

A scenic view of a coastline at sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with warm, golden light, transitioning from a bright yellow near the horizon to a soft orange and pink at the top. The ocean is calm, reflecting the light from the sky. In the foreground, two prominent, layered rock stacks stand in the water. The background shows a hazy coastline with hills and cliffs under the low sun.

# **REMEMBER STEPHEN? I'M A SCARED LAYMAN!**

**Dr. Leonard C. Albert**

# REMEMBER STEPHEN? I'M A SCARED LAYMAN!

By Leonard C. Albert

## OPENING REMARKS

After Pentecost, Peter was the premier preacher. He preached and 3,000 people got saved in one service. Now that's preaching! Do you remember Stephen in Acts 7? He was a layman and when he preached, they stoned him! "And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts 7:59).

Why am I scared? It's a big world out there and when I realize that God has called me, as a layman, to preach and minister it can be frightening. Let's talk about that call.

### I. We are all called.

All laity are called to minister—this includes preaching. Probably the greatest coup d'état that the Devil ever pulled upon the Church could be titled, "But I'm just a layman." When we look at the first century church, we find that the laity preached. Stephen preached in Acts 7. In Acts 8:4, it is mentioned that "They [the laity] that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." Philip (a layman) in Acts 8:35 ". . . opened his mouth, and . . . preached unto him Jesus." In the early church, everyone was a minister. In just 300 years, the church accomplished the most amazing results. The whole Roman Empire was undercut and overthrown by the power of the Gospel of Christ. In fact, the pagan Celsus wrote a book against Christians in the second century and admitted that it was the ". . . woolworkers, cobblers, laundry workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels. . ." who carried the gospel. Who was he referring to? The laity! The devil would make us believe that only preachers are called. But I would like to sink a dagger into that lie because our pulpits are everywhere—coffee tables, worktables, gas pumps, and office desks. Every Christian occupies some kind of pulpit and preaches some kind of sermon every day. Someone asked one of our laymen if he was called and he replied, "Certainly, I'm an ordained plumber!"

## II. We are ministers

We are never told whether Stephen ever did anything his position as deacon demanded, but we do know he did extremely well in what his *mission* demanded. Long before Stephen had a position, he had a mission. In fact, the word, *minister*, is the translation of the Greek word, *diakonia*, which means “servant.” A minister can be a deacon who is a servant. Ananias (a layman) was a servant like this. He laid hands on Saul in Acts 9, both healing and commissioning him. Aquila and Priscilla were lay missionaries in Acts 18. The Bible clearly indicates that the work of the church is not solely the responsibility of the pastor—it is for all believers. Originally, the word, *minister*, was a function of the church. It was a verb—something we did. It was the assignment of all believers, and each follower had his own ministry or ministries. Slowly, through the centuries, it has moved from being a *function* of the church to become a *station* in the church. *Ministry should be a function for all, not a station for a few.*

## III. We are gifted

In Acts 6:8 we read, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” For many years I have pondered this scripture. What were those “wonders and miracles” that he performed? He was a layman performing “wonders and miracles.” I have asked God to help me do the same. I believe that every Christian is called of God as a minister and gifted for ministry. Peter says it best in 1 Peter 4:10, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Stewards of His grace? Have you ever thought of that? Think it through. We (all of God’s people) have received a gift (or gifts), and we are to minister with that gift! How do we find our gifts?

Ask yourself these simple questions:

- *What do you see?*

So many people are waiting for a mystical call from God while all around them there is work which needs to be done. If no call seems obvious, then do the obvious! Is there a class with no teacher, a jail with no volunteers, a nursing home with no church service? Get busy!

- *What do you do?*

Can you teach, sing, or play a musical instrument? If you are good at it, do it!

- *What do you enjoy?*

There was a time when we thought that if we enjoyed doing something, it was wrong. What you love to do is a clue to your anointing.

- *What do you feel?*

What burdens you? What hurts you when you see it? Help heal those hurts.

- *What you do hear?*

What do others say about you? You can expect affirmation from the body of Christ as to the reality of the gift of God within you.

### **Concluding Remarks**

God has called us to do more than *pray, pay, and obey!* There's a new reformation coming. It is a second reformation—a reforming of the priesthood of all believers. This second reformation will take place when the ministry is in the hands of all of God's people. If we understand, accept, and act on the doctrine of the laity, it will bring about a reformation such as the world has not seen since Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the church at Wittenberg. My prayer is that the laity and clergy can become true partners in ministry.