

Apologia Part 4:

The Ministry and the Household of Faith

God bless you in the name of Jesus Christ and welcome to this special leadership conference call. My name is Rico Magnelli.

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke, chapter 10. This is part 4 in a continuation in the *Apologia* series. As you recall, an *apologia* is not an apology, but it comes from a long history in the Greek culture and its basic meaning is when one is accused, he or she addresses those accusations and defends themselves with truth. An answer of truth in the face of accusations is very important for Christian leaders to understand. Truth is not rationalizing or justifying one's actions but simply presenting truth and allowing it to reveal or illuminate the situation for all who choose to see. In this part of the series, we will address the idea of the ministry or Christian service, and how it relates to the faith of Jesus Christ. There can be and is variety in how Christians organize themselves in service to others. One group, church, or denomination may vary from another. However, the faith of Christ we all share as brothers and sisters in the family or household of God keeps the organized efforts of Christians on solid footing. The completed work of Christ for our salvation should never be a point of compromise for any Christian.

As Christians organize themselves to reach others with the Gospel (we continue the ministry of Christ on his behalf as ambassadors), keeping the Word first, and not the work, involves knowledge and application of the faith we all share. Organized Christian groups, regardless of what their denominational or non-denominational label is, do not represent the entire family of God — what the Bible refers to as “the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10). When the Word is first in the work of the ministry, it is pleasing to God, and keeps those serving blessed and sound in their thinking. Service is not about how much we

do, but how much we love and stay aligned with God's heart on matters. Ministry must be centered on Christ, which means the freewill giving of oneself, which is what he did. When any individual or group becomes centered on themselves rather than Christ, bad fruit results.

Let's see an example of this in Luke, chapter 10, a familiar record regarding Mary and Martha.

Luke 10:38-42:

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he [Jesus Christ] entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Tremendous learning here regarding service. The word "serving" here in verse 40 is the Greek word transliterated *diakonia*. Though it has a broad application, it simply means "service," like someone serving tables.

This record is very interesting because it's the only Gospel that records this event, so it is singularly significant. What we see here is that Martha was cumbered about much serving. The word "cumbered about" means "distracted". And being distracted in her service, her service is all about her. Have you ever known people that operate this way? I am sure you have. They typically do not inspire others in a good

way. One result of such self-centered service is that when pressure comes, accusations fly and blaming others is used to deflect criticism when perhaps honest reflection is in order. Well, that is what Martha does, she starts with accusing Jesus. She says, "Lord dost thou not care?" Well, of course he cared, Jesus Christ always loved; he always did the will of God. Martha does not stop there, she also accuses Mary, because she goes on to say, "that my sister hath left me to serve alone". So, she assigns blame for her *burdened* challenge of service to Jesus for not caring, and to Mary for leaving her alone to serve. Who is at the center of Martha's service? Yes, Martha herself. What a lesson!

Religion pushes *self* and *works* and misses the *heart*. True service according to the Word of God is *selfless*. The more Christ lives in someone's heart, the more their service becomes selfless. Martha had forgotten what Christ taught and modeled, selfless service. "Careful" means "anxious"; "troubled" is a "disorder of the mind about many things". Martha did not keep her service on the Word. Well, Jesus in essence says to her, "Martha, hey, you are anxious and distracted, you have too many things going on. Mary is focused on what she needs to be doing and I am not going to fault her for that."

Service is a very important part of the lifestyle for a follower of Christ. And the greatest example we have of service is Jesus Christ. Jesus' response to Martha is not an indictment on service but a redirection to the right focus that truly meets the need in the moment. Martha had too many things going on and was unable to manage them well. This caused her to lose sight of the real need. In contrast, Mary realized what her need was and took advantage of being with Christ in the moment to hear the Word.

There's everything right with service, but the question to ask is "What can one honestly handle and keep the Word first so people's true needs are met?" Sometimes the best service we provide is when we keep things simple. With distracted and anxious service, we have lost the Word in the situation. That's why, in service, the Word must be first and central, because the Word believed produces the right fruit

and meets people's needs. We do need bread for our physical wellbeing, absolutely, but we also need the bread of life for our spiritual wellbeing. The lesson in this record applies to the individual and also applies in a broader sense to any activity or work of the ministry.

Let's see this further in Acts, chapter 1. We'll look at the first occurrences of the word *diakonia* in the Book of Acts.

Acts 1:14-17:

These all continued with one accord [*homothumadon*] in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy ... [Spirit] by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

So here, Peter is speaking, he spoke of replacing Judas. By this time, Judas had taken his own life. Peter is speaking about Judas's portion of the ministry. The word "part" is the word "portion". What is the ministry Peter is speaking about? Well, clearly in the context it's carrying on the work of Christ and to be witnesses of his resurrection: what Jesus commissioned them to do. Everything that they've been taught and instructed in and what he commissioned them to do; that's the ministry. Let's go on further; look at

Acts 1:20-22:

For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

So, what we see here in the context of the ministry is Word-based decisions. So, what was important to them as they moved ahead? The Word. Here they went to the Book of Psalms, and two different references to get this understanding. It's interesting how they put these two separate Scriptures together and determined that they both applied in this situation. God was at work in this situation.

It says in verse 20 "For it is written", which is the standard upon which followers of Christ should operate in the ministry. We also see the agreed-upon criteria they used to replace Judas was exposure to Jesus Christ, "as he went in and out among us". This phrase is a Hebrew idiom expressing *living life* and the idea of *exercising leadership*. They chose someone who had been with them from John's baptism of Christ all the way through the ascension, meaning, the whole time he was available on earth. That was important to them. And that's interesting as well because they had Jesus Christ, in person, as an example because he was the Word made flesh. Everything that he did was the Word. Look at

Acts 1:24, 25:

And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen [so it's up to God],

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

Again, it says "take part", and the word "part" is "portion". We are each to take our part, our portion, of the ministry on behalf of Christ.

There are three characteristics noted here in Acts, chapter 1 that I'd like to point out regarding the ministry, that help us understand more about what the ministry was as it began.

1. *Jesus Christ is central.* His example, teaching, and accomplished work was what the disciples utilized to launch into their service after receiving the gift of holy spirit.
2. *Word-based decisions.* The Word should be at the basis of every activity, every program, every service performed, and each decision made.
3. *The ministry is portioned out.* No one does everything, it would be impossible. The ministry more closely resembles a body with many functioning parts.

And we can see these three things here in this record.

Let's look at Acts, chapter 6, the next occurrence of the word *diakonia*.

Acts 6:1:

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

The word "ministration" is translated from the Greek word *diakonia*. The ministry or service structure at that time was not adequate to meet the rising needs, because so many of those that had come from around the world to attend the feast of Pentecost stayed in Jerusalem. And this necessitated adding more leaders to serve.

Acts 6:2:

Then the twelve [the twelve Apostles] called the multitude of the disciples *unto them*, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

"It's not reason;" so they're making a clear distinction here, and the word "reason" is very key. Because the word "reason" could be rendered, "pleasing to God", and therefore proper (or fitting) in His

sight. God says, “I like that,” that’s what God wants. The apostles were willing to perform those tasks, like serving tables, but it wasn’t pleasing to God to leave the Word. Without the Word, Christian service will go awry, similar to what happened to Martha and her anxious service.

Acts 6:3:

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy ... [Spirit] and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

In the context, the “business” clearly refers to the practical side of taking care of people’s needs, like physical needs.

Acts 6:4:

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry [*diakonia*] of the word.

So here we see the ministry that we perform on behalf of Christ involves prayer and the Word. This takes care of the spiritual side of people’s needs. Then we have business that cares for more physical needs.

Acts 6:5:

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: ...

So the saying pleased everybody. This is interesting as well, because when something pleases God (like we saw in verse 2), it will fit for those who *believe* God, not just believe *in* God. See, there’s many people that believe *in* God, but those who *believe* God take Him at His Word.

... and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy ... [Spirit], and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

Stephen is especially noted among this group regarding faith, and all were chosen for their honest reputation and spiritual wisdom. They

learned about the faith and wisdom from the Word that Jesus and the apostles taught. What pleases God is that we take firm hold onto His Word and let it pave the path for service. This pleased everyone, it made perfect sense, it was a great fit.

Now, today for instance, the work of the ministry may be a lot more involved than what we see here. The clear distinction is made of serving the bread of life first, as the priority, followed by serving bread for meeting physical needs. The latter, in our day, would include many, many, categories of service. Anyone that has been part of a ministry understands that needs come up to care for people so that they are cared for, blessed, and can receive the Word. The Word must be the priority so people trust in God to meet their needs.

Acts 6:6:

Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

So they commissioned them to this service and to spiritual responsibilities.

Acts 6:7:

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests [the Aramaic reads “Judeans” here] were obedient to the faith.

“Faith” here is referring to the faith of Jesus Christ we all share as brothers and sisters in the family or household of God. Simply put, the faith of Christ represents his completed work for man’s salvation — the crucifixion and the resurrection. Regardless of the Christian organization, whether it is local, national, or international, the key that unlocks the Christian ministry and its true benefits is *obedience to the faith*, as it states right here in verse 7. This is how we keep the Word of his faith in our service and in the ministry that Christ initiated.

Right in the context God has put that safeguard so that all Christian service stays within the bounds of the Word. Notice that verse 7 does

not say, “obedient to the ministry”. If God wanted to say that, He would have said that, but that’s not what this verse states. He said, “obedient to the faith”.

In the Book of Romans, the foundational treatise of Christian doctrine, we see this concept of obedience to the faith mentioned twice, once in the opening chapter and once in the final chapter, like a pair of bookends. Obedience to the faith is to be promoted and taught to all nations. God wants the whole world to know.

Romans 1:5:

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

Romans 16:26:

But now is made manifest, [he’s speaking about “the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began”] and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

Please turn to Acts, chapter 2. Let’s learn a little more about this.

Obedience to the faith is how one begins to practically live the mystery of the church of the body of Christ and is what keeps the Word in our service. And the first step to being obedient to the faith is mutual respect for what God has done for us in Christ. We have respect for ourselves based on our identity in Christ Jesus. This identity, who we really are as children of God, is the result of each of us having the faith of Jesus Christ. God by grace, applied this same faith to every believer to justify them and give them salvation. No person could gain salvation upon their own merit, it took Christ — because the faith of Christ is what bridges the chasm between unsaved man and God. In other words, it was the faith of Jesus Christ that brought you and me salvation. Each of us has that same faith. So, we can respect each other because we have been accepted by God by the work of another man, Jesus Christ.

Titus 1:4 calls it, “the common faith”. “Common” because it’s the same faith we all share. We each have the faith of Christ. This is the basis of mutual respect and the cornerstone in our relationships one with another. And this household of God is built upon valuing “this treasure in earthen vessels” that each of us has, it’s “Christ in you”, it’s “Christ in me”. It doesn’t get any bigger than that.

Well, let’s see it here in Acts, chapter 2. Remember, at this point the early Church did not fully understand all about the body of Christ which was a mystery still until revealed later. But, practically they did begin to carry out the Word in being obedient to the faith.

Acts 2:42:

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:43:

And fear [respect] came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The respect noted here was based on what they had received through Christ. The respect “came upon every soul”, meaning it began to be, it came into existence, and it reached each soul. It was not a surface respect, but a deeper recognition within them. I’m sure there was respect for each other before, but this newfound respect was something new to them because it was not based on any individual merit but on the work of Christ.

Acts, chapter 2, verse 5 says, that there were “devout men, out of every nation under heaven” which were part of this initial group reached with salvation. Being “devout” was worthy of respect, but that was based on their own merit, behavior, or their own works. But this new respect was based on Jesus Christ and what they had received by grace. Salvation by grace through faith built mutual respect and inspired sharing together to meet needs. Keep reading.

Acts 2:44:

And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

Sure, they shared of their abundance because of the mutual respect of the truth regarding Jesus Christ that they'd received. Their attitude toward material things is the key here. "Things common" is in reference to their attitude regarding their possessions; they did not consider them untouchable or sacred but "common". This is important when it came to helping others. They understood that their material wealth was something they were to steward by God's grace because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Acts 2:45,46:

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord [*homothumadon*, one passion] in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

Wow, this was the foundation the first Christians embraced in one accord. And the very first practical step that is pointed out is having respect one for another. Mutual respect is how we begin to carry out our obedience to the faith.

Look at Galatians, chapter 2, please.

This mutual respect is very important when it comes to keeping an equilibrium and a balance in the ministry that we as Christians have all been called to. This is why God has it there in Acts, chapter 6, verse 7 and Romans, chapters 1 and 16, because we want to be obedient to the faith of Christ that we all share in God's family.

Please look at Galatians, chapter 2, in verse 20. Now let's pay close attention to the personal pronouns here in verse 20 and how individually Paul communicates the truth in these verses — because obedience to the faith begins with each of us, individually, making the faith our own.

Galatians 2:20, 21:

I am crucified [or the text is, "I have been crucified"] with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Wow! "I have been crucified ... I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "I do not frustrate the grace of God."

Wow! The household of faith is built on mutual respect in Christ, and it begins with each of us personally. We take that on, embrace it with conviction, enthusiasm, and commitment. See, to believe otherwise is to frustrate the grace of God.

Look at Romans, chapter 12. We'll see how this is so important in service.

Romans 12:3:

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Before service must come the foundation of the measure of faith given to every man. Why? God knows we must respect one another in Christ before we can truly work together on Christ's behalf.

Romans 12:4, 5:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office [or function]:

So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

This is tremendous. The practical foundation for the household faith was first laid in the Book of Acts. But the knowledge of the mystery (Christ in you, and Judean and Gentile being fellow-heirs and of the same body) came later, revealed by God to the Apostle Paul. But God had to get them off on the right foot. And the first step in being obedient to the faith is mutual respect, because God has dealt to every man the measure of faith. Wow, that levels the playing field, doesn't it? Mutual respect in Christ recognizes our individual value, potential, and contribution in Christ.

Family first, then function, is the pattern. Functioning together in the body of Christ as Christians remains a mystery to most because they do not start with mutual respect found in the shared faith of Christ.

It's just brilliant the way God set this up. Remember in the context of the mystery functioning.

1 Corinthians 12:21:

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee:
nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Sure, when there's mutual respect based on each having the faith of Christ, we can respect and inspire each other's contribution and strengths to the body, because mutual respect in Christ encourages an environment where we lovingly submit to each other. Isn't that what Ephesians 5:21 says? Sure.

Ephesians 5:21:

Submitting yourselves one to another [that's mutually] in the fear [or the respect] of God [text reads "Christ"].

Look at Deuteronomy, chapter 1.

We will see how this mutual respect is the antidote to the poison of hierarchical thinking when it comes to Christianity. See, when we have respect one for another in Christ Jesus, we have a solid foundation and level playing field for all Christians. We each have the faith of Christ, which is not only salvation but the potential to walk like him. This

encourages an environment where each member in the body can flourish and grow by contributing to the cause of Christ. This is part of living the mystery of the one body of Christ.

Deuteronomy, chapter 1. Now we learned in the *Apologia* series 1 - 3 about lording over God's people, how that is not God's will. Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul, they all warned against this practice and said the same thing, "Don't do that." Well, if continued unchallenged, lording over God's people breeds and institutionalizes a respect of persons among believers. That's right. A respect of persons is when people judge the value of others by five senses or worldly standards. Respect of persons allows for fear and favoritism, and engenders a spiritual blindness (though people engaged in such things would rarely admit it). Respect of persons breeds an environment of seeking to gain the favor of others. It isolates and controls through fear and it breaks unity. Respect of persons is the opposite of mutual respect in Christ. Let's read a little bit here about respect of persons.

Deuteronomy 1:17:

Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; *but* ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment *is* God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring *it* unto me, and I will hear it.

Respect of persons fuels partiality, inclusion and exclusion of people based on worldly standards. When we are partial due to respect of persons, people are placed below us or above us in terms of their value.

It says here, "the small as well as the great." Look at the value scale. It runs the entire spectrum where the world identifies and labels people either small or great. These are carnal judgements, and we don't judge according to the flesh. We are equal in the eyes of God through the faith of Christ. Look at one of the results here: fear.

Do “not be afraid of the face of man” — that’s what respect of persons can engender, fear. Fear of not measuring up to others, fear of being judged and ostracized from any group, religious or not.

Look at Deuteronomy 16, please. We’re looking at respect of persons as the opposite of mutual respect in Christ.

Deuteronomy 16:19:

Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift [bribe]: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous.

A gift here is a bribe. Bribes can come in different forms: financial, social, or even moral bribes. But what happens is this quid pro quo (“this for that”), which becomes an obligation — like you owe that person something, and you keep going back and forth. This cycle continues to please men and not God. And how can they get away with this type of thing? I’ll tell you, in the verse it says:

... for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, ...

That means people who take bribes eventually are blinded and can’t see what is right in front of them that is obvious to others who have not taken bribes. Notice it refers to the wise as the ones who are blinded. So, at some point they had applied truth properly because they are wise. At this point, though, they are wise in their own eyes, not God’s. That’s part of the fruit of being a respecter of persons. It doesn’t stop there though, it also says:

... pervert the words of the righteous.

And to pervert means, “to twist, or overturn, or subvert” the words of the righteous. So, the Word starts to get twisted, it’s overturned; their actions even contradict what the Word says. It subverts the words of the righteous. This is not what we want in the work of the ministry of Christ. 1 Timothy, chapter 4, please.

You know, when Peter brought the Word to the Gentiles, God showed him a very clear revelation, how he was not to call anything common or unclean that God had cleansed.

And when he went to Cornelius' house, he made a great statement in

Acts 10:34:

Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

“God is no respecter of persons.” That means, He doesn’t judge the value of people by any worldly standard. When we each have Christ within us, we have a “treasure in earthen vessels”. God got the believers practically started on the right foot in the Book of Acts by obedience to the faith that began with mutual respect, and many other things built from there, but certainly the mutual respect. Obedience to the faith is the practical foundation for living the mystery of the body of Christ. It’s also what helps to keep the Word first in the work of the ministry.

1 Timothy 4:1, 2:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith [of Christ that put us in God’s family], giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Wow, so some shall depart from the faith. Departure does not mean physically. The household faith has no location or organizational affiliation. Simply, it’s abandoning the common faith we all share spiritually. Therefore, once someone is taught what the faith truly is and experiences it for themselves, if they choose to depart from it, they have succumbed to the evil we just read. Departure is done in the heart, regardless of their location on the map or any affiliation with any organization.

Remember in Acts 2:43, it points out the first step to being obedient to the faith, which is that genuine respect for each other based on what they had received. They had all received the gift of holy spirit, and each day the Word would have been unfolding as they understood more and more; and finally, with Paul's revelation, the knowledge of the mystery of the body of Christ and how Christians can work together in unity on behalf of Christ became known.

See, we do not judge by our five senses, but value each other in Christ. We don't ignore, or slight, or love each other less. We "have the same care one for another", like it says in Corinthians. Therefore, one of the first steps logically (in a practical manner) to depart from the faith is to become a respecter of persons and to judge the value of others by the five senses and not according to Christ in them, that treasure in earthen vessels. If we have fallen prey to being a respecter of persons, each of us (especially leaders), then we must be honest before God and correct that thinking — because all it does is produce fear; all it does is make us susceptible to bribes and the blinding of our eyes, and it perverts the words of the righteous. This is not what we want.

2 Timothy 4:1, 2:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season [meaning "when it's convenient, when it's not convenient"]; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering [or patience] and doctrine.

It requires patience to re-establish the doctrine or teaching which lines up with the faith of Christ.

2 Timothy 4:3:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

Here it is:

2 Timothy 4:4:

And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

They shall turn their ears away, meaning “that they can’t even hear the truth anymore”.

And the word “from” is very interesting, because the word “from” is a preposition that means “from the surface of something”. The truth never reaches their heart; so the truth doesn’t penetrate into the individual as perhaps it had at one time. It’s like they can’t even hear it. It reaches the surface, and it just goes the other way. And what they do is they turn “unto fables”.

And the word “fables” is the Greek word transliterated *muthos* (where we get the word *myth* in English), and it means “anything delivered by word of mouth”. It’s not referring to “it is written”, it’s referring to “anything delivered by word of mouth”. Remember Acts 21:23, when they had rejected what Paul had to say about the wonderful things that God was doing? They said to him in verse 23: “Do therefore this that we say to thee”. What’s delivered by word of mouth. And it’s interesting, the word “fables” is in the plural, so it’s “myths”. Where there’s one, there will be more. Once you’ve got one, there’s going to be more that follow, that build from the first one.

It is a myth to believe that any one group as a ministry is the same as the household of faith. It’s not biblically sound to assert that any one group exclusively represents the family of God. Myths are passed on by word of mouth and become mental prisons if people allow; and each myth must be dismantled by truth to help free themselves from these negative influences. When it’s not the Word, it becomes doctrines of men. Matthew 15 says it this way:

Matthew 15:12-14:

Then came his disciples, and said unto him [Jesus], Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?

But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

That's the result of lording over God's people and encouraging a respect-of-persons environment. When you have one myth, more myths will follow: that's why it's plural. And with each myth comes more erosion of truth.

So many have learned about the faith and the family or household that we have all been placed in as Christians. These truths that we've learned have made us free. That's why so many are so grateful, including my wife and me. Also, that is why so many are fighting for the Word to be first. Once someone awakens to these truths, we can be tempted to be angry with ourselves or be bitter or angry against those who have taught and allowed and promoted the doctrines of men. We must not follow this path.

Psalms 46:10:

Be still, and know that I *am* God: ...

Getting with God and being still with Him through His grace and mercy will help us to understand moving forward. God is a God of grace and mercy, which each one of us needs. Nobody can escape that; we all need His grace and mercy. There's a lot of good work ahead of us that must be done in love, and not out of anger, or bitterness, or ill will toward anyone.

Ephesians 4:31, 32:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice [malice is ill will towards others]:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Forgiveness is not a compromise of the Word; it *is* the Word.
Remember,

Ephesians 6:12:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, ...

And Jesus Christ brings up the spiritual competition here on the night that he was betrayed, as he works with Peter on an individual basis. Please turn to Luke, chapter 22. He says to him in

Luke 22:31:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you [or demanded to have you] that he may sift *you* as wheat:

That's what the adversary wants; he's the real enemy. He wants to sift us as wheat. He wants our talents, our skills, he wants our loyalty, our heart; he wants our long suits and abilities; but we cannot let him have them. They belong to God and God's people.

Luke 22:32:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

When he was making that change to Christianity, the next thing he was to do was to strengthen the brethren. And that's exactly what *we* need to do.

As believers and leaders in the Church, we should not allow ourselves to surrender our integrity on the Word and become respecters of persons, and the fear, the bribery, and the blindness that follows. Fear and intimidation are not good counselors. You'll never get "what to do next", out of fear or intimidation.

Proverbs 19:21:

There are many devices in a man's heart;
nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.

Let God be our counselor. What does He want? We can read His Word and understand what He wants.

Service and the work of the ministry, whether individually or shared, should be Word-centered not self-centered. This will produce the good works in love that spring forth from the Word living in our souls.

How do we keep the Word first in our service?

By being obedient to the faith, maintaining that genuine respect in Christ one for another — and this includes respect for ourselves. Our identity in Christ cannot and should not be just given away. This is the check and balance on service and the work of the ministry. As we each individually recognize these truths, believing, and embracing them as God's Word, we can then help others to hear them too. We tenderly and lovingly reach out to our brothers and sisters and strengthen them, sharing and teaching them the truth in love.

You know that at the end of Paul's life he said in

2 Timothy 4:7:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

He didn't say, "he kept the ministry", he said, "I have kept the faith" — that's the faith of Jesus Christ that we all share in God's family. He understood that faith was the practical foundation on which the mystery of the body of Christ lives. Keeping the faith is the fulfillment of our heart's oath to God to put Him and His will first in our lives. Paul did it; we can do it. It's time to act and reach out and preach this Word, these truths, that will make people free.

We certainly love you and pray for you abundantly. Look for more vision-building teachings coming soon. God bless you!