



## The Ground of Ministry – In response to a letter

September 2003

Dear Charles & Mary,

> My husband asked me to email you to thank you for ministering to him last weekend. If you have any spare time, he's wondering if you could email back some of the things you shared with him, along with some of the scripture passages.

Dear Friends

Our conversation concerned the fact that you were denied the right to minister based on a sin you committed eighteen years ago. You were forgiven of that sin by the Lord and by the person you wronged. Therefore your ministry should be under the blood and you able to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. You asked what you should do in response to being shunned by those in authority in your denomination.

I began speaking to you about the two grounds upon which a ministry can stand. The first ground is works oriented. It is the *ground of performance*. The unspoken thought on this ground is the church is like a business. If one works hard he will earn a placement in the corporation. In this system of thought a church leader is like a CEO surrounded by a board of deacons who help him make sure the church grows and makes money. If the CEO fails he is replaced as candidates audition for the pulpit. Thus the pulpit becomes the reward of effective business practices. Preaching is no longer a calling but a result of good administration. Some groups even change leaders at the end of a set period of time. Thus the shepherd is

never fully able to know the flock. Those who rarely see or appreciate his ministry dictate his future.

A shepherd who is under this requirement can preach grace but is not allowed to live it. It requires the outward perfection of the minister. If a minister accepts this position it activates what I call the *pedestal principle*. The minister is put on a pedestal almost like an idol. He can subtly forget his position as servant to the flock. He begins to feel that his opinion is the guiding light for others. His sermons are holding his church and his congregation together. And worst of all the organization becomes more important than its individual members. For a while the pastor leader is applauded and adored, he is made to feel indispensable. In reality he is being controlled and manipulated. This is not necessarily the intent of the members of the church it is the result of a system that is not founded on the word of God.

Somewhere along the line something happens and in the eyes of the people he serves, he fails. It's as if a target were painted on him and the same people who were formerly encouraging him to stand shoot him down. The weapon is the tongue and the result is sin and division. This ground is works oriented and keeps the people who follow it under condemnation (works based religion). Usually gossip and slander are the tools used to destroy just as flattery and self-exaltation were the tools used to puff up. *Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. 1 Cor. 8:1*

Ministers in this situation lie wounded along the highway. Often they participated in the process, which turned around and wounded them. You may find yourself in this situation. Praise God, there is a way out.

The second choice, and I believe the correct choice, is to stand on *the ground of Rest knowing that you are forgiven*. This forgiveness proceeds from the cross. Once forgiven our sins are forgotten by God. This is what allowed the apostles Paul and Peter to minister with power and clarity. Paul, who as Saul had participated in the murder of his future brothers and sisters in Christ. Peter had denied the Lord in his hour of need. Their sins, like yours and mine, were washed away. They not only preached the message but their lives were a testimony to the power of the gospel. If you and I fail along the way and repent and turn from our wicked ways, God forgives and forgets. Jesus made it plain that he also requires us to do the same.

*Matthew 6:14*

*14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. NIV*

*Luke 17:3-4*

*"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."*

*NIV*

When we live on this ground, the ground rest, we seek the healing and restoration of anyone who has failed and is looking for help.

Matthew 11:28-29

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. NIV

Paul asks, "Having begun in the spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Gal.3: 3

If we needed the Holy Spirit to guide us into the forgiveness of Christ how much more so do we need him now? "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by His life." Rom 5:10

It is virtually impossible to satisfy those who are on the *ground of performance* because they are usually under condemnation themselves. They are also bound to bring others under the same works oriented life. The Pharisees best picture those who function in this way in scripture. Consider the man who had an infirmity for 38 years.

John 5:5-10

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

8 Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

NIV

Their only concern was the performance requirements. They did not care that a wonderful healing had just taken place. That did not care that a man had been released from 38 years of misery. They did not understand that healing and forgiveness brings Sabbath rest to the soul. In healing the man Jesus was reminding them that Sabbath is the place to get rid of anything that interferes with the love of God. The Pharisees were stuck with their traditions.

John 5:16-18

16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

NIV

Jesus had to stand his ground and rebuke them. However most of them didn't listen. Their response was to organize his crucifixion. The only way they could get changed was to repent and receive the Holy Spirit the same as the prostitutes. Consider this story.

Luke 7:36-50

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "*Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.*"

48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

NIV

Because her heart was seeking forgiveness, because she was repentant she was able to perform the act of love that Simon should have performed. Simon was too busy evaluating Jesus performance to enter into the ground of rest. The good news is that many of the Pharisees had their eyes opened after the resurrection and were converted. Saul who became the Apostle Paul is a good example.

In the final analysis it is the opinion of God that matters. What has he told you to do? What is the spirit saying to you? You are not bound to follow those who refuse to leave the ground of performance. Part of our ministry to those in this situation is to pray for them and lead them into reconciliation and forgiveness. Scripture tells to pray for those who despitefully us. This ultimately helps them and immediately helps us to stay on the ground of forgiveness and rest.

Galatians 5:1

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. NIV

When the religious leaders demanded of Jesus a sign to validate his ministry He replied, "no sign will be given you save the sign of Jonah." That wonderful sign turned out to be the forgiveness that comes from Calvary." You have been given that name for your ministry. It is time to stand on that ground and that ground alone. Jesus is the healer.

I hope this helps you. Remember Jesus said, "Of myself I can do nothing. I only do what I see my Father doing." Emulate Christ and He will guide you.

Love to you both  
Charles

Scriptures to consider

Luke 16: 1-13