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April 2020 “WHO ARE YOU FOLLOWING?”

Dear Friends,

Many times over the years I have been contacted by people wanting to be mentored or trained for ministry. Some people are excited to share about the school or seminary they are attending as they prepare to fulfill a ministry calling. One theme that has repeated itself numerous times – though not in every person – is a focus on what man can do for them instead of what God can do.

Inmates in various prisons here in the United States have written to tell me about the Bible schools in which they have enrolled. But my heart sinks when I read the names of some of those schools, knowing that these inmates, sincere in their desire to grow spiritually, are opening themselves up to massive amounts of conflicting doctrine and error that will lead them astray.

I have personally examined the curriculum of a number of Christian colleges and universities. Without fail, *every single one of them fall short of genuinely teaching students how to go deeper into God, discover their ministry calling, and how to be spiritually equipped to fulfill their calling.*

Many churches and denominations are miserably failing their members by emphasizing the need to attend a “Bible” institution (college/university/seminary) in order to be qualified for ministry. Some go so far as to state a person cannot minister or serve on staff unless some kind of religious degree has been earned. This is absolute foolishness! Unscriptural standards like these would eliminate even Jesus from being on staff! If leadership in churches were teaching at the depth they were supposed to, there would most likely be fewer Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries.

Some people might counter by saying, “Yes, but Brother Martin, you have a Master’s and Doctorate degrees, and you started a Bible college.” All of that is true. When God told me to go back to school and get an advanced degree, I absolutely did **NOT** want to do it. But, I obeyed, not knowing why He gave me that instruction. Then, during the year I was working on my PhD, He began explaining that He wanted me to start a Bible college that would be like no other. That school, Grace Ministries Bible College, currently has a four-year curriculum and charges students for nothing; we expect them to financially support the school as they are led of the Lord. Furthermore, if students apply what they learn in their first year, I guarantee they will know how to discover their ministry calling, how to be spiritually equipped to fulfill their calling, and how to operate in their calling.

I rarely talk about my education and degrees because I do not want to be known for the schools I attended. I want my relationship with God to be that which identifies me. You will not find “Dr” by my name on our church sign, on our church business cards, or (with rare exceptions) anywhere else outside of documents associated with Grace Ministries Bible College.

Keep in mind that Jesus did not have any formal ministry education.

¹⁴Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. ¹⁵And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? ¹⁶Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. (John 7:14-16)

The same was true for Peter and John.

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (Acts 4:13-14)

In fact, the only Apostle we can identify as having had extensive religious training is Paul. But even he diminished the value of personal accomplishments when evaluated in the light of his relationship with Jesus.

⁷But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Philippians 3:7-9)

Far too many Christians use their degree as some kind of status symbol, almost as though they think others should render to them a measure of special honor and recognition. They seem to expect (demand?) that people refer to them as “Doctor So-and-So.”

Along with this, many people in ministry believe they must wear special attire to prove to others they have been called of God to a mighty ministry. In what seems to be an attempt to justify wearing robes, mitres, stoles, or “minister’s apparel,” some dress similar to Old Testament Jewish priests, even though such requirements cannot be identified in scripture. Others teach that Jesus wore special clothing to distinguish Himself as an esteemed teacher. However, if you truly meditate scripture, you are hard pressed to identify this as truth. If He had worn special “Rabbi” clothing, many Jews in Jerusalem would not have had to ask who He was as He rode into the city on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). If He had been wearing unique clothing, it would have been very difficult for Him to hide in the crowd when people wanted to kill Him (Luke 4:28-30 and John 8:59). Had He been known to wear unique apparel Judas would not have needed to identify him with a kiss (Matthew 26:47-50).

All this emphasis on education, degrees, clothing and so on is very similar to how Jesus described religious leaders who were consumed with pride and self-exaltation:

⁵But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, ⁶And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, ⁷And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. (Matthew 23:5-7)

Another practice in many churches and organizations that is highly unscriptural is that of the armor bearer. In the Old Testament, the armor bearer was someone who helped carry the shields,

swords and armor of another person. Today, the concept of the armor bearer has morphed into being the person who carries a preacher's Bible, notebook, laptop computer, and more. Some Christians seem deceived into thinking they "absorb" some kind of anointing from the preacher by carrying such items. There are preachers who expect to be served by an armor bearer because, after all, they are the high and mighty man or woman of God. In some cultures, this practice has devolved to the point that it is considered a great insult and indignity if an armor bearer is not provided for a preacher. This is absolutely despicable! The modern armor bearer tradition reeks of pride and arrogance that is rotten to the core.

While I truly appreciate people wanting to help me, I do not need an armor bearer to carry my Bible or other items for me. I am no better than anyone else. I am not esteemed greater than others in the eyes of God. I am fully capable of – and prefer – carrying my own Bible, notebook, laptop, or whatever else I bring with me to a church service.

Here is a brief test as it pertains to ministry and ministry callings:

- 1) True or false: Some people have the ministry calling of Bishop.
- 2) True or false: Some people have the ministry calling of Elder.
- 3) True or false: Some people have the ministry calling of Deacon.
- 4) True or false: Some people have the ministry calling of Minister.
- 5) True or false: A minister can lay hands on others and impart a ministry calling.

The answer to every one of these is False. Nowhere in the Bible does God identify the Bishop, Elder, or Deacon as a ministry calling; they are all positions of service, *appointments* of man, not *callings* of God. Even so, churches and denominations throughout the world present people with certificates of ordination to the ministry calling of Bishop or Elder or Deacon or Minister. Additionally, it is *impossible* for one human to impart to another a ministry calling that only comes from God (meditate Ephesians 4:7-11).

The point I'm getting at in all of this is: Who is influencing you? Who is teaching you? Who are your mentors? Do you ever take the time to search the Bible to find out if what you're experiencing has the Word of God as its foundation? Are you allowing purveyors of man's traditions and cultures mold you into their image rather than in the image of Christ?

Jesus was repeatedly criticized for not adhering to the Jewish cultural traditions of His day; but He responded by referring people to what was written in scripture. Jesus taught His disciples, then instructed them to teach what they had received from Him (Matthew 28:18-20). New converts were taught what the Apostles had been taught (Acts 2:41-42). The Apostle Paul was taught by the Lord, then taught what he learned (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). The Apostle Paul only taught what is recorded in scripture; furthermore, he taught it in every church where he ministered (1 Corinthians 4:17). The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to teach what he had learned from Paul (2 Timothy 2:1-2). All the Apostles knew to depend on the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:6-13, 1 Corinthians 14:1-21).

In over 30 years of ministry I have encountered an untold number of Christians who esteem their culture and traditions over the unchanging Word of God. So many of them allow the dictates of man to set the course of their ministry. Leaders embrace social standards, then pass them on to the ones they are supposed to be teaching the standards of the Bible. Requirements for promotions in the world become the requirements for promotion in ministry.

Too many pastors attend one conference after another, opening themselves up to conflicting doctrine. Additionally, pastors invite preachers to their church without knowing nearly enough about their doctrine. But if the guest preacher has a degree of popularity or can excite the emotions of the listeners with a high-powered delivery, then the services are considered a success. This is especially true in countries not as developed as First World nations.

Pastors, stop being foolish! You are to be the fulfillment of Psalm 23 to those in your church. You are to feed the flock from the table of the Lord; but if you haven't been properly fed, you are in no condition to shepherd the Lord's flock. Stop seeking status among your peers; instead, seek to please God (Galatians 1:10). I'll pass along to you what God said to me many years ago: "I didn't call you to build a church, but to build people and My Kingdom, and to teach those who would receive it.

You may be an Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor, or Teacher, or you may not yet know God's calling on your life. Regardless, what I shared earlier stands true: Who is influencing you? Who is teaching you? Who are your mentors? Do you ever take the time to search the Bible to find out if what you're experiencing has the Word of God as its foundation? Are you allowing purveyors of man's traditions and cultures to mold you into their image rather than the image of Christ? Consider the instruction given by the Apostle Paul,

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example. (Philippians 3:17)

I have several teaching series that can be of benefit: "Excellence in Ministry"... "Learning to Hear God's Voice"... "Taking Heed to Your Ministry"... "How to be Promoted By God"... "God's Pattern for Your Ministry"... "Called, Declared, and Set in Order"... "How to Have a Book of Acts Church"... "God, What is Your Plan for Me?" These and many others are available for free download at our ministry website.

God is calling Christians to accountability like never before. Examine your life and those you have established as a voice in your spiritual growth. If you need to stop listening to any of your "favorites," then stop. If you need to leave the church you're attending, then leave. If you need to leave the organization you're a part of, then leave. Some of these decisions may not be easy, but the end result will be a deeper walk with the Lord and more complete conformation to the glory of Christ. You CAN do all things through Christ which strengthens you!

In His Grace,

Jim

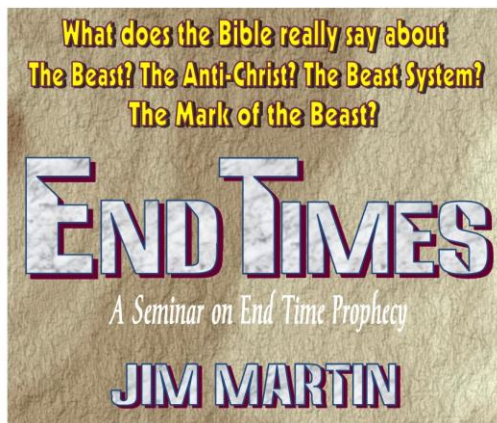
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SPECIAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

DURING PRAYER ON MONDAY, APRIL 30TH AT ABOUT 7:15 PM, JUST PRIOR TO SENDING THIS LETTER BY EMAIL, THE LORD CLEARLY INSTRUCTED ME TO CANCEL OUR CONFERENCE. This is different from what in the printed edition of this letter, which was mailed this past Saturday. I am terribly sorry for the inconvenience, but I must be obedient to what the Lord instructs. If you have any questions, please contact me at PastorJimGCC@gmail.com.

SPECIAL END TIMES SEMINAR DVD OFFER

Recently, I taught a seminar on end time prophecy at the Family Prayer Center in Immokalee, Florida, where my good friend Bronc Flint is the Pastor. The audio of the six messages is very helpful, but there is greater benefit from watching them because I make use of several



PowerPoint slides during each session. In this seminar I reveal that many extremely popular teachings about end time prophecy are incorrect. Furthermore, I explain how events in the book of Revelation are directly connected to things which took place in the book of Genesis. The titles of the messages are:

- End Times 1: Rethinking Prophecy
- End Times 2: Rapture and Wrath
- End Times 3: Isaac, Ishmael and the Promise
- End Times 4: The Great Counterfeit
- End Times 5: Is This the Mark?
- End Times 6: Home at Last

If you would like to have this special seminar box set of six DVD's, use the order form below.

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