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Deliver Us From Deliverance Ministry

By Chris Hayward

Jesus practiced it, He instructed us to do the same, and there has never been a greater need for it than today. So, how did deliverance ministry become a practice that many pastors fear? Most likely it is because of the abuses many of us have seen in the name of “deliverance ministry.”

However, the reality is that most believers carry “extra baggage” from the past into their Christian walks. And although we have been perfected through His work on the cross, there is still a work to be done – a process – as I am being sanctified (see Heb 10:14). This sanctification process does not go unchallenged by Satan.

This leads to the inevitable question: Is it possible for a Christian to be demon possessed? I believe the answer is no. But I also believe this to be the wrong question altogether.

Instead, we should ask, Is it possible for a Christian to be tempted, to be tormented and harassed by the enemy, to open themselves up to addictions and uncontrollable habits, to have a worldly mind-set and be taken advantage of by the enemy, to be subject to divisions and strife within the church, to give way to pride, to suffer with fear, rejection, unforgiveness, bitterness, anger, shame, guilt and condemnation?

Any reasonable observer would say, “Yes!” So, it is really a question of degrees. To the degree that one gives oneself over, or falls prey to the devil’s lies and deceptions, then to that degree the enemy has a foothold in his or her life (see Eph 4:27). Reality would declare that we in the church need deliverance.

Having served 16 years as a local church pastor and for the last 7 years through my involvement with Cleansing Stream Ministries, I have had the privilege to be an eyewitness to the awesome wonder of God’s power and love to heal and deliver. It is no surprise to me that the enemy would do everything in his power to distort and pervert this great weapon of the church.

Some would suggest that deliverance ministry merely caters to weak-minded Christians looking for a quick fix. Hospital emergency rooms and ICUs are filled with people who need a “quick fix.” Some arrived there through their own fault and others by accident. In either case, they probably need to have some long term rehabilitation once they are past the critical stage.

In the same way, deliverance offers a needed operation that must be followed up with long term lifestyle changes.

In the last several years I have spoken to hundreds of pastors and leaders who share the same concern: they recognize that there are spiritual and emotional needs among many of those they serve that exceed what can be met through psychological counseling. They observe obvious works of darkness that need to be confronted.

Yet the experience of these pastors with deliverance ministries has swung from the disastrous on one hand to the nonexistent on the other. I am convinced that the intention of the Holy Spirit is for deliverance not to become just another program but to be a lifestyle for every believer. My passion is to see this vital ministry functioning in a biblically balanced manner, becoming a natural part of the fabric of every church.

Over the years I have noted the marks of a healthy deliverance ministry within the church – and some of the characteristics that lead to disaster.

Pastoral Covering

In any church, for deliverance ministry to have success it must have the full support of the senior pastor. This ministry cannot be placed in the hands of those who seek to build their own little kingdoms. For all the great benefits that come from legitimate deliverance, it can also attract the weird and the wacky, giving deliverance a bad reputation. The pastoral leadership must heed the scriptural admonition, “Recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” (1 Thess. 5:12, NKJV).

After all, the primary role of a pastor is to protect the flock of God. Wolves would like to come in and decimate the sheep. Pastors must guard them from the potential hazards – either in word or in deed. This protection is most clearly demonstrated as pastors bring encouragement and comfort to people by providing a covering of direction and accountability for this ministry.

Sound Teaching

Many churches have been shipwrecked on the rocks of unsound doctrine. How tantalizing the dark and hidden things can be. It would be easy for those ministering deliverance to become captivated with the spirit of Gnosticism, the

gathering and accumulation of knowledge without the fruit of a transformed life.

In Colossians 1:9-14, Paul exposed this wicked heresy that crept into the church of Colossae. Paul wanted two things for the Colossian church: that they would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (v.9), and that they would be “fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (v.10).

Having a multitude of knowledge without walking it out is futile. Jesus declared that casting out demons is not something to get excited about or focused upon. What is most important is to know our relationship as children of God. Our attention to His truth will keep us from getting enthralled with tantalizing “mysteries” and heretical doctrines. Effective deliverance is the result of being grounded in God’s Word and ways.

Discipleship Training

I was being interviewed by a Christian publication when the writer asked, “Cleansing Stream is a deliverance ministry, right?” Although I had not anticipated my response, I said, “No, it’s not. It is a discipleship ministry – we disciple people in the ministry of deliverance.” Our ministry is committed to partnering with pastors and churches in teaching and training leaders and maturing believers in personal cleansing, deliverance and spiritual warfare so they can be released to serve, minister and disciple others in the body of Christ (see 2 Tim. 2:2).

From this verse, it seems that God thinks in terms of at least four generations: “The things you have heard from me” (first generation), “among many witnesses” (second generation), “commit these to faithful men” (third generation), “who will be able to teach others” (fourth generation). If this principle were not true, you and I would have probably never heard the gospel. To establish deliverance into the framework of the church, there needs to be a way to continually train and mentor others.

Accountability

“And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’” (Acts 19:15). Demons understand authority. Without accountability there is no authority. Accountability empowers authority by establishing unity. Our authority comes from the Father through Jesus Christ. Our accountability is to the Holy Spirit in obedience to God’s Word. And our unity with one another is through the blood of Jesus.

Within the local church all must be accountable to pastoral leadership. Apart from that, chaos ensues. To have a successful deliverance ministry, those who are involved must be accountable to spiritual authority. They should never minister by themselves – and never without pastoral approval.

We require that they always be a part of an established team that meets regularly and ministers by appointment. Accountability is acknowledging the benefit that others can bring into any given situation and the correction that can come to keep us on course. In fact, Cleansing Stream Ministries itself was birthed under the leadership of Pastor Jack Hayford and is under the covering of The Church on the Way and their pastor, Jim Tolle.

Safe Environment

It takes courage to confess and renounce sins. Deliverance will falter if a safe place is not provided. For people to feel safe, the following must be true:

- confidentiality is strongly guarded
- the people ministering are trustworthy and mature
- those ministering do not express shock at revelations of sinful behavior
- those receiving ministry are not showcased for others to see
- love and grace are always demonstrated.

Preparation

As a pastor, I have often prayed for people who needed deliverance. I was bothered by how temporary the freedom of some seemed to be. Until the mind is transformed, and until there comes a revelation of what has opened the door to demonic control in the first place, the person is doomed to repeat their ensnared condition.

This is why, in our ministry, we require 8 to 10 weeks of preparation prior to receiving hands-on ministry. This is done through viewing video teachings and completing a workbook and homework assignments. There are many ways to accomplish this preparation, but if there is not a change in thinking and a subsequent revelation through the Word of God, destructive behavior patterns are often repeated.

Follow-through

Once freedom is received, it must then be maintained through ongoing submission to God and purposeful distancing from those activities that led to bondage in the first place. James 4:7 states: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The implication of this verse is clear. We should do whatever it takes to help those who have been delivered to rid themselves of those things that serve as a continuous pull toward their previously ensnared condition. Just as there are keys to successful deliverance, there are also red flags that can signal failure. As I reviewed this list I realized each has a root in pride. This is no surprise – pride has been at the root of sin from the beginning. If we are aware of these red flags, we can avoid them and guard the ministry Jesus has entrusted to us.

Here are some observable lasting benefits to those who encompass balanced and biblical deliverance into the lives of their churches:

- an increasingly healthy body of believers who know and understand their

authority in Jesus Christ

- an increase in the number of new leaders that will be developed as people are released in their callings
- an increase of protection against the assaults of the enemy as a healed and delivered church will stand against his schemes
- an increase in evangelism as a freed-up believer becomes a witnessing saint
- an increase in your joy as a leader watching God's people walk in truth.

As pastors we are friends of the Bridegroom, attempting to prepare the bride for His coming. Preparation means clean and dressed in white. We must make the bride ready for His arrival. The ministry of deliverance can help fulfill that vision. The time is now. The Groom is coming soon.

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