his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples to get the colt. Matthew 21:1-11.

From Matthew 18:19-20 we can readily understand why results are not at all in proportion to the praying that takes place in the Churches. Many times in matters of public concern people are praying independently and sometimes even against each other, rather than being in agreement and praying unitedly. If they are not flowing in unity, they should pray that the Lord would unite their hearts so He could clearly answer the request being made.

BIBLE SCHOOLS

In as much as Jesus spent about three years training his disciples to become fishers of men, many men across the land have opened three year Bible Schools to train students for service. No doubt these studies are all very good and helpful, however in the final analysis; it is not how much a man knows about Church History, about the Bible, or about God. It is the measure in which that man knows God, in practical daily living that will determine the measure of his effectiveness in ministry. Philippians 3:10

ONE MAN MINISTRY

It is really quite amazing how men seem to follow a portion of a scriptural teaching and totally ignore the other parts to it. Men set up three year Bible Schools because Jesus spent three years training his disciples, but they fail, totally, to send out their graduates, two by two, as Jesus did.

Many men go out individually and independently. They answer to nobody. A competitive spirit is often in evidence. Jealousy shows if one succeeds more than another. Unconsciously they impart that spirit of individualism and independence to their people. Leaders have not learned to submit to each other. They find very few true servants in their midst. They haven't projected the spirit of a true servant. Matthew 20:26-28, Ephesians 5:21

There is much more possibility for dominance and control where one man stands alone. It is much easier to give in to untruthfulness, dishonesty, or immorality, where one is alone. Two have five times the strength of one.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

There is little recognition for the need of apostolic succession in the Church today. In the beginning Paul ordained Timothy and taught him to reach faithful men who shall teach others also. II Timothy 2:2

The Lord has only one body... the Church. If there is any malfunction in our human body, it is not long until weakness and sickness set in. There is much weakness in the body of Christ. Instead of all flowing together harmoniously in the bond of love, disagreements and differences have split the Church into many splinters.

The growth and expansion of the church is to come by the Church through the Church. Those who move out into new fields need to have the full blessing and support of the existing body, both in prayer and finances.

Some men were fasting and ministering unto the Lord. Acts 13:1, 2 The Holy Spirit told them to separate Barnabus and Saul for that particular work to which He was calling them. They fasted and prayed some more, laid hands on them, and sent Barnabus and Saul out as the first official missionaries of the Church.

The Holy Spirit was following the 'first mention' principal. Jesus sent out his first men, two by two.

We said in the beginning that God honors faith whenever, wherever, and however it is expressed. We read, too, that some ways are more productive than others.

We believe the Lord set forth the most effective and productive ways in the beginning of his ministry. The early Church followed that same procedure. We do well to follow that same principal today.

Some will say, there are individual men who established more and greater works than others who worked in teams. A few things must be taken into account. Some men have greater giftings than others; naturally the results will be greater. Not all men are functioning in their God-given calling. We dare to say if the men with the greater gifting were joined in the spirit with another man of equal stature; the results would far exceed those of his individual ministry.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

In Luke 6:13 Jesus calls his disciples together, chooses twelve, and calls them Apostles... sent out ones. The rest of the disciples were not called Apostles because they were not set out at that time.

He gave them all the same power to do the same things. The twelve were to cast out unclean spirits, heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. Matthew 10:1

They were to preach, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." They were to cleanse the lepers and raise the dead. Matthew 10: 7, 8

Luke 10:1 indicates their message was rather introductory and not complete because Jesus said specifically that he would follow them later.

The Church was born on the day of Pentecost. The Lord began to make provision for the growth and expansion of the Church. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:8-11, when the Lord ascended up on high he gave five ministry gifts to the church.

Today these men are recognized around the world. Their ordination gives them authority to fulfill all the functions of the Church, anywhere. By virtue of their office the government grants them certain privileges and exemptions.

These men are no longer classified in the general terms as 'sent out ones' but are given five distinct ministries as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers.

Combined, they fulfill that which is necessary to bring the Church into full maturity. Ephesians 4:11-13. It is not within the capacity of one man to fulfill the full purpose of the Lord in the Church. If one could do it all, the other four ministries would not be needed. They would become superfluous.

So, according to God's sovereign will, he sets men with different ministries into the body as it pleases him.

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

Paul told the Church at Ephesus they are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. Ephesians 2:19, 20.

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In the building world, everything depends on a good solid foundation. This is especially true with our modern high-rise structures. It is most important that architects calculate accurately the total weight of the building, plus the stress and strain that can come from violent winds. The foundation must be laid, accordingly, so as to hold the building under great stress.

It is extremely necessary that gifted men lay a strong foundation for a new church so that in the days to come the Church will be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil.

Paul says, further, that apostles and prophets have God given insight that others do not have. Ephesians 3:3-5.

How are these men to be recognized? The Bible says a man's gift makes room for him. Proverbs 18:16. That is, they will be identified by their ministry. Let us consider a few characteristics of an apostle.

APOSTLE

The apostle is set in the church by the Lord. Ephesians 4:8-11. Men cannot set him into the body. They need to recognize what God has already done. Paul said very definitely that he was called by God to be an apostle. Galatians 1:1, 15. They are identified by other leaders. Paul saw qualities in Timothy, trained him and ordained him. The leaders in Jerusalem saw the leadership in Paul and extended the right hand of fellowship to him. Acts 16:1-3, Galatians 2:9.

The ministry is released through the laying on of hands and prophecy. I Timothy 1:18, 4; 14, II Timothy 1:6.

Paul said he was a wise foundation layer. He began the work in Corinthians. Others will continue to finish the work. I Corinthians 3:10.

The strength of the apostle lies in his gift of administration. In a year he will do what it takes others years to do, if they do it at all. This is not because he is a better man than others. It is what God has called and gifted him to do He will bring people together and establish a good sound, balanced, functioning body in Christ.

PROPHET

The prophet is set in the Church by the Lord. Ephesians 4:8-11. He is a man of authority. John the Baptist challenged the sincerity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 3:7-11.

Jesus was known by the general public for his mighty words and deeds. Luke 24:19. He taught as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Matthew 7:29.

The prophet foretells future events. In Acts 11:28 Agabus told of a great dearth that should come to the entire world. It came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

He ministers to ministers. At least twice Barnabus came to Paul at a time when he was in need. Acts 9:27, 11:25, 26.

He is a Seer. He sees things in the Spirit that others do not normally see. I Samuel 9:9, 15-20. Ephesians 3:4, 5.

Amos 3:7 says God does nothing but he reveals it to his servants the prophets.

The ideal ministry is for an apostle and a prophet to work together as a team. The apostle draws the people together and the prophet establishes them in the Word. It was not by accident that Paul, the apostle, and Barnabus, the prophet, became the first official missionaries of the church. Acts. 13:1, 2.

Several years later Paul and Barnabus had a serious disagreement over John Mark. They parted company because Barnabus determined to take John Mark. Barnabus did not lose his salvation over this issue. The fact is, he broke the covenant with Paul to whom God called him in Acts 13:12. We never hear about him again.

Paul did not go on alone because Barnabus left him. He chose Silas, another prophet, to be in a team with him. The record of his ministry to the Church goes on.

EVANGELISTS, PASTORS AND TEACHERS

Evangelists

The evangelist has a strong passion for the souls of men. He has a fiery message that reaches the lost in the midst of the congregation. He has a home church from which he moves among the Churches. He does a little teaching but his burden is to reach the unsaved.

He is a fearless preacher with a powerful anointing in God that draws hundreds to the Lord in mass meetings. He directs the converts to Churches that will lead them on to maturity.

The true evangelist spends much time in prayer so as to maintain the strong anointing in the Spirit, and to keep him from restoring to carnal means which will produce carnal results.

PASTORS

A shepherd takes care of each individual lamb and sheep in his flock. He brings them back if they stray from the flock. He treats injuries and bruises. He examines them for ticks. He provides good pasture.

In like manner the pastor has a real concern for each member of every family in his care. He observes their moods, and the general attitude of their spirit. He ministers the balm of Gilead to those who have been hurt or wounded. He seeks to bring calm to those who are under tension, in distress, or in a state of rebellion. He seeks to restore the backslider.

He performs the marriage ceremony for those two whose hearts have been joined together in love. He conducts the funeral service of those whose spirit has left the body.

TEACHERS

The pastor is concerned about relationships. The primary concern of the teacher is that the people are thoroughly instructed in the Word. Many failures among Christians are for want of full, clear instruction from the Word.

The teacher does not seek to establish principals of conduct from one or two isolated texts. He compares Scripture with Scripture on a given subject and bases his conclusion on the whole content of truth relative to the subject. He has the ability in God to explain the word so simply and clearly that a child can understand what is being taught.

He begins to teach and train those whom the evangelist has brought to salvation. He seeks to minister according to their age-level, and their background of knowledge. His is possibly the most difficult ministry. Teaching, normally, does not produce signs and wonders. Only over a long period of faithful teaching will he see gradual changes in lives. It is

a great consolation to know that a man is not rewarded for accomplishments, but for faithfulness. I Corinthians 4: 12, Matthew 25:21.

GIFTINGS

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We need to appreciate the full free flow of the Spirit of God in the body of Christ, especially among leadership. God sovereignty gives ministry gifts to men as he wills. He gives some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers. Ephesians 4:11. They are identified very clearly by their respective gifting according to the will of God.

God also sovereignty endows these men with a further gifting. This accounts for a variety of manifestations among men with the same calling. No doubt personality makes some contribution. Much more is due to the special gifting.

One apostle has a prophetic anointing.

One apostle is given to some evangelism.

One apostle has a teaching ministry.

One apostle does some shepherding.

Paul told Apostle Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. II Timothy 4:5. That did not make him an evangelist. He did it as part of his apostleship. These giftings are only in limited measure. They do not overshadow his apostleship. They enhance it. If these giftings were in full measure, the apostle would lose his identity, and people would question: is he an apostle, or a prophet, or an evangelist, or a pastor, or a teacher, depending on the manifestation of the gifts? The apostle might manifest more than one of these gifts, according to the sovereign will of God.

One prophet has a limited measure of administration.

One prophet has a limited measure of evangelism.

One prophet has a limited measure of the pastor's heart.

One prophet has a limited measure of more than one of those gifts.

The teacher may give limited evidence of reaching the unsaved.

The teacher may give limited evidence of the pastor's concern for the needs of people

The evangelist does some teaching.

The evangelist does some shepherding.

The pastor, along with the many cares of the people, does some teaching

The pastor, along with the many cares of the people, reaches out to the lost.

Without these special giftings, the ministry gifts would not be as effective. With them, the men can go beyond their normal function.

The point of concern is always to stay fully within the giftings and the leading of the Spirit, not going beyond, nor falling behind the full will of God.

ELDERS

On most any subject there are two or more schools of thought. How can this be when they all go the Greek as their authority? In the English dictionary one finds several words are used to give the full meaning of a word. The same is true in Strong's Greek dictionary of the New Testament.

As was mentioned in the beginning, there are different principles of Bible study. The importance of 'Team Ministry' is shown by the 'first mention' principle. Let us see what this principle reveals regarding different offices.

In Ephesians 4:11 and I Corinthians 12:28 where the five ministry gifts to the Church are first introduced, they are not referred to as elders. In Titus 1:5-9 and I Timothy 3:1-13 where elders are first mentioned, there is no reference to five ministry gifts.

The elders are called Bishops and Deacons. Let it be noticed that the term 'elder' is a designation. It says a person is in a place of responsibility. The office, or function, or the responsibility is described as that of a Bishop or a Deacon.

Today the ordination of the five ministry gifts is recognized around the world. They are granted special privileges and exemptions. When a minister leaves a Church, he takes his ordination with him.

Elders are not a Church board that runs or controls the affairs of the Church. Elders are subject to the five ministry gifts. They serve only in the local congregation. When they leave that church, they leave their eldership behind.

Apart from the fact that a Bishop must be 'apt to teach', there is virtually no difference in the list of qualifications for a Bishop and a Deacon. I Timothy 3:1-13.

The Bible speaks of Bishops and Deacons. Somewhere along the line a change has taken place. Today we have Elders and Deacons. But an Elder is a designation, not an office.

Many pastors and Churches have the elder (bishop) on an elevated position in comparison to the deacon. Scriptural usage is the most convincing evidence on any subject.

It is generally conceded that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 were Deacons. The ministry of Stephen Acts 6:7 and Philip, Acts 21:8, is hardly in keeping with the present-day concept of deacon.

We need to bear in mind that Bishops and Deacons are local elders. They assist the five ministry gifts. Their qualifications are virtually the same. The Bishop is not superior to the Deacon because he teaches and the Deacon ministers to the needs of the people. Both are the servants of the Lord, functioning in different spheres of ministry.

COVER TERMS

Many differences of understanding come because we do not compare scripture with scripture in the light of the principles of interpretation.

We have already stated the primary reference to elders is Bishops and Deacons. In I Peter 5:1 the apostle Peter, while addressing elders, says he is also an elder. From this scripture, we may deduct that all men in the five ministry offices can also be described as elders, but not all elders are in the five ministry gifts.

There was a Church council meeting in Jerusalem on the subject of circumcision. After many have shared their views, James came through with the word of the Lord. Acts 15:22 says there were three groups who were pleased with the word: apostles, elders, and the whole church.

If the whole Church was there, it is only natural to believe the five ministry gifts were all there. Apostles were mentioned in verse 22 and prophets in verse 32. We know apostles and prophets are foundation layers. When the first missionary team was sent out, it was, Paul, the apostle, and Barnabus, the prophet.

Barnabus was called a prophet in Acts 13:1. When Paul and Barnabus separated, Paul chose Silas, another prophet, as his team partner.

In Acts 14:14 Barnabus is called an apostle with Paul. Is there a conflict in these two scriptures, Acts 13:1 and Acts 14:14?

We discover usage in the Bible reveals cover terms. Instead of Paul saying it pleased the apostles and prophets and evangelists, and pastors and teachers and bishops and deacons, he says it pleased the apostles, using the cover term for the five ministry gifts, and elders, using the cover term for the bishops and deacons. Acts 15:22

Is it all that important that we keep all our terminology straight? If it were not important the Lord would not have identified these two groups separately. Moreover, if we intend to send out teams in the days to come, it is very necessary that we know in which category a man is, and what his gifting are, so he can be properly joined with another man in a team, whether it is among the fivefold ministry, or among elders.

There is much more involved in team ministry than for two or more men agreeing to work together. There needs to be a joining together in spirit that they will move as one man, and know the strength which is five times greater than that of one man working separately.

CHOOSING TEAMS

The Bible tells us that two men have five times the strength of one. If it is good that an apostle and a prophet work together as a team to lay the foundation of a church, it is equally necessary that the evangelist, the pastor, and the teacher be working together, in some combination, as a team in the building of the church.

In as much as no two congregations have the same need, the combination of ministry will vary accordingly. If the personnel of a congregation changes, ministries may change also. Teams are not chosen on the basis of camaraderie, but by the direct leading of the Spirit. Normally, men will have complimentary gifts. They become a mutual strength to each other as they press on together in the vision God has given. Teams are not limited to two men. Paul traveled in a company of men. At one point he was concerned because, "Only Luke is with me." II Timothy 4:11

As the work grows more men with right gifting, and flowing in the same spirit, need to be added to the team. Proverbs 11:14 says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." As the five ministry gifts seek only the glory of God, they will know, by the Spirit, what men should team together, and where they should go.

A WORD OF CAUTION

We need to be fully aware that any terminology and any structure can go to seed. It is not primarily the words or the work that matters. It is rather the spirit in which words are spoken, and by which work is done, that makes all the difference and sustains the life.

Many men say they are in a team ministry. They have associates working with them. Strictly speaking, an associate is not of equal status with the pastor. He is of lesser rank. Consequently they are not a team in the full sense of the word.

Generally speaking, 'Senior Pastors' convey the same idea. When Jesus sent out his apostles, two by two, there is no inference that one was the pastor, and the other the associate. One was not the senior pastor and the other a pastor.

When Paul and Barnabus were sent out by the church, Paul was not the pastor and Barnabus the associate or assistant. They were of equal status. They stood eye ball to eye ball. One did not look down at the other. The other did not look up to the one.

In I Corinthians 12:28 when Paul said, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teacher, he was not talking of rank, but order. The apostle is not at the top of the ladder with the others somewhere below him. He is the first one to go through the door. He is the

spokesman, the chairman, the leader. The word of God is very clear. We are members, one of another, not over each other. Romans. 12:5

Jesus soundly rebuked those who aspired for position. Matthew 20:20-28. The New Testament is very conspicuous for its absence of any rank among the leadership. Jesus was servant to all. Luke 22:27

ORDER vs. RANK

Because we do not leave room for rank in the leadership of the church, some conclude we are projecting, 'Co-equal Eldership'. Not at all! Co – equal eldership can take up much time and bring confusion and frustration while decisions are being reached as to who should lead the next service, the next event, or order of business.

While little children meet on a playground it takes only a few minutes until one emerges as a leader. In all the various functions of our society there is a chairman or leader to bring and keep order throughout that event.

When the Apostle and Prophet are working as a team, laying the foundation of a church, the Apostle is the leader, and also fulfills the function of the Pastor. When his ministry is fulfilled the normal procedure is to find a man with the shepherd's heart to succeed him, to lead and co-ordinate the work, and if possible, work closely with one or more men of equal stature; each man recognizing his divinely appointed ministry.

If a Pastor is not available, those with spiritual oversight look to the Lord to find who should fill that office until a Pastor is located or raised up in the local church.

There may be several points of consideration, such as the type of people who are in the congregation, the size of the work, personnel available, etc., which will affect the choosing of the team, under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The bottom line is that the leader does not dominate, or control, or issue orders, but in the humility of Christ, works as a servant (Luke 22:27) in full harmony with the team, co-ordinating the affairs of the church and ministering to the spiritual needs of the people.

CONTINUING THE VISION

So that new works may be raised up in the days to come, the Lord is causing us to observe the lives of young men who come among us. We seek to discover their gifting by the revelation of the Spirit, by their general conduct and attitude, and by their response to opportunities for ministry. As they co-operate and flow among us, we seek to discern further: will they become local elders, or are they candidates for five-fold ministry? We believe we shall be amazed in the days to come, at what God will do, as a company of believers embrace and commit themselves to walk in God's established order.

RELATIONAL SUBMISSION:

In the church, as in many other endeavors of life, the question often arises, how does this 'team ministry' concept practically work? What should be my expectations? What are my specific responsibilities? How much input do I have or should I have in affairs of the church?

There are no simple answers to that question nor is a template we can apply since ministering in a team is out a calling from the Lord and a mutual submission and respect for one another.

When Love is our motive and the Kingdom our quest, team ministry on all the different levels of church leadership will be fruitful and blessed by the Lord.

Ephesians 4:1-3
Ephesians 5:1, 2
Ephesians 5:21
Philippians 2:2, 3

Note: Much of this material is taken and revised from the teaching ministry of Vernice Smith