

The Ministry of Condemnation

by Bill Volkman

“But if the ministry of death ... came with glory ... how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be with even more glory? For the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory” (2 Cor. 3:7,8).

Do not be surprised if you sense an unbelievable freedom and release when the first light of the union life message and perspective dawns upon you. Many share that the new freedom they experience far outshines the ecstasy that engulfed them when they first came to Christ, or even when they had an experiential baptism of the Holy Spirit. To know sins are forgiven and experience the indwelling Holy Spirit is glorious, but to come to an awareness of some of the implications of oneness with God is far more glorious. To experience a measure of victory is great, but to know in your inner being that victory is a reality, irrespective of appearances, is far greater.

But the new light also casts some new shadows temporarily, especially if a number of years have elapsed between the revelations. Many of us are so elated with our new perspective of the full implications of the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, that we resent deeply that someone did not share it with us sooner. Though many of us were part of evangelical churches who warned against legalism and condemnation, by hindsight we plainly see that we shared in ministries of death rather than life. Though we thought that we saw the lessons of freedom in books like Galatians, we found that in many instances the blind were leading the blind.

Our text verses mention four ministries: death, Spirit, condemnation and righteousness. Actually there are only two basic ministries, but Paul uses different nomenclature in order to stress the truth. The ministry of death and condemnation are the same. It might also be called a ministry of flesh or of the letter of the law. In the same way, the ministry of Spirit and righteousness are the same, and might also be called a ministry of grace or freedom.

But the primary point to emphasize is that whatever the name or brand of ministry, they are all glorious. Glory is God’s flow and flood of light and illumination. Some call it the “Glow-ray” or Light-ray that emanates from God. Glory takes many forms, but it never abates. Never regret the spiritual pilgrimage that God arranged for you, or blame someone for not teaching you something different or something more. Irrespective of whether you took a fundamentalist or liberal path, a charismatic or hyper-Calvinist path, a low-church or a high-church path, a denominational or an independent path, or whatever, be thankful! Irrespective of where you have been or where you presently are, it is all glorious — it is all God’s perfect way for you. You are God’s perfect expression right now and so were your teachers at the time they taught you. Even a ministry of death and condemnation is great, because it leads us to conversion or prepares us for the further reaches of the ministry of the Spirit. So beware of speaking negatively about any of your institutional church experiences, or about your experiences with any of the ministries to which God has exposed you through the years.

Though I walk a substantially different path from that which I followed in earlier years, I am not unmindful of the Baptist churches that God used to bless me for over forty years, nor of the multitude of organizations (such as Christian Service Brigade, Navigators, Young Life, Officer’s Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade, Intervarsity, Wheaton College, Youth for Christ, Billy Graham Crusades, Christian Business Men, Christian Legal Society, Gothard Institute, and a hundred more) with which I was involved and which God used to enlighten

and bless me. Though I now see ninety-nine percent of the Christian books that I have read through the years as being immature and dualistic in focus, I am still thankful to all the Watchman Nees and Andrew Murrays whose writings have prepared the way for greater enlightenment. Each of these encounters were profitable and glorious. Only immature ingratitude will keep us from acknowledging that each of our past involvements was perfect for that time of our lives.

A caution is in order. What our text calls a "*ministry of the Spirit*" is not to be confused with much of the current emphasis in charismatic circles. Though many of us have been introduced to wonderful new dimensions and approaches because of the Holy Spirit emphasis, do not let words or labels fool you. Even though our insights and experiences were glorious, much of what we have seen, and of which we have been a part, has still been a ministry of law and condemnation. The two-power outlook (majoring on exorcism and overcoming evil), the legalistic demands (submission, fasting, and other "dying to self" routines), the emphasis on different, but still outer forms of worship (including the ministry of the "gifts," the "spontaneous" singing in the Spirit, and frequent whispers and shouts of "Praise Jesus"), and the need to see miracles and demonstrations (especially healings), are not necessarily indications of a mature ministry of the Spirit. Wonderful as all of these things are, God frequently has more.

The mature ministry of the Spirit is an effortless, spontaneous life for others, based on our inner awareness of union. Needless to say, it is "*a more excellent way*", because now we know that we are one with Him who is love personified. We are liberated to true life because we now know that the kingdom of God is within us. We see only *One Power*. We submit to no demands or decrees, because we are the law. Forms mean nothing to us, as we see all of life as worship, service and prayer. Outer demonstrations are not demanded, because we walk by faith, not by sight. We have no need for anyone to teach us because we know all things, and His anointing teaches us about all things (1 John 2). Inner knowing has totally replaced the need for outer appearances. All this is indeed a more glorious way. So though we acknowledge the blessing and glory of other ministries, "how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be with *even more glory?*"