

**The Pastoral and Practical
Principles on which the
Churches in the
New Testament were based**

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**Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Theology in
the field of Practical Theology at the University of
Zululand.**

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Date of Submission: September 2005

Declaration

I, ANTON BOSCH, declare that this dissertation entitled

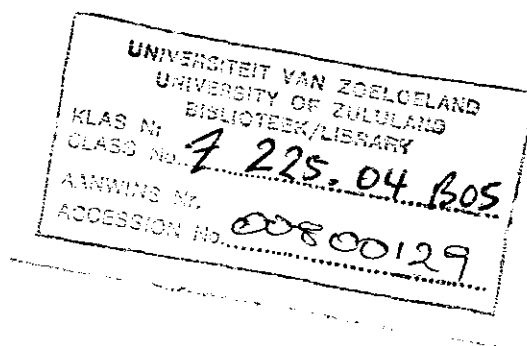
**The Pastoral and Practical Principles on which the Churches
in the New Testament were based**

Represents my own work, both in conception and execution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anton Bosch', written over a horizontal line.

Anton Bosch

30 September 2005



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of some, of the many, without whose help, support, patience, insight and prayers this work would not have been possible.

Thank you to my wife who patiently encouraged me to keep going when many other duties disrupted the work and diverted my attention.

Thank you to Professor Arthur Song who began this work with me as my promoter but now, at the conclusion of the work, has become a friend. His encouragement while requiring a high standard has contributed much to the end product.

Thank you to my daughter, Beatrice, for her assistance with printing and other technical tasks.

This list would not be complete without acknowledging the countless teachers, writers and men of God who, from my childhood, contributed to a passion for the Truth. Although the bibliography at the end of this document acknowledges those sources that I have quoted directly, there are many others who have shaped and influenced my thinking and understanding. Their contributions are recorded in the annals of Heaven.

Finally, and most importantly, whatever the value this work may have, it is all because of, and for, the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again that He might redeem for Himself a spotless bride and who has imparted gifts to men to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Abstract

The New Testament does contain sufficient information in order that we may arrive at a reasonably clear understanding of the principles upon which the churches of the New Testament were based. The Scriptures do not give us a model of how churches must look and thus provides sufficient leeway to apply those principles within the context of different socio-economic groups, cultures and ages.

One of these principles is that of the “Priesthood of Every Believer”. This principle, should effect every aspect of the structure of the church and the relationship between ministries and the flock. Thus ministries are intended to truly be servants of the churches and not masters or lords over assemblies. This does not leave leaders without authority, but it is an authority based on *relationships, and of the flock recognising the gifts of the leader, rather than a delegated and imposed authority.*

Since leaders are not “staff” or in the “employ” of the church, the question as to how they are to meet their temporal needs arises. The Scriptures draw no distinction between “full-time” and “part-time” ministries and both those who make tents and those who receive money from the church need to look to their Master – Jesus Christ for the supply of their needs. At the same time the labourer is worthy of his hire and local churches must take care of the needs of those who devote themselves to the work of the ministry.

Ministries, as listed in Ephesians 4:11, do continue beyond the first century. Unfortunately tradition and modern trends have resulted in many of these ministries being grossly misunderstood and many modern forms of particularly the pastor, apostle and prophet are grotesque aberrations of the Lord’s original intent. These aberrations have, to a large extent, resulted in the rejection of the notion that they do continue.

While the Lord Jesus clearly intended for local churches be autonomous and not part of a larger organisation (except the Church Universal), they are by no means intended to be so independent that they do not interrelate with other assemblies. Thus local churches are self-sufficient, self governing and self-propagating while, at the same time, being in loving and supportive relationship with churches and men outside the local church.

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The Pastoral and Practical Principles on which the Churches in the New Testament were based

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives of This Study

The objectives of this study are to re-examine how churches in the New Testament were structured and functioned in order to discover the principles that could be applied to churches in the 21st century. Much has been written on this subject with a theoretical and philosophical bent, which often has very little practical value to new autonomous churches and groups. I will attempt to deal with the practice, rather than the theory, in order to produce a work that may be of assistance to those who are seeking a New Testament form of fellowship.

1.2 The Problem to be Addressed

In the process of millions of words having been written on the question of the church, the subject has been obscured, rather than illuminated. Based on the assumption that the Bible contains all the information we need and that this information is readily accessible within its pages, we need to take a fresh, unbiased look at its instructions and attempt to rediscover, or confirm, the design Jesus had intended for His church.

1.3 Questions I Hope to Answer Are:

- Does the New Testament teach a pattern or principles for the building of the church?

- What is meant by the “priesthood of every believer”? How would it function in the 21st century? How does one balance this principle with the principles of leadership, submission and gifted ministries?
- Are ministers governors or servants? If servants, how do they exercise their ministry? What does the NT teach concerning authority? How does one balance the heart of a servant with the need for proper oversight in the church?
- What are the differences between full-time and part-time ministers and what principles govern their payment?
- Do the Ephesians 4:11 ministries continue today, if so how do they function?
- Are local churches autonomous or part of a wider group / denomination. What are their relationships with other churches?

1.4 Terms of Reference and Methodology

In order to arrive at the answers to the questions listed above, I shall for the most part, rely on the New Testament text in order to understand, firstly, what Jesus and the Apostles taught on these matters and, secondly, what the Apostles practiced. It is my view that we cannot use sub-apostolic teaching or practice, let alone that of the Church Fathers as a basis on which to discover the New Testament “pattern”. This is because the second-generation churches had already begun to deviate from the practices and teachings of the Apostles.

These deviations had already begun to take place by the end of the first century. Ignatius, for example, who was probably a disciple of the apostle John and may have known several of the Apostles¹, had by the end of the first century begun to separate bishops and presbyters into two separate offices.² He also began to speak of monarchical bishops and thus of himself as the Bishop of Antioch.³ Some of these deviations were as a response to false teaching and others as a result of pride, ambition and a lust for power on the part of early leaders. The greatest influence away from the Apostolic pattern, however, was not primarily as a result of any of the many attacks upon the church, but rather, as a result of endeavours to protect the church

¹ Broadbent, EH. *The Pilgrim Church*. Gospel Folio Press. Grand Rapids, 1931. p32.

Hughes, Philip. *A History of the Church*. Vol 1. Sheed and Ward. London 1948. p54.

² Broadbent. *The Pilgrim Church*. pp31-32.

Hughes. *A History of the Church*. pp54,55.

Sheldon, Henry C. *History of the Christian Church*. Vol 1. Hendrickson Publishers. USA, 1988. pp247ff.

Renwick, AM and Harman AM. *The Story of the Church*. IVP. Leicester, 1958. P26

³ Kennedy, John W. *The Torch of the Testimony*. Seedsowers. Beaumont, TX. 1965. p53 ff.

from these attacks. “These counter measures, much more than the heresies themselves, were responsible for the changes which were eventually to lead the assemblies so far away from the simplicity of church life as it was in New Testament times.”⁴

These initial deviations continue to this day, and have given licence for many other, and worse, deviations from that which was originally practiced by the Apostles.

1.4.1 Sola Scriptura

The principle that I shall apply to this work is that of *Sola Scriptura* – the sufficiency of Scripture alone. As in the Reformation, the debate amongst evangelical Christians today, is not about the infallibility of Scripture, but rather about the sufficiency of Scripture.⁵ Most Christians fully accept the infallibility of scripture, yet many of these feel that Scripture is not sufficient for all of life and godliness in the 21st century. They add to the Bible personal opinion, tradition, the teachings and dogma of their denomination, extra-Biblical prophecies and revelation etc. Many modern teachers who speak and write on the structure and practice of the church only partially base their theories on the scriptural record. To the Bible they add subjective opinion, management theory, psychology and a host of man-made philosophies. We must accept that Scripture is complete and adequate and testifies to its own sufficiency: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”⁶ *Perfect* here meaning complete, whole, entire and sound.⁷ “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”⁸

Many of our beliefs concerning church life are based on an accumulated tradition of the past 2,000 years. Add to this, modern developments in psychology as well as the advancements in management methods and we end with a view of church structure and functions which may be very far from that intended by its Founder. Our perspective is even further distorted by the almost universal assumption that the Reformation was a complete overhaul of all facets of the church, and, what emerged from the Reformation was a fully re-born, New Testament church. And while the

⁴ Ibid p60.

⁵ MacArthur, John F. *Reckless Faith*. Crossway Books. Illinois, 1994. pp135-136.

⁶ Ps 19:7.

⁷ Brown, Briggs, Driver. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Electronic). Ref Strongs #8549.

⁸ 2Tim 3:16.

Reformers restored some of the most critical fundamentals of the faith, many aspects of church practice that had evolved within the Roman system were left unaltered.⁹

In order to rediscover how the New Testament church was structured and functioned, we need to return to the text of the New Testament.¹⁰ But even here we have a problem, as our reading of these texts is coloured by our own background and experience. So, for example, when we read about baptism, one visualises a baby in a pretty dress with a few drops of water on its forehead, another sees a naked baby being dipped into a gold encrusted font and yet another sees an adult being immersed in a river or a dam. All these pictures, and more, from one word!

Thus the papist with his hierarchical structures and the individualist who sees no need for meeting with other believers both claim that they have arrived at their unique understanding of the structure and function of the church through the teachings of the New Testament. It is therefore imperative to look at the New Testament with as unbiased a view as possible. Even then, it has to be acknowledged that with the best will in the world, it remains very difficult for one's reading not to be coloured and not to fall into the trap of reading into scripture one's pre-conceived ideas.

Coad devotes an entire chapter to the problems associated with interpreting the scriptures in an unbiased way in order to understand the structure and function of the church.¹¹ He sums this up as four factors:

First, we must recognise that each mind, by its very nature, operates within a range of ideas and modes of thinking which are the product of past experience and of individual personality, and that this must to some extent colour every conclusion which is drawn by that mind.

Second, allowance must be made for the effect of the framework of Biblical interpretation which lies (often unconsciously) behind any man's approach to Scripture. Tradition is an inseparable element within Biblical interpretation.

Third, Scripture, in matters of church order, arose from the living and immediate circumstances of the early churches. This has two results. It allows a wider room for the operation of those personal idiosyncrasies of understanding which the first two factors have emphasized: and it also means that Scripture contains much that is the result of the application of general principles to particular contemporary and local circumstances. If I, in my highly

⁹ Kennedy. *The Torch of the Testimony*. Seedsowers. Beaumont, TX. 1965.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise stated, all references are taken from the New King James Version.

¹¹ Coad, F. Roy. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. Paternoster Press. Exeter, 1968. pp 250-262.

different circumstances, simply copy the results of that application, I may well find that I contradict the basic principles of Scripture...

Fourth, the question as to whether and to what extent the ordering of New Testament churches forms a precedent for later churches, is not one to which Scripture itself gives a direct answer, but one which must be answered according to our general understanding of the scope of Scriptural and apostolic authority.¹²

1.4.2 Hermeneutical issues

One of the traps the unwary can easily fall into is the incorrect use of the book of Acts in order to formulate doctrine. This becomes a particularly difficult issue when Acts is used to establish norms for the post-apostolic church. Thus we need to spend a few minutes examining what hermeneutical rules can be applied to the book and to what degree we can use the experiences of the Apostles as “rules” for the church today.

In his chapter on the “practical use of the Bible” Ramm lists five guidelines that may be applied in using Biblical examples as normative.¹³ It is important that these be borne in mind as we approach the book of Acts.

- “We must make a distinction between what the Bible records and what it approves.”¹⁴ Not everything that is recorded is necessarily good or right. Sometimes the context clearly indicates such approval or disapproval. Sometimes it is more difficult to differentiate. As an example the Apostles cast lots in order to select a replacement for Judas¹⁵. Does this then mean that we may or must use the casting of dice in order to determine the will of God? Certainly not.
- “We may take direct application from all those incidents that the Bible directly censures or approves.”¹⁶ Thus we are not to follow Ananias and Sapphira’s example of lying to the Holy Spirit¹⁷ yet we are to follow Paul’s example of perseverance in the preaching of the word.
- “Express commands to individuals are not the will of God for us.”¹⁸ Paul’s trip to Arabia¹⁹ may not be God’s command to everyone, nor would Peter’s receiving

¹² Ibid, p253.

¹³ Ramm, Bernard. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, 1970. pp190-192.

¹⁴ Ibid p190.

¹⁵ Acts 1:26.

¹⁶ Ramm. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. p191.

¹⁷ Acts 5:1.

¹⁸ Ramm. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. p191.

a vision on the rooftop.²⁰ Peter's resultant mission to the Gentiles is binding upon us because many other scriptures, both Old and New Testament, support the evangelisation of Gentiles.

- "In the lives of men in the Scriptures determine what the outstanding spiritual principle is".²¹ This will protect us from bestowing too much meaning on minor details of the historical account and losing out on the opportunity to learn some vital principles.
- "In the application of examples to our lives we do not need a literal reproduction of a Biblical situation."²² Baptism need not be in the *Jordan* to be valid, nor do we have to meet in an *upper room* to break bread.
- Particular attention needs to be paid to the cultural and historic setting of certain accounts. Some churches have based some of their practices on examples found only in the Jerusalem church. Great care needs to be exercised when quoting Jerusalem as an example, especially when other accounts or scriptures do not support this example. For instance some may teach that money must be given to apostles²³ and that believers should "hold all things in common".²⁴ These were practices unique to the church at Jerusalem. We have to be very careful as to which aspects of the Jerusalem model we carry forward, as the situation in Jerusalem was unique in the following respects:
 - It was a predominantly Hebrew congregation.
 - There were twelve apostles resident in the church in addition to many other ministries.
 - It lasted only a few years before it was totally dispersed.²⁵ (It was reconstituted later.)
 - Only in Jerusalem is it recorded that very large numbers were saved.²⁶
 - The founding members (120) had all seen the Lord.
 - Of the initial 3,000 that were saved, many came from abroad²⁷ and seem to stay on in Jerusalem in spite of their not having made financial provision for such a prolonged stay.

¹⁹ Galatians 1:17.

²⁰ Acts 10.

²¹ Ramm. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. p192.

²² Ibid p192.

²³ Acts 4 & 5.

²⁴ Acts 2:44, 4:32.

²⁵ Acts 8:1.

²⁶ Acts 2:41, 4:4.

²⁷ Acts 2:8-11.

- No other church in Acts, or since, was founded in the same way.

This does not mean that the record of the church at Jerusalem must be discarded as a purely historic account, but we need to be careful that any of the practices from this church be supported by other examples and texts before we accept them as normative for today.

1.5 The Background

I believe that the study is needed in order to cut through much of the accumulated tradition of the past 2000 years. The majority of books on the market today are either written in defence of some established system or in reaction to a bad experience with some other ecclesiastical system.

The "Church-growth Movement" is currently, probably, the most prolific producer of books on ecclesiology and, arguably, the most popular. The exponents of this movement espouse a marketing oriented, business driven, perceived-need based and egocentric model for the church. Should the reader follow the formulas propagated by these writers, he is almost guaranteed to have a mega-church within a short time, with the attendant power and money. A subset of this group is the cell-church. This is an effort to marry the concepts of mega-church and house-church into one successful formula. As with all proposed models for the church, there is some biblical support for these concepts and yet, many other New Testament principles are violated in the process.

In reaction to the hyper-church is the house church movement with its gurus. Chief of these is Gene Edwards. This movement in its over-reaction has rejected any form of church structure, order or office. In many of these groups even the quoting of scripture is frowned on as legalistic. They claim that the only legitimate expression of the church is the house church. Some even go to the extreme to suggest that one cannot be born-again and be part of a church which meets in a church building or which has a salaried leader!²⁸

Somewhere between the church-growth and the house-church movements are the traditional denominations. Most of these are caught in the traps of their elaborate

²⁸ Not all house churches are this extreme and some of them are even quite healthy, valid churches.

hierarchies, long traditions and expensive architectural structures. These try to categorise themselves in the traditional ecclesiological boxes of congregational, presbyterian, episcopalian, orthodox or coptic. Separate from these are the independent churches, who deny that there is any authority outside the local church. Yet they are all bound to long traditions and, for the most part, espouse a clergy / laity system of governance with varying degrees of inflexibility in their liturgies.

The fourth group are those independent churches of all sizes, and often, with differing theologies, who are seeking to emulate the "New Testament Pattern". The majority of these are small, meet in homes and are often without a sound theological base. It is they I wish to serve with a work which will be biblical, as far as is possible, free of bias but of practical benefit.

The first two groups are the more significant trends in the development of the church at the moment and thus a limited overview of one book emanating from each will be helpful to set the stage of the ecclesiastical scene of the early 21st century.²⁹

1.5.1 The Church Growth Movement

The Church Growth Movement, on the one extreme of the ecclesiastical spectrum, finds a champion in author and theologian C Peter Wagner, who has written copiously in praise of this movement. Although not an organised movement, it does represent a philosophy very prevalent amongst mega-churches. In *The New Apostolic Churches*³⁰ he publishes papers by 18 leaders of some of the biggest and most "successful" churches throughout the world. In his introduction to the book he summarises their commonalities as well as reasons for their success. He has since published a more detailed analysis titled *Churchquake!*³¹

Wagner has only one measure for the blessing of God on a church and that is numerical growth.³² This thinking flows from an incorrect extrapolation of a statement made by the Rabbi Gamaliel in Acts 5:38,39 "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; "but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight

²⁹ The two works were selected on the basis that they each typifies the ideas behind the respective movements.

³⁰ Wagner, C Peter. *The New Apostolic Churches*. Regal Books. Ventura, 1998.

³¹ Wagner, C Peter. *Churchquake!* Regal Books. Ventura, 1999.

³² Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p16.

against God."³³ Although it is true that a work of God cannot be overthrown, the converse is not necessarily true. The fact that an organisation survives the ravages of time and even prospers does not of necessity prove God's blessing or even approval.

Neither Old nor New Testament upholds numerical strength as a sign of, or a condition for God's blessing. On the contrary it is often the few that carry true divine blessing rather than the many. Jesus Himself spoke of the narrow gate and the few.³⁴ After Jesus' powerfully anointed ministry on earth He left only 120 disciples.³⁵ Surely if numbers were a sign of God's approval He would have concluded His ministry with a large number of followers. Admittedly a large number of people were saved on the day of Pentecost and soon after³⁶, this kind of growth however, only occurred at the founding of the church and at no other occasion was such rapid addition recorded. *Most of the churches in the book of Acts seem to have been much smaller than that of Jerusalem.* If numbers are a sign of God's approval then surely Islam and the Roman church must be the most blessed of all.

When numbers become the only measure of success, the door is opened for all sorts of evil. Doctrinal and moral purity become secondary as the end justifies the means. Thus for example Wagner cites the growth of the African Independent Churches (AICs) as part of "...a pattern of divine blessing..."³⁷ This can never be, as much of the AICs are an evil marriage of New Testament, Old Testament, ancestor worship and witchcraft. It is syncretism at its worst which does not promote a New Testament form of Christianity.

1.5.1.1 Nine common components .

Based on this faulty premise, Wagner lists 9 components of this new move which is shaping the church of the 21st century:³⁸

The first of the nine is titled a **new name**.³⁹ At first Wagner seemed to favour the term "postdenominationalism" but as a result of pressure he renamed it the "New Apostolic Reformation".

³³ Acts 5:38,39.

³⁴ Math 7:14.

³⁵ Acts 1:20.

³⁶ Acts 2:41, Acts 4:4.

³⁷ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p17.

³⁸ *Ibid* p18.

The term “apostolic” is favoured because it speaks of, what is claimed to be, one of the great moves of God in the latter days – the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic ministries. These apostles style themselves after men like Peter or Paul. They wield tremendous authority over their followers, such that many of their disciples view their words as equally authoritative as those of scripture. They use this misconception to regularly claim revelation that supersedes the Bible or even contradicts it.

He explains the second part of the title as follows: “I use “reformation” because... these new wineskins appear to be *at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost 500 years ago.*”⁴⁰ I do not believe that the use of the word reformation is justified, as the reformers sought to return the church to biblical principles and to rid it of man-made tradition. This movement, however, seems to be moving away from Biblical principles and is establishing its own norms and traditions, many of which are extra-biblical.

The second component is a **new authority structure**.⁴¹ By this he refers to the emphasis placed on leaders in these new groups. These groups are mostly headed by a single charismatic leader who often operates as a sovereign and whose authority is derived from his own dynamic personality. At times this authority is supported by prophecy emphasising the need for submission to, and the greatness of, the leader. Pastor Lawrence Khong of Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore (8000 members) attributes one of the main reasons for his success to the fact that they have “one strong and anointed leader”.⁴² Paul Daniel, founder and leader of His People Christian Ministries in South Africa unashamedly says that “The senior pastor of each His People Church exercises headship in the local church”.⁴³ Wagner speaks of the move from the recognition of the *ministry* or *gift* of an apostle to the *office* of the apostle.⁴⁴ Thus he has included a chapter by one who designates himself as “Apostle John Kelly”.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ibid pp18,19.

⁴⁰ Ibid p18.

⁴¹ Ibid p19.

⁴² Ibid p221.

⁴³ Daniel, Paul. In Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p234 (Daniel has since been forced to resign in disgrace).

⁴⁴ Ibid p20.

⁴⁵ Ibid pp29-44.

This leads to churches where believers have more of a relationship with the pastor or apostle than with the Lord Jesus Christ, where members can quote their leaders more than they can quote the scriptures and where leaders become so powerful that they are able to say, do and claim the most ridiculous things without being questioned. This mindless devotion to leaders is no different to that accorded to Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* by their followers.

The third component is **new leadership training**⁴⁶ Under this heading Wagner highlights the fact that most leaders within these new churches have little or no theological training. Qualifications for upcoming ministry are based on personal relationships with incumbent leadership and proven skills. Some of these groups establish their own in-house Bible schools but very few seem to send their up-coming leaders to independent, recognised seminaries. The argument that the pattern in the New Testament was not one of seminaries, but one of leaders training future leaders is compelling and strong.⁴⁷ It however becomes a problem when the theological skills of the incumbent leaders are almost non-existent or even erroneous and this becomes the foundation of the next generation. Most preachers in these groups are notorious for their lack of hermeneutical integrity as they interpret scripture “by the leading of the spirit” and “by revelation”. Most of these leaders, as well as future leaders, could benefit their churches immeasurably by gaining solid Biblical training.

The fourth common component is a **new ministry focus**.⁴⁸ By this a distinction is drawn between those churches that are “heritage driven” and those that are “vision driven” Most evangelical churches share a common desire to recapture the essence of the life of the church as recorded in the New Testament. The New Apostolic Churches however, feel that the past has very little that is of benefit and that the goal lies in the future. This leads to an emphasis on the “vision” with a constant expectancy of the “new thing” that God is about to do. This results in instability and a tendency to run after spiritual fads as each of these “waves” hold the potential of being God’s next great move. Often solid Biblical traditions are frowned upon as “dead tradition”. Paul, however, instructs the Thessalonians: “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”⁴⁹ Jude emphasises the

⁴⁶ Ibid p20.

⁴⁷ 2Timothy 2:2.

⁴⁸ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p21.

⁴⁹ 2Thessalonians 3:6.

completeness of that which has been delivered to us: "... exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."⁵⁰

The fifth component is a **new worship style**.⁵¹ The different style of worship is probably the component most visible to someone who comes from a more traditional church, and yet, it is also the one component that has most deeply penetrated historic and traditional Pentecostal churches. It is often the aspect of a church that will attract members to a particular church. Wagner shows how the worship team replaces the traditional musicians, hymnals are replaced by overhead projectors, organs are superseded by keyboards and percussive instruments and fifteen minutes of singing is replaced by an hour of "praise and worship".⁵²

More significant than the changes in style and mode of worship is the philosophy behind this new worship. Biblical worship had one purpose and that was to glorify God. In the New Apostolic Churches worship serves many purposes of which the adoration of God is but one. It serves as a basis of bringing God's "presence" into the meeting, as God inhabits the praises of His people.⁵³ It also serves the purpose of creating a platform or the right environment in which people can receive the teaching of the Word. Worship is also used to "do spiritual warfare". One argument says that as demons are spirits and they occupy the air around us, every time the church raises its hands, demons are being "hit". Waving arms and banners chase demons away.⁵⁴ It is fairly obvious to the diligent student that none of these were part of the original intent of worship. In addition worship, which should be the product of the Christians' entire life simply becomes a subset of praise and something that is done as part of the meeting.

The sixth component is **new prayer forms**.⁵⁵ Here Wagner extols the greater amount of time spent in many new forms of prayer. These include praise marches, prayer walking, prayer journeys and prayer expeditions. What he does not say is that the emphasis on prayer is based on the wrong premise. It is mostly based on the modern teachings of "spiritual warfare" and of "the word of faith". Under the guise of "spiritual warfare", the church has the responsibility to defeat demons, chase them out of a

⁵⁰ Jude 3.

⁵¹ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p22.

⁵² Ibid p22

⁵³ Psalm 22:3

⁵⁴ Meyer, Joyce. *Protected by God's Presence*. Trinity Broadcast Network. 11/07/02

⁵⁵ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p23.

particular area, bind demons and loose angels so that God's work is not hindered. This is achieved by doing "spiritual warfare". The "word of faith" teaching emphasises the creative power of the spoken word. As God spoke and the earth and it's fullness was created, so our words have power to create or to destroy. Unlike orthodox prayer, where the prayer is directed to God, in these churches the prayers are often directed at the Devil, demons, circumstances or even inanimate objects. Instead of speaking about praying to the Lord, they will speak of "praying into a situation". None of this has any biblical foundation.

The seventh component is **new financing**.⁵⁶ Wagner describes money in these churches as "abundant".⁵⁷ He gives three reasons for this abundance of finance in comparison to "traditional churches". Firstly, tithing and giving is not only taught *without apology, but believers are made to feel that their Christianity is not up to standard if they do not give*. Secondly, believers are taught that giving is not only because the church needs the money to function, but also the giver will receive an abundant harvest of more money, because of the seed he has sown in his giving. Thirdly, giving is cheerful and sometimes loud cheering and even laughter accompany the time of giving.

From a more objective view, however, much of the emphasis on giving can be seen as a very materialistic version of Christianity. Almost all of the 18 contributors to the book talk about money. Most quote various aspects of their budget in millions of dollars as evidence of God's blessing. The taking of the collection takes a significant chunk out of the time allocated for their services and it is not uncommon for the collection and the attendant mini-sermon on giving to last between 20 and 30 minutes. This can often surpass the amount of time allocated to the preaching of the Word. Tele-evangelism, an extension of these churches is also marked by its emphasis on money. These preachers blatantly speak of their books, tapes and other services as "products" – drawing little distinction between what they sell and what the commercial world sells. They use the same words and systems to induce buying and giving as worldly telemarketers do. Paul Daniel of His People Christian Ministries (South Africa) writes: "Managing our corporate identity and how we present ourselves to the community is very important in terms of our public relations".⁵⁸ The church no longer follows in the

⁵⁶ Ibid p23.

⁵⁷ Ibid p23.

⁵⁸ Ibid p235.

footsteps of its founder who had no place to lay His head – it has become big business in which money and corporate identity are major aspects of its operations.

This emphasis on money has an even bigger impact on these churches in the way in which it has altered the very core of the faith of its members. It has affected the preaching. Not only are some of their preachers able to preach money and prosperity from almost any verse in the Bible,⁵⁹ much of the preaching is an attempt to stroke the members in order to keep them happy and to keep them giving. Some of these preachers do not hesitate to use the misfortune of their followers to milk even more money from them, as they teach that giving will release healing, anointing and God's provision for financial problems. These preachers will not hesitate to warn about the dangers of not giving enough and often use examples of people who were not healed, faced financial ruin, etc because they did not give. This message has also resulted in a generation of Christians who believe that spirituality and God's blessing can be measured in terms of money and that God's blessings can be bought with money.

The eighth commonality is a **new outreach**.⁶⁰ Under this heading Wagner speaks about church planting and social outreach programmes. It is the mission of these churches to be "apostolic" in vision and to be reaching out to areas where they are not represented. Many of them also run multi-million dollar social responsibility programmes through shelters and feeding schemes.

The philanthropic work of these groups is difficult to judge, as the motives behind these works of charity cannot be gauged with accuracy. In a number of cases, however, the church will speak of their multimillion-dollar food distribution programme, when in fact the cost to the church is a fraction of the total budget. They will not hesitate to solicit money, expired foodstuffs, transport etc from secular organisations – often from unbelievers. While their zeal for the needy is to be commended, the taking of money from unbelievers and governmental organisations cannot be reconciled with the *modus operandi* of the Lord Jesus Christ. By their advertising their achievements in these areas they also violate the principle of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Creflo Dollar is but one example. Listening to any of his sermons as broadcast by *Trinity Broadcasting Network* will confirm this assessment.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* p24.

⁶¹ Mathew 6:3.

The planting of new churches is also difficult to measure in the absence of objective statistics. Judging by observations in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa) however, many of the so-called church plants are simply take-overs of existing churches. Traditional Pentecostal churches have lost significant numbers of their congregations and properties to New Apostolic Churches. Other evangelical churches and even traditional churches have not been spared. The second source of new churches is splits and divisions within established churches. Only the third, and by far the smallest, source of new church plants is true missionary activity where a worker or team will work in an unreached area and by evangelism and making disciples, begin to establish a new church.⁶²

The last of the common traits of New Apostolic Churches is entitled: **New power orientation.**⁶³ This describes the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the supernatural. The Holy Spirit is actively invited into the meetings and worship and prayer is directed to the Holy Spirit. These churches do not only believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are still operative today, but that there are many more manifestations that are not mentioned in the scriptures. This is all justified and encouraged under the cover of "...the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."⁶⁴ Wagner offers the following (partial) list of manifestations of the Spirit: "... healing, demonic deliverance, spiritual warfare, prophecy, falling in the Spirit, spiritual mapping, prophetic acts, fervent intercession and travail, and so on ...".⁶⁵ To this can be added holy laughter, animal sounds, dancing in the spirit, being drunk in the spirit etc. These manifestations are often used as part of the total strategy to grow the churches. Believers are taught to expect and even to demand the supernatural in every meeting. Some of these churches and ministries are built almost exclusively on such manifestations. Names such as Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonke and TB Joshua spring to mind as men who have built their ministry and following on the supernatural.

⁶² This assessment is based on the author's close observations of these movements over the past 30 years. (Marjorie Froise writes about the difficulty of quantifying these New Apostolic Churches since they do not fit into traditional denominational categories. (Froise, Marjorie. 2000 *South African Christian Handbook*. M Froise (Ed). Christian Info. Welkom. 1999. p36.) This trend is confirmed also to be true in the United States by Sarah Lesley, a respected researcher of modern trends in Christianity. This trend is changing, however, as "the G12 structure and the Purpose Driven structure are cutting new ground and making new "converts" out of the masses, using "accelerated conversion rates" – i.e., methods of psycho-social marketing and manipulation to make people believe they are "Christian" because they come into the cell group structure." (E-mail 26/09/2005, conscien@nacs.net)

⁶³ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p25.

⁶⁴ John 14:12.

⁶⁵ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p25.

Although it is not within the scope of this section of this work to examine whether or not the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament continue today or not, serious questions have to be raised as to whether the modern versions of such gifts accurately reflect the manifestations of those gifts in the New Testament and whether the Holy Spirit will manifest His power in ways not taught in the New Testament.

For example, is what passes for prophecy today, the same as that of the New Testament? I would suggest not. Modern prophecy is more akin to fortune telling than the inspired utterances found in the scriptures. Although we have some instances of foretelling in the New Testament, this does not seem to have been the main intention of prophecy. Paul clearly states that prophecy was to be "...to edification, and exhortation, and comfort".⁶⁶ Modern churches also accept a very high rate of error from their prophets. Bob Jones, one such prophet, says that the general level of accuracy of prophets is 65%, but in some instances it is as low as 10%.⁶⁷ Examples of patently misleading and wrong predictions, even from their most experienced prophets abound.⁶⁸ Scripture, however, demands 100% accuracy.⁶⁹

Prophecy that is contrary to the plain teaching of the scriptures or that supersedes scripture can also not to be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Yet, modern prophets will often speak extra-biblically or speak contrary to the scriptures and claim that the Holy Spirit has revealed to them more than was previously revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets. Each of the modern manifestations of biblical gifts must be measured against biblical criteria. On this basis much of what passes for gifts of the Spirit, has to be rejected.

Extra-biblical manifestations, those of "Toronto Blessing"⁷⁰ and the "Pensacola Revival",⁷¹ must be rejected out of hand because not only are these manifestations not in the Bible, they often go against biblical principles. Thus the emphasis on hilarity and laughter is contrary to, at least, 15 injunctions to sobriety in the New Testament. These manifestations can also be measured by their lack of fulfilment of promises. Both Toronto and Pensacola promised sweeping worldwide revival. Neither was able to

⁶⁶ 1Corinthians 14:3.

⁶⁷ Randles, Bill. *The New Prophets*. Plumline Publishing. Pietermaritzburg, 1994. p65.

⁶⁸ Randles. *The New Prophets*. pp23-54.

⁶⁹ Deut 13:1-3, 18:22.

⁷⁰ As emanating from Toronto Airport Vineyard.

⁷¹ As promoted by the Brownsville Assembly of God, Pensacola, Florida.

deliver. If these were genuine works of the Holy Spirit – comparable or exceeding the day of Pentecost, surely, the world would have been impacted visibly.

The church growth movement may certainly be building big congregations, control large fortunes and have increasing influence on politics and society, however, whether it complies with the Lord Jesus' intentions for His Church is open to debate. I do not deny that individual lives may be positively affected, but suspect that much harm has been done to individuals as well as to small churches that have been seduced into chasing statistics instead of being what God made them to be in the first instance.⁷²

1.5.2 The House Church Movement

The house church idea is not a new one and finds its roots in an overemphasis of the fact that the New Testament churches frequently met in homes. In some parts of the world it is a spontaneous God ordained movement such as in China. In most Western countries, however, these "churches" are generally populated and promoted by discontents and reactionaries who had been either hurt or disillusioned by the excesses and failures of the Charismatic revival.

One of Edwards' publications⁷³ is typical of the kind of teaching formative of and emanating from the house-church movement. A brief examination of this book will highlight some of the difficulties. At the outset, however, it must be said that the New Testament Church did meet in homes, but not exclusively so.

The first problem with this line of thinking is that it is strongly and negatively influenced by bad experiences and frustrations in established churches. This is experiential theology in reverse and it works as follows: "Because authority is abused in some churches, we will have no authority in ours. Because there is an over-emphasis on money in some, we will not participate in any form of giving. Because theological training has opened the door for some ungifted men to enter the ministry, we will not have anything to do with anyone who has a (theological) academic background. Because some full-time ministers are lazy and abuse their privilege, "we shoot paid

⁷² Matthew 7:21ff.

⁷³ Edwards, Gene. *How to Meet in Homes*, Seedsowers. Sargent.

preachers".⁷⁴ Because some sermons are boring, we reject all forms of formal preaching and teaching.⁷⁵

Secondly, it is strongly rooted in the revolutionary rhetoric of its proponents. The members of these groups pride themselves in their liberty, non-conformist views and that they are the only legitimate expression of the church in the 21st century. In the process sound hermeneutics and the clear teaching of scripture is blatantly ignored.⁷⁶

These points are well illustrated in Edwards. In the 156 pages of *How to meet in homes* he only once quotes scripture⁷⁷ and that out of context in order to arrive at an interpretation the opposite of what Jesus intended. Yet he has no hesitation to quote Churchill, Pascal, a Turkish proverb etc. In all of this he claims that he is absolutely biblical. His book is filled with indirect and incorrect quotes from the New Testament. So for instance on the church at Antioch he says: "The ekklesia in Antioch did not often all come together in one place. Generally the church met in homes all over the city. Only on special occasions did all in the ekklesia in Antioch come together in one place."⁷⁸ He provides no support for this opinion except a reference to another of his own books.

Edwards' arguments in this book generally are:

- The Bible provides no guidelines for believers meeting together. This has to be discovered by each group by some kind of trial-and-error method.⁷⁹ A lack of order is a sign of a "good" meeting.⁸⁰ The scriptures, however are clear that there are principles that govern the meeting together of the Saints and one of these is the need for order.⁸¹
- Sunday meetings were an invention of the last 500 years and imposed on us by the reformers.⁸² This statement blatantly disregards a number of biblical references to believers meeting on the first day of the week.⁸³

⁷⁴ Swanepoel, Sutton, Boot *et al.* Church Without Churches, (Online Discussion Group) churchwithoutchurches@yahoo.com. December 2002.

⁷⁵ Norrington, David C. *To Preach or Not to Preach*. Paternoster Press. Carlisle. 1996.

⁷⁶ Even a brief spell of monitoring their blogs and discussion groups on the internet will confirm this view.

⁷⁷ Edwards. *How to meet in homes*. p23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* p 46.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* p21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid* pp83ff.

⁸¹ 1Corinthians 14:40.

⁸² Edwards. *How to meet in homes*. p27, p105.

⁸³ Acts 20:7, 1Corinthians 16:2.

- The only ministry or office of the New Testament Church was that of the “church planter”⁸⁴ (Presumably another word for apostle). This work will show that there were a number of other ministries working in and among the churches.
- These “church planters” would preach between one and three messages, per week, for two weeks before moving on. Thus the sum total of teaching new Christians and churches would receive was between 2 and 6 messages, thereafter they would be left to their own devices⁸⁵. There is no support for this notion and Paul spent three years in Ephesus as well as a long time in Antioch. How many messages he would preach in each city is not recorded but there can be no doubt that the itinerant preachers would pour themselves into the local churches every waking hour.
- Once the “church planter” moves he leaves no leaders behind, in fact, he may take with him whatever leadership there may have been.⁸⁶ However in the case of Philippi Paul did leave a woman in charge!⁸⁷ This statement is patently false. As chapter 9 of this work will show, every local church had elders ordained to care for it.

1.6 The Hypothesis

The principles on which the New Testament churches were based, can be identified, and are still applicable to new churches in the 21st century.

⁸⁴ Edwards. *How to meet in homes*. p43, p49ff, pp63-64.

⁸⁵ Ibid pp63-65.

⁸⁶ Ibid pp 72-74, p91.

⁸⁷ Ibid p79.

Chapter 2

Does the New Testament Teach a Pattern or Principles for the Building of the Church?

2.1 Introduction

Amongst those who desire to see a more biblical form of fellowship, there are many who feel that the New Testament provides us with a blueprint according to which we are to build the church. They will speak of the “pattern” of the church and seek to emulate in the smallest details the structure and function of the church in Acts. These are sometimes known as “patternists”. Broadbent says: “ Events in the history of the churches at the time of the apostles have been selected and recorded in the Book of Acts in such a way as to provide a permanent pattern for the churches. Departure from this pattern has had disastrous consequences, and all revival and restoration have been due to some return to the pattern and principles of the Scriptures.”⁸⁸ “Patternism” can be illustrated by the use of a single cup in the Breaking of Bread. They will refer to the scriptures that make reference to “*the cup*”⁸⁹ and to “*one bread*”⁹⁰ and insist that no matter what the size of the congregation, only one cup is to be used. Some among the Particular Baptists will insist that when one cup is no longer practical, the congregation has become too large and needs to divide and a new work needs to be started elsewhere.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Broadbent. *The Pilgrim Church*. p26.

⁸⁹ Matthew 26:27, 1Corinthians 10:16, 1Corinthians 11:28 etc.

⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:17 (Literally “one loaf”).

⁹¹ Maoz, Hulse, Carson, Eccles, Richards, Davies, Tait, Davison. *Local Church Practice*. Carey Publications. 1978.

Others, who are equally desirous to see a return to the New Testament feel that the scriptures do not require the implementation of every detail of the New Testament “pattern”, but that it rather establishes certain principles according to which the church is to function. Kennedy, who draws extensively on Broadbent says:

The New Testament lays down basic principles for the ordering of the life of local congregations...Strict standards governing the conduct of those eligible for such a position (elders) are clearly set down, but beyond this there is detailed instruction neither as to how these elders should be chosen, nor as to the limits of their authority and duty within the assembly.⁹²

Thus in the example of the cup, they will stress that the principle behind the use of a single cup is rather one of unity in the assembly and that spiritual reality transcends the practical application. Those in this group will mostly reject the use of individual ‘thimbles’, but accept two or more cups being shared in a larger congregation.

Yet a third group use the terms “pattern” and “principle” interchangeably and draw no distinction between them.⁹³

The question as to pattern or principle is a very important one, as it affects the way the whole of the church is understood and structured.

2.2 Arguments for a Pattern

Those who support “patternism” draw strongly on Old Testament examples to support their view. Particularly the examples of Noah building the ark and Moses building the tabernacle are used as parallels to the building of the church. Lang says:

As in Israel there was a material temple in which God dwelt, so is the church a spiritual temple for His indwelling (Eph 2:20-22). As not one detail of that earthly house was left to the invention or introduction of men, not even to the faithful Moses (Heb 8:5; 1 Chron 28:19), but all things were to be made according to the patterns shown, so it is with the living temple.⁹⁴

As the ark was designed to be the means of grace and the vehicle chosen by God for the salvation of Noah and his family, so the church performs a similar function to the New Testament believer. Thus, it is argued, Noah had explicit instructions to build the ark exactly according to the “pattern” or plan designed by God. Should he have deviated from that “pattern” the ark may not have carried God’s blessing and may even

⁹² Kennedy. *The Torch of the Testimony*. p22.

⁹³ Gibbs, Alfred P. *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*. Christian Publications. Belville. pp8, 17.

⁹⁴ Lang, GH. *The Churches of God*. Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co. Maiami Springs. 1985. p9.

have sunk. Noah did not have the prerogative to add mast and sails, a rudder or some other means of steering or propulsion. While this may be true, the instructions given to Noah do not necessarily support the idea of an exact “pattern” for the churches. Genesis records that the overall dimensions are given as well as a number of other details such as the number of decks as well as the method of waterproofing and so on.⁹⁵ However many other details such as the shape of the bow and the roof are visibly absent. Even important details such as the size and shape of the door and waste disposal mechanisms as well as many other important details are not explained. Does the Ark teach a pattern? I think not. It certainly teaches certain principles but no more.

The construction of the Tabernacle on the other hand presents a stronger argument. The Lord provided Moses with a very detailed “blueprint” together with a strong admonition to build exactly “according to the pattern”.⁹⁶ In Exodus 39 it is recorded no less than 15 times that Moses built “as the Lord commanded Moses”. It is evident from the record that Moses had very little, if any, leeway to use his own initiative in the construction of the Tabernacle. Does it follow that we have the same injunction to build the church exactly according to the pattern?

The first problem we have is that the Tabernacle is not primarily a type of the church. The tabernacle may well be used to illustrate many truths about the church; yet its prime function was not to teach us, or the Hebrews, about the ecclesia. It is primarily a type of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷ And thus it was important that it accurately reflect that which is in the heavens. As Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about Himself in the finest detail, so the Tabernacle had to represent Him and the way of salvation in accurate detail.

The second problem is that we are not given a blueprint of the church in the same detail as Moses was given for the Tabernacle. Although the New Testament contains many details about the church, it seems to omit more than it declares. Surely if it was God’s will for us to follow an exact pattern, He would have provided us with more detail just as He did for Moses and the tabernacle? To illustrate this we need only look at the

⁹⁵ Genesis Ch 6.

⁹⁶ Exodus 25:9, 25:40, 26:30.

⁹⁷ De Haan, MR. *The Tabernacle*. Zondervan. Grand Rapids. 1973. p9.

Pollock. AJ. *The Tabernacle’s Typical Teaching*. The Central Bible Truth Depot. London. pvii.

Simpson AB. *Christ in the Tabernacle*. Christian Publications. Harrisburg. pp5,6.

ministry of the deacon. We are given his qualifications,⁹⁸ but not a single word is written about his function.⁹⁹

The third difficulty with the emphasis on following a pattern as Moses had, is that we are not given the same instruction “to build according to the pattern” as Moses was. Yes, we are warned to take heed how we build¹⁰⁰ – referring to the materials with which we build, but there is no warning that the structure and function of churches we build are to be measured against some model church. The Tabernacle had its prototype in the heavens.¹⁰¹ At no stage is any local church referred to as a pattern, model or prototype upon which all others are to be moulded.

2.3 Tradition and Torah, Custom and Command

Many of the clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees revolved around the difference between tradition and Torah. The Pharisees had difficulty separating the two. Their traditions had become so important that they took the same authority as the scriptures and in some cases overruled the teachings of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus upbraids them because they were “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”.¹⁰² And that they were “making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.”¹⁰³ Jesus often drew a distinction between traditions and the real teachings of the scriptures and called for a return to the essence of the Law.¹⁰⁴ For both the ordinary Jew as well as the scribe, it became very difficult to distinguish between tradition and Torah and yet it was vital to do so in order to accurately teach the Word of God.

This does not mean that those things that are part of custom are necessarily forbidden or bad just because they are not commanded. God did not institute the Synagogue, yet it was the “custom” of Jesus to attend the Synagogue on the Sabbath.¹⁰⁵ Later the disciples used the Synagogue as a rallying point and a platform from which to preach the Gospel. The time came however when the Lord closed the door for them and the

⁹⁸ 1Timothy 3:8-13.

⁹⁹ That is if one excludes the Seven of Acts 6, who are not specifically called deacons.

¹⁰⁰ 1Corinthians 3:10.

¹⁰¹ Hebrews 8:5.

¹⁰² Matthew 15:9.

¹⁰³ Mark 7:13.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 5-7.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 4:16.

church moved away from the use of the Synagogue.¹⁰⁶ Thus there may be many things included in the practice of the church that may be helpful, cultural or customary, which may not violate any Biblical injunction or principle. These things should, however, never be assumed to be commanded or necessary and should be abandoned as soon as they no longer serve their original purpose.

When looking at customs of the apostolic church, we cannot simply take those customs and make rules applicable for all time. We need to look at the custom and try to understand why it existed and what principles lay beneath that custom.¹⁰⁷ Only then are we able to decide whether the principle, rather than the custom should be adopted. If we were to apply blindly a custom from the scriptures to our very different circumstances, we may well end with something which violates or contradicts one or more of the basic principles of the Word. In addition by imposing them we, "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders".¹⁰⁸ So, for instance, there is in the record an account of Paul attending Jewish feasts.¹⁰⁹ Does this require that we, as Gentile Christians, should shave our hair and attend Jewish feasts? There are those who think so. The burden of the testimony of the New Testament clearly teaches that Jewish feasts and customs have no hold upon us.¹¹⁰ In fact, in so doing, there is the potential of turning "...again to the weak and beggarly elements..."¹¹¹ This would be a clear violation of the principle of the completeness of the work of the Cross.

We also need to understand the difference between those things that were simply customs in the New Testament church and those things that were explicit commands. Even more difficult is the problem of separating between that which has become customary in our own practice and that which was originally commanded by Jesus and the Apostles. So much of what has been assimilated into the life of the church is regarded as required by scripture, when in fact these things are simply traditions. It is also important to consider that it does not take 2000 years to form a tradition. A tradition can be established within a matter of months. Every group of Christians that meet has their unique traditions. These even include such things as who occupies which seat in the meeting place, the order of service, what kind of bread is used in the Communion, how many songs are sung, how long the meeting lasts etc. These

¹⁰⁶ Firth, Stan. *Custom and Command*. J.S. Firth. London. 1996. p 21.

¹⁰⁷ Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. p252.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 23:4.

¹⁰⁹ Acts 18, 21.

¹¹⁰ Acts 15:28,29.

¹¹¹ Galatians 4:9.

traditions must not be avoided merely because they are traditions but, they must never become requirements that prevent the meeting from doing what God intends for it.

It is a challenge to attempt to define whether a particular practice in the New Testament was a custom or a command. For example some will argue that the wearing of head coverings in Corinth¹¹² was a command, while others will argue that it was simply a custom.¹¹³ Thus there are many other areas that may be difficult to categorise and yet it is often important for us to draw a clear distinction between the two. As much as it is essential not to institute customs that do not apply to our churches, it is even more important to be sure that we obey all that is explicitly commanded and it is imperative that we apply the principles behind those instructions.

2.4 Spirit and Letter, Principle and Precept

Apart from the Pharisees not being able to differentiate between tradition and Torah, they were also quite good at keeping the letter of the Law, while at the same time violating the principles or the spirit underlying the Law. Here lies one of the reasons Jesus often found it necessary to upbraid the Scribes and Pharisees. He speaks of their attention to the minutia of tithing while they "...have neglected the weightier matters of the law; justice and mercy and faith".¹¹⁴ In His sermon on the mount, Jesus quotes a number of the Ten Commandments. He then uses these to illustrate that one may keep the letter of not killing or committing adultery, while breaking the principle behind these commands.¹¹⁵ Where the Old Testament specified the detailed outward requirements of the Law, the New Testament emphasizes the spirit. Thus loving God and your neighbour are the two principles that underlie all the commandments.¹¹⁶

In the New Testament the principle is as important as the precept. Ramm goes further and says: "The emphasis in Scripture is on moral and spiritual principles, not on specific and itemised lists of rules...".¹¹⁷ In this light it is easy to fall into the trap of seeking out various overt instructions that relate to the church, form a legalistic model of the church and measure each assembly by that standard while violating one or more very important biblical principles. For example, a superficial unity can be brought about by compromise, hypocrisy, an authoritarian suppression of dissenters or even

¹¹² 1Corinthians 11:4-15.

¹¹³ Firth. *Custom and Command*. p 21.

¹¹⁴ Matthew 23:23.

¹¹⁵ Matthew 5:21-30.

¹¹⁶ Matthew 22:40.

¹¹⁷ Ramm. *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*. p186.

forming a focus around some area outside Christ, such as a new building. Yet true unity, of the Biblical variety, may be absent. The letter may have been fulfilled but the spirit of true unity is still absent.

It is incumbent upon us then to be more concerned with the principles the New Testament teaches rather than a pharisaic conforming to outward form and structure. We shall attempt to discover those principles, while at the same time being obedient to the precepts given through the writers of the New Testament. We can liken the precepts as the mortar and the principles as the bricks in the structure of the church. There is a danger of becoming so emphatic about the principles and neglecting the precepts thus ending with an undisciplined and disorderly pile of principles that does not constitute a building either. Jesus said to the Pharisees "These you ought to have done, *without leaving the others undone*".¹¹⁸

Too easily we set about designing the structure of the ideal church on paper, quote chapter and verse and set about attempting to force every group of Christians into that mould. This is comfortable to the flesh because each group looks, thinks, speaks and acts the same. Some groups have even attempted to bring about uniformity to the extent that all dress the same. We must remember however that the church is a living organism and not a dead worldly organisation.

The church was not organised into being; it was born through the working of the Spirit of God. It is not a mechanical contrivance, but a living organism, and it's life is dependant upon that element of spontaneity which a rigid and predetermined order denies.¹¹⁹

The natural man is comfortable with an organisation – the spiritual man has to operate within the dynamics of relationships with other members of the body of Christ. Coad says:

The Scriptures are not a constitution book for the churches. The present guide of the Holy Spirit remains a permanent necessity in all the particular circumstances of each local church. But in seeking that guidance, the principles and understanding of the ways of God which come to us from the Scriptures remain our essential and authoritative guide.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Matthew 23:23. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ Kennedy. *The Torch of the Testimony*. p22.

¹²⁰ Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. pp258,259.

2.5 Principle and Practice

While the principles will remain constant between the first and the twenty first century and between first-world and third-world people, the application of those principles may differ. The keeping of the Lord's Supper with bread and wine, for example, is a command – we have no options as to whether we do so or not. We are given a principle of frequency – “This do, as *often* as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as *often* as you eat this bread and drink this cup...”.¹²¹ For some often may mean twice daily while for others it may be weekly or even monthly. Once a year, however, does not conform to the principle of frequently. Within the parameters of this principle of frequency, each group of believers must have liberty to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit and do what is fitting for them.

There is, of course, the danger of emphasising the spiritual to the extent that our meeting together becomes so ethereal as to have no practical value whatsoever. John commands us not to love in word only, but also in actions.¹²² James reminds us that unless faith results in works, it is dead.¹²³ So, having all the principles without any practice is of little value.

2.6 Conclusion

We need then to discern the difference between customs and commands. Where the Scriptures clearly command us to order the church in a particular way, we may not use our discretion, but must find grace to obey such explicit command. Where there are customs they cannot be elevated to the level of patterns but may be applied if helpful, but need not become a law. At the same time it is important that when we adopt customs, that are not expressly forbidden or encouraged in scripture, we must ensure that those customs do not violate either a principle or an express instruction of the Word. The rich young ruler claimed he had kept all the commands and yet, when Jesus tested him on the first of the Decalogue – You shall have no other gods before Me¹²⁴, it appears that he had made a god of his possessions. Even though he had kept the letter of the Law, he had failed to keep the principle or the spirit of the Law. Thus an outward conformity to the New Testament does not guarantee that the principles

¹²¹ 1Corinthians 11:25,26. Emphasis added.

¹²² 1John 3:8.

¹²³ James 2:17, 20, 26.

¹²⁴ Exodus 20:3.

will be maintained. If, on the other hand, we understand and are committed to the principles, the correct ordering of church life must follow.

Chapter 3

The Priesthood of the Believer

3.1 The Clergy / Laity System

Around the middle of the second century, a two-tier or two-class system began to make its appearance in the churches.¹²⁵ This system separated those who ministered from those who were ministered to into the “clergy” and the “laity”.

This separation of the members into different classes came as a reaction to the heresies that began to plague the church at this time. One of these, Gnosticism, had been a problem for some time and certainly predated John’s epistles that were written, partially, as a counter to this teaching.¹²⁶ A lack of trust in the Holy Spirit’s ability to keep the church pure from error resulted in the various functions of the local church being centralised, more and more in the hands of a ministerial class.¹²⁷ It is interesting that this led to the church falling prey to the very error of Gnosticism it was trying to avoid. At the heart of the Clergy / Laity concept is the understanding that the clergy have special “light” or “knowledge” (*gnosis*) which is not available to the ordinary believer. It is on this very basis that the Roman Church, for many centuries, would not trust their members to read the scriptures for themselves. It is still this same Gnostic mindset that underlies the vesting of special powers and privilege in the hands of a clerical class in many churches today.

¹²⁵ Girard, Robert C. *Brethren Hang Together*. Zondervan. Grand Rapids. 1979. p126.

¹²⁶ Douglas, JD (Ed). *The New Bible Dictionary*. Inter-Varsity Press. London. 1970. p642.

¹²⁷ Girard, Robert C. *Brethren Hang Together*. p126.

There is no denying that individuals within the church are uniquely equipped for specific tasks. Some are teachers, others are pastors, evangelists etc.¹²⁸ Such gifting, however does not give room for the ruling of the church by “the minister” or “pastor”. We will explore this in more detail in succeeding chapters.

The word “clergy” comes from the Greek word “*cleros*” which means heritage or allotment.¹²⁹ It is interesting that 1Pet 5:3 uses this term in exactly the opposite way to which it is used today. Peter refers to the church as God’s heritage or *cleros* and the text actually warns against the practice of lording it over the flock. Today the clergy are seen to be those who have, by training and ordination been qualified to perform the functions of a minister of religion. Some believe that “They have special status and are fundamentally different from the congregation”.¹³⁰ Depending on the particular denominational structure the clergy have different levels of authority and responsibility. At worst, communion cannot be served without a clergyman presiding, at best the clergyman will function as the lead elder or pastor of the congregation.

The status of the priest was defined by Narsai, Bishop of Nisibe, in the 5th century:

The priest has received the power of the Spirit by the laying on of hands. Through him all the mysteries of the church are performed... Without a priest, no woman would be given to be married to a man; without a priest their marriage obligations are not completed. Without a priest the water would not be blessed and the house would remain impure. Those who do not possess the *ordines* cannot celebrate the Eucharist, however pious they may be.¹³¹

The word laity finds its roots in the Greek “*laos*” which according to Gibbs means the “common people”.¹³² Vines says that it refers to “the people at large, especially of people assembled, a people of the same race and language or of Christians as the people of God”.¹³³ According to Strathmann in Kittel *laos* is used three times as distinct from the Sanhedrin or the leaders.¹³⁴ An examination of the 140 times this word is used in the New Testament indicates that it is used for all the people including the leaders. Only in the three occurrences as quoted by Strathmann is there a remote

¹²⁸ 1Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11.

¹²⁹ Kittel, G. and Friedrich, G. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* – Abridged by GW Bromiley. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1985. p442.

¹³⁰ Aitcheson, Ray. *The Priesthood of Every Believer*. Audiotape (Preached at Word of Truth Church 19/05/02). Plumblin Ministries. Pietermaritzburg. 2002.

¹³¹ In Warner, Rob. *21st Century Church*. Kingsway Publications. Eastbourne. 1993. p195.

¹³² Gibbs. *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*. p28.

¹³³ Vine, WE. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Bible Words*. 1994. Bath. (Electronic).

¹³⁴ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p502. refers to Luke 22:2, Acts 6:12, 13:15.

separation between leaders and the *laos*. All three, however, refer to leaders of the Jews and Israel. It is never used in this way of the church. In 1Peter 2:9,10 the *laos* are the royal priesthood: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (*laos*), that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people (*laos*) but are now the people (*laos*) of God..."¹³⁵ There is therefore no justification in the New Testament for using this word for a class apart from the *cleros*. There are those who feel that the references to the "Nicolaitans" in Revelation¹³⁶ is based on two Greek words, *nico* meaning ruler or destroyer and *laos* meaning the people. This leads to the conclusion that the Nicolaitans were those who ruled over the believers in a clergy/laity system.¹³⁷ This, however, seems to be pure conjecture and cannot be proven from scripture, except to say, that the New Testament does not support the domination of the church by a select few and that the Nicolaitans are seen in a very negative light.

Today those two classes have been subdivided into more layers. The clergy, in many denominations, have created a hierarchy, originally based on the Roman military system, and latterly, based on management methodology. Some of these pyramidal structures are steeper, with more levels and each successive level containing fewer members than the lower orders. Others are flatter or broader – having less layers and more members to each layer. Yet they all retain the same fundamental pyramidal form – ultimately headed by a very powerful individual or a select few leaders. The hierarchy delegates authority to the minister or pastor of the local congregation, who often has to represent the organisation, rather than the Lord, in the congregation. All of these aberrations have little or no biblical basis and is often very far removed from the principles operative in the first century.

3.2 Weaknesses of the Clergy / Laity System

- It places one man in a position above all others in the assembly.
- It allows one man's gifts and bias to dominate.
- Prevents the free-flow of other gifts in the church.
- Sets up a priestly caste, which alone is authorised to administer the church's ordinances.

¹³⁵ 1Peter 2:9,10.

¹³⁶ Revelation 2:6,15.

¹³⁷ Nee, Watchman. *Revive Thy Work*. Christian Fellowship Publishers. New York. 1996. p164. Girard. *Brethren, Hang Together*. p241.

- Creates the impression that the professionals can do everything better than the lay-people.
- Makes believers completely dependent on the clergy for all spiritual input.
- People are built around a man, his gifts and personality instead of the Lord Jesus.
- Inhibits the leader's own freedom as a servant of the Lord, by tempting him to seek to please those who are paying his stipend.
- Obscures the truth of the headship of Christ.¹³⁸

Clericalism is a double-edged sword in that it is attractive to both the clergy as well as the laity. The clergy enjoy the power, status and stipend that comes with the job and claim a monopoly on many areas of ministry,¹³⁹ especially the more visible. On the other hand the laity enjoy the ease of being spoon-fed and paying for the services of a professional preacher, prayer, counsellor and Bible-reader. This largely removes the responsibility of maintaining a relationship with a "difficult to understand God".

3.3 The Priesthood in the Old Testament

Before Exodus 32, there exists no record of God dealing with men through a priesthood. Those who pleased God and had established a relationship with Him had done so on a personal basis. Melchisedec¹⁴⁰ was a unique individual in God's dealings with His people before the Exodus and can in no way be construed to indicate the will of God being a relationship with man via a priesthood. In fact, just before the giving of the Law, the express will of God is declared to be: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".¹⁴¹ There can be no doubt that The Lord did not intend for Israel to have a second-hand relationship with Him, but for each one to relate to Him directly. This is borne out by the fact that God declares the Decalogue in the hearing of the whole nation¹⁴² yet they requested that He should no longer speak directly to them, but that Moses was to act as intermediary.¹⁴³ By this we do not deny that it appears to be within the plan of God to separate various individuals to fulfil a number of offices such as leaders, prophets and even priests who would perform various acts of service in and around the tabernacle. The operation of various ministries does not contradict

¹³⁸ Girard. *Brethren, Hang Together*. p128.

¹³⁹ Warner, Rob. *21st Century Church*. Kingsway Publications. Eastbourne. 1999. p197.

¹⁴⁰ Genesis 14, Hebrews 7.

¹⁴¹ Exodus 19:6.

¹⁴² Deuteronomy 5:4.

¹⁴³ Exodus 20:19.

the fact that the individual could, and should have had a personal relationship with God.

It seems that God permitted,¹⁴⁴ the transfer of this mediatory ministry to Moses. Notwithstanding this delegation, the Lord still desired a more personal relationship with His people and the opportunity was still available to individual Israelites to meet with God. For this purpose the tabernacle of meeting¹⁴⁵ is erected outside of the camp that “everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting”.¹⁴⁶ Unfortunately, it appears that only Moses and the young man Joshua availed themselves of this opportunity.¹⁴⁷ While Moses communed with God, the Israelites stood at their tent doors – watching. This is not unlike the way many modern Christians watch at a distance while their “minister” performs the religious duties. While Moses was in the mountain, receiving the commandments on their behalf, the people of Israel entered into idolatry.¹⁴⁸ The production of the golden calf was a consequence of Israel’s failure to enter into a personal relationship with God and also because the relationship that then existed was through the mediation of Moses. As soon as Moses ceased to be a tangible representative of God, they needed to create some other material medium by means of which they could relate to God. Note that the celebrations around the golden calf were still in honour of Yahweh,¹⁴⁹ but using the calf as a point of contact. It is as a direct result of this disobedience of the second command that the Levites volunteer as those who were “on the Lord’s side”¹⁵⁰ and avenge the Lord’s honour by killing many of the idolaters. Wellhausen says that “... this display of fidelity to God may partially account for the signal responsibilities given the tribe in the pentateuchal legislation.”¹⁵¹ In the same context Edersheim remarks: If Israel but obeyed God’s voice, and kept His covenant, there would be no need of a priesthood.¹⁵²

A brief analysis of the ministry of priests in the Old Testament reveals that their duties were:

¹⁴⁴ Exodus 24:6.

¹⁴⁵ Not to be confused with the Tabernacle which housed the Ark of the Covenant.

¹⁴⁶ Exodus 33:7.

¹⁴⁷ Exodus 33:11.

¹⁴⁸ Exodus 32.

¹⁴⁹ Exodus 32:5.

¹⁵⁰ Exodus 32:26.

¹⁵¹ Wellhausen, Julius. *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878; E.T. 1885) as quoted in *New Bible Dictionary*. IVP. 1962. London p1028.

¹⁵² Tatford, Fredk A. *Priesthood and Worship*. In *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. Watson, JB. (Ed.) John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p94.

- To transport, erect and serve in the tabernacle.
- To offer sacrifices.
- To represent the people before the Lord.

3.4 The Priesthood in the New Testament

On the day of Pentecost, Peter made reference to Joel's prophecy. Joel did not only announce the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but also promised that it would be on all flesh. This would result in a wide range of unlikely people being equipped for spiritual service. These would include sons, daughters, young men, old men, menservants and maidservants.¹⁵³ This is exactly what the New Testament priesthood is all about.

It is obvious, when one looks at the functions of Old Testament priests, that their ministry has been superseded by the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- There is no need for the service of the tabernacle as the church, and not a physical building is His temple.¹⁵⁴ Believers individually and corporately become a habitation of God's Spirit.¹⁵⁵
- The sacrificial system has been done away with because of Jesus' once for all sacrifice.¹⁵⁶
- There is one Mediator between God and man – the Man Christ Jesus¹⁵⁷ – Who ever lives to make intercession for us.¹⁵⁸

The New Testament is absolutely silent when it comes to nominating a priestly class.¹⁵⁹ The word translated "priest" in the New Testament is the Greek word *hierou*.¹⁶⁰ Other than it's use with reference to Old Testament priests as well as the Lord Jesus Christ's priesthood, the word is only ever used with reference to all believers as priests.¹⁶¹ Likewise the word "priesthood"¹⁶² is only used with reference to all believers, not a special class.¹⁶³ In fact on closer examination of the passage in Peter one will discover that those whom Peter calls a royal and holy priesthood are not

¹⁵³ Acts 2:66ff, Joel 2:28ff.

¹⁵⁴ 1Corinthians 3:16.

¹⁵⁵ 1Corinthians 6:19.

¹⁵⁶ Hebrews 10:12, 26.

¹⁵⁷ 1Timothy 2:5.

¹⁵⁸ Hebrews 7:25.

¹⁵⁹ Lightfoot, JB. *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. Macmillan and Co. London. 1903. p186.

¹⁶⁰ Strongs # 2409.

¹⁶¹ Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6.

¹⁶² Greek: *hierateuma*, Strongs #2406.

¹⁶³ 1Peter 2:5,9.

even mature believers. Peter admonishes them to lay "...aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking."¹⁶⁴ These traits, according to Paul, are signs of immaturity and carnality.¹⁶⁵ Peter also alludes to them as being "babes".¹⁶⁶ It is these very believers, who were squabbling amongst themselves, that Peter calls a royal and holy priesthood – clearly indicating that the New Testament priesthood is not something one is promoted to or achieves, but a position imparted to every believer as part and parcel of his new position in Christ.¹⁶⁷

The second etymological problem we have, is that the English word "priest" is not based on either the Greek or the Hebrew¹⁶⁸ words which are thus translated. It is in fact derived from the Greek "*presbuteros*"¹⁶⁹ which is translated as "elder" in most English translations. By no stretch of the imagination can any of the references to elders in the New Testament be construed to indicate that they were a different class from the flock, or that they were, even remotely, charged with some kind of priestly function.

Because every believer in the New Testament constitutes the royal / holy priesthood,¹⁷⁰ each believer has the responsibility to fulfil the spiritual dimensions of the priestly ministry. Lightfoot says: "Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength."¹⁷¹ Watson comments: "The New Testament knows nothing of a special sacerdotal caste distinguished from the laity (indeed, the word *laos* is used of all the people of God, and *kleros*, not of an official body, but of the special charge allocated to a particular worker)."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ 1Peter 2:1.

¹⁶⁵ 1Corinthians 3:3.

¹⁶⁶ 1Peter 2:2.

¹⁶⁷ For more detail on this subject see Chapter 4 of this work.

¹⁶⁸ Hebrew: *Cohen* Strong's #3548.

¹⁶⁹ Funk and Wagnall. *Practical "Standard" Dictionary of the English Language*. JG Ferguson and Associates. Chicago. 1945. p901.
Strong's #4850.

¹⁷⁰ 1Peter 2:5,9.

¹⁷¹ Lightfoot. *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. p181.

¹⁷² Tatford, Fredk A. *Priesthood and Worship*. In *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. Watson, JB. (Ed.) John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p102.

3.5 Functions of the Christian Priesthood

3.5.1 Draw Near to God

In the Old Testament only the priests could enter the tabernacle and the High Priest alone had access to the presence of God, once a year.¹⁷³ In churches with a clergy/laity system, believers have access to God and His graces through the intermediary priest. Even in churches that do not openly espouse the clergy/laity system, believers are, to varying degrees dependant on the minister to speak to them on God's behalf. In the New Testament, however, all believers have direct access to God through the finished work of the Cross.¹⁷⁴ Believers individually,¹⁷⁵ and corporately,¹⁷⁶ now become the habitation of the Lord, thus obviating the need of a physical temple. The first and prime function of the believer is to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith".¹⁷⁷ This he is privileged and responsible to do for Himself, recognising that there is "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus".¹⁷⁸ He can never abdicate this ministry to any other man, or even group of people – each must come for himself and that as frequently as possible "that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."¹⁷⁹

3.5.2 Offer Spiritual Sacrifices

Peter is plain that we "are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices"¹⁸⁰ These spiritual sacrifices take various forms:

3.5.2.1 Our whole being

We are "to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God".¹⁸¹ The word *present* here is a technical term for a priestly act.¹⁸² Inherent in the concept of sacrifice is the idea of the thing sacrificed, having to be put to death. We are called therefore to be constantly dying to ourselves and living to God. It may seem to be a contradiction, but we are called to dedicate ourselves totally, unreservedly and without question to Him who purchased us with His own blood. This sacrifice is not an attempt to buy or

¹⁷³ Exodus 30:10, Hebrews 9:7.

¹⁷⁴ Hebrews 10:19ff.

¹⁷⁵ 1Corinthians 6:19.

¹⁷⁶ 1Corinthians 3:16.

¹⁷⁷ Hebrews 10:22.

¹⁷⁸ 1Timothy 2:5.

¹⁷⁹ Hebrews 4:16.

¹⁸⁰ 1Pet 2:5.

¹⁸¹ Rom 12:1.

¹⁸² Tatford. *Priesthood and Worship*. p104

pay for our salvation – it is simply the logical expression of adoration to the One Who died for us. As David could not drink the water that had at such great risk been collected from the well at Bethlehem, but “poured it out unto the Lord”,¹⁸³ so we dare not consume our new-found life and freedom on selfish pursuits, but must, of necessity, pour ourselves out before Him as an act of worship and adoration.

3.5.2.2 Praise

Hebrews says “therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”.¹⁸⁴ This flies in the face of the modern assumption that praise is something that is designed primarily for the enjoyment of the Christian. Praise is not primarily for our enjoyment or pleasure. It is ever and always for Him, to Him and about Him. True praise may be sacrificial in that we may not always “feel” like praising and yet He is worthy of our praise, not because of how we feel, but because of who He is. In addition to sacrifices of atonement, other Old Testament sacrifices were acts of worship and of praise and so the New Testament priest must offer the sacrifice of praise. Peter clearly says that the reason we are priests, is that we may offer this sacrifice. It is not an optional part of our Christianity – it is the very essence of it. Again this ministry cannot be delegated to a minister, choir or worship team. Each believer must do this for himself and do so continually.

3.5.2.3 Prayer

Very closely associated with sacrifice in the Old Testament was the burning of incense. Psalm 141:2 says: “Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” In the Apocalypse we read that “the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.”¹⁸⁵ Another of the privileges and responsibilities of the New Testament priest is to pray and to intercede, not just for himself¹⁸⁶ but also for others.¹⁸⁷ This is the New Testament version of the mediatory function of the priest. As much as we are enjoined to pray for one another, each must avail himself of the privilege of making our requests known before God, with thanksgiving.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ 2Samuel 23:16.

¹⁸⁴ Hebrews 13:15.

¹⁸⁵ Revelation 8:4.

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 6:12.

¹⁸⁷ 1Timothy 2:1.

¹⁸⁸ Philippians 4:6.

3.5.2.4 Gifts

Paul speaks about the gifts the Philippians had sent him as “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God”.¹⁸⁹ Hebrews 13:16 encourages us not to “forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”.

Giving of our possessions often requires sacrifice and for this reason many shy away from it. The New Testament church was very careful about fulfilling their responsibilities towards those in need. Such included the widows and orphans, believers in need and full-time workers. The text from Hebrews makes it clear that the sacrifice of giving is not for man’s pleasure (although the recipient is blessed and it is more blessed to give than to receive), but that God is pleased when we are faithful in this area. Again it must be stressed that this is not in order to buy favour with God or to pay our dues, it is part of our worship and service as priests to the One we worship.

3.5.2.5 Fulfilling a Unique Ministry

In addition to the general ministries of priests, each Levitical priestly order also had a specific function they were responsible for. These functions related to the many duties in and around the Tabernacle that could only be performed by priests. In the New Testament we all have general functions as priests which we have referred to in the paragraphs above. In addition to these, each of us also may have a specific function, ministry or gift for which we are responsible. There are twenty or more different gifts mentioned in the New Testament.¹⁹⁰ In addition there are a host of other areas of service such as the presentation of a hymn or psalm, public reading of the scriptures, making tea, keeping the books etc. Without each member playing its part, the body will be sadly lacking and will not be able to fully realise its holy and high calling.¹⁹¹

3.6 Equal but Different

The New Testament does not teach of a special class of believer who is set in a position of pre-eminence above other believers. On the contrary Jesus announced a radical change from the world’s way of doing things by saying

...You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And

¹⁸⁹ Philippians 4:18.

¹⁹⁰ Summerton, Neil. *Local Churches for a New Century*. Partnership Publications. London 1996. p15.

¹⁹¹ 1Corinthians 12.

whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...¹⁹²

He explicitly prohibits calling anyone on earth Rabbi, father or teacher. By this he was teaching that no man is to be elevated to a position which would take the place of God – Father, Son or Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is interesting to note how easily Christendom has ignored both the precept and the principle of this teaching. Rather than a priestly class Jesus promotes a servant class. To the disciples the question always revolved around precedence – who is the greatest¹⁹³ – Jesus stresses being least, service and the promotion of the welfare of others.

Although the New Testament teaches that all believers are equal, it also teaches that believers are different, with differing gifts.¹⁹⁴ Thus the elder who has the responsibility to oversee the church has to do so as an equal, more, a servant. This presents a challenge, especially for those with public gifts such as preachers, to not view themselves as a special professional class above their brothers, but simply to exercise their gifts as members of the body.¹⁹⁵ This presents a dichotomy which is probably the biggest challenge to any servant of the church – how to fulfil a responsibility without wielding authority. For those who receive ministry, the challenge is to submit to the ministry, without elevating the man.

Jesus and the Apostles taught that distinctions between people is based on function. Such distinction has nothing to do with whether a man is full-time or not, or whether he is educated or not – it is purely based on the function or ministry he fulfils in the congregation. It is human to attach status to certain functions, such as apostles, yet Paul says that “God has displayed us, the apostles, last”.¹⁹⁶ It seems that the greater the visibility and authority vested in the gift, the more God builds in checks and balances so that there is less opportunity for pride and arrogance. So Paul speaks of a thorn given to him in the flesh lest he “be exalted above measure”.¹⁹⁷ Using the image of the human body he says: “...God composed the body, having given greater honour to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body”.¹⁹⁸ Therefore in status all are the same, yet, with different functions.

¹⁹² Matthew 20:25-28.

¹⁹³ Mark 10:37.

¹⁹⁴ Romans 12:6; 1Corinthians 12:5.

¹⁹⁵ Gibbs. *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*. p30.

¹⁹⁶ 1Corinthians 4:9.

¹⁹⁷ 2Corinthians 12:7.

¹⁹⁸ 1Corinthians 12:25,26.

3.7 Does Each Believer Have a Function?

This question is often debated by those who strive after a church running along New Testament lines. The views are divergent and range from what borders on “one man ministry” to a situation where each member is coerced into participation. Although we can derive some principles from the New Testament, we must allow for variation based on the gifts, personalities and dynamics present in each group of believers.

The word “each” is used 35 times and the phrase “one another” is used 79 times in the New King James Version of the New Testament¹⁹⁹ in the context of our duty towards the body of Christ. Let’s examine a few of the texts.

1Corinthians 12:11 “...the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills”. There is a tendency amongst some modern churches to dispense gifts by the whim of the leaders. People are prayed and prophesied over by people who have the gift of “impartation”. The prerogative to give a gift and to determine what that gift will be is entirely up to the Holy Spirit and although the Corinthians are encouraged to “desire the best gifts”, it is not up to us to determine what that gift is or will be. This is emphasised later in the same passage; “God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased”.²⁰⁰

1Corinthians 14:26 “Whenever you come together, *each* of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation”. What could be clearer? It does not say some, or the leaders, but each one has a contribution to make to the meeting. Some dodge this scripture by speaking about those who act in a representative capacity. That is exactly what the priesthood of the believer is not about.

Philippians 2:4 “Let *each* of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” The job of looking out for others’ interest is not the sole duty of those with a pastoral ministry. Each believer has to do so. This does not teach a theoretical response either, it calls for a practical lifestyle which places the interests

¹⁹⁹ Based on a physical count of only those occurrences of the words as they appear in the above contexts in the New King James Version. An computerized search engine was used to find the occurrences after which each was examined for its context.

²⁰⁰ 1Corinthians 12:18.

and needs of others above our own. This is surely the essence of that which Jesus did in taking upon Himself the form of a servant in order to save us.

Ephesians 4:16 "...from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." There is little escape from the directness of this verse. Clearly Paul indicates that every member of the church has a part to play – there should be neither passengers nor spare parts. Obviously, this process cannot be forced and new, shy and carnal believers must be given grace to grow to a point where they are able to participate fully in the life of the church.

Christians speak of "pew-warmers" in jest, yet the truth is that it is the most common "ministry" in many churches. This did not seem to be the practice in the New Testament churches and it certainly is not the intended teaching of the epistles. The prime function of ministry gifts is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry or as translated in the NIV: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up".²⁰¹

Watchman Nee says that it would be very difficult to find many like Paul who had five talents and local churches may wait a lifetime to have such a "five talent" visit them even once. Yet every redeemed person has one talent unless he has buried it. That means that if only six believers gather together and each brings his one talent, the church will have more than they would have had if they had waited for the man with the five talents.²⁰² This illustrates the tremendous riches that are available to the church when every member plays it's part.

...the ideal is that every member of the church should have his or her function within that life and witness made plain, then recognition becomes the open acknowledgement by the congregation of the formal place of each of its members. In this way the churches can be revolutionised by a partnership of grace in which every member has his or her own function to fulfil, without jealousy or frustration, and where the Holy Spirit will weld the individual gifts of the many into a united testimony to His power.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Ephesians 4:12 (NIV).

²⁰² Nee. *Revive Thy Work*. p182.

²⁰³ Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. p272.

3.8 Same Gift, but Not Same Measure

In discussing church structure and order we must ever bear in mind that God is a God of infinite wisdom and variety. Even nature teaches us that no two creatures are identical – all are different. Not even two of a man's ten fingers are exactly the same. Also no two members in the church are exactly the same.²⁰⁴ Therefore we cannot create a mould and insist that all elders, teachers or deacons must exactly fit that mould. As each individual is different, so the gift of God in him is different. Peter, Matthew and John were all Apostles and yet each was different, had a different emphasis and a different calling. Jesus makes this clear when after the resurrection Peter questions Him on His intentions for John. Jesus replied: "If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me".²⁰⁵

This infinite variety in ministries also encompasses a variety of "measure". That means that some may have a gifting which allows them to have greater influence, more "results", preach more prolifically or reach further around the globe than others. Even in the same church, no two elders will have the same influence on that church. That does not make the one inferior to the other, or the one more important than the other. God chooses, calls and equips as He wills.²⁰⁶ Therefore we should never measure one ministry by another or one person's gift by another. 2Corinthians 10:12 says: "But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." Thus none is to compare himself to or model his ministry on that of another, not even of men in the New Testament!

In the parables of the giving of the talents Jesus plainly taught that one received five, one received two and the other received one.²⁰⁷ He did not expect the same return from the servant with the one as he did from the servant with the five. He only required that each use what he was given and deliver a return to the master. He distributed the talents based on the several ability of each servant.²⁰⁸ In the same way Christ gives gifts to people based on His knowledge of their limitations and potential and His demands of each is well within each one's ability. Often people compare one preacher to another or one pastor to another and wonder why the one does not do this or that like the other. The answer is simple, it is because each one is unique in order to fulfil a

²⁰⁴ 1Corinthians 4:7.

²⁰⁵ John 21:22.

²⁰⁶ 1Corinthians 12:11.

²⁰⁷ Matthew 25:14-29.

²⁰⁸ Matthew 25:15.

very specific task to which each is called. Young preachers often fall into the trap of emulating some great preacher. This should never be – each should, and can only, be what the Lord has made them to be – anything else is false.

3.9 A Theocracy Not a Democracy

Some assume that the priesthood of every believer and the equality of believers is just another way of expressing a democratic form of rule. Many seem to feel that the principles of democracy are fundamentally Biblical. This cannot be farther from the truth. At no stage in the history of God's dealings with the people of Israel or of the church did He ever institute a democratic form of rule. The only hint of democracy is found in Acts 6 when the multitude is instructed to "...seek out from among you seven men...".²⁰⁹ Note that this process, although having a semblance of democracy happened under the instruction and direction of the Apostles who were not elected officials, but appointed by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Those who were chosen were recognised because of the gifts the Lord had vested in them and not on the basis of popularity or any electioneering. In no other instance when ministries were appointed or recognised was an election held, but men were recognised by incumbent leaders.

A democracy is popularly defined as a government of the people, for the people, by the people – thus making it man centred. The church is to be Christ centred and all its offices, functions and ministries must be of Christ, for Christ and by Christ or as Paul puts it "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever".²¹⁰

The church is a theocracy which means that it stands directly under the authority of, and is controlled by God. God alone, as sovereign, selects those to whom He delegates various responsibilities. These He calls, equips, directs and authorises to carry out the work to which He calls them. This is clearly illustrated in Moses, whom God had prepared for 80 years in anticipation of the day he would be commissioned to lead the people out of Egypt. On a number of occasions Moses' position was challenged by would-be leaders, yet God sovereignly upheld Moses' position without fail. Finally, Israel exercised her democratic options by voting 599998 against, and 2

²⁰⁹ Acts 6:3.

²¹⁰ Romans 11:36.

for, the crossing of the Jordan.²¹¹ As a result, all but Joshua and Caleb perished in the wilderness.

There are some who presume that the priesthood of all believers means that all are to have an equal say in all areas for the life of the church. This takes many forms. Some will insist that all must have a say in matters of doctrine and that each one can formulate his own doctrines and theology. This cannot be else there would be no need for those who are given to the church as teachers.²¹² Others will insist that all must have equal say in matters of leadership, yet there are those who have been called specifically to lead.²¹³ 1Corinthians 12 and 14 highlight the problems of disorder and chaos which can erupt when the church becomes an anarchistic mob-rule democracy. These chapters call specifically for order²¹⁴ and for each to exercise his particular gift within clearly defined guidelines.²¹⁵ The eye cannot hear neither can the hand see, therefore each must operate within the limitations of his particular gifting. That does not mean that ministries must be so compartmentalised as to render them ineffective and it is obvious that there are areas of overlap. If the body has no eye, the hand may have to use its abilities to guide the body along its path and so if there are certain lacks in the church, those needs could well be supplied by a member who has a related gift but will never be as effective as one who has been equipped in that particular area. Paul, by a rhetorical question²¹⁶ emphasises that all are not apostles, all are not prophets, all are not teachers etc.²¹⁶

3.10 Making it Work

Although most Christians will agree with much of what we have expressed thus far, the problem lies with the application. Even the Romanist says: "The universal priesthood of all believers is the foundation that makes it possible for the laity to participate in all ecumenical council.

The doctrine of the universal priesthood is part of the fundamental truths of Catholic ecclesiology. ... Catholics believe that all Christians are called to the ecumenical council by divine convocation, that they are called as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."²¹⁷

²¹¹ Numbers 14.

²¹² Ephesians 4:11.

²¹³ Romans 12:8.

²¹⁴ 1Corinthians 14:14.

²¹⁵ 1Corinthians 14:29.

²¹⁶ 1Corinthians 12:29.

²¹⁷ Küng, Hans. *Structures of the Church*. Burns & Oates. London. 1965. p85.

He continues on p121: "Catholic theology convincingly supports the principle of universal priesthood of all believers. Each human being becomes a full member of the Body of Christ

In spite of these assertions we know that the Roman church is probably the prime example of a hierarchical structure which has all but relegated believers to a paying audience who watch the priesthood perform their duties. But lest we be too harsh on them, almost every protestant church will preach that they believe in the priesthood of every believer, yet in practice, most support some form of hierarchical structure.

In order for this theory, which most subscribe to, to become a reality in the daily life of an assembly, major changes need to take place.

Firstly, those who hold clerical positions need to be totally committed to revolutionise their relationship with the flock. This will require major sacrifices and take time to bring into operation. Without total dedication and a willingness to set aside the privileges of "the cloth" this would be almost impossible to achieve.

Secondly, if the leaders are truly committed, they need to teach the congregation the theory, but more, the practice of this way of operation. At times this could require leaving things undone and keeping silent when no-one else will come forward. Encouraging individuals to find their own gifting and bearing with mistakes as people begin to stumble along unknown paths needs to be accepted as part of the process.

Thirdly, every member needs to be convinced in his or her own heart of the correctness of this way of working. Without this conviction, they may easily become discouraged when faced with a less than "professional" performance in one area or the other or when the responsibility of their particular role begins to require personal sacrifice. Sometimes the largest challenge lies in getting the whole church to take ownership of its own destiny under the direct headship of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer encourages us that "Christian Brotherhood is not an ideal we must realize: it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate".²¹⁸

through the Gospel, through the Sacrament of Baptism, and through faith enlivened by the Spirit. He shares in the royal priesthood of Christ. He is born to the priesthood, chosen, sanctified, and consecrated; in short, he belongs to the holy people who had formerly not obtained mercy but now have it (1 Pet. 2:9f). The universal priesthood is activated in the service of the word of God, which it is the duty of each Christian to proclaim, both in his private life and in the Church."

²¹⁸ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. Harper and Row. 1954. p30.

3.11 The Glorious Future²¹⁹

The conclusion of the priestly ministry will only be seen in the Millennial Kingdom: Jesus Christ will sit on His throne as both King and Priest.²²⁰ Israel “shall be named the priests of the Lord, They shall call you the servants of our God”²²¹ and the church “shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years”.²²²

²¹⁹ Tatford. *Priesthood and Worship*. p107.

²²⁰ Zechariah 6:13.

²²¹ Isaiah 61:6.

²²² Revelation 20:6.

Chapter 4

Authority in the Church

4.1 Jesus Christ – the Head of the Church

The matter of the headship of the church would seem to be a matter which is beyond debate and yet it has not escaped contradiction in theory as well as in practice. It has been attacked by “evangelical feminists”²²³ in the theoretical and by humanistic, management-oriented churches in the practical.

Col 1:18 says “...He is the head of the body, the church”. For the feminist the question revolves around the nature of that headship. Some would like it to mean that when it speaks of Him being the head it refers to Him as the source of the church. “Wayne Grudem in an extensive study of ancient Greek sources has shown decisively that the meaning of “head” as “ruler” or “person of superior authority or rank” is quite common. Furthermore, there are no instances where “head” is used in the sense of source. To say that Christ is the head of the church is not to say that He is the source of the church. Rather it is saying that He is the sovereign Lord of the church.²²⁴ And as such is the one who has supreme authority over it, but also cares for, directs and coordinates it exactly as does the head of the physical body. This headship covers every area of the life of the church and even extends beyond the church to embrace all things in heaven and on earth.²²⁵

The headship of Christ is subtly undermined by all who set themselves up as some kind of final authority in the church. This would include the Papist who claims that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ as well as the Charismatic who claims that the “senior

²²³ Fish, John H III. *The Life of the Local Church*. In *Understanding the Church*. M Vogel and John H Fish III (Eds) Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p114.

²²⁴ Fish. *The Life of the Local Church*. p115.

²²⁵ Ephesians 1, Colossians 1.

pastor of each ... church exercises headship in the local church".²²⁶ In practice many believers have set their minister or pastor in a position where he has to act as the representative of Christ in exercising headship in the congregation. All these will deny that they have usurped the position of the Lord Jesus in any way and yet the truth is that they have. Some will speak of the importance of delegated authority and how Christ has delegated His authority to certain people within the church.²²⁷ Therefore any rebellion against these (powerful) men is rebellion against the Lord.

The arguments that are used to support the concept of "delegated authority" are based on bad exegesis of the scriptures. Reference is made to Matthew 28:18,19. Jesus did not say that He was delegating authority to a particular group within the church in respect of their peers, but that all authority was given to Him and that, as a result, He was sending them out to make disciples. Romans 13:1-3 is also used as a basis for this theory. However Romans 13 makes no statement about the church and authority within the church – it teaches on the role of civil authorities and our relationship to earthly governments and their agents.

While it is true that believers are required by scripture to submit to one another²²⁸ as well as to those who stand before them,²²⁹ the converse cannot be concluded. In the world and its systems, authority is the converse of submission and those to whom one submits has authority. In the Kingdom however, this is not true. While the New Testament teaches submission it actually teaches against the wielding or even the use of authority within the church, other than references to the Lord Jesus being the supreme and sovereign authority. There is no scripture that teaches elders or leaders to have authority in the churches, while there are a number of scriptures that warn against the abuse of authority.

Setting a man up as the head of a church is a serious mistake because Jesus Christ is the head to the believer and to the church and any attempt by man to take a position between Christ and man is rebellion against Him and is a usurping of His Divinely appointed position. He desires a personal relationship with each church and with each believer individually and nothing may ever interfere with this sacred relationship.

²²⁶ Daniel, Paul. *His People Christian Ministries*. In *The New Apostolic Churches*. C Peter Wagner (Ed). Regal Books. Ventura. 1998. p234.

²²⁷ Nee, Watchman. *Spiritual Authority*. Christian Fellowship Publishers. New York. 1972. pp115 – 191.

²²⁸ 1Peter 5:5.

²²⁹ Hebrews 13:17.

Therefore, we must not only give intellectual acquiesce to the headship of Christ over His church, but we must also allow this theory to be worked out in practice. This can only become a reality when firstly each believer is in a constant, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.²³⁰ Secondly, when each member is in submission to every other member.²³¹ Thirdly, when each believer fulfils the role he has been called to within the body,²³² and fourthly, when leaders take their place as servants²³³ of the church and not as lords over it.²³⁴ We need to allow Him to speak to us personally and corporately through the whole church and not just through one or two selected ones. Many have experienced God, at times, speaking true wisdom through the most unlikely and insignificant members of the church and that in the presence of far more gifted and experienced preachers. These gems, and pivotal pieces of the mind of God could have been missed, should we not give place to each member. It is interesting that after Saul's Damascus Road experience, in spite of a personal encounter with the risen Christ, he is sent to wait for further help. This help came to him, not by a voice from heaven, but by an apparently insignificant brother – Ananias. Thus the great Apostle learns the importance of Christ speaking through, and using, all the members of the church to do His work.

4.2 Every Man for Himself

In reaction to the abuse of authority in some churches, there is a groundswell in some quarters of reaction leading to a rejection of all forms of submission. These over-emphasize the personal relationship of the believer with Christ at the expense of the corporate life of the assembly.

One of the arguments that is used to support this view is that of Israel before they became a monarchy. Reference is also made to the time Israel was in Egypt before the Exodus and the time of the Judges when "there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes".²³⁵ They argue that if God was able to keep Israel for hundreds of years without leaders and with each man doing his own thing, then He can do it in the Twenty First Century as well. An honest reading of these scriptures will reveal the spiritual bankruptcy, political subservience and economic poverty of Israel

²³⁰ Colossians 2:19.

²³¹ Ephesians 5:21.

²³² Ephesians 4:16.

²³³ Matthew 23:11.

²³⁴ 1Peter 5:3.

²³⁵ Judges 17:6, 19:1, 21:25.

during these times plus the fact that this is not a positive comment, but rather, a negative statement. The problem was not that Israel had no King, but rather that they had rejected the headship of God and the authority of Torah. By no stretch of the imagination can these years be defined as Israel's golden years. (By contrast Israel reached its zenith under the kingship of David and Solomon.) It is no wonder that those who espouse this point of view find themselves in the same chaotic state as Israel during this time. Of course God has and can lead and keep His people in the absence of the church, gifts and the Word, but He has chosen to work through the gifts He has provided for our well-being. To suggest that each man is self sufficient and that it is correct for each to do what is right in his own eyes, is to forget that even "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes".²³⁶

The second argument hangs on Jeremiah 31:33 which says: "No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother". This promise is specifically made to Israel and Judah (v31) and has specific reference to the Millennial Kingdom. It cannot be applied to the church. The whole sentence says: "No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord." This verse does not refer to teaching the Word or the Law, but simply says that it would be superfluous to bring people into a relationship with God, because they will all be in that relationship already.

The third scripture that is used is 1John 2:27 "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him" John writes these words against the background of the Gnostics and other heretics who claimed that they had knowledge to impart to the Christians outside that which had been delivered to them by the Apostles. John emphasizes the veracity of that which the Apostles had taught²³⁷ and the need for the believers not to move away from those fundamentals.²³⁸ John does not make a case against godly teachers, but against false teachers, who teach contrary to the Apostles doctrine. In John's third letter he encourages the believers to receive itinerant ministries and castigates Diotrephes for not receiving valid ministry

²³⁶ Proverbs 12:15.

²³⁷ 1John 1:1-3.

²³⁸ 1John 1:24.

from outside the local church.²³⁹ The rest of the epistles all uphold the value of teachers and other ministries to the churches.

The fourth argument revolves around being “led by the spirit” and freedom from legalism. One such writer says: “...as we are continually led by the Spirit ... and wait in painful silence before God, ...which Bible version did Moses, Abraham, Elijah etc use again? How on earth did they hear God?”²⁴⁰ The most popular reply when questioning extra-biblical practices in modern churches is: “the spirit made me do it” or “the spirit told me so”.

The church at Corinth is a clear example of what can happen when believers cast all restraint to the wind and follow, what they perceive to be, the leading of the spirit. Paul calls them to order, as God is not the author of confusion but of peace.²⁴¹ He is very clear that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”.²⁴² In the Old Testament the Spirit came upon a person which resulted in ecstatic utterances and actions. When this happened, men did supernatural things and were clearly under the control of God’s Spirit. In this state Balaam speaks what he did not want to²⁴³ and Saul and his servants were powerless to fulfil their evil intentions towards David.²⁴⁴ In the New Testament the Spirit does not come upon men to control them, but rather empowers them from within.²⁴⁵ For this reason Paul says that the prophet is in control and can choose whether he is going to act in an orderly or disorderly manner. Prophets can decide to keep silent or to speak.²⁴⁶ Thus the individual must make cognitive decisions as to what is right or wrong. The only way he will know right from wrong is by having been taught the Word²⁴⁷ and by being in submission to the other members of the body.²⁴⁸

The kind of free-for-all anarchy proposed by many in the house church and “no-church” movements has very little to do with biblical Christianity and leads only to

²³⁹ 3John 9,10.

²⁴⁰ Dyer, Jeremy. Swanepoel, Sutton, Boot *et al.* *Church Without Churches*, (Online Discussion Group) Reply to Tradition or Torah. Churchwithoutchurches@yahoogroups.com. 6/08/02. jldyer2001@yahoo.com.

²⁴¹ 1Corinthians 12:33.

²⁴² 1Corinthians 14:32.

²⁴³ Numbers 23.

²⁴⁴ 1Samuel 19.

²⁴⁵ John 14:17, Acts 1:8.

²⁴⁶ 1Corinthians 14:28,30.

²⁴⁷ Hebrews 5:12-14.

²⁴⁸ 1Corinthians 14:29,30.

confusion, error, hurt and the dishonouring of the name of our Lord. While the New Testament does not encourage the abuse of authority, it does not encourage mob-rule either.

4.3 Humble Leaders²⁴⁹

That God has placed in the church various ministries to provide for the many needs of His people, is by-and-large, undisputed. How these men relate to the rest of the body, however, is the problem. Clearly, they have responsibility and at the same time are not in positions of authority. How then does one balance the heart of a servant with the need for proper oversight in the church?

4.3.1 A Paradigm Shift

Authoritarian leaders as well as the proponents of hierarchically structured churches often refer to the way in which leaders functioned in the Old Testament as support for their views on leadership. Men like Moses, Gideon and David become role models and modern leaders emulate the leadership styles of these men. Others will refer to the pyramidal structure suggested to Moses by Jethro for the administration of the people of Israel.²⁵⁰ While Old Testament leaders are to be admired and we can learn much from them, we do see a clear shift of emphasis in the New Testament.

Jesus' disciples steeped in the Old Testament style of doing things, jockeyed for position and status in the Kingdom.²⁵¹ In Matthew 20, responding to Salome's request for positions of authority for her two sons, Jesus announced a change in the whole dynamic behind leadership:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.²⁵²

This statement is pivotal to understanding leadership in the New Testament because the whole relationship between leaders and followers as well as the measures for evaluating greatness was in the process of changing. Concerning John the Baptist

²⁴⁹ I shall, for the purpose of this chapter, deal with "leaders" as a generic term which embraces all those ministries that would lead the local church, whether they be pastors, teachers or any other gifted ones.

²⁵⁰ Exodus 18.

²⁵¹ Mark 10:37.

²⁵² Matthew 20:25-28.

Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he".²⁵³ On another occasion the disciples, obsessed with the issue of greatness asked Jesus who the greatest is in the Kingdom. Setting a little child before them He replied: "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven".²⁵⁴ Thus Jesus turns the world's concept of greatness and leadership on its head and introduces the concept of the servant-leader.

4.3.2 The Suffering Servant

During His first coming, Jesus came not as the King, but as the suffering servant and thus sets an example for us to follow. The Jews had the two comings of Jesus confused and could not understand the difference between His first coming as the Son of Joseph – the Servant and the second when He will come as the Son of David and the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In the same way some Christians are confused between their role on earth today and their future positions of authority and power during the millennial kingdom.

For the first thirty years of Jesus' life He served in menial tasks in the household and workshop of His earthly parents. He is completely obedient to Mary and Joseph²⁵⁵ and does their bidding, doing mundane chores around the home, serving His apprenticeship, serving His customers etc.

Even once His ministry started, he still did not call upon His Divine prerogative to order people about and to wield His authority. Instead He quietly goes about ministering to the needs of people, acutely aware of their frailty, hunger and suffering. He is not aloof from the people, living a life of privilege and of social elevation. Instead He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross".²⁵⁶

As they came to the upper room for the Last Supper, not one of the twelve was prepared to wash the feet of the others. Each felt he was superior to the next and none

²⁵³ Matthew 11:11.

²⁵⁴ Matthew 18:4.

²⁵⁵ His obedience to His parents can be deduced from the fact that He had fully kept the Law of which the honouring of parents is part. (Exodus 20:12).

²⁵⁶ Philippians 2:7,8.

was prepared to be seen as weak and a servant of his peers. Even at this late hour the question of ascendancy was still not settled in their minds. Jesus then laid aside His garments and girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet. This, being one of the last interactions with them, was intended to make a very deep and lasting impression upon them. In concluding this object lesson Jesus said:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.²⁵⁷

He thus emphasized that understanding the concepts around servanthood and putting them into practice, are two different things. It is not recorded that He ever taught the disciples how to handle authority or how to act as great men. Instead there is much recorded about His teaching them how to suffer and to serve.

The foregoing does not mean that Jesus was weak or did not have authority. The mere fact that people followed Him reveals that they recognised that He was a true leader. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, they said of Him that "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes".²⁵⁸

4.3.3 Servant-leaders

Paul displayed the same heart of a servant in his ministry, making tents rather than placing demands on the churches. He writes much about the responsibility of leaders to set an example and nothing about their having to wield authority. He speaks of himself as "less than the least of the saints"²⁵⁹ and that he had made himself a servant of all.²⁶⁰ When the Corinthians, by their arrogance, provoked Paul to assert his authority by virtue of his relationship to them²⁶¹ wrote that it was folly to do so,²⁶² but that there seemed to be no other way to get the message home.

In teaching Timothy how to treat errant members of the church he says: "Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older

²⁵⁷ John 13:14-17.

²⁵⁸ Matthew 7:29.

²⁵⁹ Ephesians 3:8.

²⁶⁰ 1Corinthians 9:19.

²⁶¹ 2Corinthians 10.

²⁶² 2Corinthians 11:1.

women as mothers, younger as sisters...”²⁶³ When Paul advised Timothy how to handle older believers who may be awkward to deal with he did not tell him to take authority in the situation, but simply: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”.²⁶⁴ Paul does tell Titus to preach with authority. Preaching with authority and wielding authority however, are entirely different matters as the authority lies in our message, not in ourselves.²⁶⁵

Peter deals with the position of elders in detail in 1Pet 5:1-3:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

A few important details must be stressed about this passage. It is imperative to note that Peter does not refer to elders being *over* the flock, but twice uses the word *among*. Notice that he does not position himself as an Apostle or superior, but simply as a “fellow elder”, reminding them not of the fact that he had witnessed the resurrected Lord (which he had), but that he was a witness to His sufferings. He does not speak of their authority as elders, and even when acting as overseers, they are to do so from the platform of service and were to lead by example.

Not only does Peter express the position of leaders as being servants, but also warns that they are not to be lords or masters. This word “lords”²⁶⁶ is used four times in the New Testament. Jesus used it in Math 20:25 and Mark 10:42 in describing the manner in which the Gentiles dominate those who are under them. In Acts 19:16 it is used in connection with the sons of Sceva who attempted to exorcise a demon. The demon then “overcame” or “overpowered” them. Leaders must not overpower people and control them by force, manipulation, fear or any of the many ways in which leaders dominate people. Leaders are not to dominate but are to serve. One of the most damaging waves that have hit the church in the last 50 years is the abuse of power by

²⁶³ 1Timothy 5:1,2.

²⁶⁴ 1Timothy 4:12.

²⁶⁵ 2Corinthians 4:5-7.

²⁶⁶ Strongs # 2634, *katakuriuo* is translated as “exercise dominion over” once, “overcome” once, “be lord over” once and “exercise lordship over” once. It means
 1) to bring under one’s power, to subject one’s self, to subdue, master
 2) to hold in subjection, to be master of, exercise lordship over – Thayer, Joseph. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. (Electronic).

church leaders. These range from the “heavy shepherding”, practiced in many groups, to the extreme control of Jim Jones and David Koresh. Even a mild form of heavy shepherding is toxic to the faith of the believer and is, in fact, a usurping of the role and authority of Jesus Christ in the life of that believer.

4.3.4 Under and Not Over

As long as leaders stand above believers, they *ipso facto* stand between the Christian and the Lord Jesus Christ. From this mediatorial position they are expected to dispense God’s wisdom, direction, word and care to the flock. In some denominations they are even expected to intercede for the people with God. Such leaders are dependant on the flock and the flock are dependant on the leaders.

Leaders who dominate need the flock to provide for them financially, stroke their egos and be willing supporters as the leaders work toward their personal goals – often sold to the believers as “the vision”. In many other ways the minister needs the congregation, and needs its submission to him. In order for the leader to sustain his position, he ensures that the members remain dependant on him and that they never rise to a spiritual plane where his role could become superfluous. Thus it is in the authoritarian leader’s best interest to not grow the believer to a position where the believer’s relationship with Jesus Christ is so strong, that he becomes redundant. Doubtless, no one does this consciously and yet the reality in many churches proves that this co-dependency is very real.

On the other hand it is a lot easier for the congregation to hire their personal chaplain, to enquire of the Lord, preach a nice sermon once a week, visit them when they are sick, marry their children and bury their dead than for each believer to walk in humble dependence upon his Lord and Master. This is what went wrong at Sinai, when the people delegated Moses to hear from God, while they got on with their mundane lives instead of walking in a dynamic relationship with Him. By this we do not mean that ministers (servants) should not serve the congregation in these ways, but rather, that this is no reason for the individual believer to abdicate his own responsibility to maintain that relationship.

If, however, the leaders take their position as servants to the church the whole picture is reversed. The position of a servant is under, not over the one being served. From this stance, the leader cannot interfere or get in the way of the believer’s relationship

with Christ. Instead of fighting to maintain his position between Jesus and the church, he should be pushing believers closer to the Lord, until each of those believers is able to also take the position of a servant to the church. Instead of working at keeping his job, he should be working himself out of a job. This is the principle behind Paul's journeys. He never remained in one position for so long that believers could become dependant upon him. Look at the Ephesians, where he had spent more time than anywhere else,²⁶⁷ except his "home" assembly. The Ephesians were the most likely church to become dependant on Paul because of the time he had spent in their city. However, when the time came for him to be taken to Rome, he was fully confident of their ability to continue without him and he places the responsibility of the fellowship's protection and care with the local elders.²⁶⁸

Ephesians 4, which majors on the *church* and not, as some suppose, on the ministries, defines the duty of the gift-ministries, "...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry..."²⁶⁹ The NIV translates this verse: "... to prepare God's people for works of service..." For too long the clergy and commentators have defined the duty of ministries in terms of the misplaced comma in the KJV which says: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ", creating the impression that the ministries have three functions of which the second is to do the work of the ministry. Yet verses 7 and 16, in particular and the whole chapter in general, emphasizes the role of each member and not just that of the ministries listed in verse 11. MacArthur supports this view:

Paul's language indicates that it is not the gifted men who have the most direct responsibility to do the work of service... The leader's purpose in God's plan is not to try to meet all those needs himself but to equip the people given into his care to meet those needs (cf. v. 16, where this idea is emphasized) ... Spiritual service is the work of every Christian, every saint of God. Attendance is a poor substitute for participation in ministry.²⁷⁰

4.3.5 Titles

In Matthew 23:8-10 Jesus said:

But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ.

²⁶⁷ Two years and three months – Acts 19:8-10.

²⁶⁸ Acts 20:25-28.

²⁶⁹ Ephesians 4:12.

²⁷⁰ MacArthur, John F. *New Testament Commentary – Ephesians*. Moody Bible Institute. Chicago. 1986. p155.

On the surface of this statement we have an explicit command to not take any of these the three titles “master” or “rabbi”, “father” and “teacher”. At the same time He is establishing a principle: “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (w11,12). The principle is that in taking a title, we exalt ourselves above our brethren and this will bring the chastisement of the Lord (humbling). Titles set us apart from our fellows and reinforce the clergy/laity system. It does not matter what that title may be, if it is anything other than “brother”, it remains a title and serves to elevate and divide. Even “brother” could become a problem when everyone else is called by their first name except the “pastor” who becomes “brother” so-and-so. This principle does not mitigate against the recognition of ministries as illustrated in Paul. In his epistles he refers to himself as *an apostle* and on a number of occasions refers to himself as “Paul an apostle”,²⁷¹ but he is never referred to as “*the apostle Paul*” as has become traditional. Notice the affection and respect with which Peter speaks of the great apostle without using any titles: “...as also our beloved brother Paul... has written to you”.²⁷²

The passage also deals with prominent seats in the meeting place. The principle Jesus is dealing with embraces anything that could set a minister apart as different from, or superior to, the congregation. This would include things such as robes, special seats in the meeting place and even a parking space reserved for his exclusive use.

The word “minister” has come to mean some kind of official or manager in the church. The dictionaries define a minister as “...one who is authorised to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances of the Church; a clergyman...”²⁷³ and as “...a clergyman; the head, or assistant to the head, of several religious orders...”²⁷⁴ Yet the Biblical use of the word is diametrically opposite. It simply and literally means a “servant”. The Greek word *diakonos* is most often translated “minister” and sometimes transliterated as “deacon”. The most basic meaning is to “wait at tables”, “to serve” or to “care for”.²⁷⁵ In all its derivations and nuances this word is one of servility and never one of superiority or of ruling. We evidently have a problem in using this word in modern churches as it has taken on a different meaning to that which was intended.

²⁷¹ 2Corinthians 1:1, Galatians 1:1, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1Timothy 1:1.

²⁷² 1Peter 3:15.

²⁷³ Funk and Wagnall. *Practical “Standard” Dictionary of the English Language*. p732.

²⁷⁴ Schwarz, Catherine. Chief Editor. *Chambers Maxi Paperback Dictionary*. W&R Chambers Ltd. 1992. Edinburgh. p672.

²⁷⁵ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. pp152-155.

Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. On Strongs # 1249.

As the perception of the word is wrong, it would be better if leaders chose not to use it, or to use the better translation – servant. Yet it seems inconceivable that when asked about his occupation, a man would confess: “I am a servant” or “I am a servant of Christ”. Is it important? Yes, it is. We tend to grow into our titles and no matter how humble, the respect and honour which comes with the word “minister” sooner rather than later changes our relationship to those whom we have been called to serve.

4.4 A Godly Flock

One of the core attributes of a godly man or woman is humility. Without the reality of humility in the life of the believer he cannot have a proper relationship with God as He “resists the proud but gives grace to the humble”.²⁷⁶ The first of the Beatitudes pronounces the poor of spirit to be blessed – it all begins here since without a deep awareness of our poverty, we have little need for God. Without humility we will always be in rebellion to God’s dealings in our lives and thus will be resisting His will for us.

Without humility in our dealings, we will constantly be at loggerheads with one another. Therefore each of us is “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”.²⁷⁷ If each believer in a group was to have a realistic view of himself, there would never be any striving for position and selfish ambition, but it is when we think more of ourselves than we ought to, that we are brought into conflict with one another.

4.4.1 Selfish Ambition

Probably the most destructive force at work in churches is selfish ambition. This sin listed amongst the deeds of the flesh of Galatians 5:20 was at the heart of Satan’s sin – “...I will be like the most high...”.²⁷⁸ This also formed one of the three legs of the temptation put to Eve – “you will be like God...”.²⁷⁹ It is possibly more destructive than doctrinal error, because it is often camouflaged more successfully and is more difficult to see or prove than error.

The KJV translates the Greek word *eritheia* as strife or contention. Thayers says it means: “electioneering or intriguing for office. Apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one’s self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does

²⁷⁶ James 4:6, 1Pet 5:5.

²⁷⁷ Romans 12:3.

²⁷⁸ Isaiah 14:14.

²⁷⁹ Genesis 3:5.

not disdain low arts”.²⁸⁰ It is almost inconceivable that such a spirit could exist in the church, and yet, it does all too often. Was this not at the heart of the refusal of the disciples to wash one another’s feet? Was this not why Diotrephes²⁸¹ became exclusive and closed the assembly to outside ministries? All too often, selfish ambition is hidden under the “righteous” cloak of “wanting God’s best” and finds fruitful soil in the modern-day self-esteem heresy.

James says that wisdom borne out of selfish ambition (self-seeking) is not from above, but is earthly, sensual and demonic.²⁸² The fruit of this evil is “confusion and every evil thing”.²⁸³ It is exactly opposite to true wisdom which is “...first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”.²⁸⁴

4.4.2 Submission to One Another

Paul addresses the issues of pride and selfish ambition in the letter to the Philippians: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself”.²⁸⁵ Here lies the key to true unity in the church as well as the proper functioning of the various members and ministries. He continues to say that we need the mind of Christ who was willing to become a servant and obey even to the death of the cross. When the mind of Christ is present amongst believers there are no questions of inferiority or superiority, of whose gift is more important and of when each should speak or be silent.

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul links submission to one another to the fullness of the Spirit. At the same time he gives an explicit command to all believers to submit to one another. When we think of ourselves more highly than we ought and when we have not come face to face with the reality of our own weaknesses and sinfulness, submission is hard and strife follows. If we have seen ourselves as we really are, but also acknowledge that He has gifted us in some unique way to play our part in the fellowship – each will mesh perfectly with the other, without trying to force his own way.

²⁸⁰ Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* on Strongs # 2052.

²⁸¹ 3John 1:9.

²⁸² James 3:14-17.

²⁸³ James 3:16.

²⁸⁴ James 3:17.

²⁸⁵ Philippians 2:3.

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²⁸⁰ Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* on Strongs # 2052.

²⁸¹ 3John 1:9.

²⁸² James 3:14-17.

²⁸³ James 3:16.

²⁸⁴ James 3:17.

²⁸⁵ Philippians 2:3.

Peter confirms the need for mutual submission: "...Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble".²⁸⁶ None are excluded, shepherd must submit to the flock, sheep to one another, sheep to shepherds and shepherds to shepherds. This brings God's elevation and blessing upon the individual as well as to the group.

4.4.3 Submission to Leaders

Although it has been established that leaders are not told to take authority, believers are required to submit to leaders. This submission must be willing, and cannot be forced or brought about by manipulation. True leaders will gain the confidence and respect of true believers. Arrogant and rebellious believers will not submit to any authority no matter how godly the leaders. To force such into submission is a total waste of time as the real problems will still not have been addressed in people's hearts. Aitchison speaks of the problem of those who know too little to lead and too much to be led.

Their nuisance value in local church life is immense. They are sometimes responsible for the rise of factions, when they can get a following, and they can become instigators of critical and derogatory talk about the character and authority of those who are already elders in the church.²⁸⁷

Peter contains the proof-text on the subject of submission to leadership.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.²⁸⁸

This verse is often used to show that there are those who have the rule over the church. Kittel says that the Greek word *Hegeomai*, here translated as "rule", "means to lead, to think, believe, regard as".²⁸⁹ Thayer and Vine both confirm that the emphasis is on leading. The word translated as rule in Romans 12:8 and 1Timothy 3:4,5,12 is *Proistemi* which literally means "to stand before". Thus we are admonished to obey and to be submissive to those who lead. Paul confirms the need for submission to godly leaders in 1Corinthians 16:16.

²⁸⁶ 1Peter 5:5.

²⁸⁷ Aitchison, Raymond. *Rule and Responsibility. The Witness*. England. 1964. p207.

²⁸⁸ Hebrews 13:17.

²⁸⁹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p303.

As much as it is wrong for leaders to dominate and control by vigour, it is wrong for believers to be in rebellion of leaders raised up by God. God's plan is clear. Leaders must lead, not drive and believers must obey and submit to those leaders.

4.4.4 Submission to the Word

Christians must not only submit to one another and to leaders, they must also submit to the word.²⁹⁰ At times believers will feel that they have reason to disobey the word because they have a problem with the preacher. Even worse are the occasions when people will attempt to discredit the leader because they did not like the message he brought. Even if they have reason to disqualify the messenger, they are still required to obey the Word of God, which is not dependant on the messenger for it's authority, but is its own authority and will stand for ever.²⁹¹ This does not excuse leaders who do not live godly lives or apply themselves in a godly manner. Yet, the Word has its own authority – even if spoken through a dumb donkey.²⁹²

4.4.5 The Attitude of Believers Towards Leaders²⁹³

- Acknowledge them. 1Thessalonians 5:12, 1Corinthians 16:18.
It seems strange that there should be need to remind folk that leaders must be acknowledged, yet from this we may deduce that leadership in the New Testament was so servile, that it may have been easy for believers to take them for granted. This should never be.
- Esteem them. 1Thessalonians 5:13
Esteem will follow if the follower's heart is right and the leader is living a dedicated, holy and sacrificial life. This mitigates against despising those who humble themselves to wash our feet, but should also not be confused with the kind of preacher worship one sees in some circles.
- Honour them. 1Thessalonians 5:17, 1Corinthians 9:7b
In this context honour refers to giving financially or materially – the labourer is worthy of his hire. However, it does not stop there – ministering brothers have many other needs as well. Believers are to minister to them in their emotional, spiritual and physical needs in addition to caring for them financially.

²⁹⁰ 2Thessalonians 3:14, 1Peter 1:22.

²⁹¹ 1Peter 1:25, Matthew 5:18.

²⁹² 2Peter 2:16.

²⁹³ Clarke, Arthur G. *New Testament Church Principles*. 1962. John Ritchie Limited. p61.

- Trust them. 1Timothy 5:19
Sometimes folk are quick to believe the worst of evil reports and accusations against leaders. Paul infers that unless the case against them is proven, leaders are to be trusted.
- Obey them. Hebrews 13:17, 1Peter 5:5, 1Corinthians 16:15-16
We have dealt with this in some detail above.
- Remember them. Hebrews 13:7
This text speaks to the potential of taking workers for granted, as part of the furniture. Keep them in mind, feel for them and think about them.
- Salute them. Hebrews 13:24
Again, it would seem superfluous to tell Christians to greet their leaders and yet it is easy for Christians to look right over those brothers who humbly serve them. At the very least, leaders should be warmly and lovingly greeted.
- Pray for them. Hebrews 13:18, 1Thessalonians 5:25, 2Thessalonians 3:1
Leaders need prayer more than the average believer can realise. They face temptations, attacks, discouragements and hurts far more than others. The church should constantly intercede for them, not that they should be spared the difficulties, because that is part of the territory, but that they should not be deterred and not be distracted from fulfilling their heavenly calling.²⁹⁴

4.5 The Practical

It is evident that the heart of the issue is not so much about structure, but the state of heart. This is required of leaders and followers alike. Without the right attitude the relationships proposed above could never be legislated into being.

It must also be borne in mind that leadership and roles change, depending on what function is in operation. So an elder would need to submit to a sister who serves tea by accepting the tea at her hand, without complaint. Should there be someone who serves by playing a musical instrument to accompany the singing, chaos would ensue, should the elder not submit to the tune and tempo set by the musician even though he is an elder. Each member must submit to the ministrations of every other member when that other member is serving. But at the same time the musician cannot use his position to control, dominate or manipulate the meeting.

²⁹⁴ Ephesians 6:19.

In order for these dynamics to work it is imperative that each member understands the limitations, and the potential, of his particular gift. He then needs to ensure that he functions in direct proportion to that gift. Should he extend himself beyond his gift, he is not only operating in the flesh, but he will also encroach upon the rights and responsibilities of others. No one has all the gifts and no one has supreme authority. Each needs the input of the others and must be in submission to every other member. Unfortunately, all too often, this remains in the realm of theory and speculation. The challenge is not in understanding these principles, but in translating them into life.

Chapter 5

The Payment of Full-time Workers

5.1 The Arguments

It may seem out of place to deal with this subject so early in this study, even before dealing with the ministries themselves. Yet the matter of finances can often make or break a work or a worker. Roland Allen says the following about the matter of finance in missions:

The primary importance of missionary finance lies in the fact that financial arrangements very seriously affect the relations between the missionary and those whom he approaches. It is of comparatively small importance how the missionary is maintained: it is of comparatively small importance how the finances of the church are organised: what is of supreme importance is how these arrangements, whatever they may be, affect the minds of the people, and so promote or hinder, the spread of the Gospel.²⁹⁵

These very wise comments do not only apply on the mission field, but in any area where full-time workers and those who support them interface.

Some (particularly in the home-church movement) feel very strongly that ministers should all be financially self-supporting and that none should receive any form of payment from believers or from the churches.²⁹⁶ Others (mainly from traditional church backgrounds) feel that unless a brother is full-time he cannot properly discharge his ministry and they then draw a distinction between ministers and lay-ministers as though the second were inferior. Then there are those who do feel that it is permissible, but not required for a worker to be supported, but that he may not receive a fixed stipend and must live "by faith". (Supporters for this view are mainly amongst the so-called "Brethren", although this is also changing in some of their circles to the

²⁹⁵ Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Michigan. 1962. p49.

²⁹⁶ Begier, Tom; Richey, Tim; Vasiliades, Nick; Viola, Frank. *The House Church Movement*. SeedSowers. Jacksonville. p119.

acceptance of a fixed salary). It is important therefore that we examine the New Testament record.

5.2 Jesus

5.2.1 Jesus' Example

The gospels are sketchy as to how Jesus supported Himself financially during the three and a half years of His public ministry. Not only would He have needed to provide for Himself, but He would also have been partially responsible for providing the basic needs of His disciples. We do know that there was a common purse which was kept by Judas.²⁹⁷

Jesus was poor. There is a modern trend to suggest that Jesus was rich. This is simply not true. His statement "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath no where to lay His head"²⁹⁸ was an unequivocal statement as to His lack of means. When the issue of tribute arose, He sent Peter fishing. Peter found a coin in the fish's mouth with which he paid the tribute for himself and his Master.²⁹⁹ Had Jesus a ready supply of cash at that moment, surely He would not have needed to go to this length. Yet at other times there was some money in the bag. Before the feeding of the multitude Jesus asked Philip where they could buy bread for the multitude. It seems that the problem was not whether there was money, but whether there was sufficient to feed the multitude. Philip's responded that "two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little".³⁰⁰ It does not appear that Philip was speaking hypothetically, but that there may well have been 200 pennies³⁰¹ in the fund at that time. While Jesus rested at the well at Sychar, "His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food".³⁰² This reference again reminds us that Jesus did not turn stones into bread in order to feed Himself and His disciples, but that they had to buy food, like anyone else. It also shows that they did have money with which to buy.

The source of these funds becomes the next question. It does not seem logical that He supported Himself by some secular job. The picture we get from the gospels was that He was preaching on a full-time basis. We also see Him moving about in Palestine,

²⁹⁷ John 12:5, 13:28.

²⁹⁸ Luke 9:58.

²⁹⁹ Matthew 17:24-27.

³⁰⁰ John 6:7.

³⁰¹ 200 *denarii* would translate to about 7 months' wages.

³⁰² John 4:8.

which would also rule out regular employment, besides which, there is no mention of a secular occupation. It is also evident from the way He called Peter, Andrew, James and John from their nets³⁰³ and Matthew from his customs table,³⁰⁴ that they were to turn their backs on secular employment. It was customary for Rabbis, to be supported through gifts from the community, through payment for teaching children and by benefactors or sponsors who would provide regular gifts.³⁰⁵ It is very likely that Jesus was supported in the same way as other Rabbis of His day. Luke 8:2-3 supports this view:

...and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities – Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.

5.2.2 Jesus' Teaching

Although Jesus taught much on money and one's attitude towards it,³⁰⁶ it is not recorded that He taught on the monetary support of Christian workers except for one example. In sending the disciples on an evangelistic journey He said:

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.³⁰⁷

From this we learn, firstly that it was clearly His intention that they were to be supported by those who were the beneficiaries of their ministry. Secondly they were to live "by faith" as they were not permitted to take any provisions with them. Thirdly we learn that, although they were permitted to eat from the ministry, they were not to charge for their services and they were not to be enriched by it – "freely you have received, freely give".

5.3 The Twelve

5.3.1 The Twelve's Example

We have no reason to believe that the twelve departed from these principles after the ascension of their Master. There is no record of any of the twelve having a secular

³⁰³ Matthew 4:19-22.

³⁰⁴ Matthew 9:9.

³⁰⁵ Cohen, Abraham. *Everyman's Talmud*. Schocken Books. New York. 1949. pp 136-141.

³⁰⁶ "Sixteen of Christ's thirty-eight parables speak about how people should handle earthly treasure. In fact, our Lord taught more about such stewardship (one out of every ten verses in the Gospels) than about heaven and hell combined. The entire Bible contains more than two thousand references to wealth and property, twice as many as the total references to faith and prayer. MacArthur, John. *Whose Money is it Anyway?* Word Publishing. Nashville. 2000. p3.

³⁰⁷ Matthew 10:8-10.

occupation after the ascension. It is generally accepted that Peter and his friends' temporary return to fishing after the crucifixion, was a deflection from what they had been called to.³⁰⁸ As Jesus meets them on the shore, He calls Peter to to follow Him and to shepherd the flock. This must have reminded Peter of the first day he had been called from his nets to follow Jesus and to be a fisher of men.³⁰⁹ As with the Lord Jesus, the inference from the Book of Acts, is that they were "full-time" workers in the ministry and that even the administration of the feeding scheme in Jerusalem was a distraction. Instead of serving at tables they said: "...we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."³¹⁰

Peter said to the beggar at the gate: "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you."³¹¹ This is a clear statement that they did not have an abundance of money. Their personal poverty seems to be contrary to the fact that believers in Jerusalem were laying quite large sums of money at the "apostles feet".³¹² It seems clear that the Apostles did not use these gifts for their personal use, but rather distributed the money amongst those who were in need.³¹³ This point is important, as these scriptures are often used to coerce money out of people for the preacher's personal use. Some make quite a meal of the example of Ananias and Sapphira to show what happens to those who hold back on their giving to preachers or apostles. It must be remembered that this example had little to do with giving and much to do with lying.

The only other reference in Acts to the Twelve and money appears in Acts 8 when Simon the sorcerer attempted to buy the gift of praying for people to receive the Holy Spirit. This account is given to show that the gifts and the men of God cannot be bought with money. In a sense this incident is a reversal of the occasion when Balaam was bought by Balak to curse Israel.³¹⁴ It would do well for modern preachers who sell miracles and other forms of ministry to note Peter's response.

Acts 10 records that Peter would lodge (apparently free of charge) with believers during his travels. In other accounts of the Twelve and their journeys it is inferred that they too received the same benefit. Other than these few references, the book of Acts

³⁰⁸ John 21.

³⁰⁹ Matthew 4:9.

³¹⁰ Acts 6:4.

³¹¹ Acts 3:6.

³¹² Acts 4:34 – 5:2.

³¹³ Acts 5:35.

³¹⁴ Numbers 22-23.

is remarkably silent as to the means by which the Twelve were supported. This follows the pattern of the Gospels with reference to Jesus' support. It is evident then, that the issue of financial support was, in fact, a non-issue. It was just not important – so unlike modern missionary methods where money is one of the subjects that demand the most words, time and attention.

5.3.2 The Teachings of the Twelve

As with the book of Acts, the payment of Christian workers is not a prominent subject in the teachings of the Twelve Apostles. There is an oblique reference in John's third epistle to the need to send brethren (presumably ministering brethren) on their way in an appropriate manner, bearing in mind that they were travelling for His name's sake and that they had taken nothing from the Gentiles.³¹⁵

Again it is assumed that ministering brethren should be supported, but the subject of financial support does not receive the prominence it does today.

5.4 Paul

5.4.1 Paul's Example

The best-known aspect of Paul's attitude to his support is the fact that he supported himself with the making of tents. This has been incorporated into the language of some denominations where they will speak of those who support themselves in the ministry by some secular job as *tentmakers*. Particularly the Afrikaans Reformed churches in South Africa have seen considerable change in this area over the past decade. Whereas ten years ago, it was unheard of for their ministers not to be fully supported by the congregation, today they have an increasing number of "tentmaker ministers".

There is some debate as to whether Paul actually made tents or whether he was not a leather worker. The debate stems from the meaning of the Greek word "*skenopoios*" of which Kittel says:

This rare word, which combines *skene* and *poieo*, generally refers to the pitching of a tent, but it also seems to mean "tent maker," and, since tents are often made of leather, it may mean "leather worker." The only New Testament instance is in Acts 18:3, where Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth because he worked at the same trade. If the trade is that of making tents of goats' hair, Paul is perhaps weaving fabric. But rabbinic scholars do not favour weaving, and it is thus more likely that Paul is a "leather worker," and that as

³¹⁵ 3John 5-8.

such he is a "tent maker." At any rate, he supports himself so as not to have to depend on the churches.³¹⁶

Certainly Paul provided for his financial needs through the trade he plied. This he did in Corinth³¹⁷, at Ephesus³¹⁸ and at Thessalonica.³¹⁹ Not only did he provide for his own needs through his craft, but also for the needs of his co-workers.³²⁰ As can be seen this is a radical departure from the practice of the other Apostles. For itinerant preachers to support themselves was not the norm, and from his protestations to the Corinthians it seemed that only he and Barnabas provided their own keep.³²¹

Do we have no right to eat and drink? ... Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?³²²

Although Paul worked at his trade while in Corinth, his income was also supplemented by gifts from the churches in Macedonia:

Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.³²³

Paul thanks the Philippians for four separate gifts he had received from them. The first he received on his departure from Macedonia.³²⁴ Then they sent him two more gifts when he was ministering in Thessalonica.³²⁵ And now they had sent him yet another amount.³²⁶ Paul certainly was in captivity when writing this letter and it seems that it was in Rome and not one of the other occasions that he had been incarcerated.³²⁷ Even though Philippi is part of Macedonia, the support he referred to when speaking to the Corinthians probably did not come from the Philippians, but one of the other churches in that region.

³¹⁶ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p1044.

³¹⁷ Acts 18:3, 1Corinthians 4:12, 1Corinthians 9:6-12.

³¹⁸ Acts 20:33-35.

³¹⁹ 1Thessalonians 2:5-9, 2Thessalonians 3:7-10.

³²⁰ Acts 20:34.

³²¹ Aquila and Pricilla also made tents – Acts 18:3.

³²² 1Corinthians 9:4,6,7.

³²³ 2Corinthians 11:7-9.

³²⁴ Philippians 4:15.

³²⁵ Philippians 4:16.

³²⁶ Philippians 4:10.

³²⁷ Philippians 1:7, 13-14, 16.

In addition to Paul's wages as an artisan and the gifts from churches, he would also have been cared for through the hospitality of believers.³²⁸

It is evident that Paul was not exclusively dependant on his own hands to provide in his financial needs, but this was supplemented by donations from believers and churches. We must stress this point, as there are those who create the impression that Paul provided for all his needs through secular employment and that he never received money from believers. A careful study of these scriptures also shows that Paul felt that he was entitled to being supported by the churches, but that he would not impose himself on them or make demands on them. "He was anxious to set them an example of quiet work...But above all he was anxious to avoid any appearance of covetousness."³²⁹

5.4.2 Paul's Teaching

Even though Paul did not assert his own right to be supported by the preaching of the Gospel, he is unequivocal as to the churches' responsibility towards Christian workers.³³⁰ In 1 Corinthians 9:4-15 he quotes six reasons why those who preach the gospel, should live from it.

First he refers to that which was apostolic custom. He quotes not only the Apostles as having this privilege, but also those who were "the brothers of the Lord" (v5). Presumably these would include James who was an elder at Jerusalem.

Second he appeals to common practice or common sense in verse 7 "Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?"

Third in verses 9 and 10 he quotes the Law and applies it to the Christian worker. "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."³³¹

Fourth in verse 11 he appeals to what is reasonable: "If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?"

³²⁸ Acts 16:15, Romans 16:23.

³²⁹ Allen. *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours*. p50.

³³⁰ 1Corinthians 9:4-15.

³³¹ Deuteronomy 25:4.

Fifth he cites Old Testament custom of priests as being supported by the proceeds of the temple (v13).

Finally he says "...the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." (v14 – presumably quoting Matthew 10:10). If no other argument will move them, then surely a direct command of the Lord Jesus should.

The care Paul has taken to prove his point underlines the importance of this instruction – the labourer is worthy of his hire. We are not left with much leeway to use our own discretion as to whether Christians should support workers – there are six clear reasons why this should not just be a principle but a command which transcends the testaments, time and culture. Whether the labourer avails himself of this option is another matter entirely.

Paul takes up the same theme in Galatians. This time with a one-line instruction: "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches."³³² This instruction does not only deal with material things but also with spiritual things. So teaching flow from the teachers and spiritual encouragement, material provision, help in the work etc flows from the recipient of the teaching to the teacher.

In thanking the Philippians for their gifts³³³ Paul makes a few important points with respect to giving to Christian workers. He is encouraged because the gift was a demonstration of care. Sometimes Christian workers need to know that people care for them as much as they need the finances to carry on the work. Thus the giving of money should not be a cold act of responsibility or obligation, but should be an out-flowing of care and love for the worker. Secondly he is encouraged because the gift was evidence or fruit of that which he had planted in the lives of the believers. He says: "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account".³³⁴ Meaning, that they will be blessed because of their fruitfulness and that is more important to Paul than the receipt of the gift.

To Timothy he writes: "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine".³³⁵ Vine³³⁶ and Thayer³³⁷

³³² Galatians 6:6.

³³³ Philippians 4:15-19.

³³⁴ Philippians 4:17.

³³⁵ 1Timothy 5:17.

both say that the word can be read as “monetary” or as “honour” in the sense of respect. Kittel in commenting on this verse says that it could mean “honorarium” but “honour” could also be meant.³³⁸ The financial bias has to take precedence in the light of the preceding as well as the succeeding verses. In the preceding verse (v16) Paul speaks of the financial responsibility towards widows and in the succeeding verse (v18) he uses the same argument as in 1Corinthians 9:9 – “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,” and, “The labourer is worthy of his wages.” Does he then mean that elders that rule well are worthy of a double wage? I suspect not, else he would be supporting the concept of performance based payment which would take the church into a worldly methodology. This would fly in the face of his instructions to Timothy and to Titus that elders ought not be motivated by greed for money.³³⁹ Possibly by “double” he is playing with the dual meaning of the word: Respect and payment. This view is supported by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown³⁴⁰ as well as by the New Bible Commentary.³⁴¹

Paul writes to Titus: “Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to [meet] urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.”³⁴² The NIV translates verse 13: “Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need”. Here it appears that Titus had the means to provide other workers with material support³⁴³ – whether the source was Paul or the local church is not clear.

5.5 Which Ministries Should be Financially Supported?

From the above it is evident that elders, especially those who teach, are worthy of support. This could include those who fulfil a pastoral role as well as those who are teaching pastors. Both these would be resident in local assemblies and would not be travelling much.

³³⁶ Vine. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Under “honour”.

³³⁷ Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Under “honour”.

³³⁸ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p1182.

³³⁹ 1Timothy 3:3, 8, Titus 1:7,8.

³⁴⁰ Jamieson R, Fausset AM, Brown D. *Critical and Explanatory Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Zondervan Publishing. Grand Rapids. Undated. p416.

³⁴¹ *The New Bible Commentary*. Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship. Leicester. 1994. (Electronic).

³⁴² Titus 3:13,14.

³⁴³ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Vol VI. Felming H Revell Co. New York. p877.

Paul's defence to the Corinthians that he had the right to be subsidised and his receipt of gifts from various churches indicate that those who were travelling preachers were also entitled to support.

Other than these inferences, there is no clear instruction as to who may or may not be supported. Howley says: "The New Testament ... makes clear the responsibility of the saints to support in temporal things all who worthily fulfil their ministry".³⁴⁴ So the question remains who or what kind of ministries are entitled to support and who should be making tents. It is important to reiterate the point that the scripture does not differentiate between those who are full-time and those who are part-time. Paul's ministry was not inferior nor was it superior to that of Peter because he chose to support himself at times. Each ministering brother must evaluate his own position based on his calling, gifting, needs and secular skills. Taking these factors into account and in consultation with those with whom he is in relationship, he should know the leading of the Holy Spirit and thus come to an equitable and God-pleasing arrangement. Some can do both secular work and fulfil their ministry without neglect, while others need to be full-time. Each must do what is right for himself and for the area of the church in which he operates. Someone who itinerates between churches may not be able to hold down a regular job, while many elders, who are local, may.

The important fact is that neither his secular involvement nor his full-time support affects his status or position as an elder. MacArthur says: "In a church with a plurality of elders, it is likely that some will support themselves and others will be supported by the church. Either way it does not affect a man's status as an elder."³⁴⁵ At the same time,

The releasing of a relatively small number of the lord's servants to full-time ministry should not obscure from us the fact that the very large majority of His ministers fulfil their service whilst engaged in some trade or profession.³⁴⁶

5.6 A Fixed Stipend or Not?

A question that has been much debated in some circles and yet is just not an issue to others is whether a worker should receive a fixed salary from the church or sporadic gifts from individual believers. Except for the principles established above, the scripture is silent on this matter. From Paul's example it is evident that his income

³⁴⁴ Howley, GCD. *The Christian Ministry*. In *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. Watson JB (Ed). John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p116.

³⁴⁵ MacArthur, John. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. Moody Press. Chicago. 1991. p194.

³⁴⁶ Howley. *The Christian Ministry*. p117.

fluctuated and that some gifts came from individuals and some from churches. He said that there were times of abundance and also times of lack, but that he had learnt to be content in every circumstance.³⁴⁷ This one example alone, however, is not sufficient to establish a principle or a precept.

Those who support a non-fixed amount will point to Paul's example as a precedent. They will also point to the examples of other great saints who lived in this way, particularly amongst those of the (Plymouth) "Brethren". Prime examples of men who, even when offered a fixed stipend, opted to "live by faith" are George Muller, Henry Craik³⁴⁸ and GH Lang.³⁴⁹ The primary advantage of going this way is that the worker learns to be absolutely dependant on His Master and not on the church. It greatly strengthens faith and the worker's relationship with the Head of the Church, building an attitude of dependence on Him and gratitude towards Him. It must however be remembered that not all workers are able to handle the stress and strain of living this way. Particularly when such workers have children and families who have to be supported and educated. To some the worry would be a constant distraction and hinder them from fulfilling their ministry. Those who know they have been called to live this way, must obey that call – no matter what the hardships. Those who are not called to this will not be equipped with sufficient grace to endure.

A fixed stipend on the other hand allows the church and the worker to set budgets and to work within those budgets. If left to the discretion of individual members with a number of workers on staff, some may receive an abundance while others may suffer lack. Fixed stipends even out these potential inequalities and prevent potential rivalries between workers. However this method could give rise to problems when the church feels that it "owns" the worker and the worker feels that he is employed by the church and not by the Lord. This could, and sometimes does, lead to the manipulation of the preacher by the congregation and *vice versa*.

Thus there are advantages and disadvantages to both systems. Because the scripture gives no clear guidelines each group of believers must be led by the Lord and come to a reasonable agreement with those whom they agree to support.

³⁴⁷ Philippians 4:11,12.

³⁴⁸ Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. p42 ff.

³⁴⁹ Lang GH. *An Ordered Life*.

5.7 How Much?

The next question that needs to be discussed is the question of how much the worker is to receive. It has been customary in many circles to keep the preacher as poor as possible in order to keep him humble and on his knees. The reverse has been evident in the last thirty years, especially amongst charismatic churches where workers live like kings in large mansions, wear expensive suits and fly around in private jets. Neither extreme seems to be in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament.

Although we have no clear guidelines as to how much workers should receive, we have clear instructions that they must be provided for. They are to have sufficient and should not be exposed to undue hardship. This would not only be in contradiction to Paul's instructions above, but would also show a lack of love, care and respect for those who often make huge personal sacrifices in order to serve the church. On the other hand, it is clear that Christian workers are not to use the ministry in order to make money. Paul says of such: "...men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself."³⁵⁰ Even in the Old Testament, the Lord expressed His displeasure at the shepherds of Israel: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock."³⁵¹ This reprimand not only speaks to the shepherds' failure to care for the flock, but also addresses their greed and that they enriched themselves at the expense of the flock.

It would seem that a rule of thumb can be deduced that will satisfy the principles we have mentioned above: Full-time workers should not live better nor worse than the average of the congregation to whom they are ministering. If they are working in a very poor area, a too high standard of living could render them aloof and out of touch with the congregation. At the same time a sub-standard lifestyle, when the congregation is of the mid-income group, may lead to discontent and even bitterness on the part of the worker and his family. Thus he should not be living like the more affluent members of the congregation, but may choose to identify with the poorer members. This, however, has to be by his choice and may not be imposed on him by the assembly. It should also be borne in mind, that, though the worker has dedicated himself to the work and is willing to make whatever sacrifices are called for, the same cannot be expected of his

³⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 6:5.

³⁵¹ Ezekiel 34:2,3.

children. As far as is possible, the children of a minister should never be required to suffer embarrassment or need, because their parents have chosen to serve the Lord. If this were taken into consideration many children of ministering parents could be saved from turning against the ministry and even turning against Christianity.

5.8 Conclusion

The payment of full-time workers is often a source of unhappiness and dispute. This is totally unnecessary as long as the labourer puts in a decent days work and the wage is fair. The rules that apply to a labourer and his employer as outlined in so many of Paul's epistles should apply in the relationship between the Christian worker and those who are blessed by his ministry.

On the one hand wages should be fair and be paid promptly. The worker should not be abused and expected to perform work which is not within his area of responsibility. Although the ministering brothers are the servants of the churches, they are not the lackeys of the churches or of individuals within the church.

On the other hand the worker must be satisfied with the wage and system by which he is reimbursed, once that has been agreed. Neither should he be slothful, but apply himself diligently in the service of the Lord, remembering that he is not in the employ of men, but of the Head of the church and as such serves the flock.

Finally we need to consider Paul's instructions with regards to the settling of disputes:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?... But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another.³⁵²

It is an abomination when ministers take their churches to worldly courts over labour disputes. This should never happen, if the matter cannot be settled by arbitration within the community of the holy, Paul says to the aggrieved party "Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?"³⁵³

All this is common sense, fair and just and the issue should never become clouded or complicated. In the New Testament it only became complicated when believers and

³⁵² 1Corinthians 6:1,2, 6, 7.

³⁵³ 1Corinthians 6:7.

churches did not apply themselves in a godly manner. So too, once we move away from the principles and spirit of Jesus Christ, we will also find ourselves with problems in these areas, but when the spirit of humility and grace prevails, there will not only be peace amongst the brethren, but the blessing of the Lord on the church.

Chapter 6

Do the Ephesians 4:11 Ministries Continue Today?

6.1 The Spectrum of Views

We shall briefly examine the two extremities of the spectrum in order to understand current thinking on the subject. The first we will refer to as the “cessationist”³⁵⁴ view, which basically teaches that some of the ministries and certain of the gifts³⁵⁵ ceased sometime during the first century. We shall refer to the second as the “restorationist” view. Restorationists hold that some of the ministries ceased to operate, but now in the last days, God is restoring these ministries to the church. It would be safe to say that the majority of Christian leaders hold to either of these views, roughly reflecting their charismatic / non-charismatic tradition. The third view is held by a very small minority who say that these gifts did not cease, neither have they been restored to the church but they have functioned without ceasing since the book of Acts. This is the view I shall put forward in this chapter.

³⁵⁴ Houghton, Myron J. *A Re-examination of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13*. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Vol 153. Roy B Zuck (ed). Dallas Theological Seminary. Dallas 1996. p344.

³⁵⁵ The “ministries” refer to those who have been given to the church, that their whole lives may serve the church in a particular way. Some as apostles, others as evangelists etc. The “gifts” refer to those gifts that function through a believer from time to time without necessarily defining the ministry of the individual. So a pastor may from time to time pray for the sick with attendant healing. His ministry remains that of a “pastor”, while he may be used in the “gift of healing”. The list of “gifts” is essentially, but not exclusively, given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. This distinction is clearly drawn when Acts 21:9 says of Philip’s four daughters that “they prophesied”. The next verse speaks of “a certain prophet named Agabus”. Philip’s daughters prophesied (gift), but Agabus was a prophet (ministry). My discussions in this chapter shall deal with the “ministries” and not with the “gifts”.

6.2 The Cessationist View

The cessationists say that the function of the apostolic and prophetic ministries was to lay the foundation of the church³⁵⁶ and that once the canon of scripture had been established, there was no further need for apostles and prophets and thus their ministry would cease. John MacArthur presents the classic arguments for this view:

Like the apostles, however, their (the prophet's) office ceased with the completion of the New Testament, just as the Old Testament prophets disappeared when that testament was completed, some 400 years before Christ. The church was established "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone: (Ephesians 2:20). Once the foundation was laid, the work of the apostles and prophets was finished."³⁵⁷

There are two problems with this argument. The first is the assumption that Old Testament prophets ceased *circa* 400 BC, at the end of Malachi. Not only did Jesus Himself attest to the (Old Testament) prophetic ministry of John the Baptist,³⁵⁸ but John was also commonly accepted by the Jews to be such a prophet.³⁵⁹ In addition to John there was also Simeon, who although not explicitly called a prophet, certainly displayed all the hallmarks of an Old Testament prophet.³⁶⁰ Anna, who also was alive at the circumcision of Jesus, is expressly called a prophetess.³⁶¹ The end of the Old Testament line of prophets is finally found in the ministry of Jesus, who was not only the last of the Old Testament prophets, but in a sense, the first of the New Testament.³⁶² Thus the completion of the canon of the two testaments appears to be unrelated to the cessation or continuance of prophets – old or new.

The second problem is the assumption that because of their foundational role³⁶³ the apostles and prophets only functioned in the first century. The fact that they were foundational to the church does not *ipso facto* deny them a role in the ongoing building of the church. Jesus Christ is also referred to as the foundation of the church.³⁶⁴ Does that mean His ministry has ceased? Surely not. Even though He is the foundation upon which the church was founded in Acts 2, he continues to be a very important part of the church throughout the ages. We can also say that Peter's sermon on the day of

³⁵⁶ Ephesians 2:20.

³⁵⁷ MacArthur, John F. *First Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Moody Press. Chicago. 1984. pp322-324.

³⁵⁸ Matthew 11:9-13, Luke 7:28, Luke 16:16.

³⁵⁹ Matthew 21:26, Mark 11:32, Luke 20:6.

³⁶⁰ Luke 2:25-35.

³⁶¹ Luke 2:36.

³⁶² Luke 24:19, Acts 3:22,23, Acts 7:37, Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

³⁶³ Ephesians 2:20.

³⁶⁴ 1Corinthians 3:11.

Pentecost³⁶⁵ was foundational, yet the same message should still be preached today. Ephesians 2:20 teaches on the structure of the church and makes no statements regarding the cessation or not of the prophetic and apostolic ministries. The fact that a ministry or other aspect of the church was a part of the foundation, does not automatically mean that it is not to be a continuing part of the church.

A further problem with building this theory on Ephesians 2:20 is the exact meaning of the terms "apostles and prophets" as used in this text. There is little doubt that "apostles" refers to the Twelve. However, the question has to be asked whether "prophets" mean New Testament or Old Testament prophets. A study of Acts does not indicate in which way, or if at all, the New Testament prophets were foundational to the church. It could well be argued that the evangelist, on at least one occasion,³⁶⁶ was foundational. It would seem that teachers, elders and ordinary believers may have been as foundational as the prophets, if not more so.

Luke 11:49 uses the term "apostles and prophets" in the same breath. A careful examination of the context, especially vv49 and 50 indicate that these prophets included old- (blood of the prophets from the foundation of the world) and new testamental (I will send) prophets. Verse 51 defines the range of these prophets to begin with Abel and to end with Zechariah.

2Peter 3:2 says: "that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour," Here Peter is clearly linking the message of the Old Testament prophets with that of the New Testament apostles.

In Revelation 18:20 we find these two ministries linked. The context, especially verse 24, again seems to link Old Testament and New Testament prophets in a continuum. (By this I do not mean to suggest that Old Testament and New Testament prophets are the same, but rather, that the two are not always clearly distinguished from one another.)

³⁶⁵ Acts 2:14-40.

³⁶⁶ Acts 8:5.

So, does Ephesians 2:20 refer to New Testament prophets or Old Testament prophets? It is not clear, but to build an entire doctrine on a verse which is, partially obscure, is not good hermeneutical practice.

MacArthur proposes a second reason why these two ministries have ceased. This is based on the notion that 1 Corinthians 12:28 suggests a chronological order:

In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul says, "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers." That statement adds weight not only to the idea of divine calling but also to the chronological significance ("first, ... second, ... third") in the giving of these gifted men to the church".³⁶⁷

This argument is, however, fundamentally flawed. If the conclusion can be drawn that because these ministries are listed in a particular sequence, the need for the first two has ceased, then that argument has to be extrapolated to include the rest of the verse. If the apostles came first, then prophets, then the teachers and then the other ministries and the former ones pass from the scene as subsequent ministries take their place, then teachers have also ceased and we must then be in the time of tongues (the last of the list)! A careful reading of Acts will reveal that it is true that generally churches would have been founded by apostles and they would be followed by other ministries as they itinerate amongst the churches. This however does not mean that some ministries pass from the scene.

6.3 The Restorationist View

Unlike the cessationist view, this view has very little biblical argument to support its theory. It is almost entirely based on modern-day "prophecies" by their own "prophets" and where scripture is used to support their theories, it is invariably used out of context.

Firstly they emphasise that "God is doing a new thing". This is supported with scriptures such as: Isaiah 43:19 "Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert"; They also use scriptures that refer to "the latter rain"³⁶⁸ and the scriptures that deal with new wine and new wineskins.³⁶⁹ Needless to say none of these scriptures teach what they claim they do and they are all taken out of context and their meaning twisted.

³⁶⁷ MacArthur. *Ephesians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. p141.

³⁶⁸ Hosea 6:3, Joel 2:23, James 5:7.

³⁶⁹ Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37-38.

From the supposition that “God is doing a new thing”, the charismatic movement drifted to “Kingdom now” or “dominion” theology. Which claims that the church has to take control of the world and it’s systems (because all power has been given to the church), the church is to restore all things and set the kingdom up, in order that they may invite Christ back to earth. Only then will the Lord return. One of their spokesmen put it like this:

The glorified church will bring about the return of the glorified Christ... We have been foreordained of God to become that people who will be so glorified that we can bring Christ back to earth. This glorified church must make the earth God’s footstool before Jesus can come again.³⁷⁰

From here the next faulty step in logic is that before the church can effectively do this great work, it has to be restored itself. Thus, they say, there should be a number of things restored to the church. Some of these include worship, spiritual warfare and the apostolic and prophetic ministries. These claims are entirely based on utterances of the leaders of the movement. Here are two examples:

I think the most wonderful thing God is doing for us in these last days is raising up and restoring completely apostolic leadership, apostolic authority... the hope of the church, the hope of the world is the apostolic ministry.³⁷¹

Christ cannot return until His ascension gift ministries have brought the church into full manhood. The pastor, evangelist and teacher have been the only ones acknowledged as being active in that role. But now, Christ is activating His prophets in the 1980’s and His apostles in the 1990’s. Jesus is thrilled at the thought that His prophets will soon be fully recognised by the church... I believe that the 1980’s have been designated in the councils of God as the time for the calling forth of the prophetic ministry. Before the 1980’s are over, God will have raised up and called forth thousands of prophets.³⁷²

In order to bring this about, many schools were established where people were taught how to become prophets and “to move in the prophetic”. Once the prophets had been put in place they began to announce that God was now selecting several of their number to launch the next wave – the revival of the apostolic ministry. Needless to say none of this has any biblical base and is simply the manipulations of men greedy for

³⁷⁰ Paulk, Earl. *The Wounded Body of Christ*. Dimension Publishers. Decatur. 1985. pp93-95.

³⁷¹ Cain, Paul. Vineyard Prophetic School. 1989. In Randles, Bill. *The New Prophets*. Plumblin Publishing. Pietermaritzburg. 1997. p36.

³⁷² Hamon, Bill. *Prophets and Personal Prophecy*. Destiny Image. Shippensburg. 1987 p28. (This book is still a standard handbook in prophecy schools).

power. The majority of these prophets have been discredited as false prophets³⁷³ and have no credibility as reliable witnesses to God's intentions for the church. Part of this total restoration of the church as well as the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries, is the end-time revival which they have been promising for the past two or three decades. This is said to be a (some say "the") sign of the Second Coming. This does not have any biblical basis; on the contrary, the New Testament speaks rather of great apostasy³⁷⁴ and many false prophets³⁷⁵ rising at the end of the age.

6.4 The Continuous View

The third, and least popular, view holds that although there was a unique "class" of apostle called "the Twelve"³⁷⁶ or the "apostles of the lamb",³⁷⁷ who were foundational to the church, this ministry, as well as that of the prophet has continued and will continue for the entire age of the church. Neither apostles nor prophets, nor any of the other ministries ceased to function during the history of the church – they have been with us for the past 2000 years. I shall, in the following paragraphs, provide my reasons for this statement in general but will further support this view in the subsequent chapters that deal with the specifics of these ministries.

6.4.1 No Statement to the Contrary

Nowhere do the scriptures state that the apostolic and prophetic ministries have or will cease. It may well be argued that that of itself is not sufficient reason to believe in their continuance. Although this may be true, it has to be borne in mind that should the Lord have intended that these ministries would be of a temporary nature, He would not have supplied us (in the subsequent centuries) with so much teaching on these ministries, their function and the marks of false apostles and prophets. It is a firmly established principle amongst Christians that until an instruction is contradicted or revoked it stands.

6.4.2 Ephesians 4

Ephesians 4 is often quoted as the proof text on the subject of the ministries. I shall therefore examine its teaching with regards to the continuation of apostles and prophets in some detail.

³⁷³ For a detailed analysis of this subject see Randles, Bill. *The New Prophets*.

³⁷⁴ 2Thessalonians 2:3, 9-11, Matthew 24:12, 2Timothy 3:1-3, 2Timothy 4:3,4.

³⁷⁵ Matthew 24:11,24, Mark 13:22.

³⁷⁶ Matthew 26:20, Luke 22:3, Acts 6:2 etc.

³⁷⁷ Revelation 21:14.

First the text tells us when these gift-ministries were given: “*When* He ascended on high”³⁷⁸ This point is important, especially as far as the apostolic ministry is concerned. The Twelve were called and commissioned *before* the ascension.³⁷⁹ It is expressly recorded that Jesus called them “apostles” in Luke 6:13. After this, the synoptic gospels also refer to them as “apostles”.³⁸⁰ Thus if Ephesians 4 says that He gave apostles after the ascension, does it not infer that these apostles are distinct from the Twelve? Also if prophets were given after the ascension then John the Baptist, Simeon and Anna could not be New Testament prophets (as distinct from Old Testament prophets).

Second, the text tells us how long the ministries will be operative: “...*till* we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”.³⁸¹ The word “till” or “until” is a good translation of the Greek “*mechr*”, which is used 27 times in the New Testament and never means anything other than “until” or “unto”. So, the time span of these ministries is clear. It is from the ascension until the church attains perfection. (Perfection being the only way Ephesians 4:13-16 can be summarised.) All that now remains is to ask when did, or will, the church attain to perfection. Certainly not at the close of the Apostolic age, not at the formation of the canon of Scripture and most definitely not today! This will only be achieved at the rapture of the church. It seems, to me, that the only way these verses can be read is that the ministries will continue until we see Him face to face. Only when we are transformed fully into His image,³⁸² will we no longer need the ministries.

Third, Ephesians 4:11 does not indicate any difference between the first two and the latter two or three³⁸³ on the list. They are given as a group or set and the context indicates that they function as a group until their objective has been achieved. To deprive the church of any of these gifts would rob it of the fullness of Christ’s provision for His church. Fortunately the acknowledgement or not of these ministries does not determine whether or not they are given. If God gives a particular gift to the church, we

³⁷⁸ Ephesians 4:8 (Emphasis added).

³⁷⁹ Matthew 10:1, Mark 6:7, Luke 9:1,2.

³⁸⁰ Matthew 10:2, Mark 6:30, Luke 9:10, 11:49, 17:5, 22:14, 24:10.

³⁸¹ Ephesians 4:13 (Emphasis added).

³⁸² 1John 3:2.

³⁸³ Depending whether one reads “pastors and teachers” (*poimenas kai didaskalous*) as one or two ministries. See Chapter 10 of this work for a detailed discussion on this subject.

can call it what we like, at worst, we can but inhibit its full development. Titles we give or don't give do not change the facts of God's gifts or to quote a proverb: "a rose by any other name is still a rose".

6.4.3 Examples From History

Experience can never have the same level of authority as the scriptures and we need to be careful of the trap that many modern Christians have fallen into who base their theology on experience and who hold something to be truth, just because they have experienced or witnessed it. At the same time, if something is taught in scripture, we should be able to see the manifestation of that truth in the history of the church.

There are many men who have, over the past two millennia exhibited all the fruits of apostles and prophets, except that we have called them by other names. "Apostles" have come to be called "missionaries" and "prophets" have come to be called "mighty preachers". By this I do not mean that all missionaries are apostles and all preachers are prophets, but some are in deed.³⁸⁴

6.4.4 Warnings concerning false apostles and prophets

The fact that God deemed it necessary to warn us about false apostles and prophets indicates that it was His intention for them to continue. If this were not the case, He would simply tell us to avoid all apostles and prophets except for those of the first generation.

In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus Himself warns that false prophets will arise at the end of the age.³⁸⁵ Note that this is not a warning for the first century but for the last.

Paul writes about false apostles in his day.³⁸⁶ If the apostolic ministry was only limited to the Twelve plus Paul, there would be no room for false apostles to make any such claim as the number would have been closed. Clearly the field was wide open for false apostles to assert their claims. The same can be said about the commendation of the Ephesian church who had "tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars".³⁸⁷ By the time of this writing (*circa* AD96), most of the first

³⁸⁴ I shall provide specific examples of these in ensuing chapters.

³⁸⁵ Matthew 24:11, 24, Mark 13:22.

³⁸⁶ 2Corinthians 11:13.

³⁸⁷ Revelation 2:2.

generation apostles had already passed from the scene and yet the Ephesians were still sifting between true and false apostles – thus indicating that there were apostles other than the Twelve plus Paul and that new apostles were still emerging.

6.5 In Conclusion

Is it possible that the dismissal of the continuance of apostles and prophets after the first century is based on a reaction to the abuses of those who have falsely claimed to be such? By no means the least of such examples can be found in the “apostolic succession” of popery. Is it also possible that the emphasis on the restoration of these ministries in other quarters is also based on a lack of understanding as to the true nature of these ministries? I would humbly suggest that a better understanding of these ministries could remove the suspicion, mystique and abuse that surround these two vital functions of the church.

Chapter 7

Apostles

7.1 The Problems

The problems that arise when attempting to understand the ministry of apostles lie in the many prejudices that have been perpetuated against the continuation of this ministry as well as the many unscriptural practices that flow from a superficial reading of the relevant scriptures. Some of these misconceptions are:

- Apostles run denominations.
- Apostles receive supernatural extra-biblical revelations as Paul did.
- Apostles have authority that supersedes that of scripture.
- Apostles succeed one another (a continuous line since Peter in some cases).
- Apostles are the highest authority in the church.
- Apostles are inward (churchward) focused while evangelists look outward.

Most of these views are based on a failure to distinguish between different “classes” or “orders” of apostles as revealed in the New Testament.

7.2 The Term “Apostle”

Thayers says the word means: “a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders”.³⁸⁸

Kittel says: “Always signified is the person sent with full authority... *apostolos* denotes one who is legally charged to represent the person and cause of another”.³⁸⁹ Thus apostles are simply those who are sent out with a particular mission. From this concept we get the word “missionary”. There are three important components that need to be defined in order to fully understand a particular apostle. There is the sender, the sent one and the mission or purpose. Defining these three components in each case will greatly assist to understand the differences between the various orders of apostles.

³⁸⁸ Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Under “apostle”.

³⁸⁹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p70.

7.3 Jesus

The first and most important of all who are named apostles is Jesus Christ: "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him".³⁹⁰ Jesus was sent by the Father³⁹¹ to seek and to save that which was lost³⁹² and to build His church.³⁹³ He fully represents the Father and acts with the full blessing and authority of God Himself.

7.4 The Twelve

The twelve apostles (also called "the apostles of the Lamb")³⁹⁴ were unique and of a closed number – twelve. Revelation 21:14 speaks about the special place their names occupy in the foundations of the New Jerusalem. Not only did they occupy a special place in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and in the establishment of the church, but The Lord Jesus envisioned a special purpose for them in the Millennial Kingdom.³⁹⁵ The Twelve were first called "apostles"³⁹⁶ and "the twelve apostles"³⁹⁷ quite early in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. After the fall of Judas they are called "the eleven" for a short while.³⁹⁸ These twelve were commissioned by the Lord Jesus to "preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give".³⁹⁹

Thus they are sent by Jesus Himself and their first commission is clearly defined. A little while later Jesus sends the seventy, but notably these are not called "apostles" even though they receive a similar mission from the same source as that of the Twelve.⁴⁰⁰ After the ascension He commissioned the Twelve again in the upper room.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁰ Hebrews 3:1,2.

³⁹¹ John 20:21.

³⁹² Luke 19:10.

³⁹³ Matthew 16:18.

³⁹⁴ Revelation 21:14.

³⁹⁵ Luke 22:29,30.

³⁹⁶ Luke 6:13.

³⁹⁷ Matthew 10:2.

³⁹⁸ Matthew 28:16, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:9,33.

³⁹⁹ Matthew 10:7,8, Luke 9:2.

⁴⁰⁰ Luke 10:1.

⁴⁰¹ John 20:21.

7.4.1 The Replacement of Judas Iscariot

During the 10 days between the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, the disciples discovered that the Old Testament spoke about Judas' falling away and that his place was to be taken by another.⁴⁰² Peter sets one qualification for this man. He was to have been with the eleven and the Lord from His baptism to His ascension⁴⁰³. It is important to note that having been a witness to the resurrection was not a separate qualification, it would have been part of the journey from the Jordan to the Mount of Olives. His election was that he may "be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection"⁴⁰⁴ – future tense not past tense.

There are those who feel that the selection of Matthias was a mistake and that Paul should in fact have been (was) the twelfth apostle. This is based on Paul's statements that he had also seen the Lord "as one borne out of due time".⁴⁰⁵ This is said to be Paul's claim that he had fulfilled the requirement set in the upper room. Paul, however, did not fulfil the requirement, as he was not part of the group that had been with Jesus for the three-and-a-half years. There is also not a single scripture that says that Paul should be part of the twelve and he explicitly sets himself apart from them⁴⁰⁶ and works separate from (but not against) them.⁴⁰⁷

There is also no evidence that the selection of Matthias was out of order, as he is clearly numbered with the eleven to make twelve: "the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles".⁴⁰⁸ In recording Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, Luke says: "Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice".⁴⁰⁹ Clearly Matthias is fully absorbed in the number of the apostles. The verse immediately following the election of Mathias tells about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:26 & 2:1). It appears that God had thus placed His approval on the selection of Matthias.

⁴⁰² Psalm 109:8, Acts 1:20.

⁴⁰³ Acts 1:22.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ 1Corinthians 15:8, 2Corinthians 12:1-6.

⁴⁰⁶ Galatians 1:17.

⁴⁰⁷ Romans 15:20, 2Corinthians 10:15, Galatians 2:7-9.

⁴⁰⁸ Acts 1:26.

⁴⁰⁹ Acts 2:14.

7.5 Paul

It is clear from the above that Paul was not part of the Twelve and so we need to examine his ministry more carefully in order to understand where he fits into the whole picture.

7.5.1 Paul's Commission

Paul specifically traces his commission back to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴¹⁰

- Galatians 1:1; "Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father..."
- Ephesians 1:1; "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."
- 1Timothy 1:1; "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Unlike the commission of the Twelve, Paul's commission by the Lord did not happen publicly, nor was Jesus still on earth at the time and except for Ananias⁴¹¹ there were no witnesses to it. This does not make it less valid than that of the Twelve, but it is clearly different.

In practice he was commissioned by the church at Antioch where he and Barnabas had, up to that time, been functioning as either prophets or teachers.⁴¹² These two were sent out by the other leaders of the church at Antioch under the direction of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹³ It was only after Paul and Barnabas had embarked on their first mission journey that Luke refers to them as "apostles".⁴¹⁴ It is important to note that at this stage no distinction is drawn between Paul and Barnabas, as both are referred to as "the apostles".

From that moment on there is evidently no question in Paul's mind or in that of those to whom he ministered that he was indeed an apostle. His position as an apostle came under attack by some of the Corinthians, especially by those who were divisive. He has no hesitation to defend himself and his apostleship to the Corinthians. In 2Corinthians 12:11 he sets himself on a par with the most eminent of the (twelve) apostles: "for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing".

⁴¹⁰ Acts 20:24, Galatians 1:1.

⁴¹¹ Acts 9:15-16.

⁴¹² Acts 13:1.

⁴¹³ Acts 13:2,4.

⁴¹⁴ Acts 14:4,14.

7.5.2 Paul's Ministry

It is evident from the paragraphs above that Paul could not be one of the Twelve or an addition to them (a thirteenth) as their number was closed. At no time do we see Paul including himself amongst the Twelve in the day-to-day operation of the church, nor did they feel the need to include him. He clearly operates as an apostle, separate from, and different to the Twelve. He speaks of those who were apostles before him⁴¹⁵ and of himself as an apostle to the Gentiles.⁴¹⁶ It is clear from the accounts of Paul's ministry that he was uniquely equipped, prepared and called to spread the gospel amongst the Gentiles. Peter also had a limited work amongst the Gentiles, but not to the same extent and focus as Paul.

Although the Scriptures say very little about Paul's responsibility of writing much of the New Testament, it is evident that God had uniquely prepared him for this very important task of writing the epistles, which later would form the backbone of the New Testament. Peter attests to the fact that Paul's writings are equal to scripture, which, at that time, consisted of the Old Testament.

...as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also *the rest of the Scriptures*.⁴¹⁷

For this purpose he receives instruction at the hands of the glorified Christ⁴¹⁸ and revelation which is unparalleled. Here is his testimony:

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught [it], but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁴¹⁹

He then continues to show that he was not in touch with the Twelve, but that he received his doctrine by direct revelation. When, at the council of Jerusalem,⁴²⁰ he compared notes with the other apostles, it was determined that his message was not only the same as that of the Twelve, it was also complete and they could add nothing to it.⁴²¹ More than that, Paul went on to show the Galatians that Peter's practice around the issues of legalism was flawed (possibly revealing a slight flaw in his theology) and

⁴¹⁵ Galatians 1:17.

⁴¹⁶ Romans 11:1, Galatians 1:15, Galatians 2:7.

⁴¹⁷ 2Peter 3:15,16. (Emphasis added).

⁴¹⁸ 1Corinthians 11:23.

⁴¹⁹ Galatians 1:11,12.

⁴²⁰ Acts 15.

⁴²¹ Galatians 1:11-2:9.

thus the need for Paul to correct Peter publicly.⁴²² Thus Paul has certain truths more sharply in focus than Peter who had sat at Jesus' feet. The mechanics of how Paul received this revelation is not important to this discussion, the fact is he received revelation which was comparable, if not more comprehensive than that of Peter.

It has to be emphasized that Paul was unique in his calling, preparation and ministry. No other apostle, not in the New Testament, nor since, can be compared with Paul. He was especially unique in that he received revelation and wrote much of the canon of the New Testament. Amongst the Twelve there were many who did not receive this kind of revelation and consequently their writings or teachings are not part of the canon. Thus the suggestion that modern apostles should receive similar revelations to Paul and that their teachings are as authoritative as that of Paul⁴²³ has no biblical support.

They (the apostles) had an obvious consciousness that it was being given to them to finally complete the divine revelation for this dispensation (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; 2 Peter 1:15; Revelation 22:18-19); and any supposed additional revelation today, on which a man would claim the apostolic office, is rightly to be regarded with the utmost suspicion; as an almost certain mark of error and deception.⁴²⁴

7.5.3 Paul and the Resurrected Christ

In 1Corinthians 15:8 Paul speaks of having seen the resurrected Christ. Some use this passage as proof of Paul's apostleship. Some even use it to prove that he was one of the Twelve (instead of Matthias). This is based on the apparent similarity between 1Corinthians 15:8 and Acts 1:21. Note that the requirements for Judas' replacement were:

Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.⁴²⁵

Paul simply claims to have seen the resurrected Christ and not that he had been with Him during His earthly ministry. By no stretch of the imagination does Paul qualify as one who walked with the Lord Jesus from the baptism of John. He therefore does not qualify as one of the Twelve or even as a thirteenth.

⁴²² Galatians 2:11ff.

⁴²³ Coppin, Ezra M. *The Relevance of the Ascension Gifts in the Life of the Church*. California Graduate School of Theology. 1985. p167.

⁴²⁴ Gee, Donald. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. Assemblies of God Publishing House. c1930. Nottingham. p34.

⁴²⁵ Acts 1:21.

Paul proves his apostleship to the Corinthians by two things. Firstly that he had been their father in the faith.⁴²⁶ Secondly that he performed signs, wonders and mighty deeds.⁴²⁷

If 1Corinthians 15:8-10 is read in the context of the verses preceding and succeeding it – it becomes evident that the point that Paul is making here is not his apostleship, but his credentials as a witness to the resurrection and that he has the right to teach authoritatively on this subject. If witnessing the resurrected Christ is the basis of apostleship, then there were another 500 apostles besides Paul and the Twelve!⁴²⁸

7.6 The Apostles of the Ascended Christ

Ephesians 4:8 says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” Ephesians further emphasises the timing of the giving of the gifts by specifying that the ascension of our Lord was preceded by his descending into the lower parts of the earth. The apostles appointed/chosen/given in Ephesians 4:11 are clearly given *after* the ascension of the Lord Jesus. This would then indicate a difference between the Twelve, who were so named before, and other apostles who were given after the ascension. We may refer to these as the apostles of the ascended Christ. Paul would thus be one of those apostles that were given after the ascension.

7.6.1 Others Who Were Called Apostles in the New Testament

In addition to Paul and the Twelve, a number of other men were named and functioned as apostles. These are:

- Barnabas – “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this...”⁴²⁹
- James the Lord's brother – “But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother”.⁴³⁰ (Note: This James was not one of the Twelve.)
- Epaphroditus – “Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger (*Apostolos*) and the one who ministered to my need”.⁴³¹
- Apollos – Although 1Corinthians 3:22, 1Corinthians 4:9 do not call Apollos an apostle explicitly, it is implied in the context.

⁴²⁶ 1Corinthians 4:15.

⁴²⁷ 2Corinthians 12:12.

⁴²⁸ 1Corinthians 15:6.

⁴²⁹ Acts 14:14.

⁴³⁰ Galatians 1:19.

⁴³¹ Philippians 2:25. Young is the only translator who correctly translates as apostle, what is messenger in most other translations. The word in the Greek is *Apostolos* (Strongs # 652).

- Timothy & Silas. In Thessalonians 1:1 the letter is written by Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy. In this letter, as in all of Paul's letters, he carefully differentiates between "I" and "we".⁴³² However in 1Thessalonians2:6 he says "Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as *apostles* of Christ." Paul thus refers to himself, Timothy and Silvanus as apostles.⁴³³
- Andronicus and Junias – Romans 16:7: "... salute Andronicus and Junias, my kindred, and my fellow-captives, who are of note among the apostles," Commentators are divided on this verse.⁴³⁴ Some say that these two had a good reputation with the Apostles, while others say that of all the apostles, these were important. The face-value interpretation of this verse to me speaks of the second. These two people were noteworthy as (prominent) apostles. The second problem is that the King James Version, New King James Version and Weymouth translate the second person's name as Junia, which is female. The American Standard, Darby, LSG French, Luther's German, New International Version, New English Bible and Young translate it as Junias – male. The preferred Greek texts all have the name as male (Ιουλιαν).⁴³⁵

The above references clearly show that there were men, other than Paul and the Twelve, who were recognised as apostles. Although they were apostles in the sense of having been sent out, they were different in the author of their commission, in the scope of their ministry, and in the duration of, and impact, of their ministries.

⁴³² 1Thessalonians 2:18, 3:5, 4:9, 4:13, 5:1, 5:23, 5:27.

⁴³³ Note that this is not the "Royal we", which concept was introduced many years later by Queen Victoria when speaking of herself and not wishing to exclude Albert.

⁴³⁴ FF Bruce and Jamieson, Fausset & Brown and *The New Bible Dictionary* state that they are undecided. FL Godet and HCG Moule say Junias must have been male. Matthew-Henry, Thayer and the *New Bible Commentary* make the case for the female form.

⁴³⁵ Aland, B, Aland, K, Black, M, Martini, C M, Metzger, B M, & Wikgren, A. *The Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament 27th/UBS 4th Edition*. United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany. 1993, c1979. (Electronic).

Pierpont, WG, & Robinson, MA. *The New Testament in the Original Greek : According to the Byzantine/Majority textform*. The Original Word Publishers: Roswell, GA. 1995, c1991. (Electronic).

Westcott, BF, & Hort, FJA. *1881 Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament*. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor WA. 1996. (Electronic).

Tischendorf, C. *Vol. 3: Tischendorf's Greek New Testament* (electronic ed. of the 8th ed.). Logos Library System. Logos Research Systems: Oak Harbor. 1997, c1869-1894. (Electronic).

Scrivener. *Scrivener's 1881 Textus Receptus*. Logos Research Systems: Oak Harbor. 1995. (Electronic).

Stephanus. *Stephen's 1550 Textus Receptus*. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA. 1995. (Electronic).

The Twelve and Paul were commissioned by the Lord Jesus Himself. All other apostles were commissioned by the churches. By this we do not detract from the fact that the gift still finds its source in the Head of the Church. The subsequent apostles differed in scope in the sense that they lay foundations for local churches. Paul and the Twelve lay foundations for the Universal Church. In the same way the duration of their impact differed in that the Twelve and Paul still have an effect on the Church today, mainly through their writings. The other apostles only impacted their churches for one or two generations. Thus, although all apostles were sent out with the specific responsibility to lay foundations, they did not all have the same function or measure.

7.6.2 Apostles After the First Century

Church history abounds with examples of men who followed in the footsteps of and functioned much like New Testament apostles. The only difference is that these are normally called missionaries. We shall examine a few examples.

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) travelled extensively in Great Britain, North America, The West Indies, Europe, New Zealand and Australia.⁴³⁶ Wherever he went he preached and established churches. In spite of a major split amongst his followers and doctrinal and personal idiosyncrasies, at the end of his life "he left behind him some fifteen hundred churches... who looked to him as their founder and their guide."⁴³⁷ WB Neatby spoke of him as "...the apostle of tireless energy".⁴³⁸ These comments are especially pertinent as they come from a movement that denies the continuation of apostles beyond the book of Acts. Even a superficial study of Darby's life and work reveals a ministry which very clearly epitomised that of an apostle.

In 1915 William F P Burton headed into the jungles of the Congo. Here he worked amongst people who had never before heard the gospel. At the end of 45 years of ministry he had established 985 churches, all of them fully self-supporting and staffed by indigenous leaders who had been converted and disciplined by Burton.⁴³⁹

These are but two of many examples. Countless books have been written about hundreds of men who in similar vein preached the gospel to unreached peoples, taught them and established churches. Donald Gee says:

⁴³⁶ Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. p209.

⁴³⁷ Ibid p107.

⁴³⁸ Neatby WB. *History of the Plymouth Brethren*, p78. in Coad p 106.

⁴³⁹ Whittaker, Colin. *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers*. Marshalls. Basingstoke. 1983. pp146-179.

With diffidence we might suggest such names as Augustine, Columba, Luther, Knox, Fox, Wesley, Carey, Hudson Taylor, Judson, Muller, and others. Admittedly they may not fulfil all that which we consider justifies their recognition as "apostles", but the extent and result of their labours have been truly "apostolic."⁴⁴⁰

Missionaries are the apostolic ministry in action. Not all missionaries are apostles because many of them are involved in administration, medical work or education. Those however, who establish churches, train leaders and then move on to new ground are apostles indeed – whatever title we may give them. Lightfoot confirms that: "The apostle... was essentially, as his name denotes, a missionary, moving about from place to place, founding and confirming new brotherhoods."⁴⁴¹

7.7 The Work of an Apostle

There are four basic aspects which are fundamental to the work of an apostle. There may be many other things he would do in the normal course of his duties, but these four must occupy the bulk of his time.

- First an apostle is sent out to preach the gospel.⁴⁴²
- Second he establishes assemblies.⁴⁴³ (The difference between the evangelist and the apostle is essentially that the one only preaches the gospel while the other takes the next step and establishes a local church.)
- Third he confirms and establishes the churches through follow-up visits.⁴⁴⁴
- Fourth they appoint elders to oversee the local churches.⁴⁴⁵

MacArthur gives a very good description of the work of an Apostle, but, because of his cessationist view, calls them evangelists and yet he is clearly describing the work of apostles.

In the early church an evangelist was a church planter who went to an area where there were no Christians, won some people to Christ, and established a congregation. Usually he would stay with that congregation for as long as a year, maybe even longer, until he had taught them sufficiently. When some of the people had matured, he would then appoint elders in that city to care for the church and teach it. Then he would move to another place and do the same thing all over again.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴⁰ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p37.

⁴⁴¹ Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. p196.

⁴⁴² Mark 16:15, Acts 16:10, Romans 15:19,20 etc.

⁴⁴³ 1Corinthians 3:10, Acts 19:8-10, Acts 18:1-11.

⁴⁴⁴ Acts 14:21,22.

⁴⁴⁵ Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5.

⁴⁴⁶ MacArthur. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. p84.

7.8 Apostolic Succession

Most denominations who recognise apostles will have some form of apostolic succession. By this we mean that apostles are replaced by new apostles as the older ones die. Some like the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches will trace this line of succession back to Peter or the Twelve. Some of these groups will boast of this line, while others try to deny that they believe or practice any form of succession. This practice is especially prevalent when apostles are in charge of denominations. There is however no reference in the New Testament to any form of apostolic succession. Yes, the message has to be passed from one generation to the next,⁴⁴⁷ but a relationship and personal gift cannot be bequeathed.

Paul sets a clear example of the process in his dealings with the Ephesian elders. Paul had established the church at Ephesus⁴⁴⁸ and, because of the relatively long time (three years) he had spent there, he must have had very good personal relationships with many of the believers in that church. Yet, when he passed by on his way to Jerusalem he stopped at Miletus and called for the *elders*.⁴⁴⁹ It is important to note that at this point his relationship was no longer with the believers personally, but with the elders and that he does not call for the church, but only for the elders. Also note that his request carried a certain authority and that it was obeyed without hesitation.

Paul then proceeds to explain that this would be the last time they would see him⁴⁵⁰ and thus gives final instructions for the continued care of the church. Note that he makes no provision for a successor. He does not point to Timothy in whom he had much confidence, and who would minister in Ephesus at a later date. Nor does he nominate Barnabas or one of the Twelve. The responsibility for the church's ongoing care and protection had passed fully onto the shoulders of the local elders:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember...⁴⁵¹

If the Lord Jesus Christ or Paul had any intention to have apostolic succession established in the church, we would have seen it implemented here. Paul knew that he

⁴⁴⁷ 2Timothy 2:2.

⁴⁴⁸ Acts 19.

⁴⁴⁹ Acts 20:17.

⁴⁵⁰ Acts 20:25.

⁴⁵¹ Acts 20:28-31.

was to be removed from the scene – he was not taken by surprise and the only provision he makes is for the instruction of local elders.

Roland Allen alludes to the same principle:

With the appointment of elders the churches were complete. They were fully equipped. They very soon became familiar with all the orders of ministry both permanent and charismatic. They no longer depended necessarily upon St Paul. If he went away, or if he died, the churches remained.⁴⁵²

7.9 Apostolic Infallibility

From the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the Pope to the many apostles who claim direct revelations and thus infallibility a common thread runs by which these despots control their organisations. Again we have to say that the scriptures teach no such thing. It is interesting to note that Peter was rebuked publicly by Paul⁴⁵³ and Peter confessed that he found Paul's teachings hard to understand.⁴⁵⁴ If anyone should have been equipped with this power, it was Peter, yet he clearly made mistakes and had limited insight. It is therefore somewhat ridiculous for those who claim to follow in Peter's footsteps to suggest they have what even Peter did not have.

7.10 The Apostolic Office

It is commonly held that apostles are officers in denominations who hold that office in all situations.⁴⁵⁵ This is not supported by the New Testament where an apostle can only be such by virtue of a fatherly relationship with particular churches.⁴⁵⁶ Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church, where some of the believers seemed to gravitate to other apostles, provides us with some lucid teaching on this matter.

In 1Cor 3, Paul admonishes the Corinthians because of their schismatic attitudes. Some were following Paul, while others preferred Peter or Apollos. In this context he seeks to prove his apostleship by three points. He speaks of having planted while others watered.⁴⁵⁷ He reminds them that he had laid the foundation and that only one foundation can be laid. All others who come after the foundation layer are builders on

⁴⁵² Allen. *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Our's?* p 111.

Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p20.

⁴⁵³ Galatians 2:11.

⁴⁵⁴ 2Peter 3:16.

⁴⁵⁵ Sumrall, Lester. *The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit*. Harrison House. Tulsa. 1982. p205.

Nee, Watchman. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. Living Stream Ministry. Anaheim. 1994. p10.

⁴⁵⁶ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p33.

⁴⁵⁷ 1Corinthians 3:6.

that foundation.⁴⁵⁸ By both these illustrations he emphasises his foundational (apostolic) role. From this platform he then says: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”.⁴⁵⁹ Thus he concludes that there can only be one planter, foundation layer or father to the Corinthians – thus only one apostle. Amongst the waterers, builders or instructors were Peter and Apollos – both apostles in their own right. This is very interesting as Paul is in effect saying that Peter is an apostle in Jerusalem, but not in Corinth. Later in the epistle he applies the converse of this argument to himself: “If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”⁴⁶⁰ In other words Paul may not be an apostle in Jerusalem, but he *is* to the Corinthian church.

This clearly defines the concept of “one church, one apostle”. No-one could ever take Paul’s place as an apostle to the Corinthians – they would only ever have one apostle – Paul. All others would be instructors, those who water and those who build on his foundation. The idea of an apostle taking authority over a church he has not established is clearly being refuted in these passages. This mitigates against the trend of latter-day apostles bringing churches they had not established under their authority and then ruling over these churches as a form of archbishop.

7.10.1 Apostles Look Out, Elders Look In

Apostles are sent out, and as clearly illustrated by Paul’s ministry, remain on the move as they continually plant new churches, visiting those they have established from time to time until elders are appointed. Once elders are appointed, the apostle moves on to new territory. The very essence of his ministry demands that he be on the move, always looking for new opportunities to preach the gospel and establish new assemblies. Paul stresses the fact that he is determined to only work in new fields: “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation.”⁴⁶¹

Elders are inward focussed and have no responsibilities beyond the local fellowship. Their total focus is the care, protection, feeding and guidance of their flock. Although

⁴⁵⁸ 1Corinthians 3:10.

⁴⁵⁹ 1Corinthians 4:15.

⁴⁶⁰ 1Corinthians 9:2.

⁴⁶¹ Romans 15:20.

there were a number of churches within close proximity of Ephesus, Paul does not instruct the Ephesian elders to extend themselves to Smyrna or to Laodicea.

These two principles highlight the mistake of modern “apostles” who have no interest in the preaching of the Gospel to virgin territory, but rather rule as sovereigns over large collections of churches they have managed to amass.⁴⁶² They spend their time looking inward at their “kingdom” instead of leaving that part of the work to the shepherds, and having been released, go into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples.

7.10.2 Apostolic Teams

It appears that Paul never worked alone, but always took other men with him who could minister to him, assist him in the work and who, in turn, were being trained by Paul. It is very important to note that these teams were dynamic – they changed all the time. At different times in the journey, men would be left behind or dispatched to some other field while others would join the party.

These teams were never static and they were not another name for a committee or governing body. Some denominations have, what they call, apostolic teams⁴⁶³ but this is just another name for the controlling body of the denomination. None of the New Testament apostles ever worked like that and the concept is as foreign to New Testament church life as the concept of a Pope.

⁴⁶² Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p174.

⁴⁶³ Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. pp106, 175, 178.

Chapter 8

Prophets

8.1 Introduction

As with the ministry of the apostle, a lot of confusion exists around the ministry of prophets. Much of this confusion surrounds the question of the role of the prophet as a foreteller of future events and about the difference between the Old Testament and New Testament prophets. Although the New Testament does not provide a lot of information as to the function and ministry of the prophet sufficient insight is provided in order to arrive at a fair understanding of this ministry. Only four are specifically mentioned as being New Testament prophets – Jesus, Agabus, Judas and Silas. There were, however, besides these four a number of other prophets who were not named.⁴⁶⁴

8.2 Examples of New Testament Prophets

8.2.1 Jesus

The first of all New Testament prophets is obviously the Lord Jesus Christ. Both Peter and Stephen preached that He was that prophet which Moses had prophesied would be raised up.⁴⁶⁵ However, because Jesus was endowed with all the gifts, it is very difficult to isolate one specific aspect of His ministry in order to define how that ministry operates.

8.2.2 Agabus

Agabus appears on the scene twice. First he predicts, "There was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar".⁴⁶⁶ Second he prophesied that Paul would be bound at Jerusalem and handed

⁴⁶⁴ Acts 11:27, 13:1.

⁴⁶⁵ Acts 3:21-25, 7:22,27.

⁴⁶⁶ Acts 11:27.

over to the Gentiles.⁴⁶⁷ It is important to note that Agabus was accurate on the first of these two, but that the prophecy concerning Paul was flawed in the detail. First he predicted that the “Jews at Jerusalem” would bind Paul. This did in fact not happen. Luke is specific on two occasions, Acts 21:23 and Acts 22:29, that it was the *Romans* who bound Paul. Second he foretells that the Jews would “deliver” Paul into the hands of the Gentiles. Again this was not fulfilled as the Jews tried to kill Paul and the Romans had to rescue Paul by force.⁴⁶⁸

It is further noteworthy that Paul did not regard the prophecies concerning his capture and the need to avoid captivity as prescriptive. He continues to do what God had indicated to him personally to do.⁴⁶⁹

The fact that these are the only two occasions when prophecies of a New Testament prophet are recorded is significant. They clearly indicate that:

- New Testament Prophets are not accurate *verbatim* as Old Testament prophets were.
- Their pronouncements were not the authoritative word of God as in the Old Testament.
- This aspect of the ministry of a New Testament prophet was indeed a minor aspect of the work of a prophet.

8.2.3 Judas and Silas

We are not given much detail about these two men. They are specifically called prophets and are sent from the council at Jerusalem with the responsibility to disseminate the conclusions of the meeting.⁴⁷⁰ They were “leading men amongst the brethren,”⁴⁷¹ indicating that they were mature and respected as leaders in the church.

The mission of carrying the message to Antioch does give some insight into this ministry. These two had the confidence of the council to not only carry the letter, written by James, but also to verbally explain the decision to the believers. This they did, it seems, not as “prophets” but as respected leaders. When they arrived at Antioch, they fulfilled their commission and then “exhorted and strengthened the

⁴⁶⁷ Acts 21:10.

⁴⁶⁸ Acts 21:32-33.

⁴⁶⁹ Acts 21:13,14.

⁴⁷⁰ Acts 15:22.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

brethren with many words."⁴⁷² This second "phase" of their ministry in Antioch had to do with their ministry as prophets. Thus we can deduce that exhortation (building up) and strengthening are essential elements of this ministry.

Having completed their work, the church at Antioch released them to return to Jerusalem, thus indicating their submission to the local church where they were functioning at the time as opposed to functioning as representatives of Jerusalem. Silas, however, felt differently and decided to stay while Judas returned. After a while in Antioch, Paul asks Silas to accompany him on his next missionary journey. Later Paul continued his journey, leaving Silas behind.⁴⁷³ After some time, Paul sends for Silas and Timothy, who both obey this call indicating that they were working under Paul's direction at that point in time.⁴⁷⁴ The manner in which Silas' movements are arranged give an important insight into the absence of a hierarchical structure and the degree of fluidity that existed in the relationships between these workers. Men moved about as they personally felt the Holy Spirit direct them and as the dynamics of relationships amongst these workers required.

8.3 Differences Between Old Testament and New Testament Prophets⁴⁷⁵

8.3.1 Ecstatic vs. non-ecstatic utterance

Old Testament prophets spoke ecstatically. According to Grudem an affirmative answer to any one of four questions would define the prophet as speaking ecstatically.

- Was the prophet forced to speak against his will?
- Did the prophet lose his self-control and begin to rave violently or in a disorderly, disruptive way?
- Did the prophet speak things that made no sense to him?
- Was the prophet for a time unaware of his surroundings?⁴⁷⁶

Thus a careful examination of most of the Old Testament prophets would reveal that they spoke "under the control of the Holy Spirit", often did not understand what they were saying and at times had no control over what they uttered.

⁴⁷² Acts 15:31.

⁴⁷³ Acts 17:14.

⁴⁷⁴ Acts 17:15.

⁴⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem has done an excellent and detailed study on the differences between these two "varieties" of prophets in Appendix One of his book *The Gift of Prophecy*. Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2000.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid p103.

The New Testament prophet is however different. In dealing with the disorder in the Corinthian church, Paul is emphatic that "...the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets"⁴⁷⁷ and that prophets could choose whether they wanted to speak or not.⁴⁷⁸ The modern trend for people to say, "I could not help doing this or that – the spirit made me do it" belies this principle. Friedrich confirms the absence of the ecstatic in the operation of the New Testament prophet:

Its chief mark is the proclamation of God's word in which the speaker's personhood remains intact (1Corinthians 14). It stays on the sober ground of faith (cf Romans 12:6). God gives, and believers make responsible use of the gift.⁴⁷⁹

8.3.2 Foretelling

It is also incorrectly assumed that the prime function of Old Testament prophets was to predict future events.⁴⁸⁰ This erroneous preconception is then amplified in a double error when it becomes the prime function of New Testament prophets to speak predictively. "The biblical prophet was primarily a servant of the covenant whose main purpose was *to speak forth the Word of God*. Forth telling is more primary than foretelling."⁴⁸¹ "The main function of Old Testament prophets was to be *messengers from God*, sent to speak to men and women with words from God."⁴⁸² "The biblical prophet is... essentially a proclaimer of the word, not a magician or soothsayer."⁴⁸³ Thus in both the Old and New Testaments, prediction of future events was a secondary aspect of the function of a prophet and, in the Old, such predictions were often declared as consequences of not heeding the word of God, or of not returning to the terms of the covenant.

8.3.3 Authority of the Prophetic Word

The Old Testament prophet spoke the very words of God. "(I) will put My words in His mouth"⁴⁸⁴ are words that frequently appear in the scriptures.⁴⁸⁵ The very words that the prophet would speak would be the actual words God was speaking, to such an extent

⁴⁷⁷ 1Corinthians 14:32.

⁴⁷⁸ 1Corinthians 14:29,30.

⁴⁷⁹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p963.

⁴⁸⁰ Koch, Kurt. *Charismatic Gifts*. The Association for Christian Evangelism. Montreal. 1975. p109.

⁴⁸¹ Juster, Dan *Jewish Roots*. Destiny Image. 1995. Shippensburg. p18.

⁴⁸² Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. p21.

⁴⁸³ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p960.

⁴⁸⁴ Deuteronomy 18:18.

⁴⁸⁵ Exodus 4:12, 24:3, Numbers 22:38, 23:5,16, Jeremiah 1:9, Ezekiel 2:7 etc.

that the prophets often spoke in the first person. One example out of many is when Isaiah says: "Thus says the Lord to His anointed...I am the Lord, and there is no other,"⁴⁸⁶ thus "to disbelieve or disobey anything the prophet says in God's name is no minor matter – it is to disbelieve or disobey God."⁴⁸⁷ "What the Lord thus spoke through the prophet had absolute divine authority, extending even to the very word the prophet used."⁴⁸⁸ As a result much of the Old Testament scriptures are these same words of the prophets in written form.

When we turn to the New Testament however, we find that this kind of authority is vested in the Apostles who wrote the New Testament.⁴⁸⁹ No prophet in the New Testament has the same authority as an Old Testament prophet, nor did they speak the very words of God as in the Old. If this were not so, the words of these prophets would likewise be above question. But the contrary is true. The words of the prophets are to be judged.⁴⁹⁰ As seen above, Paul had no hesitation to reject the words of the prophets as not binding, even though different prophets confirmed the same prophecies.⁴⁹¹

The Old Testament prophet had to be tested as a *prophet*.⁴⁹² If he passed that test, his words were above question. The New Testament prophet is not tested as a *prophet*, but every time he speaks, his *words* are to be judged. While Old Testament prophets spoke words that were not only equal with scripture, but also *were* scripture, those of the New do not have the same authority as scripture and indeed have to conform to, and be subservient to the scriptures.⁴⁹³

8.4 Prophets in Practice

8.4.1 Revelation Rather Than Plenary Inspiration

As seen above, Old Testament prophets received the very words they were to speak and often had no control over what they would say at all. Since we have established that those of the New Covenant do not enter into the same kind of ecstasy, it becomes important to define how they receive their message. "Prophecy rests on revelation.

⁴⁸⁶ Isaiah 45:1, 5.

⁴⁸⁷ Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. p24.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid p25.

⁴⁸⁹ 1Corinthians 11:23.

⁴⁹⁰ 1Corinthians 14:29, 1Thessalonians 5:20,21.

⁴⁹¹ Acts 21:4, 11.

⁴⁹² Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 18:20-22.

⁴⁹³ 1Corinthians 14:37.

Revelation is imparted to the prophet and becomes prophetic proclamation.⁴⁹⁴ We can see this in 1Corinthians 14:30: "But if anything is *revealed* to another who sits by..." Thus the Spirit would give some kind of revealed knowledge to the prophet, which would have to be from God and in conformity with His Word to be valid. Because this is a revelation of a (small) part of the mind of the Lord and because this revelation comes to a human mind which is tainted by it's own agenda, background and spirituality, or lack thereof, the message which is conveyed to the congregation could be incomplete, lacking in detail or even incorrect. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part...for now we see in a mirror, dimly."⁴⁹⁵ Hence the need to evaluate that which is spoken, as is also clearly evident in the case of Agabus and Paul.

Grudem lists five qualities of this revelation:⁴⁹⁶

- The revelation comes spontaneously.
- The revelation comes to an individual.
- The revelation is from God.
- The revelation gives insights from God's perspective.
- The revelation is recognisable to the prophet.

8.4.2 Evaluating the Words of the Prophet

1Corinthians 14:29: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (NKJV) "Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said" (NIV). The question is who are the others that must judge? Three possibilities are proposed. First, those with the gift of discernment of spirits, second the other prophets, and third the whole congregation.

It could not refer to the gift of discerning spirits as the only link between 1Corinthians 14:29 (let the others *judge*) and 1Corinthians 12:10 (*discerning* of spirits) is the similarity between the two Greek words, for judge (*diakrino*) and discerning (*diakrasis*) and of their proximity in the text. This link however is tenuous at best.

If Paul had meant to restrict his instructions in 1Corinthians 14:29 to those with this gift, he would not have used such a general term as "the others" and left it without further specification. He would have had to say something like, "those with the gift of distinguishing between spirits" if he had wanted to convey this meaning to his readers.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p963.

⁴⁹⁵ 1Corinthians 13:8,12.

⁴⁹⁶ Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. pp96-100.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid p55.

Could Paul be meaning the other prophets when referring to “the others”? This is possible, but we must raise the same objection as above. Surely he would have specified the other prophets if that were what he meant. The second objection is the practical application of this rule. If it meant the other prophets, one could imagine a prophet speaking after which the other prophets would meet in a huddle while the congregation waits for the decision. Once these prophets had conferred they would relay their decision to the congregation by which time the force of what had been said had been forgotten.⁴⁹⁸ Surely not.

In other scriptures that refer to the judging of what had been said, the whole congregation is involved. In 1Corinthians 12:3, Paul gives a test for the evaluation of speech. He gives it to the whole congregation, not to an elect group. In the same way he tells the Thessalonians “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things.”⁴⁹⁹ Again it is evident that he is addressing the whole church and not just a particular part of that church. The Bereans are commended because they “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”.⁵⁰⁰ In each of these instances the whole assembly is involved and it would seem correct to assume that 1Corinthians 14:29 is no exception to this pattern.

Grudem proposes the following scenario, which seems highly probable:

As a prophet was speaking, each member of the congregation would listen carefully, evaluating the prophecy in the light of the Scripture and the authoritative teaching that he or she already knew to be true. Soon there would be an opportunity to speak in response, with the wise and mature no doubt making the most contribution. But no member of the body would have needed to feel useless (cf. 1Corinthians 12:22), for every member at least silently would weigh and evaluate what was said.⁵⁰¹

Against what is the prophecy tested or measured? There can only be one median – the Word of God. There can be no other standard as all else would be subjective and therefore would not be normative in every situation and in every church.

...there is the over-all test of the apostolic deposit. The test of the true prophet, or any man who lays claim to spirituality, is that he takes ‘knowledge of the things that I write to you, that they are the commandment of the Lord’, for apart from this there is nothing but ignorance (1Corinthians 14:37,38 RV). This

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid p56.

⁴⁹⁹ 1Thessalonians 5:20,21.

⁵⁰⁰ Acts 17:11.

⁵⁰¹ Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. p57.

teaches us that the prophets were not sources of new truth to the Church, but expounders of truth otherwise revealed.⁵⁰²

8.4.3 The Purpose of Prophecy

The purpose of prophecy is clearly stated in 1Corinthians 14:3 “But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.” Other than this verse, we have no other statement as to the purpose of prophecy. It is interesting that the predictive aspect is not included in what seems a fairly complete definition. In one of the few scriptures that show prophets in operation, Judas and Silas “exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words”.⁵⁰³ This confirms 1Corinthians 14:3.

The Greek word for edification (*oikodome*) is made up of two words – *oikos* meaning a house and *demo* meaning to build. So it literally means, “to build up the house” or “the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, happiness, holiness”.⁵⁰⁴ Thus building up the church and its members in the faith would be the first priority of prophecy. Paul contrasts edification with breaking down when a few verses earlier he says “... according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.”⁵⁰⁵ This may indeed be a good test as to the validity of a prophet’s ministry and prophetic utterance: Does it build up or break down? This question should not only be asked in the short term but in the long term. Many apparent prophecies seem encouraging to the hearer at the time, but in the long run can be very destructive. Take for example the common “prophecy”, “God told me to tell you to resign your job, he has a great work for you”. When this does not come to pass and the poor victim has lost all, it can rightly be assumed that this was destructive and not up-building.

The Greek word for exhortation is *paraklêsis*. Of the verb form of this word Vine says: “to call on, entreat... to admonish, exhort, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct (always prospective, looking to the future, in contrast to the meaning to comfort, which is retrospective, having to do with trial experienced)”.⁵⁰⁶ Thus exhortation includes the whole gamut from encouragement to admonition, but all with an eye to urging the believer on to greater devotion and service.

⁵⁰² Motyer, JA. *The New Bible Dictionary*. JD Douglas (Ed) Inter-Varsity Press, London. 1970. p1045.

⁵⁰³ Acts 15:32.

⁵⁰⁴ Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁵⁰⁵ 2Corinthians 13:10.

⁵⁰⁶ Vine. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Bible Words*.

Of the Greek word for “comfort”, Vine says that it is “primarily a speaking closely to anyone (*para* - near, *muthos* - speech), hence denotes consolation, comfort, with a greater degree of tenderness than *paraklêsis* (exhortation).⁵⁰⁷

If we have to draw from the function of prophets in the Old Testament, we can deduce that prophets primarily called men back to a right relationship with God and to the scriptures. “Should not a people seek their God?... To the law and to the testimony”⁵⁰⁸ seems to capture the essence of the Old Testament prophet’s message. Edification, exhortation and comfort are a continuum of the same function. Friedrich says: “The prophets admonish, console, encourage, and censure.”⁵⁰⁹

8.5 Are All Who Prophecy “Prophets”?

Some argue that there was not a clearly defined group of prophets and that all believers were required to prophesy.⁵¹⁰ This however stems from an incorrect assumption that all who prophesy are of necessity prophets. Every believer is required to preach the gospel,⁵¹¹ and yet there is a separate ministry or function of the evangelist.⁵¹² Every believer is required to care for others⁵¹³ and yet there is an office of elder or shepherd.⁵¹⁴ Older women are encouraged to teach younger women,⁵¹⁵ yet this does not make them teachers to the whole church since they are forbidden to teach.⁵¹⁶ Thus, in the same way everyone is encouraged to prophesy,⁵¹⁷ but this does not mean that everyone is a prophet.

In Ephesians 4:11 the word “some” is used four times, clearly emphasising that there were specific ones gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists etc. These are contrasted with and distinct from the “saints” (v12), “we all” (v13) and the function of “every joint” (v16). In 1Corinthians 12:29 Paul asks a rhetorical question: “...are all prophets?” To which the answer clearly is no. Yet he says “For you can all prophesy one by one”⁵¹⁸ and “... if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Isaiah 8:20, 21.

⁵⁰⁹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p963.

⁵¹⁰ Grudem *The Gift of Prophecy* p161ff.

⁵¹¹ Math 28:19, Mark 16:15.

⁵¹² Acts 21:8.

⁵¹³ 1Corinthians 12:25.

⁵¹⁴ Titus 1:12.

⁵¹⁵ 1Timothy 2:12.

⁵¹⁶ Titus 2:3.

⁵¹⁷ 1Corinthians 14:24, 31.

⁵¹⁸ 1Corinthians 12:31.

convinced by all, he is convicted by all.”⁵¹⁹ Thus it becomes evident that although many, if not all, in the church may prophesy, there are specific ones who are gifted as prophets in the church. As we have seen some of these are even named such as Agabus, Judas and Silas. Acts 11:27 says: “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch”. Clearly this was not a group of believers, but a specific group of men who were recognised as prophets. We find a similar group in Antioch.⁵²⁰ However, Philip had four daughters and it is specific that they prophesied,⁵²¹ and Scripture does not name them prophets or prophetesses.

In 1Corinthians 12:10 we find prophecy listed as one of the “gifts of the Spirit”. None of the other nine gifts listed resulted in the one used in that gift being called a “healer”, “tongues speaker” or “dispenser of knowledge”. These are simply gifts that support ministries or functions in the church. Thus we see miracles and healing associated with the apostolic ministry and a word of wisdom and a word of knowledge with the pastoral ministry. That does not mean that someone who is used in a word of wisdom automatically becomes a pastor. In the same way we can safely assume that the prophet would prophesy, but the converse is not of necessity true – everyone who prophesies is not *ipso facto* a prophet.

However, to speak of the “office of the prophet”⁵²² would also be wrong. We see that elders and deacons are ordained or appointed.⁵²³ There is, however, no similar instruction concerning prophets or evangelists or teachers. While these are clearly recognised by the church as “ministries” or “functions”, they do not occupy an “office”.

8.6 Prophecy, Preaching and Teaching

Lang goes to great length to show how prophecy was replaced by preaching. “In the course of the second century this original spontaneity of utterance died almost entirely away.”⁵²⁴ This resulted in the common perception today that preaching is prophecy. As shown above, prophecy must contain the element of revelation. Lang quotes a number of respected sources such as FF Bruce who stress not only revelation, but the *immediacy* of that revelation.⁵²⁵ Thus prophecy would be a speaker declaring that

⁵¹⁹ 1Corinthians 12:24.

⁵²⁰ Acts 13:1.

⁵²¹ Acts 14:9.

⁵²² Sumrall. *The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit*. p214.

⁵²³ Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5.

⁵²⁴ Lang. *The Churches of God*. pp138ff.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*.

which the Holy Spirit would reveal to him for that moment and for that audience. Thus some preaching and even some parts of a regular message or sermon could contain prophetic elements, but to say that all preaching is prophecy is to strip the gift of its supernatural component.

It is also possible to confuse prophecy and teaching. 1Corinthians 14:31 says that prophecy results in learning or instruction. However, the kind of instruction the writer has in mind would be very different from the kind of doctrinal instruction that comes from teaching. While it is evident that both prophecy and teaching would be involved in the declaration of the Word of God, there also has to be a distinction between them. On five occasions the New Testament mentions “prophets” and “teachers” in the same breath and yet, distinguishes between them as separate groups.⁵²⁶ Clearly therefore, they have different functions and, in fact, operate very differently.

Teaching has its source in a systematic study of the scriptures in a logical and, often, empirical way, while prophecy has its source in revelation which comes spontaneously. Teaching has the purpose of imparting doctrinal truth through the reasoning faculties while “the emphasis of prophecy would have been on immediate practical application to the hearers lives”.⁵²⁷ Prophecy would appeal to the conscience often through the emotions.⁵²⁸ Thus the two are so different that they could never be confused in practice.

8.7 Conclusion

Paul lays a lot of emphasis on the need for prophecy in the church: “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy... he who prophesies edifies the church.”⁵²⁹ “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy.”⁵³⁰ Today the church seems to be split into two camps. Those who overemphasize this gift, and often run to the very excesses that 1Corinthians 14 warns against, and those who are so afraid of such excesses that they do not allow for the operation of this ministry at all. Surely the truth does not lie in the excess, or in the over-correction of it, but in a biblical application of that which the Lord intended for His church. Would to God that men would again speak by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that which is doctrinally correct, for the edification, exhortation and comfort of His church.

⁵²⁶ Acts 13:1, 1Corinthians 12:28, 29, Ephesians 4:11, 2Peter 2:1.

⁵²⁷ Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy* p129.

⁵²⁸ Gee. *The Ministry-Gifts of Christ*. p40.

⁵²⁹ 1Corinthians 14:1,4.

⁵³⁰ 1Corinthians 14:39.

Chapter 9

Elders

9.1 Introduction

There are two great challenges in understanding the ministry of the pastor or elder. The first is the many preconceptions that surround the role of the pastor as the leader of the congregation as an entity separate from the elders.⁵³¹ The second difficulty surrounds the different titles that seem to apply to the same ministry and traditionally have been changed into titles for different offices in a hierarchical structure.

9.2 Pastors, Shepherds, Elders and Bishops

The Greek New Testament uses three different words which are typically translated into four English words. I shall endeavour to show that these refer to the same function.

Presbuteros (Strong's 4245) literally means "elderly" appears 67 times and is translated by the KJV as "elder" 64 times, "old man" once, "eldest" once and "elder woman" once.⁵³² *Poimen* (Strong's 4166) appears 18 times and the KJV translates this word as "shepherd" 15 times, "Shepherd" twice and "pastor" once.⁵³³ The only time it is translated as "pastor" is in Ephesians 4:11. *Episkopos* (Strong's 1985) appears 7 times and the King James translates this as "bishop" 6 times and as "overseer" once.⁵³⁴ It is therefore already clear that the words "shepherd" and "pastor" are interchangeable.

⁵³¹ Pastor (n) a clergyman in charge of a congregation. *Collins English Dictionary*, Harper Collins Publishers. Glasgow 1993. p617.

Fish, John H III. *The Life of the Local Church*. In *Understanding the Church*. Joseph M Vogl & John H Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p119-120.

⁵³² Thayer, Joseph. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. (Electronic).

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

In Acts 20 we find Paul “sent to Ephesus and called for the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church”.⁵³⁵ Speaking to these elders in verse 28 he says: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*), to shepherd (*poimaino*) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Clearly the same men were to be elders, shepherds (pastors) and overseers (bishops). There is absolutely no distinction between them in this text. Peter also refers to Jesus Christ as the “the Shepherd (*poimen*) and Bishop (*episkopos*) of your souls.”⁵³⁶ He thus also links these two aspects of the Great Shepherd’s ministry.

In writing to Titus, Paul says that he was to: “appoint elders (*presbuteros*) in every city”⁵³⁷ He then continues to give the qualifications of these “elders” and says “For a bishop (*episkopos*) must be blameless...”⁵³⁸. Again the two terms “elder” and “bishop” refer to the same office.⁵³⁹

The qualifications for a *bishop*, listed in 1Timothy 3:1-7, and those for an *elder*, in Titus 1:6-9, are clearly parallel and therefore equates an elder with a bishop.⁵⁴⁰

Peter in his first epistle says: “The elders (*presbuteros*) who are among you I exhort...”⁵⁴¹ he continues: “Shepherd (*poimaino*) the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers (*episkopeo*)...”⁵⁴² Again linking the three terms to the same individuals. The fact that these three terms denote the same ministry is confirmed by a number of authors⁵⁴³. Thus the concept that the “pastor” is the one who leads the congregation and that the (board of) elders is a separate function⁵⁴⁴ has no biblical foundation. There is no such distinction in the New Testament, this is simply a man-made tradition.

⁵³⁵ Acts 20:17.

⁵³⁶ 1Peter 2:25 (KJV). The NKJV translates it as “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

⁵³⁷ Titus 1:5.

⁵³⁸ Titus 1:7.

⁵³⁹ Clarke, Arthur G. *New Testament Church Principles*. John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1962. p56.

⁵⁴⁰ MacArthur, John. *The Master’s Plan for the Church*. Moody Press, Chicago. 1991. p183

⁵⁴¹ 1Peter 5:1.

⁵⁴² Ibid v2.

⁵⁴³ Hobbs, Herschell H. *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Convention Press. Nashville. 1990. pp80,81.

MacArthur. *The Master’s Plan for the Church*. p183.

⁵⁴⁴ Sumrall, L. *The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit*. Harrison House, Tulsa. 1982. pp239, 245.

Why the different labels? On this we cannot be emphatic. MacArthur and Lightfoot trace *episcopos* to the Hellenistic equivalent of the elder in Hebrew culture and show that this term is only used later when the church began to absorb more Gentiles and appears only in epistles where Gentiles were in the majority.⁵⁴⁵ This is a distinct possibility. *Episcopos* (overseer) also indicates a part of the function of the man – he looks after, watches and cares for the church. *Poimen* (shepherd) also seems to focus on what the man does, he shepherds, feeds, leads and protects the flock. *Presbuteros* (elder) appears to have more to do with who he is.⁵⁴⁶ He is senior, older or more mature – it certainly does not describe his function. “All three terms are used of the same church leaders, and all three identify those who feed and lead the church; yet each term has a unique emphasis”.⁵⁴⁷

Which term should we use? It is clear that from the earliest times of the church that the term “elders” was part of the function of the church. The first mention in the context of the church, is in Acts 11:30 referring to the elders at Jerusalem. The last mention is in Revelation 19:4. the word “elder” is used twice as often as “bishop/overseer” and “pastor/shepherd” together.

In general usage, therefore, *elder* seems to be the most appropriate term for our day, since it is free of the many unbiblical connotations and nuances of meaning imposed on *bishop* and even of *pastor* throughout much of church history.⁵⁴⁸

9.2.1 Link Between Pastors & Teachers

MacArthur is one of the most vocal modern proponents of the idea that “the pastor-teacher” is one function.⁵⁴⁹ The link between the two hinges largely on the fact that the word *kai* (and) is used in such a way to link pastors and teachers together. This is further emphasised by the fact that the definite article precedes apostles, prophets and evangelists, but does not precede “teachers”. “The phrase reads ‘the pastors and teachers,’ not ‘the pastors and the teachers’”.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁵ MacArthur. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. p184.

Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. p194.

⁵⁴⁶ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p56.

⁵⁴⁷ MacArthur. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Ephesians*. p144.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid* p144.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid* p143.

⁵⁵⁰ Mappes, David. *The New Testament Elder, Overseer and Pastor*. In *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Roy B. Zuck (ed). Vol 154 No 614. Dallas Theological Seminary. Dallas. 1997. p168. Mappes deals with the whole argument in great depth and quotes various scholars who support this view.

A detailed study of these two functions in the New Testament reveal that they are two separate functions that at times may find an overlap in the same man. In Acts 13:1 we read that in “Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers:” It does not call them “pastor-teachers”, but simply “teachers” indicating that they were primarily teachers. Again in the list of ministries in 1Corinthians 12:28, 29 “teachers” are mentioned simply as that – “teachers”.

In the 67 times the word “elder” is used, it is never linked to teaching in the sense of “elder-teacher” In the 18 times the word “shepherd / pastor” is used, it is only linked in this way once – in Ephesians 4:11. In none of the seven occurrences of the word “overseer / bishop” is it linked with teacher in this way. It would therefore be questionable to link these two ministries, just on one scripture, when the vast majority of the texts do not make this connection.

1Timothy 5:17 says: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.” This verse very clearly differentiates between elders who rule and elders who teach. It would be correct to assume that all elders should have some ability to teach.⁵⁵¹ Yet it is equally true that this text indicates that some specialised in teaching. “While all elders rule, not all necessarily teach or preach. This distinction between ruling and teaching is one of function, rather than one of class or office”.⁵⁵²

9.2.2 Plurality of Elders

Whenever the New Testament refers to elders, it does so in the plural.⁵⁵³ From this we may deduce that a minimum of two elders should be appointed to a church. Thus the concept of a singular pastor or monarchical bishop has no biblical foundation. The real strength and authority of the elders therefore lies in their joint abilities as a team.

This allows for elders with differing skills and emphases to be forged into a balanced team – some concentrating on teaching while others focus on pastoring. This alleviates the burden from one man having to be a jack-of-all-trades, but also means that in selecting elders, one does not have to find a man who has all the skills required to be a

⁵⁵¹ 1Timothy 3:2.

⁵⁵² Mappes. *The New Testament Elder, Overseer and Pastor*. p173.

⁵⁵³ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p935.

Lewis WR, *Government in the Churches*. In *The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. JB Watson (Ed). John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. pp84, 90.

lone elder. As long as all the skills and gifts required to lead an assembly are present in a balanced team of shepherds, the church will be well catered for. Thus there is no need to find an “ideal elder” but each is free to pursue his particular area of gifting and to allow his own personality and leadership style to come to the fore.

This multiplicity of elders also serves as protection to the church against the abuses of a single strong personality and even if such an individual were not abusive, a single “pastor” would stamp his personal preferences and personality on the church.⁵⁵⁴ A plurality of elders ensures that the church receives balanced leadership.

It is accepted that there could be exceptions to this rule such as in the case of elders leaving the church or town and one elder remaining behind, or in the case of a new church which is still in its infancy. These, however, have to be exceptions and interim situations only until other suitably qualified men can be appointed.

9.3 Ordination of Elders

9.3.1 Elders in Every Church

While every church may not have evangelist(s), prophet(s) or teacher(s), every church should have elders. On the return trip of their first mission journey Paul and Barnabas called on Lystra, Iconium and (Pisidian) Antioch again and “appointed elders *in every church*”.⁵⁵⁵ This is particularly interesting as these churches had been established only a few months before, on the missionaries’ outward journey. Thus these elders could not have been Christians for more than six months or so. There is no reason to think that Paul would not have followed this pattern of ordaining elders in each of the churches he had established.⁵⁵⁶ Lightfoot emphasises that it is not mentioned in the other cases as this first journey would serve as a precedent for all subsequent journeys.⁵⁵⁷

In Titus 1:5 Paul says to Titus “for this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”. Paul is clearly taking a strong line with Titus who, evidently, had not done as he

⁵⁵⁴ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p49.

⁵⁵⁵ Acts 14:23.

⁵⁵⁶ Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. p156.

⁵⁵⁷ Lightfoot. *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*. p193.

had been instructed. Whether he had appointed elders in some churches⁵⁵⁸ and not in others or not at all is not clear. But what is evident is that every church or city had to have elders and also that Titus seemed to have problems carrying out his commission. We can only speculate that Titus ran into the same problems as some churches today, in that he could not find men of sufficient stature to appoint. Paul seems to disregard this possibility and insisted that Titus was to do what he had been instructed to do in the first instance.

If any church could be exempt from having elders, the church at Jerusalem would qualify as they had the Twelve plus a number of other outstanding ministries in residence, yet we read that Jerusalem had elders and that they played a very prominent role in that church.⁵⁵⁹ Six times Luke identifies these elders as a distinct group from the apostles.⁵⁶⁰

Since the church at Antioch was a product of the church at Jerusalem it can safely be assumed that Antioch would have followed the Jerusalem example and also had elders. In fact it is likely that Paul and Barnabas were two of these elders.⁵⁶¹

Peter's first epistle is directed to "the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia".⁵⁶² These are not cities or churches but entire regions and Paul writes to all the believers and churches giving instructions to elders. For Paul to address elders in a general epistle to so many churches seems to indicate that most, if not all of the churches in these areas would have had elders.⁵⁶³

"The church of Thessalonica was less than a year old when Paul wrote 1Thessalonians and yet there was a plurality of leadership (1Thessalonians 5:12)".⁵⁶⁴ Thus everything tends to suggest that all churches had elders and there is nothing to indicate the contrary. "Nearly every church we know of in the New Testament is specifically said to have had elders."⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁸ At this time each city had only one church, thus the terms "city" and "church" are interchangeable.

⁵⁵⁹ Acts 11:30, Acts 15.

⁵⁶⁰ Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 16:4.

⁵⁶¹ Acts 13:1, MacArthur. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. p182.

⁵⁶² 1Peter 1:1.

⁵⁶³ MacArthur. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. p183.

Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy*. p158.

⁵⁶⁴ Fish. *The Life of the Local Church. Understanding the Church*. p121.

⁵⁶⁵ MacArthur. *The Master's Plan for the Church*. p183.

9.3.2 Their Qualifications

It is interesting that we are not given a list of qualifications for apostles, prophets, evangelists or teachers and yet we are given two very detailed lists of qualifications for elders. The first is found in 1Timothy 3:1-10 and the second in Titus 1:6-9. These lists basically run parallel as the table below shows. It is noteworthy that they primarily contain personal and moral attributes,⁵⁶⁶ rather than skills or abilities. "An elder must

Timothy	Titus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bishop then must be blameless • the husband of one wife • temperate • sober-minded • of good behaviour • hospitable • able to teach • not given to wine • not violent • not greedy for money • gentle • not quarrelsome • not covetous • One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence • Not a novice • he must have a good testimony of them which are without 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if a man is blameless... For a bishop must be blameless • the husband of one wife • sober-minded • hospitable • holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict • not given to wine • not violent • not greedy for money • not quick-tempered • self-controlled • having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination • not self-willed • lover of what is good • just • holy

⁵⁶⁶ Lewis. *Government in the Churches. The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice.* p86.

be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his family life, his business life and his spiritual life.⁵⁶⁷ “Natural ability or business acumen, financial prosperity or social position neither qualify nor disqualify a brother for overseership.”⁵⁶⁸

However, even if the man was of exemplary character and yet was not gifted to be a shepherd, he would still not be suitable for the task. These skills are manifest first in the way he manages his home “for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”⁵⁶⁹ Second it is evidenced in his ability to teach.⁵⁷⁰ This does not mean he should of necessity be a full-blown teacher (in the case of a ruling elder vv a teaching elder), but he should never-the-less be able to instruct new believers in the fundamentals of the faith⁵⁷¹ and instruct those in his care in the practicalities of living the Christian life. Third it is obvious that he must be able to perform the responsibilities of an elder as outlined below.

In addition to these lists a number of other qualifications are implied.

- He would be senior to the flock, as indicated by the word “elder”. This does not necessarily mean that he is an old man, but certainly requires that he be more mature in the faith than the rest of the assembly. However the idea of a 25 year-old elder also seems to militate against this principle.
- He should also have a shepherd’s heart for the flock. The Lord’s reproach against the shepherds of Israel was that they did not care for the flock, but used the flock for their own ends.⁵⁷² Even if a man excelled at all the moral qualifications and had all the skills required, but showed no pastoral care for the church, he could not be an elder or shepherd.
- He is to be willing to serve and should not feel compelled to do so.⁵⁷³
- He should not be manipulative or controlling.⁵⁷⁴

Finally, the shepherd should be willing to lay his life down for the sheep.⁵⁷⁵ Those who run away or resign when trouble comes to the church are not true shepherds but simply hirelings. True shepherds will be willing to fight for the welfare of the sheep and

⁵⁶⁷ MacArthur, John. *The Master’s Plan for the Church*. p187.

⁵⁶⁸ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p60.

⁵⁶⁹ 1Timothy 3:5.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid v2.

⁵⁷¹ Hebrews 5:12.

⁵⁷² Ezekiel 34.

⁵⁷³ 1Peter 5:2.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid v3.

⁵⁷⁵ John 10.

if necessary, even die in the process. Laying their life down for the sheep often takes on a less dramatic form since in order to be a good shepherd, an elder must be willing to die to his own agenda, ambitions, ego and even die to the things he would want to do with his time. It speaks of a sacrificial commitment to place the church before himself. This requires a fairly unique individual who is willing to follow in the footsteps of the Great Shepherd.

These qualifications set a very high standard indeed and one which may be well-nigh impossible to attain. The question then arises as to how these very stringent qualifications are to be reconciled with the fact that elders were appointed from amongst relatively new believers and that elders were appointed in every church without exception.

In this connection Donald Gee says:

This (the high standard) does not imply perfection in a man before he has any claim to fill the office of a pastor. The men who filled even the apostolic office were plainly compassed about by infirmities, and deeply felt the imperfection of their ministry.⁵⁷⁶

The secret may lie in the probability that the term "elder" is relative and not absolute. Thus a 75 year-old would be elder to a 70 year-old and a nine-year-old elder to a eight-year-old.⁵⁷⁷ So in the spiritual realm in every group of believers there will be those who stand out above the others in maturity, zeal, purity and gifting. It should also be remembered that elders are bound to local churches and do not move between churches. Thus an elder in a relatively young assembly may not be an elder in a more mature church, where he could well be quite junior. (Albeit if he indeed is gifted as a pastor, he will in time gain maturity and be able to be ordained in this more established church.)⁵⁷⁸ "The model elders of 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are to be found in model churches".⁵⁷⁹ Since the ideal church does not exist, we have to accept that no elder will be perfect. This does not mean we should not set a high standard, but the standard should not be impossible to attain.

⁵⁷⁶ Gee. *The Ministry-Gifts of Christ*. p57.

⁵⁷⁷ Mappes. *The New Testament Elder, Overseer and Pastor*. *Bibliotheca Sacra*. p87.

⁵⁷⁸ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. pp42,43.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid* p43.

9.3.3 Who Ordains?

There are only three direct references to the ordination or appointment of elders. The first is Acts 14:23. Here it is the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, who had started these churches who appoint the elders. It is also important to note the solemnity of this occasion as it is accompanied with prayer and fasting – this is no light matter.

In 1 Timothy 5:22, in the context of various instructions to Timothy, Paul writes to him: “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.” The majority of commentators are agreed that the laying on of hands in this text refers to the ordination of elders.⁵⁸⁰ Timothy could ordain elders in one of two capacities. He may have done so as a representative or delegate of Paul, but he may also have done so as an apostle in his own right.⁵⁸¹ That Timothy had the responsibility to ordain elders is further supported by the list of qualifications Paul sees fit to supply him with. Again note the seriousness of this step. Ordaining men, who are known not to be above reproach, would result in the one who ordains sharing in the guilt of the sinner, thus Timothy is warned not to be hasty, but to prove the men first.

In the third instance, Titus clearly operates as a delegate of Paul with the express instruction to ordain elders in every city. It is important to note that although Paul had instructed him to do so and had supplied him with the qualifications, the selection process is left in Titus' hands. Paul does not dictate the names to him, but leaves it to Titus to select the men based on the supplied list of qualifications.

In all these cases the selection process is clear. It is not done by popular vote,⁵⁸² but the apostle or his delegate would select and appoint the men whom he deemed fit for the position.⁵⁸³ The only post-Pentecost occasion when a democratic process seemed to be employed was in the appointing of the “Seven” in Acts 6. Although these men are not given a title, there is no suggestion that they were elders, but rather that they could have been deacons.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁰ Mappes quotes no less than 29 commentators who support this view in Mappes, David. *The “Laying on of Hands” of Elders. Bibliotheca Sacra*. Roy B. Zuck (ed). Vol 154 No 616. Dallas Theological Seminary. Dallas. 1997. p475.

⁵⁸¹ For evidence of his apostleship see Chapter 7.

⁵⁸² Lewis. Lewis. *Government in the Churches. The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. p83.

⁵⁸³ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p56.

⁵⁸⁴ See Chapter 10 of this work for a detailed discussion on this subject.

This of course raises a problem for those who do not believe in the continuation of apostles. And it is exactly on this point that some of Darby's followers refuse to appoint elders⁵⁸⁵. For those who believe in the continuation of the apostolic ministry, the solution is simple. The man (apostle) who established or planted the church, will have both the confidence of the congregation and the intimate knowledge of the personalities involved to make such appointments.

Many modern budding churches, however, come into being without the agency of a "church planter", as many groups of believers spontaneously develop into churches. In such cases it will be fairly obvious to the whole group who those leaders are⁵⁸⁶ and if unanimity could be reached on the names, it would be permissible for the whole church to lay hands on such men and appoint them to the work. From there on the elders would constantly be on the lookout for others of stature who could join their ranks.⁵⁸⁷

9.3.4 Can Ordination be Withdrawn?

Many have wrestled with the question as to what happens to elders who are no longer qualified to function as elders.⁵⁸⁸ Although Paul anticipated that wolves would arise from amongst elders who would ravish the flock,⁵⁸⁹ he leaves no instructions as to how these are to be dealt with except for 1Tim 5:19, 20. These verses require that the rules of evidence be properly followed (2 or 3 witnesses). If the sin is proven, such elder(s) must be rebuked in public (presumably meaning before the whole church). This still does not answer the question as to whether these continue in their office or not.

In spite of the absence of any clear instruction regarding the "resignation" or "dismissal" of elders, it seems fairly obvious that if high qualifications are set for the recognition of elders in the event that should such elders cease to fulfil these requirements, such recognition would have to be withdrawn. It would also be a fair assumption that the disciplinary procedure of Matthew 18 would have been pursued prior to the withdrawal of recognition.

⁵⁸⁵ Lewis, Lewis. *Government in the Churches. The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. p84.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid* p83.

⁵⁸⁷ Clarke, Arthur G. *New Testament Church Principles*. p56

⁵⁸⁸ Mappes. *The Discipline of a Sinning Elder*. In *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Roy B. Zuck (ed). Vol 154 No 615. Dallas Theological Seminary. Dallas. 1997. p333ff.

⁵⁸⁹ Acts 20:30.

It would be impossible to draw a list of all the possible reasons why an elder would become unfit for service, but if he no longer qualifies based on the discussion above, he would not be fit to continue in that ministry. The concept of elders being untouchable and “ordained for life” has no biblical support. The withdrawal of recognition or ordination could take the form of public rebuke in the case of persistent sin. In the case of someone who has become so embroiled in his business affairs that he can no longer fulfil his obligations to the church the brother would simply quietly withdraw, followed by a brief announcement that the brother has stood down from his responsibilities.

The next question would be whether a previously disqualified elder could be “re-ordained” should his circumstances change. Again, we have no biblical directive. It seems possible, however, should a brother who is fully restored in the eyes of the Lord and the people, be encouraged to pursue his ministry. The same would apply to one who may have been sidetracked because of the affairs of this life or even who may have fallen into doctrinal error and who has recanted such error. Each situation would have to be assessed on its own merits and on the degree to which the person has been restored in the eyes of the church. The essential question being – does he have the confidence of the people and the blessing of the Lord?⁵⁹⁰

9.3.5 Why Ordain?

Apostles, prophets, teachers or evangelists cannot be *made* by ordination. They are what they are by virtue of the gift God has deposited in their lives. In the same way a man who has not been gifted to be an elder cannot be *made* an elder by virtue of ordination. Thus ordination can simply recognise what is already in operation as a result of the gift of God. Ordination should not change anything in the relationship between the man and the congregation. His authority does not lie in his title, it lies in the confidence the flock has in him and in his gift.⁵⁹¹ Thus if his relationship with people changes after his appointment, it is likely that a wrong appointment was made.

Because the man’s ability to shepherd lies in his gift and his relationship, some feel that ordination is superfluous.⁵⁹² And indeed elders could probably function equally

⁵⁹⁰ The question as to the restoration of an elder who divorces and remarries is not within the scope of this work.

⁵⁹¹ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p43.

⁵⁹² Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p56.
Coad. *A History of the Brethren Movement*. pp125-126.

successfully with or without ordination in most situations. We do, however, have a biblical command⁵⁹³ and example⁵⁹⁴ to ordain elders and this alone should be sufficient reason to maintain this practice. In addition, “the elders” were always a uniquely identifiable group within the local church⁵⁹⁵ which could not have been so without some type of formal recognition.

It is also understood that in the normal flow of things in a church, where there are no serious problems, elders will be able to function very well without ordination and, in fact, should never need to call on their rank in order to function.⁵⁹⁶ If, however, there were those in the church who are insubordinate or unruly,⁵⁹⁷ the elders may need to call on their “authorized” position in order to deal with such. In such cases, the insubordinate may not recognise the inherent authority of an elder, and elders would have to act as the “officials” of the church.⁵⁹⁸

9.4 The Ministry of Elders

9.4.1 To Shepherd and Oversee

The function of shepherding seems to encapsulate the bulk of the work of elders and to this end Psalm 23 gives an excellent exposition of the role of the Great Shepherd and therefore sets the tone for the under-shepherds.

- V1. “I shall not want” speaks of the role of the shepherd in supplying the needs of the flock, particularly in the emotional and spiritual realms.
- V2. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.” This verse refers to the shepherd creating an environment of peace and safety where the sheep can feed and rest. People must feel at home in the church and should not feel stressed when meeting together. Jeremiah speaks of “...shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding”.⁵⁹⁹
- V3. “He restores my soul” speaks of the shepherd healing the hurting and returning those who go astray to the fold.

⁵⁹³ 1Timothy 5, Titus 1:5.

⁵⁹⁴ Acts 14:23.

⁵⁹⁵ Acts 11:30, 20:17, 21:18, 1Timothy 5:17, James 5:14, 1Peter 5:1.

⁵⁹⁶ 1Peter 5:3.

⁵⁹⁷ 1Thessalonians 5:14, Titus 1:10.

⁵⁹⁸ 1Timothy 1:9.

⁵⁹⁹ Jeremiah 3:15.

- V3. “He leads me in the paths of righteousness; For His name's sake,” Leading and guiding the sheep in the ways of the Lord. This happens primarily by example as the shepherd walks ahead of the sheep.⁶⁰⁰
- V4. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”. Shepherds should comfort and accompany believers as they endure times of bereavement and stress.
- V5. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” Again speaks of feeding the flock,⁶⁰¹ but especially creating a safe-haven from the attacks of the flesh, the world and the devil. Paul speaks of “savage wolves” coming in amongst the flock, not sparing them and therefore the need for elders to be watchful.⁶⁰²
- V5 “You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.” Speaks of an abundance of blessing and provision. Elders should not only take care of the basic needs of the flock, but ensure that people can be blessed with the abundance of God’s blessings and provision.

A detailed study of Ezekiel 34 will highlight all the areas in which the shepherds of Israel failed in their responsibilities, and thus also teach us more on the role of shepherds.

A good shepherd will take special care of the lambs⁶⁰³ or new believers. In Jesus commissioning Peter the lambs are highlighted as part of Peter’s responsibility.⁶⁰⁴

9.4.2 Other Duties Listed in the New Testament:

- He is to take care of the church.⁶⁰⁵
- He must teach the word of God.⁶⁰⁶
- He is to watch for the souls of those entrusted to him.⁶⁰⁷ This would especially apply to those who are straggling, straying, sick and weak.
- He should pray for the sick.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁰ 1Peter 5:3.

⁶⁰¹ Acts 20:28.

⁶⁰² Acts 20:29,30.

⁶⁰³ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p58.

⁶⁰⁴ John 21:15.

⁶⁰⁵ 1Timothy 3:5 (Emphasis added).

⁶⁰⁶ 1Timothy 5:17.

⁶⁰⁷ Hebrews 13:17.

- Elders should warn and admonish those who are going astray.⁶⁰⁹
- Elders should lead by example. This is one of the most important responsibilities of a good shepherd.⁶¹⁰ “Eastern shepherds do not drive the sheep, but lead them.”⁶¹¹
- They should labour amongst the flock,⁶¹² which speaks of “to labour with wearisome effort and to toil”.⁶¹³ Thus the work of a shepherd is not easy, but requires much diligence and application.
- They should watch for the souls in their charge, which indicates a monitoring of their spiritual welfare and growth.⁶¹⁴

9.5 Admonitions to Elders

The New Testament contains a number of warnings to elders. The first is that elders need to take heed to themselves first and then to the flock. It is often the case that elders are so concerned and absorbed with caring for the church that their own spiritual walk with the Lord suffers. Hence Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians elders to “take heed to *yourselves* and to all the flock”.⁶¹⁵

Second, elders are warned not to neglect their duties as the shepherds of Israel did,⁶¹⁶ but to be diligent in the exercise of their responsibilities.⁶¹⁷ Hebrews⁶¹⁸ reminds flock and shepherd of the fact that a day of reckoning will come when elders will give account of how they discharged their duties, while believers will give an account of how they responded to the leadership provided for them.

Third, elders are warned about the ever-present dangers of becoming authoritarian and “lord’s over those entrusted to” them.⁶¹⁹ This is an easy trap to fall into as the proliferation of cults and abusive churches testify. Elders should ever be mindful that

⁶⁰⁸ James 5:14.

⁶⁰⁹ 1Thessalonians 5:12,13.

⁶¹⁰ 1Peter 5:3.

⁶¹¹ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p58.

⁶¹² 1Thessalonians 5:12, 1Timothy 5:17, Acts 20:35.

⁶¹³ Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. On *Kapiao*.

⁶¹⁴ Hebrews 13:17.

⁶¹⁵ Acts 20:28, 1Timothy 4:16.

⁶¹⁶ Ezekiel 34.

⁶¹⁷ 1Peter 5:2.

⁶¹⁸ Hebrews 13:17.

⁶¹⁹ 1Peter 5:3.

they are servants to the church and not masters over it. Thus Peter stresses that elders are “among” the flock and not over it.⁶²⁰

⁶²⁰ 1Peter 5:1-4.

Chapter 10

Teachers, Evangelists and Deacons

10.1 Teachers

10.1.1 The Term

Only one Greek word is translated into English as “teacher”: the word *didaskalos* (Strongs 1320).

The term occurs 58 times in the NT. 48 instances are in the Gospels, 41 refer to Jesus (29 in direct address), one to the Baptist, one to Nicodemus, one to the teachers among whom the boy Jesus sat, two to the teacher in relation to the disciple. Elsewhere there are references to *didáskaloi* (teachers) as a group in the churches (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11).⁶²¹

The word is unambiguous and the English translation captures the clear essence of this word which, in the context of the church, is used of those who have the ability to impart the truths of the Word of God with the aim of building the believer and church in order that both would reflect the image of Jesus Christ.⁶²² “Teaching is not the same as preaching... Preaching is motivating, teaching is instructing”.⁶²³ The usage of the word is in keeping with its Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament.

10.1.2 Jesus the Teacher

“Christ’s ministry to the multitudes and to the disciples was primarily a teaching ministry”.⁶²⁴ At the beginning of his ministry it is recorded that “he opened His mouth and taught them...”⁶²⁵ At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount it says: “And so it

⁶²¹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Electronic).

⁶²² Romans 8:29.

⁶²³ MacArthur, John Jr. *The Body Dynamic*. Chariot Victor Publishing. Colorado Springs, CO. 1996. pp107, 108.

⁶²⁴ Hurst, DV. *And He Gave Teachers*. Gospel Publishing House. Springfield MO. 1955. p7.

⁶²⁵ Matthew 5:2.

was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”⁶²⁶ “...He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom ...”⁶²⁷ Luke, in his account of the Gospel, says: “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach”,⁶²⁸ Thus condensing Jesus’ ministry into two main areas – His deeds and His teaching.

Jesus is commonly addressed as “teacher” or “Rabbi”. Not only did his disciples recognise Him as their teacher but the crowds and even the scribes could not deny that He was indeed a “teacher come from God”⁶²⁹ and that He taught the way of God in truth.⁶³⁰ “If there was any objection (from the religious community) to His activity as a teacher, it arose from the fact that He had not gone through the prescribed course of instruction or received authorization from any teaching body (John 7:15; cf. Matthew 13:54).⁶³¹ Jesus acknowledged that his followers were correct to call him “teacher” when He said: “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am”.⁶³²

10.1.3 Other New Testament Teachers

That teachers and teaching held a well defined and important place in the New Testament churches is evidenced by the fact that they are mentioned in all three of the lists of ministries given, respectively, in Romans 12:6-8, 1Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.⁶³³

Paul refers to himself as a teacher⁶³⁴ and after Jesus, is arguably the most prominent New Testament teacher. Acts 13:1 refers to Paul plus four others as “prophets and teachers”. This scripture does not define which of these men were teachers and which were prophets, but clearly this church had a number of teachers as well as prophets. This is confirmed by Acts 15:35: “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also”.

⁶²⁶ Matthew 7:28-29.

⁶²⁷ Matthew 13:54.

⁶²⁸ Acts 1:1.

⁶²⁹ John 3:2.

⁶³⁰ Matthew 22:16.

⁶³¹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p155.

⁶³² John 13:13.

⁶³³ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p62.

⁶³⁴ 1Timothy 2:7, 2Timothy 1:11.

Interestingly, no others are explicitly called teachers. This is probably because teaching was such a core activity that the various writers did not feel the need to make any special reference to such. Even though few are titled “teacher”, it is evident from their activity that many others were engaged in the process of teaching. Peter and the apostles were “in the temple and teaching the people”⁶³⁵ and Paul instructs Timothy to teach⁶³⁶ and to train faithful men to teach others also.⁶³⁷ It is said of Apollos that he “taught accurately the things of the Lord”.⁶³⁸

10.1.4 The Importance of Teaching

In post-modern times teaching has fallen into disfavour as the focus of churches moves increasingly towards entertainment and brief, exciting sermonettes that tickle the ears of the congregation.⁶³⁹ We do, however, have a number of very clear injunctions in scripture to teach,⁶⁴⁰ and specifically to teach the Word.

Jesus set the example and gave the command to teach and that is what the Apostles did. Jesus’ disciples began to teach, even in His early ministry.⁶⁴¹

Paul lays much emphasis on the importance of teaching. This is particularly noticeable in his instructions to his “sons”, Timothy and Titus. To Timothy he writes: “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”.⁶⁴² “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”⁶⁴³ “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine”⁶⁴⁴ and:

I charge you therefore ... Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.⁶⁴⁵

⁶³⁵ Acts 5:25.

⁶³⁶ 1Timothy 4:11, 1Timothy 6:2.

⁶³⁷ 2Timothy 2:2.

⁶³⁸ Acts 18:25.

⁶³⁹ 2Timothy 4:3,4.

⁶⁴⁰ Matthew 28:19,20.

⁶⁴¹ Mark 6:30.

⁶⁴² 1Timothy 4:13.

⁶⁴³ 1Timothy 4:16.

⁶⁴⁴ Titus 2:1.

⁶⁴⁵ 2Timothy 4:1-4.

10.1.5 Teaching *Life*

There can be a tendency for teaching to be a dry regurgitation of facts and a purely intellectual exercise. This should never be. Jesus' teaching was dynamic and life-imparting which set Him apart from other teachers of His day, so that Peter said: "You have the words of eternal life".⁶⁴⁶ Jesus said of Himself: "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life".⁶⁴⁷

The intellectual approach can be traced to the time after Greek intellectualism invaded the Alexandrian church. Rengstorf notes that "The Alexandrian School is not a continuation of the work of the first Christian teachers, but the introduction of a Greek institution into the Church in Christianized form".⁶⁴⁸

Teachers ought not to be lecturers, philosophers or those who deal in the theoretical, but must minister *life*, as Jesus did. Paul's instruction is still relevant: "...charge some that they teach no other doctrine nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith".⁶⁴⁹

10.1.6 The Content of the Teaching

As mentioned above, teaching can tend to be theoretical but its goal has to be to equip believers for service. Jesus' explicit command was "...teaching them to *observe* all things that I have commanded you".⁶⁵⁰ The emphasis has to be on the observance or *doing* of the will of God, not just the *knowing*. Knowledge for knowledge sake will engender pride⁶⁵¹ but true knowledge imparted by the gifted teacher will result in spiritual growth in the obedient disciple. Paul says "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine... that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work".⁶⁵² Note that the purpose of the Scripture and doctrine is to *equip* people for *good work*.

⁶⁴⁶ John 6:68.

⁶⁴⁷ John 6:63.

⁶⁴⁸ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Electronic).

⁶⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 1:3,4.

⁶⁵⁰ Matthew 28:20.

⁶⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 8:1.

⁶⁵² 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Biblical teaching must have as its content the Word of God. Paul said: "Preach *the word!*"⁶⁵³

All teaching must have Jesus Christ as its focus and centre. The Apostles "did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ"⁶⁵⁴ and Paul was "teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ".⁶⁵⁵

Sound doctrine and good teaching does not only include the tenets of the faith, but also deals with the practical issues of daily living. Paul speaks about the treatment of widows and elders and also about the relationship between employees and their employers and in this context tells Timothy to "teach and exhort these things".⁶⁵⁶

Teachers in the church are not such by virtue of natural ability or inclination but are given by the Spirit to the church. Natural abilities may provide a background to spiritual teaching⁶⁵⁷ but these are not essential. New Testament teachers are definitely gifted by God and are also gifts to the church: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us..."⁶⁵⁸ "And God hath set some in the church... teachers"⁶⁵⁹ "And He Himself gave some... teachers".⁶⁶⁰ Often it is because men teach the Word on a purely intellectual basis out of a naturally developed skill that the teaching appears dry. If it is presented by those who have been gifted, called and anointed by God it can never be boring, but has to be life-changing. The one is of the Spirit and gives life; the other is of the letter and kills.⁶⁶¹ This does not mean that the presentation will be illogical and irrational. By its very nature teaching is a rational and logical process with arguments and thoughts presented in a sequential fashion, but directed and anointed by God's Spirit.

⁶⁵³ 2Timothy 4:2.

⁶⁵⁴ Acts 5:42.

⁶⁵⁵ Acts 28:31.

⁶⁵⁶ 1Timothy 6:2.

⁶⁵⁷ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p63.

⁶⁵⁸ Romans 12:6.

⁶⁵⁹ 1Corinthians 12:28.

⁶⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:11.

⁶⁶¹ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p65.

10.2 Evangelists

10.2.1 The Term

The word “Evangelist” (*euaggelistes*)⁶⁶² is only used three times in the entire New Testament: Acts 21:8 “Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven”, Ephesians 4:11 “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” and 2Timothy 4:5 “do the work of an evangelist”. It is also a rare word in Greek usage outside the Scriptures.⁶⁶³

The verb *euaggelizo*⁶⁶⁴ appears 55 times in the New Testament. In 23 of these occurrences are translated by the King James as “preach” and 22 times as “preach the gospel”. The noun *euaggelion*⁶⁶⁵ is used 77 times and is mostly translated as “gospel”. This distribution alone indicates that even though there may have been few evangelists in the New Testament church, the activity of evangelism enjoyed a high priority throughout the church.

Most of the New Testament references to *euaggelion* are in Paul. His use of *euaggelion* shows that the concept is now a fixed one both for himself and his readers. As one may see from 2 Corinthians 8:18 and Phillipians 4:3, 15, it refers to the act of proclamation.⁶⁶⁶

Thus an evangelist is simply one who proclaims the gospel or good news.

10.2.2 Jesus the Great Evangelist

As with all the ministries, Jesus is once again our prime example of the heart and work of an Evangelist. He Himself declared that “He has anointed Me to preach the gospel...”⁶⁶⁷ and “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent”.⁶⁶⁸ Not only did He proclaim the Gospel but He actively “has come to seek and to save that which was lost”.⁶⁶⁹ He preached the message but He also *is* the message. Unlike other evangelists, Jesus not only preached about but performed the act of redemption on the Cross.

⁶⁶² Strong's 2099.

⁶⁶³ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p277.

⁶⁶⁴ Strong's 2097.

⁶⁶⁵ Strong's 2098.

⁶⁶⁶ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p277.

⁶⁶⁷ Luke 4:18.

⁶⁶⁸ Luke 4:43.

⁶⁶⁹ Luke 19:10.

Much can be learnt about the work and methodology of an evangelist by observing The Evangelist. One of these lessons needs to be highlighted as it is also emphasized by the example of Philip. There were times when Jesus preached to the multitudes.⁶⁷⁰ But He frequently forsook the crowds to speak the Good News to individuals such as the Samaritan woman at the well,⁶⁷¹ Zacchaeus⁶⁷² and many others. This set Him and Philip apart from some modern “evangelists” who will only preach to large crowds and who are shielded from the people by a barrier of armed body guards.

10.2.3 The Twelve

Early in the ministry of Jesus He sent the Twelve out to preach the message of the Kingdom.⁶⁷³ At the conclusion of His earthly ministry He again confirms this assignment in the Great Commission.⁶⁷⁴ After the ascension, they faithfully preached the Gospel from the Day of Pentecost⁶⁷⁵ until each was silenced by death.

10.2.4 Paul

Even though Paul's ministry can be defined as a teacher⁶⁷⁶ and apostle,⁶⁷⁷ the preaching of the Gospel was central to his ministry. He says that “...Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect”.⁶⁷⁸ And “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁶⁷⁹ His evangelism is focussed on the Gentiles⁶⁸⁰ but also reached many Jews.⁶⁸¹ It was Paul who provides us with the definitions of the Gospel. The long version of the definition is contained in the whole book of Romans and the short definition is found in 1Corinthians 15:

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁰ Matthew 5:1, 11:7, Mark 4:1 etc.

⁶⁷¹ John 4.

⁶⁷² Luke 19.

⁶⁷³ Matthew 10:7, Mark 3:14.

⁶⁷⁴ Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15.

⁶⁷⁵ Acts 2, 5:42, 8:24 etc.

⁶⁷⁶ Acts 13:1, 1Timothy 2:7, 2Timothy 1:11.

⁶⁷⁷ Romans 1:1, 2Corinthinas 1:1, Galatians 1:1 etc.

⁶⁷⁸ 1Corinthians 1:17.

⁶⁷⁹ 1Corinthians 9:16.

⁶⁸⁰ Galatians 1:16, Romans 15:20.

⁶⁸¹ Acts 13:43, 16:3, 18:5.

⁶⁸² 1Corinthians 15:1-4.

10.2.5 Philip

The above notwithstanding, Philip is the only one who is explicitly called “the evangelist”.⁶⁸³ It is important then, that we carefully study his *modus operandi* in order to discover how this ministry functions.

The first reference to Philip in his role as an evangelist is in Acts 8 which records his “evangelistic campaign” at a Samaritan city and his leading a lone Ethiopian proselyte to Christ. The following highlights are recorded:

- His message was “Christ” – v5. Not himself, money, healing, his denomination or some favourite doctrine but *Christ*.
- The message is confirmed by signs following – vv6, 7, 13. These included healing the lame and deliverance for those who were demon possessed.
- His message impacted the whole city and brought great joy – v8.
- Many believed the Gospel – vv10,12.
- Even the local sorcerer had to acknowledge that Philip was anointed by God – v10. This is in sharp contrast to today’s evangelists who claim miracles which cannot be verified or healings that last for one day only.
- Those who believed were baptized in water – v12.
- Philip was not a lone wolf and does not lead people to Christ only to abandon them, but allows the Apostles to confirm the believers and to establish them in the faith – v14ff.
- In spite of this great revival, he obeys the Spirit and leaves the crowds in order to lead a single Ethiopian to Christ – v27. This is in sharp contrast to modern evangelists.
- He again preaches the only message that matters – Jesus – v35.
- Note also the importance of the Word in the process of evangelism. Philip preached Jesus beginning from Isaiah 53. The Word and not the miracles was his springboard.
- Once again he baptized the convert – vv36-39.
- Again the result of the message accepted is great joy – v39.
- From here Philip is translated by the Spirit and he embarks on a preaching tour in “all the cities” from Azotus to Caesarea – v40.

⁶⁸³ Acts 21:8.

After this there is only one other reference to Philip and that in Acts 21:8-10. It seems he had settled in Caesarea where he had obviously been successful in preaching the gospel to his daughters as they were believers and had also brought a number of others into the faith.⁶⁸⁴ It is also evident that he maintained⁶⁸⁵ an open house and that it was a place where believers could meet and find hospitality.⁶⁸⁵ Yet it is interesting that the record shows that his biggest impact was while he was “on the road”. It would appear that the moment he settled down his ministry became limited. A possible deduction from this is that Evangelists must itinerate in order to “make full proof of their ministry”.⁶⁸⁶

10.2.6 Timothy

Based on Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist”,⁶⁸⁷ some conclude that Timothy was an evangelist.⁶⁸⁸ This, however, seems largely based on the mistaken notion that all itinerant preachers are evangelists, and on a misreading of the text. Wuest says of this passage:

The word (*euaggelistēs*) is not preceded by the definite article. When that is the case, character, quality, or nature are stressed. The idea is, “let your work be evangelistic in character... Be ever reaching out for lost souls in your teaching and preaching.”⁶⁸⁹

This view is supported by the majority of commentators. Paul is stressing the need for Timothy to continue in the tradition of Jesus, the twelve and himself as they made evangelism the thrust of their work, irrespective of what their specific gift was. Evangelism, together with the other attitudes mentioned in the same sentence – being watchful, enduring afflictions and fulfilling one’s ministry should be at the heart of all who would serve the Lord and His church.

⁶⁸⁴ Acts 21:15.

⁶⁸⁵ Acts 21:8,10.

⁶⁸⁶ It may also have been God’s will for Philip to engage in a more settled ministry at this juncture of his ministry and the development of the church.

⁶⁸⁷ 2Timothy 4:5.

⁶⁸⁸ Henry, M. 1996, c1991. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* . Hendrickson: Peabody. On 2Timothy 4:5.

Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F. 1962. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* . Moody Press: Chicago. On 2Timothy 4:5.

Gee, Donald. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. pp51,52.

MacArthur. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Ephesians*. p143.

⁶⁸⁹ Wuest, KS. *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English reader* . Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. 1997, c1984. (Electronic). On 2Timothy 4:5.

10.2.7 Evangelists and the Church

The word evangelist(s) is also mentioned in the list of ministries of Ephesians 4:11. It seems significant that the text expressly mentions that these ministries were given “to prepare God’s people for works of service”.⁶⁹⁰ Although it is obvious how apostles, prophets and pastors and teachers would have an impact on equipping the saints, it is less obvious how evangelists would have anything much to do with the church. It seems rather that the evangelist is given to the world. Yet we have to conclude, based on this text, that evangelists have a role to play within the church in addition to their work of reaching the unbeliever. It can only be assumed that it would be in the sense of encouraging and training believers in evangelism. Without the evangelist constantly reminding the church of the needs of the lost, the church could very easily become inward focussed.

“Ephesian 4:11 makes it plain that “evangelists” constituted in the early church a distinct and well-recognized order of ministry, separate from apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers”.⁶⁹¹ And “although every Christian is called to confess Jesus Christ, evangelistic talent is a distinct gift”.⁶⁹² Some have lamented the scarcity of evangelists in the modern church,⁶⁹³ yet it is significant that only one evangelist is so named in the entire New Testament. Thus it would be unlikely that we would have a proliferation of evangelists today, but rather, that each believer would be productive in the spreading of the Good News.

10.2.8 The Church and Evangelism

It is clear from the above that while certain men would be especially called, gifted and commissioned to be evangelists, the responsibility for evangelism lies with the whole church. Every believer, irrespective of his or her other gifts, has to “do the work of an evangelist”.⁶⁹⁴ “...the main *raison d’être* of the church’s presence on earth is to evangelize.”⁶⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that after the dispersion of the church, following the initial wave of persecution in Jerusalem, the gospel was spread throughout Israel by

⁶⁹⁰ Ephesians 4:12 (NIV).

⁶⁹¹ Gee. *The Ministry Gifts of Christ*. p46.

⁶⁹² Koch. *Charismatic Gifts*. p148.

⁶⁹³ Goodman, Montague. *Evangelists and Evangelism*. In *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. JB Watson (ed). John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p141.

Sumrall. *Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit*. p239.

⁶⁹⁴ 2Timothy 4:5.

⁶⁹⁵ Goodman. *Evangelists and Evangelism*. p140.

the ordinary believers while the Apostles remained in Jerusalem.⁶⁹⁶ Later, when Paul began his mission journeys, he found believers almost everywhere as a result of the scattered disciples preaching the gospel wherever they went.

10.3 Deacons

Arguably, the most difficult ministry to understand is that of the deacon. This is because no clear instructions exist as to the function of deacons and neither is there a single unequivocal example of a deacon in operation in the New Testament.

10.3.1 The Term

The word deacon is a transliteration from the Greek *diakonos*. *Diakonos* appears 31 times in the Bible and the KJV translates it as “minister” 20 times, “servant” eight times, and “deacon” three times.⁶⁹⁷ It means “one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master, a servant, attendant, minister⁶⁹⁸ and is frequently used of a “waiter at a meal”.⁶⁹⁹ The word finds its origin in the secular world and has no equivalent in the Hebrew tradition or the synagogue that can cast any light on the New Testament usage.⁷⁰⁰ The New Testament often uses it in the general sense of a servant or minister to the church, in which case it is either translated as *servant* or *minister*. It is evident therefore that the ministry has to do with service to the church, very likely in the temporal realm and Hort connects their work with the menial.⁷⁰¹ Only three times (in two passages) is *diakonos* explicitly used in the context of a ministry or office in the church.⁷⁰² That it is a specific ministry or office that was as clearly identifiable as that of elders is certain since 1Timothy 3:8-13 gives very specific qualifications for deacons which match very closely those of elders. And in Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses the saints “with the bishops and deacons”.

10.3.2 The Seven of Acts 6

Much debate exists as to whether or not The Seven of Acts 6 were the first deacons. If this can be proven, then we would certainly have one passage that would throw light on the function of this ministry.

⁶⁹⁶ Acts 8:1,4.

⁶⁹⁷ Strong, J. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (electronic ed.) 1996.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Electronic).

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰¹ Hort, AFJ. *The Christian Ecclesia*. Wipf and Stock. Eugene, OR. 2001. p206.

⁷⁰² Philippians 1:1, 1Timothy 3:8,12.

Some feel that there is no justification to refer to these men as “the first deacons” since the text does not refer to them as such. Amongst these are H.W. Beyer,⁷⁰³ Vitranga, Böhmer, Ritschl,⁷⁰⁴ Hort⁷⁰⁵ and Furneaux.⁷⁰⁶ In spite of these objections, from the earliest times, tradition has recognised them as deacons⁷⁰⁷ and commentators seem to agree with this position.⁷⁰⁸ References to them as deacons can be found in the writings of Irenaeus (AD 130 – 202) and the council of Neocaesarea (AD315).⁷⁰⁹

Arguments for the idea that The Seven were indeed deacons are *inter alia*:

- The functions of a deacon as described above are in line with the functions of The Seven.
- The secular Greek usage of the word *diakonos* is very closely related to the concept of serving tables – “It is not desirable that we should... serve tables”.⁷¹⁰
- The qualifications for deacons in 1Timothy 3:8-13 and those of The Seven in Acts 6 are similar.
- The words *diakoneo* (to serve) and *diakonia* (ministry, ministrations) are both used in Acts 6 in direct reference to the work of The Seven.

10.3.3 The Function of Deacons

The New Testament nowhere gives the exact functions and duties of deacons. Their duties must therefore be inferred from 1) their name, 2) their qualifications, 3) their relationship to elders, and possibly 4) the description of Acts 6.⁷¹¹

The word *diakonos* emphasizes the servant aspect of this ministry. Although all believers should be servants of one another, it appears that some have the specific responsibility for caring for household tasks and providing other kinds of practical service to the church.

⁷⁰³ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p155.

⁷⁰⁴ Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. p188.

⁷⁰⁵ Hort. *The Christian Ecclesia*. p209.

⁷⁰⁶ Robertson, A. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Logos Research Systems: Oak Harbor. 1997. (Electronic). On Acts 6:2.

⁷⁰⁷ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*. Moody Press: Chicago. 1962.

⁷⁰⁸ Robertson, Wiersbe, Matthew Henry, Richards, Watson, Lightfoot, McGee, Jamieson Fausset & Brown, Girard, Erdman, Fish, Barnes *et al.*

⁷⁰⁹ Lightfoot. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*. p188.

⁷¹⁰ Acts 6:2.

⁷¹¹ Fish. *The Life of the Local Church. Understanding the Church*. p122.

If one looks at the lists of qualifications for elders and deacons in 1Timothy 3, the only substantial difference is that elders should be apt to teach and deacons not. Also from Acts 6 it appears that the function of teaching and serving of tables are separated. Thus we can conclude that deacons are not primarily involved in preaching or teaching but rather, focus on the temporal aspects of the assembly.⁷¹² This does not exclude them from ministry in the word as can be seen by the example of Philip and Stephen – both powerful preachers and members of the Seven. The fact that both lists of qualifications stress spiritual qualifications indicates that these men are not simply confined to the mundane, but also share in the spiritual care of the church with the elders. In the administration of the feeding scheme at Jerusalem, the Seven would certainly have come into contact with many pastoral and even doctrinal needs and it can safely be assumed that they would have dispensed teaching and counsel where possible whilst referring the more difficult cases to the Apostles. Jethro's advice to Moses established a principle which seems relevant here:

You shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do... select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness... And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you.⁷¹³

In references to deacons both in Philippians 1:1 and 1Timothy 3:8-13, deacons are linked with elders. This seems to infer a close working relationship between these two ministries.⁷¹⁴ Elders oversee the spirituality of the assembly while deacons assist the elders in their function with a particular emphasis on the practical issues.

From the statement of The Twelve: "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables",⁷¹⁵ it can be concluded that the prime function of deacons is to free the preachers and teachers in order that they may concentrate on "prayer and... the ministry of the word".⁷¹⁶ Acts 6 clearly establishes that the prime function of The Seven was to take care of the feeding of the needy. Thus we can link the entire

⁷¹² Watson, JB. *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. Watson, JB. (Ed.) John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p213.

⁷¹³ Exodus 18:20-22.

⁷¹⁴ Fish. *The Life of the Local Church. Understanding the Church*. p124.

⁷¹⁵ Watson, *The Church. A Symposium of Principles and Practice*. p213.

⁷¹⁶ Acts 6:4.

operation of the collection and disbursement of gifts of charity with the office of deacons.

In the list of ministries as given in 1Corinthians 12:28 we have two ministries, “helps” and “governments” listed in addition to apostles, prophets and teachers. These two terms are not used anywhere else in the New Testament and no explanation is given as to their meaning. It seems reasonable to deduce that “governments” refers to elders as governing is clearly their function. “Helps” seems to describe the function of deacons as much as “governments” describe the function of elders. This term opens a broad spectrum of possible functions for deacons which could embrace any work that would help the church and the elders. This would cross over from the secular to the spiritual. The proximity of these two terms again indicates the close working relationship between elders and deacons.

10.3.4 Their Appointment

Should every church have deacons? The evidence for deacons in each church is much less than for elders.⁷¹⁷ When churches are relatively small they are able to function very well without deacons but if the church grows, the volume of administration and many other practical tasks increase. At the same time, the demands on elders to teach and shepherd increases also. As the need to relieve elders of administrative and secular tasks becomes more of a priority, the need for deacons increases. This certainly was the principle behind the appointment of The Seven. “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied...”⁷¹⁸

How are they appointed? Since 1Timothy 3 places the qualifications for elders and deacons on the same level and since it was a principle that leaders be appointed with the laying on of hands,⁷¹⁹ we can safely assume that the same would apply to deacons as well. Certainly we have a precedent for appointing deacons with the laying on of hands in Acts 6.

There does however seem to be a difference between the selection of elders and deacons. As seen in the previous chapter, elders are selected and appointed by

⁷¹⁷ Fish. *The Life of the Local Church. Understanding the Church.* p122.

⁷¹⁸ Acts 6:1.

⁷¹⁹ See chapter 9 of this dissertation, 1Timothy 4:14, 1Timothy 5:22, Acts 6:6, 13:3 etc.

apostles. In Acts 6 however, there is a difference. The Seven were elected by the people and then appointed by the apostles.⁷²⁰ There seems to be a principle here. Elders represent the Lord and act on His behalf as under shepherds and thus are not selected by popular vote. Deacons on the other hand, act on behalf of the church and therefore are elected by the church. The laying on of hands, however, does confer upon both great authority to go about the Master's business.

10.3.5 Women Deacons

No discussion on deacons can be complete without some reference to whether or not there were female deacons in the New Testament church. The discussion revolves around two scriptures – Romans 16:1, 2 and 1Timothy 3:11. The first reads:

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.⁷²¹

The possibility exists that the word *diakonos* here simply refers to her as a servant of the church in the general sense, as we all ought to be. However the majority of commentators feel that this is a specific reference to her as occupying the office of a deacon or deaconess⁷²² of the church in Cenchrea.⁷²³ It is interesting to note that of the many commentators who agree that Phoebe was a deaconess, a number come from very conservative traditions that do not generally give women much opportunity for ministry in the church.⁷²⁴ One has to assume that for them the evidence for female deacons has to be very strong in order to overcome their prejudice.

Stiffler says: "She was a servant not in, but of, the church in Cenchrea, holding an official capacity".⁷²⁵ Her official capacity also seems to be reinforced by the fact that Paul exhorts them to receive her "and assist her in whatever business she has need of you..." thus indicating that she was on some sort of "official business" on behalf of the

⁷²⁰ Acts 6:3,5,6.

⁷²¹ Romans 16:1, 2.

⁷²² The Greek for of this word is neuter and does not have a male or female form.

⁷²³ McGee, Jamieson Fausset & Brown, Stiffler, Ironside, Haldane, Lange, Schaff, Meyer, Vincent, Barnes, Wuest, Robertson, Wiersbe, *New Bible Commentary*, Matthew Henry, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Walvoord, Beyer (Kittel), Watson, Lightfoot, MacArthur *et al.*

⁷²⁴ Ironside, Haldane and Lightfoot *et al.*

⁷²⁵ Stiffler. *The Epistle to the Romans*. p244.

church at Cenchrea. Furthermore, she is commended as a helper⁷²⁶ of Paul and others, thus fulfilling a deacon's task. The fact that she is mentioned together with, and ahead of, other leaders of the churches clearly indicates that she must have enjoyed some "seniority" in the local church.

Next we need to consider 1Timothy 3:11: "Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things."⁷²⁷ Wuest deals with this passage very clearly:

The word "wives" is *gunē* (γυνή), "a woman." The word when used in reference to the marriage relation, means "a wife." Here, it should be translated "women." It does not necessarily refer to the wives of the deacons, and for the following reasons: *first*, the words, "even so," are the translation of *hōsautōs* (ὡσαυτως), which is used in introducing a second or third in a series. The series here is of Church officials; *second*, there is no possessive pronoun in the Greek, which would be needed if the women were the wives of the deacons; *third*, the four qualifications which follow correspond, with appropriate variations, to the first four required of deacons as regards demeanor, government of the tongue, use of wine, and trustworthiness; and *fourth*, this is a section dealing wholly with Church officials. The reference here is to women who hold the office of deaconess, as Phoebe.⁷²⁸

Thus Weymouth translates the verse as: "Deaconesses, in the same way, must be sober-minded women..."

These two passages together with the fact that deaconesses were also a feature of the church in the second century seem to confirm that deacons could be male or female. The fact that they were not primarily involved in preaching and teaching or in the overseeing of the churches, but acting in a support role, is clearly within the restrictions of 1Timothy 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man".

10.3.6 Conclusion

Not all churches should have deacons, but where elders and preachers can no longer cope with the function of pastoring and teaching/preaching, deacons should be appointed. These may have a general responsibility to "help", but they may also be specialists who concentrate on a specific area such as accounting, technology or works of charity. The presence of deacons, however, should never excuse each believer from serving the assembly in as many ways as possible.

⁷²⁶ Not the same word as for *helps* as in 1Corinthians 12:28.

⁷²⁷ ASV.

⁷²⁸ Wuest. *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*.

Chapter 11

The Autonomy of the Local Church

11.1 Autonomy and Not Independence

The word *autonomy* does not appear in the New Testament. It is, nonetheless, a word that describes a concept that is thoroughly biblical,⁷²⁹ as will be shown.⁷³⁰ Even though the dictionaries do not draw such distinction,⁷³¹ we do draw a distinction here between *autonomy* and *independence*. Local churches are autonomous in that they are self-determining, self-governing and self-propagating but they are not independent of other churches and ministries. The subsequent chapter of this dissertation will deal with the subject of the inter-dependence of churches.

11.2 The Church Universal and Local

The word *Ekklesia*, which is translated as church or assembly is used in two different ways in the Bible. It is used of the so-called *universal church*⁷³² which comprises all believers including those who have gone before, those who are currently living and those who are still to come. It will never be tangible or visible until the advent of the New Jerusalem. The local church is the visible, earthly group of believers who regularly gather together in one place.⁷³³ Watchman Nee refers to the universal church as *The Church* and the second as *the churches*.⁷³⁴

⁷²⁹ Spender, John A. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church*. Joseph M Vogl & John H Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p154. (This source will be used as my major source for this chapter since Spender defines the subject very clearly and also relies heavily on other sources that are not available to this author).

⁷³⁰ Just as the terms *Trinity* and *rapture* do not appear in the Bible and yet describe ideas that are can be proven from the Scriptures, so the word *autonomy* has very Biblical foundation.

⁷³¹ *Collins English Dictionary*. Harper Collins. Glasgow. 1986. pp 47, 426; *Funk and Wagnalls Practical Standard Dictionary*. JG Ferguson and Associates. Chicago. 1945. pp90, 585.

⁷³² For *universal* we can also use the term *catholic* as used in the Apostles Creed, but the term is unacceptable for obvious reasons. It is also wrong to refer to the Roman Church as the "Catholic Church" as it is certainly not the *universal church* in the true sense.

⁷³³ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church*. p154.

⁷³⁴ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p52.

On the day of Pentecost and for some time after that, the local and universal church were the same thing. "The new believers were simply "the church". Both the universal church and the local church had their birth at the same time".⁷³⁵ The local and universal church, technically became two different things when the first believer died or practically at the time of the Dispersion. This is one reason why it is very dangerous to take the early experiences of the pre-Dispersion Jerusalem church as normative for all churches.

The New Testament does not use different words or forms of the word *ekklesia*, and only the context determines when the word is being used in reference to the local or universal church. A few references could go both ways and cannot be determined with certainty. "By one estimate, of the 114 occurrences of *ekklesia* in the New Testament, at least 92 refer to the local church".⁷³⁶ When Jesus said "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it",⁷³⁷ He could only be referring to the universal church. When Paul says "...if the whole church comes together in one place...",⁷³⁸ he could obviously have no other entity but the local church in mind.

Nee draws the following distinctions between the local and universal churches:

The Church is invisible; the churches are visible. The Church has no organization; the churches are organized. The Church is spiritual; the churches are spiritual yet physical. The Church is purely an organism; the churches are an organism, yet at the same time are organized.⁷³⁹

"The local church is a visible manifestation of the universal church in a particular location",⁷⁴⁰ but a local church can never be referred to as "the church" but simply as "a church". In the New Testament Paul was able to refer to "the church of God which is at Corinth",⁷⁴¹ referring to the local church in Corinth. However, it would be impossible, in

⁷³⁵ Grant, Charles T. *The Life of the Local Church*. In *Understanding the Church*. Joseph M Vogl & John H Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p86.

⁷³⁶ Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church*. As quoted by Grant, Charles T. *The Life of the Local Church*. *Understanding the Church*. Joseph M Vogl & John H Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p85.

⁷³⁷ Matthew 16:18.

⁷³⁸ 1Corinthians 14:23.

⁷³⁹ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p52.

⁷⁴⁰ Grant. *The Life of the Local Church*. *Understanding the Church*. p87.

⁷⁴¹ 1Corinthians 1:2, 2Corinthians 1:1.

the twenty first century, to refer to any single congregation as “the church in Los Angeles” or “the church of Pretoria”.⁷⁴²

Thus we read about “the *church* of the Thessalonians”,⁷⁴³ “the *church* that was at Antioch”⁷⁴⁴ or “the *church* in Cenchrea”⁷⁴⁵ – each of these being individual congregations. We also read about “the *churches* of Galatia”⁷⁴⁶ being a region containing a number of churches, “the *churches* throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria”⁷⁴⁷ and “the *churches* of the Gentiles”.⁷⁴⁸ There is no *church of Galatia* or of Macedonia or of the Gentiles. So there are only two variations; either a single *church* or more than one assembly, called *churches*. Never do we find a collection of churches grouped together to become the church of Asia or of Macedonia. There are no groupings of churches based on region, ethnicity, doctrine, a leader or anything else that can ever be referred to as the “church of America” or “the church of this doctrine or that” or “the church of Paul”. The New Testament reveals local churches and the universal church – nothing else.

11.3 The Seven Churches of Asia

The clearest example of the autonomy of local churches can be seen in the seven churches in Asia Minor, as addressed by Jesus Christ in Revelation chapters two and three.

These seven churches were in very close proximity to one another, none being more than 25 miles from it's neighbour. They all existed at the same time in similar political and economic context and with similar cultural influences, yet they are each addressed separately. The Lord does not write to the “church in Asia” but to the “seven churches”.⁷⁴⁹ If there had been any place and time where a “regional church” could have been justified, it would have been here, yet each church is addressed separately. Each of the seven are held accountable, not to John the Apostle, who worked in this region before and after his exile to Patmos and was resident in Ephesus, nor are they

⁷⁴² There are those, particularly amongst those who emphasize the “one locality one church” extremism, who have this audacity, but this kind of exclusiveness is neither biblical nor charitable.

⁷⁴³ 1Thessalonians 1:1.

⁷⁴⁴ Acts 13:1.

⁷⁴⁵ Romans 16:1.

⁷⁴⁶ Galatians 1:2.

⁷⁴⁷ Acts 9:31.

⁷⁴⁸ Romans 16:3.

⁷⁴⁹ Revelation 1:20.

held accountable to the "district council", or even, one another. Each church is held accountable directly to the Head – Christ.

Had there been any kind of "regional oversight" or anything other than autonomy, these churches would not have been so very different, as they clearly are. A regional cooperation agreement or organisation would have resulted in a closer conformity, yet each church is different in character, doctrine, strengths, weaknesses and organisational structure. By no stretch of the imagination can these churches be seen as organised into any form of human organisation. Neither does Christ advise the weak to draw on the vitality of the strong or the strong to take care of the struggling churches. Each assembly has to deal with it's own issues and find it's own answers from the Head – Christ.⁷⁵⁰ Each church is promised its own rewards, and in the case of the delinquent ones, has to receive its own judgement at the hand of Jesus Christ. He alone will remove the lamp stand or spit them out. "No church is given authority to control or to disfellowship another".⁷⁵¹

These seven churches are symbolised by seven lampstands or candlesticks. The natural mind would immediately be drawn to the image of the seven-branched lampstand or menorah of the Tabernacle, with the assumption that the picture in the Apocalypse has to be a repeat of that of Exodus, but nothing can be further from the truth. Here is the description from Exodus 25:31-36:

You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knobs, and flowers shall be of one piece. And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side... Their knobs and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold.

Here is the picture from Revelation 1:12b,13a, 20b :

I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man... the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.

Note that the menorah was one single work, of one piece, standing on a single base with a central branch and three branches emanating from the left and the right of the centre, respectively. The Law emphasizes the fact that it was of one piece, beaten of a

⁷⁵⁰ Clarke. *New Testament Church Principles*. p18.

⁷⁵¹ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church*. p168.

single lump of gold. The lampstands of the Apocalypse, however are clearly called “seven lampstands” and not seven branches of one lampstand. The menorah may well illustrate modern denominations or fellowships but this is not the case of the churches in Asia. This autonomy of the seven lampstands is further emphasized by the fact that Christ is “in the midst” of the lampstands. He could not be amongst the lampstands if each one was not on its own base and independent of the others.

Therefore, though all churches stand under the authority of the one Head and express the life of the one Body (for they are all made of gold), still they are not united by any outward organization, but each stands on its own base, bearing its own responsibility, maintaining local independence.⁷⁵²

The case of these seven churches also wonderfully demonstrates God's majesty in the infinite variety He creates. Man tends to find a formula that works and then replicates that same pattern again and again, with very little variation. In fact man-made organisations are hallmarked by their monotonous uniformity. In the local church, the emphasis is not on all being the same, but on all being different. Each member of the body is different. And even the left and right index fingers are not the same – so the Lord places different people with different gifts in the church.⁷⁵³ Man wants to regulate and control everything to make everyone clones of the leaders which leads to cultic systems. So also are local churches infinitely different from one another. No two churches in the New Testament could be regarded as a copy of another. But one of the ways man controls his organisations is by legislating that each church look and function just like every other. Thus today one can, by attending most churches, identify its denominational affiliation by observing one meeting, and without reference to the name above the door. Sometimes one can even identify a particular individual's affiliation by simply observing his dress or speech. This does not mean that there would not be commonalities between all churches since all “good” churches will embrace the elements of worship, prayer, preaching and fellowship in most of their meetings. Most will also share similarities of structure without being clones or franchises of one another.

11.4 Autonomy of Local Churches in Acts

Acts 8 records the dispersion of the believers from Jerusalem. Not long after we read about “the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria...”. This scripture

⁷⁵² Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p62.

⁷⁵³ 1Corinthians 12.

highlights that the church was no longer only in Jerusalem but found its expression elsewhere as well.

Acts 11 refers to certain believers who came to Antioch, preaching the Lord Jesus, and who brought many to faith. When news of this event reached Jerusalem, they (presumably the Apostles) sent Barnabas to Antioch.

If ever there was a strategic opportunity to affirm the ascendancy of Jerusalem and the submission required of daughter churches, this was the perfect occasion. But no such instruction came forth, and Barnabas rather exhorted the believers to “cleave to the Lord” (Acts 11:23). This he did himself. The decision to go to Tarsus to seek for Saul and bring him to Antioch seems to be a matter between him and the Lord only.⁷⁵⁴

It is abundantly clear from the way Antioch was founded, governed its affairs⁷⁵⁵ and sent out missionaries,⁷⁵⁶ that it never operated under the auspices of Jerusalem, but functioned as a fully autonomous church. The fact that the first missionaries were sent out from Antioch, without any reference to or instruction from Jerusalem, further reinforced the fact that Jerusalem was not the “mother church” or head office of the churches and that the Apostles were not the heads of this new movement. “The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (AD 70) emphasized the fact that to the churches no visible head or centre on earth is given.”⁷⁵⁷

The transfer of authority from apostles to local elders further highlights the autonomy of local churches. This transfer was more gradual in Judea but almost immediate in Gentile churches.⁷⁵⁸ Certainly by the time the “Jerusalem Council” in Acts 15 took place, elders featured prominently⁷⁵⁹ with the meeting being presided over by James who was not one of the Twelve. These elders were raised up from within the churches and not trained by, and imposed on, the churches by some outside agency. Spender provides the following chart to illustrate the devolution of authority in the churches:

Beginning	Apostles
Middle	Apostles and Elders
End:	Elders. ⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁴ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p160.

⁷⁵⁵ Acts 11:29,30.

⁷⁵⁶ Acts 13:1-3.

⁷⁵⁷ Broadbent. *The Pilgrim Church.* p7.

⁷⁵⁸ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p162.

⁷⁵⁹ Acts 15:2.

⁷⁶⁰ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p163.

This change in the dynamic between apostles, elders and the local church can be compared to the change in dynamic between a father and his daughter. While she is a toddler, the father will exercise almost complete authority (beginning), but as she matures, a wise father will gradually become less authoritarian and more of a guide and councillor (middle). This relationship evolves even further when she marries and leaves home when the responsibility for her care fully passes to the new husband while the father may still act as a (remote) advisor.

Nowhere is this transfer of authority more clearly demonstrated than in Paul's taking leave of the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. He confirms that they will not see him again, but makes no provision for a successor or replacement for himself. Neither does he place the church under the oversight of any outside agency, but charges the elders with the full and final responsibility to lead the church.⁷⁶¹

The apostles founded churches, *and they founded nothing else*, because for the ends in view nothing else was required or could have been so suitable... Of any scheme or form of interlocking of assemblies we see no trace. Neither racial, social, geographical nor political groupings or divisions are to be found; indeed such thought was wholly alien to the mind of the Lord as touching His church.⁷⁶²

11.5 Central Control in Acts 15?

The events of Acts 15 need to be carefully examined as, in the minds of some, this formed the basis for future church councils and various forms of centralized control over the church.⁷⁶³

The meeting in Jerusalem was not a meeting of all the leaders of all the churches, or even of representatives of all the churches. It was a matter between two churches that was being resolved between themselves. Certain men from Judea had come to Antioch to teach circumcision to the Gentiles (v1), whereupon Paul and Barnabas decided to take a few representatives from Antioch with them to resolve the issue with the church that was causing the problem (Jerusalem) (v2). Acts 15:3 clearly defines them as having been delegated by the church at Antioch and although the outcome would have an impact on all Gentile churches, the delegation was not representing any other churches other than Antioch.

⁷⁶¹ For a more complete discussion of this event see Chapter 9 of this work.

⁷⁶² Lang. *The Churches of God*. pp10,13. Emphasis: Lang's.

⁷⁶³ Easton, M. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA. 1996, c1897. (Electronic).

The matter was purely a doctrinal one and no matters of organization, methodology, systems, discipline, evangelism, congregational affairs or any of the many other topics that so frequently form the agenda of district, regional and national synods, councils or forums, were discussed.

The conclusion of the meeting is summed up in a letter to “the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia”.⁷⁶⁴ The letter was sent only to those churches that had been affected by the rogue teachers. It was not sent to all churches and therefore cannot be regarded as a precedent for centrally issued edicts, decrees and canons. Acts 16:4 refers to the contents of the letter as *dogma* which the NKJV translates as “requirements”,⁷⁶⁵ “regulations”⁷⁶⁶ and “decrees”.⁷⁶⁷ “The basic meaning is ‘what seems to be right’”.⁷⁶⁸ Dr F J A Hort says of these “decrees” that:

The New Testament is not poor of words expressive of command... yet none of them is used...The independence of the Ekklesia of Antioch had to be respected” They are “... a strong expression of opinion, more than advice and less than a command... A certain authority is thus implicitly claimed. There is no evidence that it was more than a moral authority.”⁷⁶⁹

The meeting did not make any provision for future meetings and there is no scripture encouraging the perpetuation of such “councils”. From this example we can only conclude that it is right for churches to resolve doctrinal problems between the affected churches. It sets no example whatsoever for churches to establish any form of central meeting to manage the affairs of local churches, neither can a case be made for the issuance of decrees, edicts and canons that would be binding on local churches.

11.6 Autonomy in Paul’s Writings

The autonomy of local churches is taken as a given in all of Paul’s letters. There is not a hint of anything that can remotely be construed as local churches not being fully self-determining and directly accountable to the Head of the church – Jesus Christ.⁷⁷⁰ He often emphasized the headship of Jesus, yet never makes reference to any other form

⁷⁶⁴ Acts 15:23b.

⁷⁶⁵ Colossians 2:14.

⁷⁶⁶ Colossians 2:20.

⁷⁶⁷ Acts 16:4.

⁷⁶⁸ Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. p178.

⁷⁶⁹ Hort. *The Christian Ecclesia*. p82,83.

⁷⁷⁰ Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 1:88, 2:10 etc.

of delegated authority, except that moral authority which exists by virtue of a personal relationship between brothers, or a church and its founder.⁷⁷¹

Spender quotes the following examples of the autonomy of the church at Corinth:⁷⁷²

- Excommunicating discipline, the most serious form, did not wait for the arrival of the apostle... Nor was it referred beyond the local church but was carried out in all parts at the local level (1Corinthians 5).
- Disputes among believers were settled through the church, not the civil courts of law (1Corinthians 6).
- The appointment of delegates carrying funds from the church was local (2Corinthians 8:19).
- Letters of commendation were given by the local churches (2Corinthians 3:1,2; 8:19). No other commending agency existed beside the local church.
- Ministries for the poor saints came from the local churches (2Corinthians 8 – 9). Again all decisions were made at the local level.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul is emphatic that he was not taught the doctrine by the men in Jerusalem but that he was instructed by the Ascended Christ. He goes into great detail to prove that the only times he was in Jerusalem or had discussions with the Jerusalem leaders was on a few brief occasions which had the purpose of confirming that his doctrine did not differ from theirs.⁷⁷³ Once again, if Jerusalem was intended to be the “mother church”, Paul would have been instructed and commissioned by Jerusalem. But on the contrary, he has very little to do with Jerusalem, is taught in the desert and commissioned by a Gentile church and yet is categorical that he is not inferior to the most eminent apostles.⁷⁷⁴

11.7 The Benefits of Autonomy

In building His church, the Lord did not impose on it many restrictions as to style of meetings and many other aspects of organization, structure and function. He did however, provide principles in certain key areas which we do well to abide by. One of

⁷⁷¹ 1Corinthians 4:5. For a detailed discussion of the role of apostles to churches see chapter 7 of this work.

⁷⁷² Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p166.

⁷⁷³ Galatians 1:15 – 2:10.

⁷⁷⁴ 2Corinthians 12:11.

these principles is the autonomy of local churches under the leadership of local elders. The following are some of the reasons why this principle is so important.⁷⁷⁵

11.7.1 Protection against empire builders

From the beginning the church was plagued by ambitious men⁷⁷⁶ who wanted control for personal reasons. Sometimes men like Diotrephes⁷⁷⁷ managed to gain a foothold in a local church. In the beginning the autonomy of local churches protected the Church from such men gaining control over more than one assembly. Unfortunately as time marched on, the autonomy of local churches was undermined and churches were brought more and more under the control of ambitious leaders. This trend found its nadir in the Roman church with its "vicar of Christ". As long as churches remain autonomous, under local elders they are less likely to fall prey to men with great charisma and organizational genius. Paul says that believers belong to Christ and not to men, but that ministries are available to the churches and not the other way around.⁷⁷⁸ "When people are saved by the instrumentality of any man, they belong to the church in the place where they live, not to the man through whom they were saved, nor to the organization he represents."⁷⁷⁹

11.7.2 Protection against sectarianism

The great divisions in the church along denominational and sectarian lines would not have been possible had local churches not begun to band together to form sects. This trend evidenced itself very early when the Corinthians began to argue for allegiances to Paul, Peter and Apollos.⁷⁸⁰ "These man-formed divisions separate the people of God into various distinct companies."⁷⁸¹ Paul emphasizes that they are not to rally around men as these were simply "servants of Christ"⁷⁸² and that such sectarianism was carnal. Arguably, the biggest dividing factor between geographically neighbouring churches is the presence of denominational labels. In the absence of such labels many would have been freer to cooperate on Biblical grounds for the salvation of many in their communities. "If churches so group themselves together as to think and speak of

⁷⁷⁵ I have borrowed, to some extent, the headings of Spender, John A. *The Autonomy of Local Churches*. In *The Life of the Local Church. Understanding the Church*. Joseph M Vogl & John H Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. pp175-185.

⁷⁷⁶ Romans 2:8, 2Corinthians 12:20, Philipians 2:3 etc.

⁷⁷⁷ 3John 1:9.

⁷⁷⁸ 1Corinthians 3:21-23.

⁷⁷⁹ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p67.

⁷⁸⁰ 1Corinthians 3.

⁷⁸¹ Gibbs. *Scriptural Principles of Gathering*. p11.

⁷⁸² 1Corinthians 4:1.

other believers, who are equally in the body of Christ as 'not belonging to us,' they have become sectarian, and virtually, if not openly, a system."⁷⁸³ "Scripture unsparingly condemns denominationalism, or the dividing of the people of God into sects, parties and systems that exclude many Christians that are sound in doctrine and life from their fellowship."⁷⁸⁴

11.7.3 Protection against heresy

If churches remain autonomous, error is isolated much more effectively than in larger associations. This is true firstly because local elders are more vigilant and do not abdicate their doctrinal responsibility to some man or committee. The existence of a federation either implicitly or explicitly removes the responsibility to take heed to the doctrine from local elders. Secondly, associations larger than local churches are dangerous because if the regional or national leaders fall into error, they will by means of their authority, and the communication channels such as newsletters and conferences immediately spread that error across the denomination. This scenario has repeated itself countless times and the rise of cults are clear examples of this truth.

Plural leadership and local church autonomy compliment one another. False teachings are more likely to take root where control is in the hands of a single person or distant organization... False doctrine can but make slow progress among churches which individually follow the Berean pattern, 'They searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so' (Acts 17:11). However false teaching spreads rapidly when it takes hold within a denomination or seminary officially linked to a circle of churches.⁷⁸⁵

11.7.4 Dependence on Christ

As the believer should personally be dependent on and have a relationship with Christ, the Head, so should the church as a group learn to walk in humble dependence on Christ. When there is an outside agency to whom the church can turn at the hint of a problem, Christ can become superfluous and thus the opportunity to draw on Him, to learn from Him, and find the sufficiency of Christ a reality, is lost. If this happens regularly, the organization will soon usurp the position of Christ in the local church. It is in this regard that Paul writes to the Colossians about the dangers of "...not holding fast to the Head..."⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸³ Rendall, Robert. *The Church: What it is*. In *The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. JB Watson (Ed). John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p24.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church*. p177.

⁷⁸⁶ Colossians 2:19.

"...the Adversary... will present a thousand plausible reasons why some capable person or group ought to stand between a local church and the Head. Yet scripture allows none... The headship of Christ must not be usurped either from outside by controlling agencies or from within by autocratic individuals and groups."⁷⁸⁷

The need for churches to learn to be dependent on Christ and not on man is probably one of the main reasons why Paul and other apostles left churches so soon after their establishment. Very few ministers would leave a new church, where all the believers were recently converted, six months after its founding, to their own devices. Many would see this as being an irresponsible act. Yet for Paul this was the right thing to do because he knew that it was the Lord who was building his church and the sooner the church learnt dependence on the Head the sooner their reliance on man would be broken.

11.7.5 Raising Up Ministry

In the New Testament new ministries were recognized and developed in the local church. There were no Bible schools or seminaries to train the next generation of workers, but Paul instructs Timothy that "... the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."⁷⁸⁸

Where some central agency has a pool of ministries available to the local church and where the responsibility to recognize, develop and encourage new ministries lies outside the local church they will not take the development of their people seriously and may even stifle developing ministry for the fear of losing such to the organization at large. But where the church knows that it has to recognize and develop such ministry for its very survival, this aspect of the work will be taken seriously and they will be on the lookout all the time for suitable people for the work.⁷⁸⁹ The development of ministry internally has many advantages over the system of external recruitment and

⁷⁸⁷ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* pp176, 178.

⁷⁸⁸ 2Timothy 2:2.

⁷⁸⁹ John Spender warns that even in autonomous churches gifted individuals could be stifled if that gift threatens the established clergy. If, however, the church is built around the priesthood of every believer, this is less likely to happen as opposed to a clergy / laity arrangement. Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p180 footnote.

training⁷⁹⁰. The seminary system is an artificial one and results in men who are generally far too immature for the ministry but with a head full of knowledge, a piece of paper and much arrogance, being foisted on churches to whom they cannot relate. (This does not mean that those in training should not gain sound academic qualifications, but that such knowledge should be tempered by the realities of local church life.) Men should “enter the ministry”, not when they have gained the academic qualifications, but when the local church recognizes that they are ready for such an awesome responsibility. This assessment cannot be made in any other context except the local assembly where the candidate is well known and has been proven.⁷⁹¹

11.7.6 Safety From a Hostile Government

The separation of church and state is vital for the ongoing health of the church. Where this distinction is blurred and the state begins to interfere in the affairs of the church – the church will face various problems. This has been proven over and over, as early as Constantine, and as recent as Soviet Russia and Maoist China. (The reverse, where the church interferes with matters of state are equally disastrous as in Calvin’s city-state of Geneva as well as in the long history of the Roman church.)

When churches are grouped in associations and denominations, it becomes a lot easier for a hostile government to threaten the whole organization. Autonomous local churches are a lot more difficult to bring to the heel by a dictatorship. FF Bruce states:

Spiritual liberty is more likely to be preserved where... administrative independence of each local church is maintained... If the state be adversely disposed, it can more easily paralyze a centrally organized corporation than a multitude of unfederated congregations, each independently governed...⁷⁹²

Recent history in China and the former Soviet Union has once again proven that the only way churches can survive in the face of persecution, is by being autonomous and thus “fly under the radar” of the authorities. Governments are becoming increasingly hostile to evangelical churches, even in countries that previously claimed to be “Christian”, and denominational links are used more and more in order to catalogue and monitor churches. Thus the value of autonomy will become more apparent as

⁷⁹⁰ It is also true that many seminaries do operate in close cooperation with local churches and that candidates are carefully screened and commended by local churches. In these cases the students continue their practical training in the local church. This is often a good compromise.

⁷⁹¹ 1Timothy 5:22.

⁷⁹² Bruce FF. *Church History and Its Lessons*. In *The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. JB Watson (Ed). John Ritchie Ltd. Kilmarnock. 1999. p191.

societies become increasingly hostile towards the “religious right” – especially in the “first world”.

This principle does not exclude the possibility that churches may speak out against immorality, injustice and general ungodliness in government and society. They would do so as independent of the government and not as agents or servants of it.

11.7.7 The Local Church in its Context

Local assemblies function within the context of a particular society, customs and language. When churches are part of a larger federation, the uniqueness of each locality is often overlooked, thus imposing on local churches forms of worship, music and other traditions that may be foreign to those peoples. Thus to impose on Bushmen in the Kalahari western forms of worship, liturgy and traditions, can become an unnatural arrangement.

Where the local church is allowed to establish its own unique “personality”, it will be able to reach out and relate to the people around it more effectively. This also allows for people to express their worship in the context of their own customs, language and music. The Roman church’s, until recent, insistence on Latin as the language in churches, where people do not speak Latin, is a case in point. The development of the personality of a church has to take place spontaneously and without pressure from within or without to engineer the situation socially. Post-modern attempts at segmenting the “market” to the degree that entire churches are populated by a single age group has no biblical basis. In some instances multi-ethnic churches will come together and develop a unique “taste and feel” while in other cases language limitations will demand mono-cultural churches.⁷⁹³

However, contextualization taken to the extreme becomes equally reprehensible, as in images of female, black christs and syncretism where witchcraft or idolatry become acceptable under the guise of contextualization.

11.7.8 Non-Dependence on Missionary Organisations

History is full of examples of missionary organisations establishing churches in foreign lands that are dependent on the sending organisation and country. When this support

⁷⁹³ This is, however, a complex issue and it is not within the scope of this work to thoroughly examine this subject.

is withdrawn for financial, political or other reasons, the local church(s) often has to close down because of its dependence on the sending agency for finances, ministry, leadership, administrative support or any combination of these. Only where local churches are fully self-determining will they be able to survive the withdrawal of such support. When Mao denied mission societies access to China, only those churches that were truly indigenous survived. This was also how the churches established by Paul could continue after his incarceration. William Burton had similar success in leaving behind 1500 autonomous churches when the Congo forced missionaries to leave that country in the 1960's.

11.7.9 Ownership

Only when the assembly is truly autonomous and not under the control of autocratic dictators will the members of the body be able to take ownership of the church and all its affairs. This sense of "our church" is the only sure way to ensure that members will be fully committed and take responsibility for its welfare. As long as the church is in the hands of an outside agency, it is very difficult to motivate believers to care for one another, bear financial burdens, defend the assembly against various attacks and stick together through hard times.

11.8 Areas of Autonomy

11.8.1 Oversight

As clearly demonstrated above, the responsibility for all of the functions connected with leading, caring for, protecting and nurturing the local church lies with local elders. There is no other authority above or outside the local church except Jesus Christ.⁷⁹⁴ As also demonstrated, the founder of the local church will initially have a lot of responsibility for the church, but as elders are raised up, his role diminishes.

11.8.2 Finances

Local churches are solely and fully responsible for the collection and disbursement of all funds. They should neither rely on any outside agency for their support, nor should any outside agency make any demands on them for monetary support. The concept of local churches sending some or all of their income to a head office, mother church or a

⁷⁹⁴ 1Timothy 2:5.

For a detailed exposition on the function of elders, see chapter 9 of this dissertation.

federal centre has no biblical grounds. The tradition amongst some groups to send a tithe to the central organisation is also not taught in the New Testament.

Obviously, because the local church has sole discretion over how its money is spent, it may elect to support another church,⁷⁹⁵ missionary,⁷⁹⁶ itinerant preacher⁷⁹⁷ or any other worthy endeavour⁷⁹⁸ that it may choose. This is commendable and supported by scripture, but may never be demanded by the recipient or made a condition for fellowship.

The notion that when the Jerusalem believers, “laid (money) at the Apostle’s feet”,⁷⁹⁹ they set a pattern for all future believers has no hermeneutical basis. As indicated in Chapter 1 of this work, the situation in Jerusalem was unique and the functions of the Jerusalem church are not necessarily to be seen as normative for all churches. Certainly the laying of money at the feet of the Apostles and the holding of all things in common did not extend to any other church, nor even to the post-Dispersion Jerusalem church.

Neither should the fact that Gentile assemblies collected money for the poor in Jerusalem be seen as a reason for sending money to a “head office” or “mother church”. As has already been proven, Jerusalem did not occupy such a role amongst the churches, and the reason for sending money to Jerusalem is very clearly stated as being for the support of believers, who had fallen on hard times, due to the famine that had plagued the region.⁸⁰⁰

11.8.3 Discipline

The discipline and restoration of errant believers is the sole responsibility of the local church. In dealing with the Corinthian situation, Paul instructs them as to how the discipline is to be exercised, and also on the need of restoration, on proof of repentance. He does not, however, impose the discipline himself.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁵ Acts 11:29-30, Rom 15:25-29.

⁷⁹⁶ Philippians 4:18, 2Corinthians 11:8-9.

⁷⁹⁷ Galatians 6:6.

⁷⁹⁸ 1Timothy 6:18.

⁷⁹⁹ Acts 4:35,37, 5:2.

⁸⁰⁰ Acts 11:27-30, Rom 15:25-29.

⁸⁰¹ 1Corinthians 15:11-13, 2Corinthians 2:6-8.

He is also emphatic that disputes between believers have to be resolved at the local level and not before civil courts, or in any other forum.⁸⁰²

11.8.4 Sending Out Workers

As mentioned above, the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas out without any reference to Jerusalem or any other agency, except to spend much time entreating the Lord.⁸⁰³ It was a local initiative. Once sent, the apostles worked under the direction of the Holy Spirit and did not refer to Jerusalem or even Antioch as to their *modus operandi*.⁸⁰⁴ Only on returning to Antioch did they report their progress.⁸⁰⁵ When Apollos refused to bow to Paul's wishes for him to go to Corinth, he clearly demonstrated that each itinerant worker was also directly accountable to the Lord of the harvest and not to other men, irrespective of the "seniority" of such men.⁸⁰⁶ "These individuals were servants of God, and not the delegates of a mother-church. The churches which they founded, therefore, were not mere outposts of a central authority".⁸⁰⁷ This autonomy of workers extended to how and where they would preach, but they remained accountable to one another for their moral behaviour⁸⁰⁸ and doctrinal integrity.⁸⁰⁹

11.9 Conclusion

Autonomous churches must guard their position of being directly accountable to Jesus Christ. No motivation, threat or incentive of success should move assemblies from that privileged position, under the headship of Christ, to a position of bondage to man. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage."⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰² 1Corinthians 6:1-8.

⁸⁰³ Acts 13:2-4.

⁸⁰⁴ Acts 16:6-7.

⁸⁰⁵ Acts 14:27.

⁸⁰⁶ 1Corinthians 16:12..

⁸⁰⁷ Rendall. *The Church: What it is*. In *The Church a Symposium of Principles and Practice*. p23.

⁸⁰⁸ Galatians 2:14, 1Timothy 5:20.

⁸⁰⁹ Acts 18:24-26, Galatians 2:1-3.

⁸¹⁰ Galatians 5:1. While this verse primarily refers to freedom from the Mosaic Law. The Principle of freedom in Christ can also be applied secondarily to freedom from (church) dictatorship.

Chapter 12

The Interdependence of Local Churches

12.1 The Basis of Interdependence

The interdependence of autonomous local churches appears to be a contradiction in terms. As shown in the previous chapter, local churches are to be autonomous but this does not mean they are independent of other churches or of ministries that may not be a permanent part of that church. "This subject is complex in character, frustrating to implement, relevant to the age of ecumenicity, and volatile to discuss among conservative, bible-believing churches."⁸¹¹ Indeed, no other subject is bound to raise as much and as vehement debate amongst autonomous churches as the matter for inter-church relationships. Such fierce independence often stems from fears of denominational-type control but also from arrogance and a sense of self-sufficiency. Hort sees the root of such independence in the spirit of lawlessness!⁸¹² But, "true autonomy encourages cooperation among local churches."⁸¹³

12.1.1 Interdependence and Unity

We cannot speak of the interdependence of local churches without making reference to the unity of the church (universal). "Although they are unit-churches in outward management, still their inner life is one and the Lord has made their members the members of one Body."⁸¹⁴ Jesus said: "there will be one flock and one shepherd,"⁸¹⁵ speaking of Jew and Gentile. If Jew and Gentile are to be one flock, then clearly He is saying that all believers will be one flock and not many flocks. It is towards this end that Jesus prays "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that

⁸¹¹ Strauch, Alexander. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* Joseph M. Vogl & John H. Fish III (Eds). Loizeaux. Neptune. 1999. p189.

⁸¹² Hort. *The Christian Ecclesia.* p119.

⁸¹³ Spender. *The Autonomy of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p182.

⁸¹⁴ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life.* p62.

⁸¹⁵ John 10:16.

they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”⁸¹⁶ He does not pray for this unity within local churches only. The preceding verse specifies that He was not only praying for those who were believers at the time, but for all believers: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.”⁸¹⁷ There can be no doubt that His desire is for unity amongst all believers on the earth at any given time and it is exactly this unity which is destroyed by the man-made fences of denominationalism, sectarianism and isolationism. It is wrong to claim that we have unity in a theoretical or theological sense but that Jesus never intended this unity to be a practical reality. If all our Lord desired was a theoretical unity, there would have been no need for Him to pray this prayer, since all believers are automatically, *de facto*, one in the Spirit. This unity is to be a witness to the world that Jesus is indeed the Christ. A theoretical, spiritual unity cannot witness to the world. Only a practical, visible harmony will do that. But, Jesus prayed for unity and not an organic union or organisation.⁸¹⁸ Paul worked towards this unity and Peter exhorted all believers to “love the brotherhood.”⁸¹⁹ “We have varied evidence of the pains taken by Paul to counteract any tendency towards isolation and wantonness of independence, which may arise in the young communities...”⁸²⁰ We shall quote two of many examples:

12.1.2 Ephesians and Unity

In Ephesians Chapter 4, Paul goes to great lengths to prove the unity of all believers. He stresses that we are one in the Father (v6), one in the Son (v5) and one in the Holy Spirit (v4). He uses the word “one” seven times, thus confirming the seven-fold unity that binds all believers together (vv4-6). Thus, all believers and (true) churches share the same body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism and God and Father.

Paul realistically enjoins us to *endeavour*⁸²¹ to keep the unity (v3). The fact that he uses the word *endeavour* and does not give an unequivocal instruction indicates how difficult it is to maintain such unity. Later in the chapter (v13), he indicates that the unity

⁸¹⁶ John 17:21.

⁸¹⁷ John 17:20.

⁸¹⁸ Hobbs, Herschell H. *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Convention Press. Nashville, TN. 1971. p127.

⁸¹⁹ 1Peter 2:17.

⁸²⁰ Hort. *The Christian Ecclesia*. p119.

⁸²¹ Greek *spoudazo*; AV translates as “endeavour” three times, “do diligence” twice, “be diligent” twice, “give diligence” once, “be forward” once, “labour” once, and “study” once. (Strong, J. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible*. (electronic ed.). Woodside Bible Fellowship: Ontario. 1996.)

of the faith will only be achieved once we are perfected, and that we will have to work towards that end until the day of the resurrection.⁸²²

12.1.3 Corinthians and Independence

The Corinthian church seemed to have had many problems, of which an independent spirit was but one. Their sectarian divisions did not only separate them from each other within the church, but also separated them from other assemblies. In his opening remarks, Paul reminds them that they are "called to be saints, *with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*, both theirs and ours."⁸²³ They are not the only saints, but all who call on the Lord are saints together with the Corinthians. Sectarianism and elitism has plagued the church throughout its history and is often the makings of a cult.⁸²⁴

Throughout his first letter to the Corinthians Paul makes reference to other churches to remind the believers of the fact that they are not the only church and that they are not to pursue a lone course. He assures them of his fatherly care for them and writes that he will send Timothy to them "who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church"⁸²⁵ thus reminding them of the uniformity of doctrine. He gives direction on marriage and adds, "and so I ordain in all the churches."⁸²⁶ When speaking about the debate over head coverings he says: "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God,"⁸²⁷ thus appealing to them to come in line with other churches. On the matter of order he says: "God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."⁸²⁸ He urges them to send aid to the believers in Jerusalem "as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also."⁸²⁹ In 1 Corinthians 16:6 he expresses the hope of visiting them and that they would "send me on my journey" indicating their responsibility to assist him spiritually and financially as he ministers to others. He concludes the letter by conveying the greetings of the Asian churches and of the

⁸²² Note that the unity of the Spirit is a fact that needs to be maintained whilst the unity of the faith is something that needs to be achieved. Unity of the Spirit seems to refer to the spiritual bonds that bind us together while the unity of the faith seems to refer to the practical unity, particularly doctrinal unity.

⁸²³ 1 Corinthians 1:2 (Emphasis mine).

⁸²⁴ Martin, Walter R. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Bethany Fellowship. Minneapolis. 1977. pp25,26.

⁸²⁵ 1Corinthians 4:17.

⁸²⁶ 1Corinthians 7:16.

⁸²⁷ 1Corinthians 10:16.

⁸²⁸ 1Corinthians 14:33.

⁸²⁹ 1Corinthians 16:1.

brethren⁸³⁰ and in so doing reminds them again of their connectedness with other churches and brothers.

Each of these references taken individually, may seem insignificant, but together they clearly demonstrate how Paul would use every opportunity to remind the Corinthians of their inter-relatedness with other churches – reminding them that each church is not the whole but that each is part of the greater church and that this interdependence brings benefits and responsibilities.⁸³¹ Paul finally makes the following very piercing comment: "...did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?"⁸³² A broad paraphrase would be; "Were you the original Christians, did you start the Christian message and are you the only believers in the world?" These words should shame all independent-minded churches into seeking and building relationships with other true believers.

12.1.4 Practical Realities

The truth is that no church, no matter how isolationist, can claim to be truly independent of all other churches. Many of the members of that church will have been saved as a result of someone outside that congregation. The doctrine they teach (no matter how different from the mainstream) will largely be based on ideas of others, and if not formed in agreement with others, may be formed in reaction to others. Many of their traditions, liturgies, order of services etc, will have been coloured by other leaders, churches, books and history.

The songs they sing, illustrations the preachers use, the structure of the church and the way the leaders act will all largely reveal various outside influences. Even if such a group denies any influences in modern times, it will most certainly have been influenced by, and exist because of 2000 years of Christian History.

12.2 Inter-Church Activities

12.2.1 Itinerant Preachers

The New Testament churches were fairly dependant on travelling apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists. These ministers provided a balanced and varied diet of spiritual nourishment to the congregations as they would reside and minister in the

⁸³⁰ 1Corinthians 16:19.

⁸³¹ Hort. *The Christian Ecclesia*. p122.

⁸³² 1Corinthians 14:36.

different churches for varying lengths of time. As established in Chapter 9 of this work, the elders would remain within local churches, providing stability whilst itinerant preachers brought teaching, balance, fresh direction and correction.⁸³³

These itinerating men would also carry news and greetings⁸³⁴ between the churches as well as pastoral letters from other leaders. At times they would also convey financial gifts from one fellowship to the next.⁸³⁵

They were held in esteem and it was expected that their ministry would be received by the various assemblies.⁸³⁶ And as such, they would often carry the commendation of leaders known to and trusted by the local church. It was expected that they would be supported financially by the churches to whom they ministered, but at times also receive general support from churches where they were not actively preaching at the time.⁸³⁷

Unfortunately false teachers and preachers also circulated between the churches causing confusion and division⁸³⁸ and it is sad to note how easily some received their error.⁸³⁹ Thus the need to distinguish between true and false preachers was imperative then as it is now.⁸⁴⁰

12.2.2 Inter-Church Communication

Various leaders wrote letters to the different churches of which some were taken up in the canon of Scripture. These letters would contain teaching, admonition and administrative directives. In addition, they also contained personal news of the writer, his co-workers and other churches. .

In addition to the various epistles and itinerant preachers, other believers would also visit churches (other than their home church) and in so-doing foster bonds and relationships on personal and congregational levels.

⁸³³ 1Corinthians 4:17ff, 1Thessalonians 3:2.

⁸³⁴ Philippians 2:19, 1Thessalonians 3:6.

⁸³⁵ 1Corinthians 16:3, 2Corinthians 8:19.

⁸³⁶ 1Corinthians 16:10, 2Corinthians 8:23-24, 3John 8.

⁸³⁷ 3John 5-7.

⁸³⁸ 2Corinthians 11:4,13, Galatians 2:4, 2Peter 2:1.

⁸³⁹ Strauch. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p195.

⁸⁴⁰ Revelation 2:2.

Letters of commendation would accompany preachers and other visitors.⁸⁴¹ This indicated that the various churches accepted and recognised the assessment of other assemblies and this practice, to some degree, helped to differentiate between true and false workers. Letters of commendation showed that local churches cared what influences would affect other churches and also that they were concerned about the smooth transition of members from one congregation to the next.

12.2.3 Financial Support

Finances and gifts flowed between churches for two reasons: For the support of itinerant ministries and for the aid of believers in churches that were famine stricken.

Although Paul viewed it as robbing a church to receive support from one in order to minister to another,⁸⁴² it nevertheless appears to have been common practice for churches to support itinerant ministers wherever they may be working at the time. Even though the Philippians were the most faithful (financial) supporters of Paul,⁸⁴³ it is evident that this was common practice. To Titus he writes:

Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.⁸⁴⁴

At least two occasions are recorded when churches sent relief to the poor believers in Jerusalem. This was not because Jerusalem was the "mother church" but simply because it was in need. The first occasion is recorded in Acts 11:27-30 when Antioch sent a gift to Judea. About ten years later the churches of Macedonia, Achaia and Galatia sent a large gift to the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem.⁸⁴⁵

Paul is emphatic that the principle behind such giving is that those churches that have more should share with those who have need so that there would not be major inequalities amongst the churches. This is a powerful principle which militates against certain churches spending large amounts of money on elaborate buildings, excessive

⁸⁴¹ Romans 16:1, 2Corinthians 3:1.

⁸⁴² 2Corinthians 11:8.

⁸⁴³ Philippians 4:10, 15, 16.

⁸⁴⁴ Titus 3:13,14 (NIV).

⁸⁴⁵ Romans 15:26,27, 1Corinthians 16:1.

Strauch. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p193.

salaries and expensive motor vehicles while other churches are starving. Indeed, a principle which is largely ignored today.

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality.⁸⁴⁶

12.2.4 Doctrinal Agreement

The meeting between representatives from Antioch and Jerusalem of Acts 15 illustrates the commitment amongst the churches to find agreement on major points of doctrine. Antioch did not simply correct the error propagated by the Jerusalem brothers in the local church, but met with the offending church in order to come to an agreement on the essentials. Unfortunately, it seems that today many autonomous churches simply insulate themselves from such differences by retreating into their own cocoons, instead of attempting to resolve them in order that all may learn and benefit.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul is at pains to point out that doctrine should be the same in all the churches.⁸⁴⁷ This obviously does not refer to the non-essentials such as forms of meetings or matters of custom.⁸⁴⁸ This doctrinal uniformity was further enhanced by the itinerating brothers teaching the same doctrine in all the churches.⁸⁴⁹

We should note that some of the first churches experienced fears, suspicions, strains, and tensions between themselves just as churches do today (Acts 15; 21:18-26; Gal. 2:11-14). Dividing or establishing separate denominations was not an option for these first Christians.⁸⁵⁰

12.2.5 Inter-Church Modelling⁸⁵¹

Five times in his first letter to the Corinthians Paul points out that he expects of them to follow the example of other churches in doctrine,⁸⁵² social and marital matters,⁸⁵³ non-contentiousness⁸⁵⁴ order,⁸⁵⁵ and generosity.⁸⁵⁶ In the second letter he shames the

⁸⁴⁶ 2Corinthians 8:13-14.

⁸⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Corinthians 7:16, 1 Corinthians 10:16.

⁸⁴⁸ Chapter 2 of this work shows that the scriptures put forward a set of principles and not patterns for these and other aspects of governance and administration.

⁸⁴⁹ 1Corinthians 4:17.

⁸⁵⁰ Strauch. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p196.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

⁸⁵² 1Corinthians 4:17.

⁸⁵³ 1Corinthians 7:17.

⁸⁵⁴ 1Corinthians 11:16.

⁸⁵⁵ 1Corinthians 14:33.

⁸⁵⁶ 1Corinthians 16:1.

Corinthians into more generous giving by reminding them that the Macedonians were liberal in spite of their poverty.⁸⁵⁷

To the Thessalonians he writes that they were an example in evangelical zeal and faith to the Macedonian and Achaean believers by preaching the gospel to those who were near and far.⁸⁵⁸ The Thessalonians in turn had followed the example of the Judean believers in believing and obeying the Word in the face of persecution.⁸⁵⁹ Paul also commends them for expressing their love to all in Macedonia.⁸⁶⁰

"Thus churches learnt from other churches, inspired one another to perseverance and love, and encouraged and comforted one another in hard times (1Peter 5:9)."⁸⁶¹

12.3 Benefits of Cooperation

12.3.1 Sharing Gifts

As seen above, churches in the New Testament helped one another in areas where some were strong and others were weak. This sharing may include financial assistance, ministry support, technical expertise as well as other gifts and abilities. Very few churches have a full range of ministries, gifts and talents, and each fellowship, no matter how small, has areas of strength that can supplement the weaknesses of others. If one church has to build a hall or house, the financial support, labour and expertise of many assemblies pooled together can result in a building being erected in a short time and with a small or no mortgage. Amish barn raisings serve as an excellent example of what can be done by way of cooperation.⁸⁶² Such cooperation has to be based on free-will, cannot be by compulsion and may not be used to place the receiving church under any form of obligation.

Often small autonomous churches have very limited preaching skills which could leave believers somewhat under-nourished. When ministry is shared between such churches, folk are exposed to different gifts, emphases and a more varied diet. This rotating of ministry also builds fellowship between groups and widens the horizons of those who do the preaching.

⁸⁵⁷ 2Corinthians 8:1-5.

⁸⁵⁸ 1Thessalonians 1:7.

⁸⁵⁹ 1Thessalonians 2:14.

⁸⁶⁰ 1Thessalonians 4:10.

⁸⁶¹ Strauch. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church.* p196.

⁸⁶² This is not to say that all of Amish traditions are to be emulated.

In some instances a local church may have a particularly strong preacher or teacher whose effectiveness is limited because he has to make tents. By a number of churches rallying to support such a man, he can be available full-time and more widely so all may benefit.

12.3.2 Balance

Inter-church relationships are very helpful in providing balancing and stabilizing influences. It is too easy for autonomous churches to become too inward-focussed and to lose perspective when operating in isolation. This myopia may be in areas of doctrine, mission-mindedness, the role in society, increasing threats from outside and the changing needs of its constituents. Talks and inter-action with others help to bring balance and fresh perspectives.

12.3.3 Learning From Others

Often autonomous churches have to work through steep learning curves, re-learning lessons that had been learnt by other churches. By sharing information amongst churches, this unnecessary waste of time and energy could be redirected towards a more effective operation. This is particularly true where the church interfaces with the world in areas of evangelism and social responsibility. Things like the effective use of technology and other media to spread the gospel can help churches, particularly where they may operate in a technologically challenged environment.

In many countries, statutory and governmental red-tape can easily overburden small groups. By learning from others that have dealt with the same situations, much expense, time and trauma could be spared.

As modern trends and error proliferate, all bible-believing churches need to develop responses to combat each successive wave of post-modernism. This often results in unnecessary duplication as each local church discovers the error, sometimes once the damage has been done, and develops a response to it. By cooperating and delegating one or two people to stay abreast of trends and to develop appropriate responses that can be used in all the assemblies, lag-time can be minimised and churches can be better prepared.

12.3.4 Fellowship and Mutual Encouragement

Autonomous churches are often small and their leaders can easily become discouraged without the support of other like-minded churches. By joining with other churches for special meetings, fellowship days and conferences, much encouragement can be shared. Believers in these churches can easily develop a cocoon mentality while fellowship with other churches, from time to time, goes a long way to broaden the horizons of such folk. In some groups this may take the form of annual conferences and camps, but could also be extended to spend an informal day of fellowship together on a public holiday.

Churches with small youth groups often struggle to keep the youngsters involved and interested because of a lack of other young people and adequate activities aimed at the young people. Joint activities help to build awareness that they are not isolated and help to build healthy friendships with other Christian young people instead of with the world. The lack of suitable Christian marriage partners in autonomous churches often leads to young people being lost to the world. Inter-church youth activities helps to broaden the pool of potential marriage partners. This also protects against the semi-incestuous marriages that have plagued some groups.⁸⁶³

Inter-church fellowship should also include churches of other ethnic groups and may even extend to other countries. Churches in a first-world environment can be of much help to churches in third-world environments. This should, however, not degenerate into the weaker becoming dependant on the stronger and thus forsaking their dependence on the Lord.

12.3.5 Joint Projects

The relative smallness of many autonomous churches often hinders them from embarking on projects that would help them to better fulfil the Great Commission. By working with a number of other similar churches, they can leverage their resources and achieve that which otherwise would have been impossible. Some such projects could include:

- Sending out missionaries.
- Developing publishing facilities.
- Establishing Bible schools and training facilities.

⁸⁶³ This is most evident amongst the "Exclusive Brethren" and Amish but also plagues many other small groups.

- Evangelical crusades.
- Radio stations.
- Internet and other technologically advanced projects.
- Developing youth programs.
- Joint conferences and camp meetings.
- Social responsibility programs and works of charity.

When embarking on such projects they need to be structured in such a way so as not to violate the autonomy of the local churches. This can be done in several ways. First the project could be under the jurisdiction of a single local church but with full support and cooperation of other churches. So for instance, a conference could be arranged and hosted by one of the churches with others sharing ministry and finances. Second, it could have a separate identity such as a printing press as a separate legal 'person' with representatives of the churches acting as trustees. Finally, the project could be the investment in a single person, such as a missionary, who receives support from a number of churches but who works under the commission and oversight of one of those churches.

12.3.6 Caveats on Cooperation⁸⁶⁴

All cooperation between assemblies must be structured in such a way so as to guard the autonomy of each church. Weaker Churches should not become financially or spiritually dependent on stronger churches in such a way that the headship of Christ to the weaker is undermined.

Such cooperation and unity can only be based on relationships and not on an organisational structure. At times the difference between the two can be very small indeed. For example; the various Baptist unions and associations could easily be seen to overstep the limits.⁸⁶⁵ The so-called "Plymouth Brethren" seem to have been most successful at finding the balance between the extremes.

Although fellowship between churches in the New Testament was facilitated by the itinerant ministries and while there were strong personalities amongst them such as Paul and Peter, such fellowship may never revolve around, or function under the

⁸⁶⁴ The following remarks are based largely on 36 years of working amongst, and observation of, small and independent churches.

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headship of a personality. If this happens it becomes yet another personality cult. The focus can also not be the unique distinctive of the group, such as a doctrinal emphasis, but must always be Jesus Christ.⁸⁶⁶

The cooperation of a number of churches may never lead to an exclusivity and a “them and us” attitude. The doors should not only be open to all who wish to fellowship with the group, but relationships with others need to be actively pursued. At the same time the dangers of becoming yet another denomination are very real and should be guarded against with diligence.

The imperative laid on the Church to be one is also the excuse for the ecumenical movement where Evangelicals embrace Mormons and Papists and beyond. Sections of the “ecumenical movement” are now extending overtures to, and sharing fellowship, prayer and platforms with Muslims, Hindus, Satanists⁸⁶⁷ and many others. This pluralism and inclusivism is simply a re-incarnation of Israel’s practice of worshiping Yahweh and Baal simultaneously.⁸⁶⁸ A line has to be drawn and a local church has to establish for itself the doctrinal minima they require from another church in order for cooperation and fellowship to take place. However, such standards dare not be too narrow nor too broad. A clear thesis on this subject has been written in a letter written in 1836 by Anthony Norris Groves to John Nelson Darby at the time that the “Exclusive Brethren” began to secede from other churches.

I make use of my fellowship in the Spirit, to enjoy the common life together, and witness for that, as an opportunity to set before them those little particulars into which, notwithstanding all their grace and faithfulness, their godliness and honesty – they have fallen.⁸⁶⁹

12.4 Dangers of Isolationism

One of the oldest and, still most successful tactics of the Devil is to isolate people and groups in order to weaken and attack them.⁸⁷⁰ When we stand united within and amongst churches we are much stronger.⁸⁷¹ The dangers of isolationism are many and great. John addressed one such situation which clearly illustrates the dynamics at work in a “closed” church:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his

⁸⁶⁶ Colossians 1:18.

⁸⁶⁷ The Ministerial Association of Burbank, CA includes Wickens and New Agers.

⁸⁶⁸ 1Kings 18:21.

⁸⁶⁹ *Coad. A History of the Brethren Movement.* pp291-295.

⁸⁷⁰ Genesis 3:1, Deuteronomy 25:18, 1Peter 5:8.

⁸⁷¹ Ecclesiastes 4:12.

deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.⁸⁷²

12.4.1 Isolationism and Heresy

Independent churches frequently become narrow in focus, circuitous in reasoning and incestuous in relationships. The moment perspective is lost because of a rejection of all outside reference points, the individual and group quickly become unbalanced in relationships and doctrine. We need the fresh perspectives that interaction with a broader group of believers can bring in order to remain balanced. The Judaisers in Jerusalem is a case in point. They had overemphasised the legalist aspects of the Word and needed the fresh focus that the brothers who were working amongst the Gentiles brought in order to have a correct view of the Gospel.⁸⁷³

Just as navigators need external reference points to remain on course, so churches need the wisdom that comes from a multitude of counsellors. The advice of Solomon still holds true: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety."⁸⁷⁴ Deviations from the truth will first be evidenced in an imbalance in the inter-personal relationships, particularly between the leaders and the people. The next, more visible stage, in the slide into heresy, is doctrinal error as the group and its leaders reject orthodox interpretations and views of Scripture. Along this path the group will become increasingly isolated until it becomes a full-blown cult.⁸⁷⁵

One of the identifying marks of a cult is its isolationism⁸⁷⁶ and the attitude that "we alone have the truth – all others are in error". This is true of small independent groups as well as large cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Heresy is both a cause and effect of isolationism and exclusivism.

12.4.2 Unchristian Attitudes

As much as individual believers need interaction with other believers to remain humble and to be shaped as "iron sharpens iron,"⁸⁷⁷ so local churches need interaction with

⁸⁷² 3John 9,10.

⁸⁷³ Acts 15.

⁸⁷⁴ Proverbs 11:14.

⁸⁷⁵ History abounds with examples. An analysis of the Exclusive Brethren, Mormons and groups led by Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* will confirm these trends.

⁸⁷⁶ Martin. *The Kingdom of the Cults*. pp24-26.

⁸⁷⁷ Proverbs 27:17.

those outside their immediate circle to foster the attitudes that are the marks of true believers and true churches.

Zealously independent churches... are suspicious of all outside their local fellowship (and) breed all sorts of sub-Christian behaviour... (They) produce Christian people with unChristlike attitudes... These believers often become self-satisfied, suspicious of all others, (even those slightly different from themselves), prideful, closed-minded, biblically stagnate and self-deceived. Their badge of distinction is that they are not like other churches.⁸⁷⁸

12.4.3 Oblivion

The ultimate danger of isolationism is that the group may eventually die. On rare occasions this may take a long time as the members become physically aged and die off. More often, this happens sooner. There are two causes. First, the increasingly narrow preaching which is inevitable in an isolationist group results in members leaving for greener pastures where there is more depth and width to the teaching. Second, new converts are not added because such groups are (by definition) inward-focussed and lose their sense of mission.

12.5 The Balance

The balance between autonomy, isolationism and denominationalism is very fine and few seem to have been able to find that equilibrium. Nee says that the churches are totally independent from one another in areas of government, responsibility and organisation,⁸⁷⁹ yet, dependant on one another for their very survival, and it is this tension between independence and interdependence that is hard to achieve and maintain. Indeed, many who lay claim to being autonomous local churches are in fact denominations, while others that claim to be open to outside relationships are in fact isolationist. The balance cannot be found in an independent pursuit of this truth, but in harmony with and in consultation with others who are able to see each church and its relationships with a clear and unbiased outside perspective. Unfortunately, in the absence of apostolic figures, very few have the humility to ask for, or take advice. That in itself already indicates a problem.

Let us not treat as enemies Christian brothers and sisters or churches that are not of our select circle of churches. The work of God is a large worldwide work, let us be large enough to appreciate it and be a part of it. The Lord help us to balance ourselves on this tightrope of unity and doctrinal purity.⁸⁸⁰

⁸⁷⁸ Strauch. *The Interdependence of Local Churches*. p199.

⁸⁷⁹ Nee. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. p64.

⁸⁸⁰ Strauch,. *The Interdependence of Local Churches. Understanding the Church*. p212.

Chapter 13

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although conclusions have been drawn on each chapter, there is need for a final brief summation of the principles uncovered during this research.

13.1 Tradition Has Obscured Many Truths

As suspected at the outset, 2000 years of tradition has obscured the understanding of a number of truths. Sadly the Reformation, the Pentecostal Revival of the early twentieth Century, and even more recently the Charismatic Renewal of the late twentieth Century did little to rediscover various truths discussed in this work. The Reformed tradition simply ignored or denied the continuation of particularly the prophetic and apostolic ministries. The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, on the other hand, have been marked by a lack of scholarship in these areas and have formed their theology largely on experience and pragmatism.

It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to discard the rigid and unscholarly ways of thinking and return to a simple, yet scholarly approach to the understanding of the principles that underlie the Master's plan for His church. There have been a few isolated thinkers who have applied themselves to some extent to look at the New Testament without prejudice and preconception. In this regard mention must be made of the so-called Plymouth Brethren who went a long way to rediscover truths such as the priesthood of every believer, the leadership by elders and the autonomy of the local assembly. They are to be commended for not only rediscovering these truths but propagating and defending them for the past 200 years. Unfortunately, their negative experiences with the Irvingites⁸⁸¹ early in their history, and Darby's views on the ruin of the church, resulted in a prejudice against some aspects such as apostles and prophets. The work of Wayne Grudem and his attempts to understand the ministry of prophets makes a

⁸⁸¹ The Irvingites were a sect founded by the Rev. Edward Irving (about 1830), who call themselves the Catholic Apostolic Church. They are highly ritualistic in worship and have an elaborate hierarchy of apostles, prophets, etc.

huge contribution towards a clearer understanding of the prophetic ministry; importantly his views are not fettered by either the Pentecostal or Reformed traditions.⁸⁸² Unfortunately no similar work exists on the ministry of apostles and it is hoped that this thesis will go some of the way towards filling this gap.

13.2 There is Sufficient Information

In spite of the many books and practices that obscure the truths about the New Testament church, there is sufficient information within the confines of the Word to arrive at a Biblical model, as was intended by the Architect. Since the scriptures have been inspired both in content and scope, those principles that should enjoy precedence have been amply elucidated within the pages of the New Testament. These areas include the role of elders, the priesthood of every believer, and the autonomy and interrelatedness of local assemblies, as well as the true spirit of the servant-leader. It has also to be assumed that the Lord intended for us to have leeway in the application of those aspects such as the role of deacons for which there is minimal information.

There is sufficient information for churches to develop a biblical model which embraces the same principles that lay at the heart of churches of the first century. Because the Bible is all-sufficient, there is no need for churches to look to the world and its business models in order to discover a model that will work. That is, as long as we believe that the scriptures are still relevant and applicable today. For those who believe that the Bible is out of date and has little to contribute towards an understanding of how the church in the twenty first century should look, the scriptures have no relevance, except as a tool with which to sanctify worldly methods of building an earthly and secular organisation. But for those who believe that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, there is a wealth of information, not only covering the theory of ecclesiology but practical advice and direction for the planting, establishing and continued care of true Bible-based churches.

13.3 Are the Principles Practicable?

It is all very well to rediscover theories and principles that may have been obscured, but if they cannot be applied in real life churches in the post-modern world, they are of academic interest only. To the question as to how well these principles can be implemented, we have to consider three responses.

⁸⁸² Grudem, Wayne. *The Gift of Prophecy*. Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2000.

First, they worked for the church of the first century. The Lord could have led the Apostles to develop a very different model, possibly based on the Roman military, the Hebrew Synagogue, or the ideas of Plato's Republic, but instead He taught them a pattern that was the reverse of any human ideas. He taught them by word and example that leaders were to be servants and not masters. As the disciples began to implement the "plan", He Himself blessed their work with souls and churches. It has been the contention of this thesis that God, in His omniscience, delivered principles to His church that will remain applicable until His return.

Second, the principles in this work have been proven in many real-life situations and churches, and they do still work in the 21st century.

Third, we have a clear and unequivocal command to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."⁸⁸³ Our commission is to teach the observance of *that which He commanded*. We have no command to teach anything else. The fact that He mentions the end of the age without making reference to any change in the plan or the method confirms that the faith "once for all delivered" will stand until that great and glorious day when this age will come to an end.

13.4 Hypothesis Revisited

My research and findings indicate the validity of the hypothesis that the principles on which the New Testament churches were based, can be identified, and are still applicable to churches in the 21st century.

13.5 Recommendations

To those churches and leaders who are serious about following a biblical alternative to the many models available today, my recommendations are that they:

- Dismantle structures, functions and practices that violate the principles outlined in the New Testament.
- Seek to implement and apply those principles that are not currently operative in their churches.

⁸⁸³ Matthew 28:19,20.

- Modify those structures and practices, that are partially in place according to New Testament principles, but that have been corrupted by various factors.

Such changes are never easy and may require several years of persistent teaching and example but can be made, and the results are well worth the effort. We need to be reminded;

*...let each one take heed how he builds on (that foundation). For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if...if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.*⁸⁸⁴

13.6 In Conclusion

The simplicity of God's ways result in many thinking they are not sophisticated enough for a post-modern world, yet man's problems and the solutions to them remain unchanged.

But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!⁸⁸⁵

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸⁴ 1Corinthians 3:10-13 (Emphasis and parenthesis added).

⁸⁸⁵ 2Corinthians 11:3,4.

⁸⁸⁶ 1Corinthians 1:18-20.

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