

## **Chapter 19**

### ***FUNCTION, NOT POSITION***

*Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:35-45 NIV)*

- I. Background: In this course we have studied Spiritual Gifts and Gifts of the Spirit, Identifying and Developing Spiritual Gifts, and how these Gifts should function in the church, the Body of Christ.
  - A. The church is the Body of Christ. Paul's letters help us to see the church as a many-membered body, made up of different members, each having different functions. We are learning to deal with our differences of identity and function in the Body of Christ. We are learning to appreciate our differences rather than separate because of our differences or merely tolerate each other in spite of our differences. (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4)
  - B. The New Testament speaks of both Gifts of the Spirit and Fruit of the Spirit. The difference between the Gifts of the Spirit and the Fruit of the Spirit is that Gifts are given, and Fruit is grown. Good fruit grows on trees that are planted in good soil and stay put so as to develop healthy roots. To consistently bear good fruit is a process that takes time. Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 13 that the Gifts of the Spirit without the Fruit of the Spirit is empty and meaningless, like banging on a dustbin lid. We want to see Gifts of the Spirit flowing out of lives that have developed the Fruit of the Spirit. (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12 & 13; Galatians 5:22-25)
  - C. In Term 1 of this course we studied some of the terms and concepts relating to service in the church: Call, Gift, Ministry. We saw that to a large degree your Call is who and what you are (like being a carpenter). Your Gifts are what you have to work with (like a carpenter's tools) and your Ministry is the job you do (like remodeling a kitchen or building a garden shed).
  - D. It is important that we see the balance and interaction between Fruit of the Spirit and Gifts of the Spirit and that we understand how Calling, Gifts, and Ministry come together to produce effective service in the church, the Body of Christ.

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- II. In this lesson we will look at two other concepts that must be clearly understood and properly applied in order to serve effectively in building up the church and helping to establish God's Kingdom in our generation. We must understand the relationship between Function and Position in ministry and service. The account in Mark 10 and Matthew 20 helps us see how function and position must relate. (Mark 10:35-45: Matthew 20:20-28)
- A. James and John, two of Jesus' inner circle of disciples, came to Him with a request for favor. Matthew's account has their mother making the request. In any case, the request was that James and John should be honored by being given the key positions of prestige and power in the Kingdom of God. They asked to be seated "one at Jesus' right hand and the other at His left hand in His glory." They said, "Let us sit..." They were asking for a position - a position of prestige.
1. Jesus' response was clear and dealt very specifically with the issue of Position and Function. The Kingdom of God is not about sitting (position), but about serving (function). James and John were focused on and desired a position. Jesus was focused on function or service.
  2. The other disciples were envious of James and John because they were afraid they would lose out on the best positions and that there would be no greatness for them. Jesus said that greatness is not sitting (a position), but serving (a function).
- B. The word Minister means "one who serves." The word Ministry means "to serve." Ministry is service, serving, helping, doing what needs to be done. As long as you are functioning and doing something to serve Christ and others, you are a minister and you are ministering. When you stop doing what needs to be done, you cease being a minister and you don't have a ministry anymore.
- C. In the church we must put our focus on serving, not sitting. Too much strife and competition is caused by an emphasis on position rather than function. If we all concentrate on functioning effectively, it will remove one of the primary causes of strife in the church and one of the main hindrances to accomplishing God's purposes. No matter what position you may have in the church, when the function ceases that position becomes meaningless.
- D. It's good to identify the various members within the Body of Christ, to know what kind of body parts we are, to understand where we fit and how God wants to use us. But if a member of the physical body doesn't function as it was designed to, the body is ill or handicapped. How much does this affect the health and function of the Body of Christ? Is the Body of Christ handicapped because some of the members have positions but aren't functioning?
- E. It is also a good thing to know what gifts we have and how to use them. There are a variety of ways we can identify and begin to develop our Spiritual Gifts. It's good to have tools in our tool box, but if we aren't getting up and going to work, the tools are serving no useful purpose. If we aren't skilled in the use of our gifts, they become more like toys than tools. Position should be determined by function and gifts or tools should be used for service.

III. What are some of the things that can hinder us from functioning properly and effectively as members of the Body of Christ? We can gain some insights into this from the story of the three servants or stewards in Matthew 25:14-30. If we have a position, we must use it effectively for God's purpose. If we have been entrusted with the stewardship of God's gifts we must "use them or lose them!" Use what you have been given and it grows, bury it and opportunities are lost forever. Here are some of the things that can hinder us from functioning effectively:

A. **Ignorance and lack of understanding.**

1. We may be ignorant of God's emphasis on function over position. Many times the church falls into the snare of doing things the world's way. Jesus said, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:42-45 NIV)
2. We may be ignorant of the Gifts God has given us and of how to use them effectively. There are a number of tools we can use such as Spiritual Gifts Questionnaires to help identify our gifts. We can also simply observe and determine what we have aptitude for. We can consider our interests and skills. We should make an effort to discover how God wants to use us in effective service. (Hosea 4:6)

B. **Self-interest and unsundered rights.**

1. If we are selfish in our attitude, we may be more concerned about finding a position of prestige or power than about serving effectively and accomplishing God's purpose.
2. If we have unsundered rights, if we have only made Jesus our Savior and have not made Him our Lord, then we may feel we have the right to a position even if we are not functioning effectively in service.

C. **Lack of training or skill.**

1. One of the most important responsibilities of leaders in the church is to equip the members of the Body of Christ for effective service. Each believer has gifts and has a call of God to some aspect of service. The leaders must be diligent in helping people identify and develop areas of effective service. (Ephesians 4:11-12)
2. Each believer should look for and make the most of opportunities for training. Wherever possible, attend classes, take training courses, offer to assist those who are already functioning. Be a good steward of your gifts and talents and develop them, don't bury them. (1 Peter 4:10)

D. **Fear of failure.**

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1. Often people are afraid to step out and try to do something they have never done before. They are afraid to step out of their “comfort zone.” People are afraid that if they try to do something new they will fail and be looked down on by others.
2. When people look back at life and its opportunities, their regrets are most often about things they didn’t do or attempt. You will never know what could have been. Take a step of faith and see what God can do with you and through you.

### **E. Laziness.**

1. Sometimes effective function is hindered by laziness. It’s easier to sit by and let others do the work. Church becomes a place we go to be blessed, rather than a body we commit ourselves to in order to serve. Church is not a “spectator sport!”
2. For effective service and function in the church we must have a balance between Faith and Works. Real Faith is “Faith that Works.” Faith that is not accompanied by action is dead.

### **F. Lack of structured opportunities.**

1. The providing of opportunities for service, training for service, and leadership for service, must become a primary function of local church leaders. The leadership ministries are to equip people for service and lead people in service.
2. There are many kinds of ministry that can be done much more effectively by teams than by individuals. The properly structured church provides the opportunities for people to work together with pooled resources to accomplish things that individuals could never accomplish on their own.

### **G. Over-specialization.**

1. When there is an over-emphasis on Identifying one’s Spiritual Gifts as a basis for service, the people can develop a “specialist” approach to ministry. People get the idea that if something is not the thing they have been specifically gifted for or trained for, “It’s not my job!” This can create an elitist approach to ministry. “That’s not my gift, not my ministry.”
2. Much of Christian ministry or service will always be to simply “do what needs to be done at the time.” Don’t become so “specialized” you can’t function in the real world. A Swiss Army Knife is a knife with many blades and other tools on it so that it can be a multi-purpose tool, something that will function in a variety of ways and serve a variety of purposes. Let’s be “Swiss Army Knife” Christians. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

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| <b>Effective ministry (service) is doing what needs to be done.</b> |
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- IV. What can we do with this information? How can we ensure that we understand and properly apply the truth of **“Function not Position?”**

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- A. We must see ourselves and others as joint members of the Body of Christ. We are mutually dependent. No one has it all, but all together we have it.
- B. We must continue learning to appreciate each other for our differences, rather than separate because of our differences or merely tolerate each other in spite of our differences.
- C. We must avoid pride concerning Spiritual Gifts. They are tools to work with rather than toys to play with or trophies to boast about. We cannot boast of our gifts as if we had earned them because they are given by God's grace, not on the basis of merit.
- D. Remember that the best gift for you is the one you need to do what needs to be done. The best gift for you is not necessarily the same as for someone else. Don't envy another's gift or function and don't expect others to be gifted or function in the same way you do.
- E. Avoid "Tunnel-Vision" and "Over-Specialization." Both will limit your effectiveness in the purposes of God and the Body of Christ. Keep your eyes open to the "Big Picture" of what God is doing through the whole church, through all the members of the body. Be willing to serve where you are needed, not just where you like to serve.
- F. Remember that it is the quality of your work and the quality of your character that has real lasting benefit, not just how many or what kind of gifts you have.
- G. Serve, don't sit. Keep your eyes and ears open to the needs around you. Be a "...good and faithful servant..." who is willing to do what needs to be done.

***Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others,  
faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.  
(1 Peter 4:10 NIV)***

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION**

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1. How would you explain the relationship between Function and Position in terms of ministry or service in the church? Use Jesus' encounter with James and John in Mark 10:35-45 as a basis for your explanation.
2. How would you maintain a balance between Availability and Specialization? Availability is the willingness to simply offer one's services, to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Specialization is to identify your gifts and then find ways to function in service that make the best use of those gifts. One extreme is over-generalization the other extreme is over-specialization.