

# The New Wine Renewed

A Return to New Testament Church Practices

Marc Carrier

*The New Wine Renewed*

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# Introduction

*The New Wine Renewed: A Return to New Testament Church Practices* was born from a series of Facebook posts I have put together as one document for a quick-reference resource about New Testament practices, specifically concerning the church. The posts were written somewhat spontaneously and were not originally intended to be assembled as a book. They were just my ramblings from streams of consciousness (maybe the Holy Spirit was involved). However, the information was well received by many people, and I thought it would be helpful to put it all together in one volume as a concise resource on the very important subject of New Testament practices.

Without further ado, here it is, in nearly identical form to what was originally posted online.

God bless you.

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# Chapter 1: Apostles

Okay. This will be the first in a series of posts about the church. I will be starting with leadership. First, apostles, Greek apostolos.

Thayer's defines apostolos as a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. And then it adds a theological interpretation: a. specifically applied to the twelve apostles of Christ, and b. in a broader sense applied to other eminent Christian teachers such as Barnabas, Timothy and Silvanus. I have mentioned in one of my earlier posts (included as Chapter 9 in this document), our lexicons are post-Reformation and apply contemporary theological definitions to words often contrary to the normal period word usage. Here is a great example of that. The word apostolos simply means "one who is sent."

There are about a couple dozen named apostles in the Bible. Jesus is one (Hebrews 3:1), the Twelve (Matthew 10:2), Matthias (Acts 1:25-26), Paul (Romans 1:1), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Timothy and Silvanus (believed to be Silas in Acts) (2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), and two unnamed brothers (2 Corinthians 8:23). This fact alone can cause heartburn to those who adopt the theological construct implied by the above lexicon definition. However, if we recognize the natural sense of the word, it's not complicated.

In fact, when we understand the natural sense of the word apostolos, we realize there have been thousands of apostles throughout history, and numerous still at work today. But because of the reigning theological issues with the word, we simply rename them. Today, we call them missionaries. The English word missionary is derived from the Latin verb mittere which means to send (equivalent to Greek verb apostello). So, in order to avoid using the term apostle today, many resort to using an unbiblical term, missionary. Ironically, it is actually quite biblical; it's just translated apostle. An apostle is simply a missionary.

Of course, the Apostles (note the upper-case A) who were personally (in-person) commissioned by Jesus are granted a special place in history. Their writings alone (and contemporaries Mark, Luke, and Jude) were recognized as inspired by the Holy Spirit and considered

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authoritative. The writings form our New Testament. Their practices and traditions are preserved in Scripture and are also evident in the earliest writings of their disciples. But the work of missionaries (apostles, lower case a) continues to this day.

So where do they come from?

The Twelve were selected by Jesus and sent by Him. Note they were called his twelve disciples until He sent them for ministry (see Matthew 10:1-3). Then they were called apostles. He gave them their commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Matthias was picked by lot by the remaining eleven. This is somewhat understandable as they had not yet experienced the Spirit's filling at Pentecost. Saul (Paul) was called by Jesus at the road to Damascus (see Acts 26:12-18, note v. 17 apostello), but not set apart and sent for over a decade. So, after the ascension of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it was the Holy Spirit who did the sending.

“Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:1-4)

I will discuss their role in a future post. This is enough for now.



## Chapter 2: Apostles Continued

Here is my second chapter on the role of apostles as set forth in Scripture.

Apostles are sent ones or delegates. They are sent with orders, under the authority of the One who sent them. Their authority rests in this fact. We see when the Twelve disciples became apostles, they were granted authority to preach the kingdom, heal the sick, and expel demons (Luke 9:1-2). Before that time, they did no such thing. Their effectiveness in achieving their mission was possible because of the fact they were sent to accomplish the mission. The order gave them the authority.

Let me show you an example. When the Twelve were in the boat and Jesus approached walking on the water...

“Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. (Matthew 14:28-28).

Why do you suppose Peter asked Jesus to command him to come to Him on the water? A better question is what do you suppose would have happened to Peter had Jesus not commanded him to approach Him and impulsively walked onto the water? He would have sunk like a rock. But once the command was issued Peter was granted the authority to perform the task.

I provided this example to emphasize that those sent by God are granted the authority to complete the tasks commanded by Him. However, they are not permitted to perform things not commanded. For example, on the road to Damascus Paul was sent to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17, Romans 11:13, Galatians 2:8). His authority rested in his assignment. And even with the assignment given, he still waited over a decade until he went forth with specific instructions (Acts 13:2-4). He also was directed and redirected while on the move (Acts 16:6-10). Paul was not granted the opportunity to pick his ministry; it was the Lord's choosing.

This is vitally important because the powers of darkness rule and reign on the earth and the unseen will not permit the advancement of

the kingdom of God undeterred. Demons, the foot soldiers of the kingdom of darkness, are trampled like serpents and scorpions by the saints through Christ. However, the “rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness (better defined lord of the world and prince of this age, prince of darkness), and the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*” (see Ephesians 6:12), are not to be confronted without the Lord’s leading and therefore backing. Apostles are uniquely sent as pioneers to advance the kingdom (see the Lord’s prayer Matthew 6:10) by His leading, and therefore, with His backing. They lay the foundation of the church.

So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. (1 Corinthians 3:10)

And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man’s foundation; (Romans 15:20)

The foundation of the church is of the apostles and prophets. We saw that in Acts 13:1-3. The prophets met, the Holy Spirit spoke. The Holy Spirit sent, the sent ones being apostles. The church was established. But let us not forget a foundation is only as strong as what supports it. Christ is the Rock (see Matthew 7:24-27). Paul said follow me as I follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). And he warned Timothy about those who would advocate a doctrine other than the sound words of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:3). Anything else is building on sand, and great will be its fall.

And it also must be built where the Master directs. Christ is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). That stone determines the placement and orientation of the entire foundation. It is Christ who holds the golden lampstands. They are not issued by the will of man. Christ said He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). Our commission is to

make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20).

So, apostles are called and sent by God to pioneer advancing the kingdom of God into Enemy territory. Having been sent to the place of God's choosing, He supplies spiritual reinforcements in the heavenly places to support the ground attack by the apostolic workers. Their ground game consists of preaching the kingdom, healing the sick and expelling demons. Their objectives are to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. This process results in Christ building His church.

This is a long and diverse subject. I will serve it up in bite-sized chunks.



## Chapter 3: Apostles Continued Again

We already covered that apostles are missionaries, called and sent by God to pioneer advancing the kingdom through preaching, healing, and deliverance. Their mission is the great commission: making disciples, baptizing, and teaching to observe the commands of Christ. They lay a foundation on the bedrock and cornerstone being Christ (and His teachings). Through all this, Christ builds His church.

Their mission model is per Christ's instructions. Modern missionary movements call this Luke 10 evangelism (see Luke Chapter 10 for details). They go out two by two, seeking out a man of peace. They bring only the gospel and move in power. They engage the many to find the one: the one who is ready. And then they invest in the one who gathers the few. Through this process, disciples are made, and churches are planted.

Compare this to modern "missionaries." Today most missionaries are not serving as apostles. They primarily serve as long distance deacons. Instead of advancing the kingdom through evangelism, healing, and deliverance, they attend to people's practical needs. However, Jesus commanded those He sent to not pack their bag. The reason is if you carry the gospel and any other material benefits, your ministry prospects will quickly gravitate towards the material benefits. This leads to confusion.

Instead, those Jesus sent went empty handed, but full of power. The things they offered only God could deliver. There was no confusion. The good they saw and received could be from no source other than God.

The apostles followed this model precisely. We see when Paul went out, he preached the kingdom, healed the sick, expelled demons, made disciples, and planted churches. When rejected, they wiped the dust off their feet and moved on. When they found a man of peace, they remained with him/her and engaged their households. And they proceeded with disciples for their ongoing training. Let me provide an example of each of these activities.

- Preached the kingdom: Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:30-31
- Made disciples: Acts 14:21

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- Planted churches: Acts 14:23
- Healed the sick: Acts 14:9-10
- Expelled demons: Acts 16:17
- Found “man of peace” and reached their household: Acts 16:15, 16:33, 18:8
- Wiped dust off feet: Acts 13:51

Now I don't want you to imagine that Paul singlehandedly promulgated the church to the entire world. All the Apostles and apostles did the same work. However, the author of the Acts of the Apostles (Book of Acts) was Paul's companion, a disciple he picked up in Troas. Therefore, the account is heavy on Paul, and light on the others.

However, we do have one example to look at: Peter in Caesarea (Acts 10). Peter was sent by the Holy Spirit to Cornelius. Cornelius gathered his household. Peter preached the gospel, baptized them, and then remained with him for several days. You might think that after such successful evangelism Peter would have gone door to door scouring the neighborhood to reach others. No, Peter instead followed the instructions of Jesus and remained in the house of the man of peace and continued strengthening the disciples. You may also imagine that Peter was organizing to find a church for these new converts to attend. Actually, Peter had just planted the church Cornelius was going to attend. He and his household (Acts 10:24, and 2) were a newly birthed home fellowship, or church in his house.

These apostolic teams were called and sent. They preached publicly to the masses to find the few. They healed and delivered. They baptized and made disciples. They planted churches and taught to obey Jesus. They moved on to different locations when persecuted. They traveled with select new disciples to train them on the move.

Paul explained that most of the apostles and the Lord's brothers traveled with their wives (1 Corinthians 9:5). The husband and wife two-by-two apostolic team was also seen with Aquila and Priscilla and Andronicus and Junia. Paul lamented that only he and Barnabas had to labor day and night for their own support while those traveling with wives received help through their spouse. Contrary to popular opinion, it was the women who were supporting the laborers in at least part of the New Testament ministry (see Luke 8:1-3). Early writings teach that all of the Twelve except John were married, and

the families obviously had to fend for themselves while the men were away with Jesus. This may also explain why Jesus selected John to stay with His mom, Mary, if he was the only one not traveling with a wife.

With that said, lamentations aside, Paul was committed to never receiving support from those to whom he ministered, though he stated this was a right he elected to forego (see 1 Corinthians 9:5-18). Instead, he worked with his own hands for his support (2 Thessalonians 3:6-9). By trade, Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). We see his pattern was to minister publicly on a weekly basis until his disciples assisted him to permit him to devote himself completely to ministry (Acts 18:4-5). He received support from the disciples he had made and the churches he had planted (Acts 19:22, 1 Corinthians 11:7-11), not those to whom he ministered.

Multigenerational discipleship was their propagation model. The ministers were not an end in of themselves, intent on doing all the ministry. Rather, their role was to equip the saints for the ministry. All disciples were intended to be soldiers to be trained and mobilized.

And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Today, we assume the leaders are there to do the work and everyone else is a spectator. Jesus showed us how it's done. Preach to the many. Whittle down to the serious (see Luke 14:25-33). Identify the few and heavily invest in them (see John 6:66-70). The few will reproduce and multiply.

We see this multigenerational discipleship model in 2 Timothy 2:2. "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Many see four generations here. I see six. Jesus taught Barnabas (one of the seventy) who taught Paul, who taught Timothy, who taught faithful men, who were intended to teach others also. Note how Paul preached to the many, whittled down to the serious, and narrowed down to the few. Some of those men traveled with him to be fully trained. I already mentioned he found Luke in Troas. He found Timothy in Lystra, Sopater from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus

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from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia, among others. Later, he was assigning them to do the exact work he was doing, such as appointing elders in the churches. This illustrated multigenerational discipleship at its best.



## Chapter 4: Final Post on Apostles

This should be my final chapter on the subject of apostles. I understand the role of apostles is of minimal interest. However, their role as a foundation of the church is vitally important, then and now. A lot flows from their work. From here I will move on to other leadership roles and church practices.

One thing worth discussing now is the matter of leadership and authority. I mentioned apostles are granted a unique authority to pioneer advancement of the kingdom where they are sent. The principalities and powers of darkness that rule and reign in that region remain uncontested until God speaks to His prophets and sends his emissaries. These principalities will not relent without a fight. If someone presumptuously advances into that region without God's leading, they could find themselves advancing a ground attack without air support. That is not a good idea. It doesn't end well. (I will return later to what happens if a church is built without an apostolic foundation).

But note what that authority is about. It pertains to taking ground for the kingdom of God from the powers of darkness. It's not about ruling over people. It's about overtaking enemy territory. In spite of Jesus' clear explanation that leadership in the kingdom of God is not like worldly leadership, people still treat leadership in the church as they do in the world, in business and government. Jesus clearly taught that leadership is a stewardship, an opportunity to serve (Matthew 20:25-28).

The apostles did not rule over the people. They taught them, appealed to them, and set an example for them to follow. Paul said: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1). Never are we expected to imitate or follow the example of people teaching or living contrary to Christ. The entire paradigm of the kingdom of God is voluntary. People are presented with the truth and given an opportunity to respond to it. No one can be forced to do anything. The truth presented is an authority unto itself.

The first apostles, or Apostles of the New Testament were obviously unique in the fact that they had been taught by Jesus Himself, face to face. Therefore, some things they taught verbally were indeed the

Lord's teaching. Paul occasionally would say something was the Lord's teaching even though that teaching was not recorded in the Gospels. I believe he was simply repeating a verbal instruction from the Lord Himself or relayed from one of the Twelve. For the next generation leaders, they repeated the same practice but with the traditions of the Apostles. They had that privilege. For us, we rely on the preserved record of the Apostles' teachings, our New Testament.

All this is to say the Apostles, apostles, and all future leaders do not have intrinsic authority over other people. Well, I guess they do, but to build up, not tear down (see 2 Corinthians 13:10). Authority is granted by God over demons and sicknesses, and to advance the kingdom of God. We appeal to God to support our ground attack with heavenly support. If our work is His work, that support is granted. In this way, the kingdom of God advances.

We saw Paul and the other workers expelled demons. We also read he stood against the powers of darkness (Acts 13:8-11) and Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira; however, both of these two examples were a move of God for very specific objectives, and not a show of explicit human authority. During the Jerusalem Council, no human exercised authority over others. Rather, the final ruling was presented by James, the Lord's brother, appealing to the Word. The Holy Spirit confirmed the ruling.

We have to get it out of our head that leadership in the kingdom is equivalent to leadership in business or government. We do not lord it over others. We are not their bosses. Instead, we have a special stewardship and are responsible for their spiritual health and wellbeing. On the one side, churches abuse their responsibilities by coercing and controlling their members. And on the opposite side of the spectrum, we have leaderless social clubs who take no responsibility for the wellbeing of those under their care. Both are dangerous practices.

Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

Leaders are entrusted with the responsibility to watch over the souls of those they lead and will be accountable for it. The author of Hebrews is urging the saints to not make this work difficult, because

that's not in anyone's best interest. But note this still does not grant the leaders authority over the saints. It's a responsibility and stewardship. The Word is the authority. They have no right or permission to teach, demand, require, or enforce any unbiblical mandate. Because unbiblical mandates are not protective of souls. In fact, unbiblical mandates are often harmful to the soul. And all mandates are an assault to the conscience. Leaders must appeal to the saints with the authority of the Word and bring people to understanding or even repentance.

Going beyond the Word is dangerous, for all parties. James said: "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." (James 3:1). People who teach will be judged for what they teach. If they are leading others into sin by complacency, compromise, or even rebellion through forcing extrabiblical mandates, they will be judged for it. And if they unjustly condemn and ban saints for unbiblical mandates, the judgment is not valid before the Lord, and the people who have done this injustice will be held to account for dismembering the Bride of Christ. Leaders will give an account for that soul. Jesus taught that a good shepherd loves the one so much he leaves the ninety-nine and pursues him. The good father seeks the prodigal. Leaders must capture God's heart for His children.

However, since many people view church leadership as they would business or government leadership, they work to protect the INSTITUTION they serve, rather than watch over and protect the souls that were entrusted to their care. I fear for them, lest they repent. The institution has become their idol.

If the matter is legitimate sin, then Jesus provided a process for the church to adjudicate the matter (Matthew 18:15-18). I will explain this process in detail in a future post. For now, just recognize that the leader has no authority to pass judgment on the matter, but only the church does. He is only one among many.

So, what about 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, you ask? This was a very unique case where Paul exerted authority over the entire church which he had planted. Let me explain why. In this case Paul acted abruptly because the church failed in its responsibility to discipline the brother in sin. The sin was public. Steps one and two of Matthew 18 were now irrelevant. The issue at hand was the church's failure to expel the

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unrepentant brother. It was a clear case. The church was being rebuked by Paul because of their failure to follow through with what Jesus commanded to do when a brother was in sin and refused to repent. Paul, as their apostle, simply stepped in to rebuke them for partaking in this man's sin by permitting him to remain in it. He did what they should have done and rebuked them for not doing it.

I will end this chapter here and then we will move on to prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

## Chapter 5: Five-Fold Ministries

I want to now discuss the five-fold ministries and how they fit into the church (or not). Before I get there, I have to differentiate the biblical concept of the church compared to the modern premise. All these concepts are so intertwined, I must provide a lot of background information to make it understandable.

The church, Greek ekklesia, is the called-out ones, gathered. The best one-word description is assembly. The people called out of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Christ (see Colossians 1:13-14). We see the concept again in 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Acts 26:18. The ekklesia always refers to people, not a place, structure, organization, or institution.

Imagine many sheep dispersed throughout a field. But in one corner, a group gathers together separated from the rest. We would call this a flock. The ekklesia is like a flock of people, separated from those still in darkness and gathered together.

Regardless of scale, it's still people. You have the universal church (Matthew 16:18). That's those called out of darkness and transferred to His kingdom in the entire world. Then there is the regional church (2 Corinthians 1:1). The called-out ones present in a particular region. Then we have the local assembly, or the called-out ones who meet in someone's house (1 Corinthians 16:19). Then we have the multiple local assemblies in a region, the groups of called-out ones meeting in various private homes (also 1 Corinthians 16:19). There are numerous examples of each. Just do a word search for church or ekklesia and you can see for yourself.

It takes a considerable effort to retrain a modern Christian to adopt the historical sense of the word ekklesia because our only experience with the concept of church is a building, an organization, or an institution. We seldom understand that the term is and has always referred to people. I will get into the details of ekklesia later and specifically explain more about the church that meets in the house.

I needed to address this now so I could explain the five ministries of Ephesians 4:11-12. Because four of these five ministries are itinerant roles. They serve the ekklesia but have little recognition or value in the

modern church. This is a travesty. We already learned about apostles, missionaries who pioneer advancing the kingdom of God. Called and sent by God through prophetic agency, they preach the kingdom, heal the sick, expel demons, baptizing and teaching to obey Christ. In this way, Christ builds His church. The gathered saints make up living stones forming the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). Christ being the rock and cornerstone, the apostles and prophets laying the foundation. And others (I will explain forthcoming) will build on that foundation. The saints being the living stones that make up a spiritual house for a holy priesthood (see 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Corinthians 3:10).

Itinerant means traveling ministers. Since the church system today nearly exclusively recognizes local ministers, the other roles are misunderstood and underrepresented. The recognized local ministers are typically pastors, bishops, elders, and deacons, and sometimes preachers and priests. (I will get into these roles in great detail later). Since the itinerants have no relevance within the four walls of institutional Christianity, if they step into their calls in any way, they are often a threat to the system. That's because the system can't contain them. It wasn't meant to.

Imagine a believer stepping into his call as a young apostle, prophet, evangelist, or teacher in a church that only recognizes pastors and deacons, and people are not permitted to operate in their gifts. Conflict is inevitable. Not only does the church offer no discipleship to train the young disciple in properly and maturely exercising his gifts, but they are also threatened by his advancement and work to silence him or sideline him. The church system has grown very effective at cannibalizing it's own, the very ones God has prepared and called to advance His kingdom. The result is a bunch of stagnant churches that seldom hear from God, move in power, or add disciples, and a bunch of estranged young disciples with high callings and no training who become lone rangers and radical individualists. Without the stability and grounding the mature in a healthy church should offer these men, they seldom reach their potential. Instead, we need to embrace these roles, be watchful for their emergence, and mentor them to reach their full potential. If local leaders lack the experience, reach out to others who have the experience.

What evidence do I have of the itinerant roles of prophets, evangelists, and teachers? It's obvious apostles and evangelists are itinerant roles. Because they minister outside the church to the unsaved. Paul himself

was an apostle, evangelist, and teacher (see 1 Timothy 1:7 and 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11). Note a preacher is an evangelist (the two words translated preach are *kerusso* and *euaggelizo*, meaning to publicly proclaim or evangelize). There are never preachers in the church. The church is the saints and preaching is evangelizing or proclaiming the gospel. Every biblical example of verbal ministry to the saints is teaching, not preaching. (And the KJV translation of Acts 20:7 is a terrible mistranslation, the word is talking, or dialogue.) This is logical since it would be pointless to evangelize those who have already been saved.

Timothy was also an apostle, teacher, and evangelist (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6, 2 Timothy 4:5, 1 Timothy 4:13, 16, 6:2). For the itinerant role of prophets see Acts 11:27, 13:1, 15:32, and 21:10. These are all examples of prophets visiting outside churches. The importance of traveling ministers is all but lost today.

Imagine a church where God calls and sends apostles who serve as evangelists to make disciples, teaching those new disciples to obey Jesus. These new churches (home fellowships) obviously do not yet have local leadership. The established churches regularly send teachers and prophets to encourage and establish them. When the locals grow in maturity, those with leadership potential emerge and they are groomed for their ministries. Apostles appoint elders and deacons by the leading of the Holy Spirit and with the blessing of the local congregation when they are qualified (more to follow on ordination/appointment).

In this paradigm the kingdom of God is continually advancing. It is not just a matter of increasing church membership or preserving church traditions/order. It's a well-oiled machine where each of the ministries is serving their vital part to advance God's kingdom. This is what we see in the New Testament. This is what we are missing today.





## Chapter 6: Prophets

I mentioned numerous times that the ekklesia is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, on the bedrock of Christ, He being the cornerstone. And then others would build on that foundation. The others are the local leadership. I am going to get into that shortly. First, I want to provide some important details about prophets, evangelists, and teachers.

But before I do that I need to provide a public service announcement. I know that not everyone will agree with what I am posting. That's a given. If people agreed with these posts then modern Christianity would look a lot more like New Testament Christianity. And of course, it doesn't. So, I am not the least bit surprised many of you out there disagree with some aspects of what I am posting. You are free to disagree.

I do want to state for some of you who may not be aware, I am not a theoretical or theological guy. I know what I believe and why and have done my share of study. However, above all, I am a practitioner. The things I am sharing I have put into practice and learned a lot doing things right, and even more doing things wrong. I have pioneered advancing the kingdom in multiple countries, making hundreds of disciples and planting lots of churches, moving in power with signs and wonders. That work continues to this day. With that said, I am not here to debate words or theories about words. I am instead trying to assist people to approach the Scriptures from a different perspective to be open to the possibilities that NT Christianity was not a unique experience for special people at a special time and a special place. Rather, the NT narrative provides us with a model that applies to all saints, at all times, and all places. If you can't accept this as a possibility, stick to your brand and keep doing what you are doing. I won't be offended, I assure you.

Paul said prophecy was one of the greater gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1-6). Greater being defined as gifts that edify the body, rather than just the individual. Prophecy has the purpose of edification, exhortation, and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3). Though it's an important ministry, there is no biblical evidence of NT prophets being appointed or ordained (as were the other local and itinerant leaders). We are urged to desire earnestly to prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:39) and not despise

prophetic utterances (1 Thessalonians 5:20). But everything must be done properly and orderly (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Though we should welcome and seek supernatural revelation, we are under no obligation to blindly accept what is said. We permit the reporting, and the saints pass judgment (1 Corinthians 14:29). We test everything and hold on to the good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). There are numerous warnings about false prophets. We are to test the spirits (1 John 4:1). Men and women equally serve in the revelatory gifts (Acts 21:9, and 1 Corinthians 11:5).

Prophets are known by their fruit (Matthew 7:15-23). Also note a special revelation from the Holy Spirit will not directly conflict with the written Word, an uncontested revelation from the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit tells you to divorce your wife and marry your secretary, it's a spirit speaking to alright, but not the Holy Spirit! And note the fruit of the report too. If the revelation results in fear, division, dissension (or the entire fruit of the flesh list):

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

...then it's not the Holy Spirit. He would not prompt you into practices that would inhibit you from inheriting the kingdom of God. It's amazing how many God-fearing Spirit-filled believers I know who so easily and dutifully fall into that trap. There are so many false prophecies out there (or misinterpretations) and few recognize that it is not the Holy Spirit bringing the reports.

Reports from the Holy Spirit will be consistent with His fruit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

Here is some practical advice, applying to prophecy and all revelatory gifts (dreams, visions, tongues/interpretation, word of knowledge, discerning of spirits). Do not just take people's word for it. If you are born again, the report should result in an inner witness. If uncertain,

put it in the mental file cabinet and pray and wait. Permit God to bring clarity one way or another. If the prophet is pressuring you or forcing you to concede without an inner witness, beware. The prophet's role is to report, and not to coerce others into action. The prophecy does not negate free will. If the recipient refuses, that's not the prophet's concern. If they are bent on a reaction, they have motive and that makes the report suspect to me. Recall the purpose: edification, exhortation, and consolation.

If you get a bad report, it's not fatalistic. It's a call to action. Isaiah told Hezekiah he was going to die. Hezekiah prayed and he lived another fifteen years. Isaiah was not a false prophet though it did not occur as reported. Instead, the report prompted action.

If you get one report, pray, and wait. Two reports mean increased certainty. Three reports mean a sense of urgency. I always wait for a confirmatory report before taking any significant action on a report. Revelations are not to be weaponized for church discipline. Matthew 18:15-18 demands eyewitnesses, not just dreams and visions. More will follow on that later.

Later I will detail the NT practice of a participatory, interactive fellowship (see 1 Corinthians 14:26...). The purpose of the meeting is not to hear the articulate masterful oratory of talented and charismatic men. Instead, it's God ministering to His people through gifts He apportioned to His people. The meeting is designed for God to speak to His people. No ministry or mission will prove effective absent God regularly communicating with His workers.

Here's another tip. Prideful people are receptive to spirits of deception. The one who doesn't believe he can be wrong already is. Emotionally unstable people are open to spirits of confusion. The enemy works to trip up the gifted just a bit, just to warp the message. The best lie is ninety percent truth. If you don't believe that demons have any impact on the saints because they have the Holy Spirit, stay away from the prophetic. Because you are a landing strip for demonic attack. It's just a matter of time before it becomes obvious something is wrong. Always bind spirits of deception and confusion. Pray for God's hedge of protection. And seek confirmation from other stable believers.

This might be a good time to kill a sacred cow for all leaders: titles. None of the gifts, ministries, or “offices” in Scripture were accompanied by titles. They were opportunities to serve out one’s call. Though people were appointed (publicly recognized) and everyone knew each other’s role, they never took titles. Paul was not Apostle Paul. Paul said, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. He even said a bond-servant and apostle (Titus 1:1) and Peter, a bond-servant and apostle (2 Peter 1:1). Follow their example, please. No Pastor Jimmy. He was one of the elders in the Bible. No Prophet Jeff. He was just a prophet named Jeff. Titles lead to pride and create a paradigm far different than what Jesus described leadership to be in the kingdom. I always say, serve in your gifts, and the recognition will follow. But never ever take on a title. It’s just a source of pride.

Throughout my overseas work I had to work hard to train the locals who are predisposed to addressing people by titles to call me by my proper name, brother Marc.

## Chapter 7: Evangelists

I am not going to repeat all the same passages I already provided about evangelism in my discussions about apostles. I will reiterate the general model employed by the apostles. They were sent two-by-two preaching the kingdom, healing the sick, and expelling demons. They engaged the many to reach the few. This means they engaged crowds with a broadcast shotgun approach, trying to identify those who were interested in learning more. This is described by missionaries as Luke 10 evangelism.

There are no pure evangelists in the Bible. We have instead apostles who were also evangelists: Paul see 1 Timothy 2:3 and 2 Timothy 1:11 and Timothy see 2 Timothy 4:5. We have Phillip who is understood to have been appointed as a deacon and later served as an evangelist (see Acts 8:12, 21:8). And then we have admonition about elders who teach and preach (1 Timothy 5:17). I have already noted the distinction between teaching and preaching in a prior chapter in this series. Preaching is proclaiming the gospel to the unsaved. It is always directed outside the church. There are no exceptions.

I mentioned in the prior post that itinerant ministers were appointed (publicly recognized with the laying on of hands). This is often described as ordained in modern churches. We saw this with Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:3 and with Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. Unlike local ministers (elders and deacons), the qualifications of itinerant ministers are not specified in Scripture. However, we do know that they need not meet the age or family requirements set forth for the local ministers because Timothy was a young man (1 Timothy 4:12) and history reveals he was unmarried, as was Paul at the time of his ministry (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). As with all the ministries, I recommend permitting people to serve with their gifts and allowing their calls to become evident for all to see. Then public appointments will be undisputed.

I want you to note above, that though Phillip did not travel with a companion for whatever reason, he still stuck to the script of preaching the kingdom, healing the sick, and expelling demons and baptizing people (see Acts 8:4-7, 12).

If you have been discerning, you may have noticed I constantly say preaching the kingdom, or advancing the kingdom, rather than “gospel”. This is not by accident. Now is the time to explain what that is all about. The NT evangelists were preaching a different message than most today. And that subject needs to be addressed. For those of you that this is new, I say just take your time and look into it. Remain open minded and permit the Scriptures to speak to you.

I want to explore the NT presentation of the gospel. For starters, note that the four first NT books are called “gospels” (see Mark 1:1). The reigning concept of the gospel today is nearly exclusively concerning the atonement, or the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is entirely understandable considering these events constitute the means by which we benefit from the gospel. However, Scripture says Jesus was preaching the gospel at the very beginning of His ministry, with never a mention of these events until way later (see Mark 1:14-15, Matthew 4:23, 9:35). If the atonement is the beginning, middle, and end of the gospel, how then was Jesus preaching the gospel without ever mentioning the “gospel?”

He drops a great hint as to what He considered the gospel in two of those passages above:

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

And

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Matthew 9:35)

Note the gospel is called the gospel of the kingdom. That is interesting, isn't it?

If I asked you what the major theme of the NT was, the stock answer is God's redemptive plan for humanity. However, Jesus only discusses this subject a handful of times. Yet He mentions the kingdom of God nearly a hundred times. He stated preaching this message was the reason He was sent (Luke 4:43).

When Jesus rose from the dead, He met with His disciples and taught them for forty days before His departure. He knew that they would press on with the great commission and planting churches without His physical presence and constant guidance and correction going forward. I imagine He would commit these forty days to solidify the most important things to make sure they get it right. Did He teach them how to design the church buildings, how to prepare a three-point sermon, or how to establish the order of worship? No. Instead, the Scriptures record that He taught them just one thing: the kingdom of God.

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

Did He mean the parables? Really? Did you ever for a moment consider that the parables were indeed the gospel. They describe the good news of God's impending kingdom. They were not just cute stories.

Jesus also taught us how to pray:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

So poetic, right? Actually, it's God's plan revealed, His overarching goal.

Here is a very brief summary. God created everything, humanity being the culmination; for after humanity He declared it was very good. Dominion was given to humanity. Satan rebelled against God and deceived man. Man obeyed Satan and became enslaved to him. Satan became the de facto ruler of this world. God loved us so much, He sent Christ as a ransom to redeem us from Satan, sin, and the world. Satan, by the hands of evil men, tortured and killed Jesus. However, because He was without sin, the law of sin and death was powerless to hold Him. He rose from the dead and now holds the keys to death and Hades. His time in Hades was a short-term mission trip; He was preaching to the dead. Now Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. His kingdom has arrived, has been established, and will ultimately fill the earth.

This is all about God establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. So, what is our part? That news is indeed good news, but we have limited place in that part of the story. Here's where it gets interesting.

Jesus rose from the dead because He had no sin. However, we have sin. Under the law of sin and death, we will receive our wages, death. However, if we die with Christ, we will also rise with Christ. If we repent, and are baptized for the forgiveness of sins, we can be born again, a new creation indwelt by the Spirit. We die with Him in baptism and become alive with Him in His resurrection. By His blood, we are cleansed, and our sins forgiven, forgotten. We were broken, bound for destruction. But in God's mercy, He made a way for us to not only be forgiven, but cleansed. And not only cleansed, but changed. And not only changed, but empowered: to become who we were created to be. This is very good news!

This whole process is how we become citizens of the kingdom of God. We were once in darkness, but become transferred to His kingdom, through the forgiveness of sins.

“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:13-14)

That passage above is the most succinct treatment of the gospel of the kingdom in the Bible.

I noted above Phillip was preaching the gospel about the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12). Paul was too (see Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 30-31). Please go read these verses. In fact, do a NT word search for “kingdom” and see for yourself how prevalent it is. You will never see the NT the same again once you grasp how significant this theme is.

Paul said he received his gospel directly from Christ, and not from men (Galatians 1:11-12). And Paul said that if someone preached any gospel other than his gospel, he is to be accursed (Galatians 1:8). That's pretty strong language. This is interesting since Paul was not one of the Twelve who were personally trained by Jesus. Though we do know Paul had multiple encounters with Christ, one which provides much detail about their exchange, the Damascus road encounter.



“And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” (Acts 26:14-18)

Note verse 18 above is remarkably similar to Colossians 1:13-14, what I described as the most succinct treatment of the gospel of the kingdom in Scripture. This passage is a close second.

Jesus said the end would not come until this gospel is preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14). And what does the end look like? His prayer come true!

“Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

Guys, this is very good news. The atonement is simply the means by which we can change our citizenship, from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is a very prolific topic in the NT, and I can't do it justice in a Facebook post. If you want more details, I suggest visiting [livethebible.info](http://livethebible.info) and watching my videos on the subject. Note the understanding I am presenting is historical and easily validated in the early church writings. There are some strange dispensationalist ideas out there that are simply modern innovations. Be aware that they are innovations. Likewise, the atonement gospel I am contrasting here is also an innovation. It has elements that are historical (biblical), but elements that require violence to a lot of Scripture. For example: we were indeed saved by grace through faith. However, not for no reason. It was so that we could become who we were created to be and do what we were created to do. We will indeed be judged by our deeds, be

they good or evil. (This teaching is prolific in the Scriptures). And if we remain unchanged, then God's grace failed us. We are actually worse off than when we started. Again, there are numerous passages to support these claims. Too much for a Facebook post. Simply watch the videos for details.

For your information, what I have written is firmly established by the Scriptures and early church history. I didn't invent these concepts. And I uphold the originalist position. Therefore, debating me about it is pointless (because I can't change history). I have stated in the past that every belief, practice, and doctrine can be traced back to a person, place, and time. If that's not back to Jesus and the Apostles with a clear lineage, it's a human innovation. If you have questions or need more details on subjects, just state that much. I may be able to add that topic for a future post. But if you very strongly disagree with or are deeply offended by what's being posted here, you are free to simply unfollow or unfriend me and opine on your wall. I prefer to keep the peace.

## Chapter 8: Teachers

Having already discussed four of the five Ephesians 4:11 ministries, much has been said. I will briefly reiterate a few points. I stated teachers were one of the four itinerant roles of the five ministries. This means they served multiple fellowships, traveling from church to church with the prophets. I already cited several biblical examples of itinerant prophets in Post 6. I likewise mentioned that Paul and Timothy served as apostles, evangelists, and teachers, likewise in an itinerant role. We also see in Acts 13:1-3 that two of the four prophets and teachers were called and sent as apostles.

Teaching is also specifically itemized as a qualification for the localized ministry of overseer (see 1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1). The pertinent passages are below.

...able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2b) *and* not a new convert (1 Timothy 3:6a)

holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:9)

Recall the great commission Jesus gave His disciples, to make disciples, baptize, and teach to observe all He had commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20). Implicit in this command is the expectation for all future generations of disciples to do the things Jesus had commanded the first disciples. This is evident because the first disciples were commanded to teach successive generations of disciples to observe what Christ had commanded them. That means all disciples are expected to teach others what Jesus taught.

This also means men and women are both expected to teach in the context of discipleship.

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.” (Titus 2:3-5)

However, women are prohibited from teaching or exercising authority over men. (1 Timothy 2:12). For those who believe this passage is just cultural or pertaining to a specific problem in a specific church, the context doesn't permit such a possibility. Paul defends the statement with evidence from the Genesis account (so the pertinent culture is all people for all time). And all the churches proceeded to uphold his teachings here. There was no misunderstanding what he meant.

Bear in mind, far more women attend churches today than men. And personal discipleship was Jesus' prescribed method for bringing disciples to maturity. There is no lack of opportunity for women to have an incredible impact advancing the kingdom of God utilizing their gifts in spite of the prohibition on teaching men. It will just be directed towards women or youth.

Likewise, this restriction on teaching or having authority over men is arguably not a prohibition from operating in other gifts. We have already seen that there were women prophets in the NT churches. And Scripture says prophecy is specifically meant for the edification of the body. In light of this, it is my opinion the admonition for women to be silent in the churches is restricted to teaching the Word of God (not singing, testifying, or revelatory gifts). Since the New Testament churches met in private homes, I could not imagine strict silence for the entire time of gathering. I repeat, this is simply my opinion that I believe best reconciles the passages.

Now the great commission can be understood two different ways. One interpretation is to teach new disciples to obey every command Jesus taught. The Biblicist approach to this teaching is to list the do's and don'ts. A second way to understand the passage is that the commission is to make disciples and teach them that they are to observe all the things Jesus said. We need not provide them with a list. We just need to teach them that it is their responsibility to read what Jesus taught, understand what He meant, apply those teachings to their life, and practice the things He said. Sort of like James 1:22 and 4:17.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (James 1:22)

Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

The second interpretation is the only practical one in cross-cultural ministry (I would say everywhere, actually). Because the objective is a converted heart. A person who receives the grace and mercy God offers and reciprocates that love back to God through a commitment to honor Him with their lives. A surrendered and converted heart produces fruit. Lists of rules seldom result in any lasting fruit, especially not from the heart.

This second interpretation presumes that the teachings of Jesus can be understood at face value. The early church interpreted the teachings of Jesus in this way. They believed Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said. Their understanding did not demand a lot of theological training. The early church did not have theological schools. They instead believed and obeyed.

Nowadays Christians are knowledgeable beyond their ability to obey. And people formulate complicated and convoluted theologies in order to avoid the inconvenient truths that Jesus presented. Through hermeneutical gymnastics, people have found convenient ways to wholesale disregard the things Jesus plainly stated. They say those passages don't apply to us but were addressed to other people before us. Or they say Jesus taught us hard things to show us that we couldn't obey it and He never intended us to. Or they say even though He said hard things, the cross eliminated any culpability for any ongoing or future sin. The early church believed no such nonsense. Because of these strange doctrines, specialized theological training is required to carry the torch of the branded beliefs. Seminaries, systematic theology reference books, and years of training are needed to promulgate such views.

However, the early church was able to simply read (or hear) the Scriptures and teach to observe them, just like Jesus said in the great commission. And therein lies how the early church advanced the kingdom to the known world and brought the pagan Roman Empire to its knees without political or military strength. There is great power in such simplicity.

At the birth of the Church, this was their practice:

*The New Wine Renewed*

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42).

Note that in the early church not everyone was literate, and even if you were, nearly no one possessed their own personal copy of the Scriptures. The OT was complete but was only hand copied. The NT canon wasn’t yet established for hundreds of years. The letters we read in our New Testament were publicly read to the churches. The church was heavily reliant on teachers to promulgate the message. Note Paul’s instruction to Timothy:

“Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13)

This was the work of a NT teacher. We are blessed today to have the apostles’ teaching in a nicely bound book. What an incredible advantage. However, we have complicated the Scriptures and trained people to not trust them at face value. We have likewise negated the Holy Spirit’s role in teaching all truth (1 John 2:27).

Understandably, when the apostles were present, they taught. Itinerant ministers would be given special attention, much like a guest speaker would today.

“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.” (Acts 20:7).

However, Paul explained that during normal gatherings each would share in part for the edification of the body. There was no designated teacher or prepared sermon. (See 1 Corinthians 14:26).

We have seen that the great commission includes teaching to observe all that Jesus commanded. We also learned that building on the rock is acting upon the words of Jesus. In context, Jesus was telling the crowd who had just listened to Him proclaim the sermon on the mount. “These words” actually refers to the teachings of the sermon on the mount!

And the apostles and teachers likewise taught Christ: not just about Him, but rather His teachings. Paul said follow me as I follow Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). And he warned Timothy about those who would

advocate a doctrine other than the sound words of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:3).

We repeatedly see the supremacy of the teachings of Christ throughout the New Testament. Jesus repeatedly stated that if we loved Him, we would obey His commands (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). He gave a parable that if one did not abide in Him and bear fruit, that they would be cut off and thrown into the fire. And He defined abiding in Him as obeying His commands (John 15:1-10).

John the apostle wrote that if we say we know Him and don't obey His commands, we are liars (1 John 2:3-6). Lastly, and maybe most importantly, Jesus said that His words would judge us on the last day.

“If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (John 12:47-50)

The modern “gospel” renders obedience optional. However, the early church upheld the supremacy of the teachings of Christ, as presented by the Apostles, written (Scripture) and by their example. (I will not explain the value of the early church writings here but will save it for the next section. It was originally posted prior to the writing of this series and will be included as Chapter 9 within this volume).

Another important factor in teaching is recognizing the historical significance of Old versus New Covenant theology. The early church only saw the Old Covenant as relevant for general instruction and for leading to Christ (Galatians 3:24). In Christ, we are made complete. Though the Law of Moses had direct applicability to the people of that covenant, Gentiles were exempt from abiding in the Law of Moses. This was decided at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and was reaffirmed in Acts 21:17-25. The obsolescence of the Old Covenant was ironclad among the early saints (see Hebrews 8:7-13). This understanding carried forth throughout the Ante-Nicene period. It was only later, following the legalization and institutionalization of Christianity did the church begin to introduce Old Covenant concepts into Christianity.

I understand that nearly all modern forms of Christianity deviate from the understanding presented here in one way or another. However, in the churches planted by the Apostles, all Christians throughout the world once believed as described above for hundreds of years. I urge anyone who teaches otherwise to seriously consider what you are doing. Scripture offers a solemn warning to teachers that should encourage us to remain humble and teachable. “Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” (James 3:1) Let us be faithful in teaching to observe all that Jesus commanded.



## **Chapter 9: The Value of the Ante-Nicene Witness**

This was not originally part of this series but was written immediately prior. However, I have included it here because the article was cited in Chapter 8.

Here I am writing something I did not know needed to be said. I want to make a case for why the Early Church (Ante-Nicene, or before the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD) witness is an invaluable resource for establishing unity of the church. First of all, I personally don't know a single person who elevates the early church writings to the level of Scripture. If those people exist, they are hiding effectively.

But it was the same early church who gave us the earliest witness of the post-Apostolic church who actually determined what makes up our New Testament. Their basis was that the New Testament canon had to be Apostolic in origin (or a direct companion of the Apostles). There was near unanimity as to what the New Testament canon was, and none of the gnostic gospels or other spurious writings were considered. That said, there were several very early writings that they held in high esteem and were circulated because they were consistent with the inspired Scriptures and were not far removed from the Apostles. But again, they were not ultimately considered Scripture.

Today we have one Bible (arguably), yet tens of thousands of denominations all believing vastly different things. And even worse, most can't even find a church that believes in their unique set of beliefs. Therefore, we have almost as many different beliefs as we do Christians, most, if not all, claiming they are right and everyone else is wrong. Yet Christ prayed we would be One three times the night before He was crucified towards that aim. He gave gifts to achieve that unity (see Ephesians 4:11-16). Yet the written Word is the tool with which we parse word from word to divide saint from saint. How could that be? Did Jesus really fail in His endeavor? Were His chosen disciples failures too?

Though the Scriptures identify errors and factions early, the people the Lord assigned to correct those matters weren't negligent in their responsibilities. Those examples in Scripture were penned by the very

men tasked with remedying the errors, and they did! Their issues with the Gnostics and other dissidents were quelled rather quickly.

The Ante-Nicene witness gives us a beautiful example of Christ's Bride that spanned many continents, cultures, and centuries who shared near complete unity in the Spirit and love. They used this fact to argue the validity of Christ and His kingdom powerfully to refute the pagans. Though this idea is nearly impossible for us to fathom today, they were one church with one belief and one practice. Their differences only spanned matters which were not clearly articulated in the Scriptures. And on those matters, they showed extreme leeway for other churches to practice as they saw fit.

So why is their witness valuable? First of all, these people were in some cases directly taught and disciplined by the Apostles, or not far removed. Many of these writers were taught and baptized in the actual churches the Apostles planted. Today we have Calvinists who hold the same tenets as Calvin did nearly five hundred years later. (And many other sects as well). Yet we are supposed to believe that Calvin was better at articulating and propagating his beliefs than Christ and the Apostles He selected and trained. Really?

The Ante-Nicene saints also read and spoke the Greek of the Old and New Testament. Yes, even the Old Testament (LXX) was in Greek at the time of Jesus, the Apostles, and the Ante-Nicene church, (something we learn by reading their writings). Today, two thousand years removed, we derive word meanings from lexicons published post-Reformation, oftentimes with contemporary theology built into the definitions, sometimes deviating from common word use from the period. Likewise, being so close in time to the Apostolic writings and teachings, they have the ability to derive cultural context that we may miss by miles.

Now I know so many who like to poke at the Ante-Nicene writers because they simply don't agree with some of their views. However, their core premise was the supremacy of Christ and His teachings, and the authority of Scripture. They would not deviate from this foundation. In fact, if you want to know what the early church believed on a subject, read the Scriptures and accept them at their most logical and straightforward understanding while balancing other Scriptures addressing the same subject, and you will come to the same conclusion as them. If we were humble, unbiased, and honest with our

handling of the Scriptures, we would be one in belief and practice as they were.

The problem is, that's not how we are. We are schemers and fraudsters. We pick and choose verses that defend our positions and ignore, diminish, and redefine passages that conflict with our views. We formulate complicated and convoluted theologies and explanations to defend and dismiss, defend and dismiss, defend and dismiss. That's how we can easily end up with literally millions of belief systems, all claiming one Bible and one Christ. The early church did no such thing. The churches in Gaul believed like the churches in Asia Minor. The churches in North Africa, believed like the churches in Caesarea.

And the schemers don't stop at violence to the Scriptures to defend their positions; they likewise attack the early church writers. The Adventists and law-followers disparage them because they believed the church was under the New Covenant and following the Law of Moses was not relevant. Calvinists disparage them because they were unequivocally free will. The Modalists and Jehovah Witnesses disparage them because they were trinitarian. Cessationists disparage them because the gifts and miracles continued. The faith-only or easy believism followers disparage them because they believed that repentance, holiness, obedience, and bearing fruit were hallmarks for the Christian life. They believed baptism and being born again were how one became a Christian. I could go on and on. However, every one of the tenets above are supported in Scripture, when looking at them in totality without preconceptions. That's WHY they believed what they believed.

But above all, and I repeat, they believed in the supremacy of the teachings of Jesus Christ. They did not believe that Jesus messed up with the gospel and Paul corrected it. Not at all. They knew the four books called gospels were the gospel. Paul elaborated on and explained Jesus, not replaced Him with a new and better version.

Now hear this. The faith was once for all given to the saints (Jude 3). It was lived by Jesus and His Apostles. Penned by them. Taught to others. Preserved by those same others. And those men continued in the teachings and traditions of the Apostles, and we have the benefit of peeking into their experiences with their writings.

Today, I want to challenge you. Since the faith was once and for all given to the saints, there is no place for human innovations. With the resources we have at our disposal today, every teaching, practice, and belief can be easily sourced. We can learn who was the first person, place, and time something was accepted. If that teaching is not represented by the disciples of the Apostles in the first churches, BINGO, you got yourself a human innovation (i.e. corruption of the Enemy). Don't be so arrogant and prideful to believe you (or some innovationist before you) have some new-found monopoly on truth and somehow you unilaterally figured out some special meaning or new understanding of a passage of Scripture or doctrine that NONE of the disciples of the Apostles saw. That is simply foolishness.

In times past people took stone and wood and formed it into statues and called those things gods and worshipped them. To us that sounds like foolishness. There is no way we with our advanced learning would ever do something so foolish, would we? Well, today, rather than humble ourselves and submitting to the natural and logical reading of the Scriptures, we scheme and defend and dismiss, defend and dismiss, formulating a god into an image of our own choosing. Rather than worship the One True God as He is, and accepting we are created by Him, we create the god of our own liking and imagination. Foolishness.

Again, the Scriptures should be enough, if we would simply be honest and humble. But since apparently, we can't, the early church witness can serve us, for settling disputes and "apparent contradictions." They are a powerful tool to lead us to the simplicity of the faith once and for all given to the saints.

## Chapter 10: Pastors

In our series on NT church, we are finally on the fifth and final remaining member of the Ephesians 4:11 ministers: pastors. Pastors are the only local minister, leading a local congregation, as compared to the other four itinerant roles. Ironically, this is the only use of the word pastor in the entire bible. The Greek word *poimen* translated pastor here is most often translated shepherd, referencing Jesus Himself, or other literal or figurative shepherds. Ephesians 4:11 is the exclusive reference to a church leader as pastor. I found this remarkable because the role of pastor was ingrained in me as the nucleus of Christianity in my upbringing. The church was defined by the pastor and the building: pastor showing up only once in the Bible and the building not even once. I was shocked to learn this.

I was likewise shocked to learn the so-called “pastoral letters” never once mentioned pastors and were written to men who were never identified as pastors. However, my shock was unjustified. Though the noun “pastor” only shows up once in Scripture, the related verb “to pastor” shows up multiple times as a ministry of the church leaders elders and bishops. In Scripture, pastors, elders, and bishops are nearly interchangeable.

Today, many denominations have a hierarchy of bishop, then pastor, then elder. These are commonly seen as a bishop who oversees numerous congregations each led by a single pastor who then oversees several lay leaders called elders within the congregation. (Though every church is a bit different). This modern system was not always the case. In fact, bishops, pastors, and elders were a common role in Scripture.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Before I unwrap this passage, I need to define the terms. Elder is *presbuteros* in Greek; It means older or advanced in years. Bishop is

episcopos in Greek; it means overseer or one who watches over. As I stated earlier, pastor is poimen in Greek; it means shepherd.

So, in the above passage, Peter, identified as an apostle of Jesus Christ in the introduction of the letter (1 Peter 1:1), also being advanced in years (an elder), exhorted the older men (elders) to shepherd (verb or pastor) and oversee (verb of bishop) the saints, here identified as God's flock. Therefore, bishop, pastor, and shepherd are here interchangeable.

Here is yet another example.

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church...Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (Acts 20:17, 28-29)

Paul called the elders (older men) to him and addressed them as bishops (overseers) and told them to shepherd (pastor) the flock. If that is not enough, I will provide one more example.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9)

Here Paul exhorts Titus, an apostle, to appoint elders (older men) in every city. Then he details what the qualifications are for a bishop (overseer). He completely changes terms in the middle of the instructions. That's because they were referencing the identical role.

Elder (older or advanced in years) describes a single attribute of a local church leader. But that is not sufficient to qualify one for leadership. Simply not dying is not a qualification for leadership. There are many who are advanced in years physically but are still

immature and irresponsible mentally or spiritually or unstable emotionally. So here Paul is saying to Titus, from among the men who are advanced in years, look for those who are of requisite character and capabilities to watch over (bishop) the church.

Before we look at the actual qualifications, I want to provide the parallel passage.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

Let us look at the list:

- Older man.
- Married (to one wife).
- Godly/discipline children (assumes a family man).
- Good character: gentle, peaceable, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not pugnacious, hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, temperate, prudent, respectable.
- Manages household well.
- Not alcoholic (principle applies to all substance abuse).
- Not greedy.
- Good reputation outside the church.
- Not a new convert.
- Not overlording, but someone who leads by example.
- Willing to lead voluntarily.
- Not a new convert.
- Holds to the truth.
- Can teach.
- Can refute lies.

From the list above, it's now obvious simply not dying is an insufficient qualification for leadership in the church. The main items are matters of personal character and spiritual maturity, and how one manages his own household. Because if we have not yet permitted the Word and the Spirit to transform us, how would we be able to shepherd others? Likewise, if we can't manage our personal households, and our own children, then how effective will we be managing God's household, the church?

Some may prove contentious over the fact pastor, bishop (overseer), and elder is reserved for men. I didn't write the Bible or establish the program. God is God and I am just reporting what it is. I say let's let Him be God and just surrender to His perfect will. In a few posts from now I will specifically write a chapter just about women in ministry. That should start a wonderful and long undesirable controversy, from both liberals and conservatives. In the end, you might be surprised about my understanding of things.

I will stop here for now. I will continue with pastors, appointing (ordaining) leadership, where they come from, plurality of leadership, building on right foundations, a bit of early history on the role, etc. Then deacons, then women. Then church practices which are many.



## Chapter 11: Pastors Continued

I have already made the case that bishops/overseers (episkopos), pastors/shepherds (poimen), and elders (presbuteros) were a common role in Scripture. I also detailed their qualifications as set forth in Scripture. However, I would be remiss to neglect to mention that the multi-tier tradition emerged rather early in the churches that John the apostle planted. Inasmuch as the Pauline/Peter churches continued with the one-tier tradition we see in Scripture for at least some time, John's churches separated the bishop/overseer from the elders, with no mention of a pastor. It isn't clear if this tradition was established by John himself, or if it was adopted by his disciples on their own. However, since some of the first bishops were leaders John himself had appointed/ordained, it would be reasonable to believe this was a paradigm he had personally implemented. And this model would ultimately become the one adopted by the entire church in a relatively short time.

Let us now discuss where these leaders came from. Earlier we established that Christ was the rock and cornerstone on which the apostles and prophets laid a foundation. Then Scriptures say others would build on that foundation.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. (1 Corinthians 3:10-14)

I suggest reading starting in verse 4. The workers are servants. The building is the saints, the fruit of the work. The prophet hears and the Holy Spirit sends. The apostle pioneers. Then others build up the body on that foundation. The quality of the work will be tested. This is the spiritual health of the flock, the saints. Not the longevity or popularity of the institution.

Note that in Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church, he referenced the fact that their existence as a church was the seal of his apostleship. It wasn't credentials that ultimately proved his apostleship. It wasn't just a revelation. It was the fact that he had reached them. His other noteworthy credentials aside, he said that even if others were to deny his apostleship, the Corinthians could not (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-2). Paul pioneered a foundation (see Romans 15:20), sent to the Gentiles, and his offering to God was the Gentile believers (Romans 15:16). The fruit of his work was the testimony of his call. Those who were to build on that foundation were urged to build properly, so that the building would be able to withstand testing by fire.

Who are these other builders?

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you (Titus 1:5)

The elders were appointed by the apostles to build on their foundation. Note that they appointed elders, not an elder. The plurality of elders is noteworthy in both examples. There was no church CEO. No, this was not the unilateral leader we have come to accept as the hallmark of modern Christianity. This was a group of men. I also note that they were appointed in every church, and every city. This is interesting and made little sense to me until I actually did similar work in the field. Let me explain.

In pioneer work, the gospel is preached, disciples made, and they gather for fellowship in private homes. This is how house churches are planted. I will discuss church practices later. Spoiler alert: all the churches in the Bible and for a long time after exclusively met in private homes. They did not construct special buildings for their meetings. That's another subject.

Though itinerant ministers (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers) traveled from place to place, they were not imported to

permanently serve as local leaders. Instead, the local disciples were trained by the itinerant ministers until such a time as qualified people emerged from the flock who would then be appointed to oversee and shepherd the churches.

I want to note something else here. The churches in the passages above were already churches before elders were appointed. They were simply new churches supported by itinerant ministers. In an apostolic mission, churches exist with external support until a time when local leadership is identified and appointed. Then the church functions autonomously, with the need for itinerant minister support reducing with time.

So back to the plurality issue: every church and every city. When making disciples in new locations, oftentimes a particular fellowship lacks potential elder candidates but a nearby fellowship can have several. Local leadership can serve in regional itinerant minister roles until such a time that the other fellowships have members who can serve in such capacities.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

Paul here was explaining to Timothy that elders who ruled well, and especially those who served in itinerant (outside) ministry were worthy of practical assistance. Consider the context here. An older man from a local congregation that met in private homes, (by design, a smaller group), would not need to be a full-time minister to oversee the fellowship. In fact, one of the qualifications was to manage their own household well, which can be interpreted as attending to their own practical needs. However, if one of those ministers is committing ample time to outside ministry, such as preaching (evangelism) and teaching (supporting outside fellowships), he may indeed need some outside assistance. The amount of assistance should be commensurate to the amount of time dedicated to the task of ministry, thus inhibiting his ability to personally provide for his family.

The passage above goes on to detail church discipline matters with leadership and appointing leadership (see verses 18-22). I will cover church discipline later. I will explain here a bit just to provide context for the passage. Matthew 18:15-18 states to go to the brother privately,

and then as a group, and then take it to the church in the absence of repentance. Here, the passage says for elders it starts at step two. The sin must be public. I believe this is because leaders often need to make unpopular decisions and can be targeted. As a result, the Enemy uses the disgruntled to try to derail their ministry. I believe the Lord included this layer of protection to prevent leaders being abused by the disgruntled.

You may be thinking to yourself, where is the recourse for those wronged by leadership? Just pray until the sin is public. Be patient. God is not mocked. Hidden sin always comes out. The Lord will correct things. Meanwhile, pray. When that or another matter goes public, adjudicate it without partiality.

The last verse in the passage is about not being hasty with the laying on of hands. In context, I believe this is also about leadership, not prayer for healing. This goes along with 1 Timothy 3:6 not to appoint a new convert. Acts 14:23 reads like the apostles made disciples on Tuesday and appointed elders on Friday. Having done this work personally, I assure you that a considerable amount of time elapsed between those visits. How much time is not clear.

I want to here reiterate that pastors/elders/overseers are a vital part of God's economy. They have an incredible responsibility shepherding God's people to maturity, unity, and mobilization. They are responsible for teaching truth and protection from harm.

I also want to reiterate the biblical concept of leadership here. Their role is not fiat authority. They are to set an example to the flock.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Their work is not under compulsion, but voluntary, according to God, not for money, but with eagerness, not lording it over those allotted to their charge, but setting an example. If they do this, they will receive their reward. Paul said:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. (1 Timothy 3:1)

Be on guard for yourselves and for 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. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

They have an awesome responsibility. And they will give an account for the souls allotted to their care.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:17)

That's why the saints are here commanded to not make things difficult for them. The words obey and submit above mean "be persuaded" and "yield." This does not mean blindly follow. This means, receive their admonition with an open mind, without an adversarial disposition. These men are responsible for your souls. Cooperate with them in accomplishing their call. However, they are under shepherds. Christ is the Chief Shepherd. Our ultimate allegiance is to Christ and His teachings. Leaders have the onus to persuade the flock that they are indeed shepherding them into green pastures (to Christ), and not taking them outside the fence.

I want to offer more details about appointing leadership. The Scriptures only offer two examples where elders were appointed, and it was by apostles. However, elsewhere (in passages above) Scripture indicates "the Holy Spirit made you overseers" and "according to the will of God." Elsewhere Scripture says that the leaders must have a good reputation and stellar character. I know from experience that itinerant workers would not benefit from the intimate knowledge of someone's character that members of the local congregation would possess. And we see in the appointment of the seven in Acts 6 that the process involved congregational approval (verse 5). Also, in Chapter 15 of the Didache, the congregation is encouraged to appoint local elders and implies that they will assume the role that prophets and teachers were filling.

In my personal opinion, I believe the Scriptures are indicating that the apostles identify candidates based on the biblical qualifications, they fast and pray as a group and wait on revelatory confirmation from the Holy Spirit, and then they present the candidate(s) to the local congregation for their approval. Then the leaders are publicly appointed with prayer and the laying of hands. This is how I believe it should be done.

Once appointed, elders are to oversee and shepherd the flock, building on the foundation laid by the apostles whose bedrock is the teachings of Christ. They hold to sound doctrine, which is Christ, and keep out false doctrine. They are protectors of the souls of their flock and will be accountable for such and held to a stricter judgement as teachers. The congregation is encouraged to make their call joy, and not make things difficult for them.

I want to reiterate again the purpose of the five ministries of Ephesians 4:11. It is equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Pastors, being the only local minister of the five is not a one man show, expected to do all the work of the ministry. His primary role is to equip the congregation for the work of the ministry (see Ephesians 4:12). We are all soldiers, emissaries of the kingdom of God, for His service. The leaders are there to teach, equip, and model kingdom service to encourage the saints to step into their unique gifts and calls. The goal is bringing maturity and unity to the Body.

So now the elephant in the room: this is apostolic biblical Christianity described here; how does any of this apply to modern Christianity? You know what one trap is? Surprisingly, I see people imprisoned by their own theology. I have seen people who are literally apostolically gifted themselves self-appointed the title Pastor and then denying that there are apostles today. Sometimes these “pastors” promulgate this theology and prevent anyone else from stepping into their calls. And they never step into their call themselves, not believing the ministry exists today. As a result, their theology limits their faith which prevents the release of power holding back the miracles which are ready to be released. Such a shame.

The reigning theology today puts “pastor” at the top of the food chain and numerous people eager to serve God by default end up pastoring a church. I have seen gifted prophets and healers take the role on, with

no gifts for teaching, shepherding, and discipleship. But since the system doesn't have a place for the other roles, we get many good-hearted and eager young people stepping into a role reserved for mature family men, when in fact they have a great call outside of the four walls. The result is a lot of unqualified people serving as pastors working hard but doing a terrible job at being a pastor because that was never their call (or simply not the right timing). This is all because the system itself is broken by not recognizing the other ministry roles. Then these unqualified pastors do a pretty bad job giving the entire ministry of pastor a bad rap. But it was never their fault. The system was broken.

Lastly, the authoritarianism in ministry, adopting corporate and government leadership philosophies for the church, which was never meant to be, results in a lot of power hungry, prideful, and unhinged leadership styles that disenchant multitudes from institutional Christianity. Again, they simply adopted what they saw and continued the trend. The broken system is at work again.

Double lastly (I am rambling now) we have people starting churches with a faulty foundation. Lampstands are distributed by Christ who said would build His church. The eager impulsively take on a task they were not called, equipped, or empowered to assume. As a result, the powers of darkness chew them up and spit them out. Building a house without a foundation never ends well. But by skipping the prophet and the apostles in laying the foundation, the pastoral ministry stands at odds against a rallied Enemy that they are ill-prepared to endure. The result is all kinds of spiritual attacks and a church full of all sorts of confusion, disunity, and a lack of vision and purpose. The apostolic mission is to advance the kingdom. The modern pastoral mission is to grow or sustain an organization.

We need the watchman, the ears and eyes of the Lord, the prophets. We need the pioneers, the trail blazers, the visionaries, the apostles. We need the preachers of the gospel, the soul winners, the evangelists. We need the truth bearers, those who bring Christ, the teachers. And yes, we need the shepherds and overseers of the church, the caretakers of souls, the pastors.





## Chapter 12: Deacons and Women in Ministry

It's time to move beyond the Ephesians 4:11 ministries and discuss the second appointed/ordained ministry in the local church, deacons. They shared the local ministry role for the local church with elders/bishops/pastors (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Philippians 1:1).

The Greek word for deacon is diakonos, which means servant or minister (in the natural sense, not the religious sense). The word is translated servant 18 times, minister 8 times, and deacon 3 times in the New Testament (NASBS translation). It is the word used to describe an appointed/ordained role in the church, but also a common word used to describe someone who serves or ministers to others, even outside a religious context (even government is a "minister" of God in Romans 13:1-7).

The qualifications for the church leader role are detailed below:

Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of *only one wife, and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

By beginning the description of the qualifications for a deacon with "deacons likewise" and seeing the overlap in qualifications with the overseer written directly prior to the description, we can conclude their qualifications are nearly identical. Again, the qualifications are predominately concerning personal character and how they manage their households and children. However, there are differences worth noting.

One noteworthy distinction is the lack of necessity for teaching the Word or refuting false teachings (see 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9). Overseers have a responsibility for shepherding the flock spiritually and would need to be adept at "exhorting sound doctrine and refuting

those who contradict.” They are stewards of souls, and their primary mission is spiritual.

Whereas deacons are primarily tasked with attending to the practical needs of the saints, and would be responsible for managing practical affairs, which would also involve handling money. It is my opinion that for this reason the second distinction is there: that they must be tested first.

These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. (1 Timothy 3:10)

Before anyone is given the opportunity to handle money, they must be tested to see if they can be both faithful and competent for the task. They should first manage smaller tasks and amounts of money, and if they prove faithful and responsible, increase their stewardship accordingly. When they have served faithfully for a time, then the appointment/ordination process can proceed as set forth for elders in the prior chapter with the blessing of the entire congregation.

One way we prepare people for the role in our churches is to let the congregation select interim deacons to manage the finances as a team. We pick three people to collect and count offerings, maintain records, and coordinate together on how funds should be used and maintain records available for all to see. This system provides optimal transparency and accountability. This is their testing period.

Also in the qualification description is that they are good managers of their households. I interpret that as being responsible, not in debt, and wise managers. Those are the characteristics you desire for the people responsible for managing the church funds. And it is also wise to prevent those who have personal financial problems from being subject to unnecessary temptation by handling funds. These are guidelines that we have tried to apply. They are not hard and fast rules, but just principles consistent with the text above.

Since we are NT practice and do not own buildings or pay salaries, all offerings are used for personal assistance or kingdom advancement. The interim or appointed deacons have an understanding that funds are to be appropriated for said purposes. And records are kept so that anyone can see how they are used.

It is traditionally understood that the seven in Acts Chapter 6 were appointed as deacons, though they were never named as such in Scripture or in the Ante-Nicene writings that I have read. However, the task for which they were appointed is commensurate to the role of deacon, and the language used can support that understanding. I want here to detail a principle detailed by the apostles in that example.

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

The apostles objectives are obvious:

So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables... But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:2 and 4)

They say their role was primarily spiritual and were intent on focusing on that work. They wished to assign others to attend to the practical needs of the saints so that they were free to attend to spiritual matters.

This separation of duties is identical to the separation of duties between elders/pastors/overseers and deacons. And it's my opinion that there are good reasons for the separation of duties.

Jesus said:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24).

The separation of duties minimizes temptations and potential compromise. I will explain more later.

We have already discussed the pioneering role of apostles. So, on the mission advance, the focus is the great commission, evangelism and making disciples. Jesus commanded them to not pack their bag and leave their money at home (recall Luke 10 evangelism). This is because if you evangelize with money in one hand and a Bible in the other, all interest gravitates towards the assistance. Assistance is a great commandment enterprise. Apostolic and evangelistic work should not intermix with great commandment work.

However, once disciples are made, and churches are planted, the disciples are then modeled and taught to love each other practically; this is the great commandment work. In the pioneering phase, deacons are not yet present. In this church development phase of the mission apostles are forced to wear many hats and they are put in a position to also manage the great commandment work (see Acts 4:34-35).

However, the apostles were eager to relinquish this responsibility quickly and commit themselves to spiritual matters as we see in the account of appointing the Seven in Acts 6 above. The exception to this is when the needs were interchurch. In this scenario the apostles were responsible for collecting and delivering regional assistance (see Acts 11:27-30 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). However, once established, local church assistance was administered locally, with deacons being responsible for the work.

Before we continue with the role of women in ministry, I want to highlight the importance of eliminating the conflict-of-interest present in a lot of modern ministries. Since in modern ministry, the person with the biggest title normally oversees the purse, people are attracted to that title. And if the biblical role of that title is the Word (spiritual), and being a caretaker of souls, and they likewise take on the responsibility of managing funds, sometimes these two objectives compete. Let me give you an example. If someone's salary is linked to the church budget. And the budget is funded by offerings. And offerings come from membership. There is a lot of pressure to attract and sustain membership, especially those who give generously. The steward of the Word and caretaker of souls may be pressured to not teach subjects that may offend or alienate their supporters. And such

churches may compromise on truth and fail to practice church discipline. They may also show bias and favoritism. That is why the Word and finances should be separated as soon as possible. (I have also seen that church property ownership or being officers for a registered organization can also introduce unhealthy biases. The Bible doesn't speak to these as they are outside of NT practice).

Women in ministry is a controversial topic. I have already shared that elders/pastors/overseers are to be men. I also pointed out that I believe that women can be a part of apostolic teams such as Andronicus and Junia, Aquila and Priscila, the apostles and their wives, and the Lord's brothers and their wives. Refer to my prior chapter for details. I know not all agree with this understanding. It's what I believe, and I have seen it in action. You are free to disagree.

The Bible is also clear there are female prophets, the prophetesses. We also discussed that it is my understanding that women could teach other women but were restricted from teaching the Word to men (at least during the Lord's Day assembly). We did not discuss the possibility for women evangelists. I can't provide you a biblical example. The closest would be the Samaritan woman at the well. But that's a weak example. However, I can tell you from experience I have seen women with that particular gift move powerfully. These women were bold in preaching the gospel to the lost yet were submitted to not teaching men in the fellowship or assuming a church leadership role. My only evidence for God's approval was the granting of these gifts and revealing these gifts through supernatural revelation. The fruit was indisputable. I don't expect everyone to accept this, but I know it to be true. You are free to practice as you wish; but we need all hands on deck for the task before us.

So, all that aside brings us back to deaconesses. The text below is unclear whether it refers to the deacon's wife or a separate role of deaconess.

Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. (1 Timothy 3:11)

KJV translates the word women above as wives. However, the word is women, which can be understood to mean the wives of the deacons or possibly deaconesses. Note the following verse (verse 12) repeats the same qualification as an overseer that the deacon must also be the

husband of one wife. So, I believe it most likely means the wife of the deacon. However, we do have one example of a woman named as a deacon in Scripture.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1-3)

Phoebe was called a diakonos (servant) above. We can't know if she was a servant in the natural sense of the word or a deaconess. Regardless, she was a faithful servant of God and an esteemed helper of the apostle Paul. In the end, we don't need titles to serve God faithfully.

I want to speak to another easily overlooked ministry in the Scriptures, the widows and the virgins. The widows in particular are interesting because their qualifications are spelled out in Scripture.

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work. (1 Timothy 5:9-10, see verses 3-16).

Widows "indeed," were those supported by the church; they served as intercessors (verse 5), caretakers of other widows (verse 16), and likely teachers of younger women (Titus 2:3-5). The virgins were those who intentionally never married to serve the Lord wholeheartedly (see 1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Ultimately virgins were integrated into the Roman Catholic Church as nuns and monks. This call and commitment has been all but lost outside the Roman Catholic Church. It's a noble call. The apostle Paul considered it a higher call. Today the unmarried are unvalued.

## **Chapter 13: NT Church Practices**

I have concluded my discussion of church leadership and am ready to move on to NT church practices. However, before I do, I do not want anyone to conclude that other roles in the church are not valuable. Paul the apostle made the point that all the parts of the body are important for the proper functioning of the body, even the less visible ones (1 Corinthians 12:14-31). I intend to briefly discuss other spiritual gifts and roles within the body of Christ and their functions later. For now, I will discuss NT church practices.

Before I get into church practices in the New Testament, I need to discuss the relevance of practices as compared to commands. We already discussed the significance of the commands of Christ in Chapter 8: Teachers. We also saw how the Apostles recognized the supremacy of the teachings of Christ. It was the Apostles and their contemporaries who gave us the teachings of Christ, and the record of the earliest church which they recorded in the New Testament text. After Christ departed, they were the promulgators of Christ as eyewitnesses to His ministry and teachings.

The writings of Paul the apostle, who came after the Twelve, were also recognized as Scripture by Peter the apostle (2 Peter 3:15-16) and by nearly all throughout church history. Today, some elevate Paul to above Christ by superseding Christ's teachings with their particular interpretation of Paul's writings; others dismiss Paul because they disapprove of some of the teachings and practices presented in his letters (especially in matters concerning women's issues). However, Scripture is Scripture, and we are not permitted to pick and choose what we obey and what we ignore. God is God, and He determines truth. We should not be so arrogant to assume we know better than He. (And if you do not believe the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, I highly doubt you appreciate anything I have written in these numerous posts.)

The reason I make this case for Paul is because the lion share of teachings about the church is from Paul. Jesus barely mentioned the church. Jesus left shortly after His resurrection and the Holy Spirit appeared at Pentecost, what I consider the birth of the church. The Book of Acts and the epistles document everything we know about

church practices. Most of the epistles were written by Paul. Without recognizing the authority of his teachings, it's simply a free-for-all.

That said, if we recognize the authority of Scripture, we accept that we are expected to obey commands; disobedience would be wrong. Commands are binding. However, practices are at another level. There are many things in Scripture that were practices of Jesus and the Apostles that were never explicitly commanded. We have already read concerning Jesus that we are expected to both obey His commands and follow His practices (see 1 John 2:3-6). We likewise see such statements from Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1-2, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6). So, this is where it gets complicated. Because Paul here commands to obey his traditions (verbal instructions) and imitate his example (practices).

Let us look at an example; Jesus never commanded to plant churches. He instead commanded to go to all nations, make disciples, baptize, and teach to obey all He commanded (Matthew 28:18-20). This, by default, plants churches. Therefore, the apostles planted churches. The realization that they planted churches can be understood to apply to us in multiple ways.

- Option 1. Since Paul commanded us to follow his example, we are obligated to do what he did and plant churches.
- Option 2. Since Paul planted churches, we are encouraged to plant churches.
- Option 3. Since Paul planted churches, we are permitted to plant churches, and planting churches can't be forbidden.
- Option 4. We can ignore the fact that Paul planted churches because we are not Paul.

We see that is quite a range of options. And that's even assuming we agree that the great commission applies to us. (It was a COMMAND of Jesus that was in my opinion clearly meant for successive generations of disciples by saying "always, even to the end of the age").

Then there are practices derived from silence. For example, there are no, not one, examples of music in the NT church. Yes, there was music in the Old Testament, and the Psalms had accompaniment; however, that is not the church. The church had singing for certain, but no music. The Ante-Nicene writings continued to support the acapella



tradition. So, what are our options for dealing with traditions established through silence?

- Option 1. Since Paul commanded us to follow his example, we are obligated to refrain from what he didn't do. Music is never permitted in fellowship.
- Option 2. Since we have no evidence of music, we are encouraged to refrain from music.
- Option 3. Since there is no explicit command against music, we are permitted to have music.
- Option 4: We can adopt human traditions even if they conflict with biblical commands. Anything goes.

Options 3 and 4 above mean we are introducing a new concept: unbiblical traditions.

Every one of us makes a judgement call concerning these matters unconsciously. I personally don't believe we should be so flippant or random with our approach to Scripture. I personally fall into Option 2 of the apostolic practice options and Option 3 of the apostolic silence question.

My reasons are several. I don't believe that every practice of the Apostles is an obligation. However, I do believe their example is worthy of emulation. Their practices are obviously permitted and should be encouraged. However, on matters of silence, or things that we have no evidence the Apostles did, I believe we can do as long as our tradition does not conflict with things we are specifically commanded to do. That is where I stand. I will admit that this puts me a tiny bit to the liberal side of the Ante-Nicene church. However, I only view commands as binding and do not believe in enforcing anything beyond the Scriptures. That's my personal opinion and practice.

I had to explain this concept by way of introduction because when I start detailing the numerous specific NT practices of the early church, we will quickly recognize significant differences between modern church practices and early church practices. However, we are not necessarily obligated to adopt every one of their practices if they are never explicitly commanded. They may be a good idea for good reasons but are not mandatory. I will go as far as to say we should discontinue human traditions that lead us to disobey biblical

commands. Jesus had a very unfavorable opinion about this practice. (see Mark 7:5-13).

Here are several NT church practices (not in order) we may discuss in coming posts.

- Fellowship in homes
- The centrality of the Lord's Table (communion)
- Meeting on Sunday
- The participatory interactive service
- The operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Sharing a fellowship meal
- Confession of sins
- Washing of feet
- Singing
- Prayer for healing
- Women's silence
- Dress

We will detail several of the items above as to where they fall: commands or practices. We will also discuss whether or not any modern or long-held unbiblical traditions result in disobeying any biblical commands. This could get very interesting, to say the least.

Much more to come. Next, we will discuss specific church practices. Then maybe we will tackle spiritual gifts.

## Chapter 14: The Church in the House

We discussed in Chapter 5 that the church (ekklesia) was people, not the place or building where people meet, or an organization or institution. Here I want to discuss where the churches cited in the New Testament met for fellowship.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: (Philemon 1-2)

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. (Colossians 4:15)

The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. (1 Corinthians 16:19)

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. (Romans 16:3-5)

These are the only four examples in Scripture specifically describing where local fellowships were gathering. And as you can see, all four describe churches meeting in the private homes of brethren. Note again that the church was not the house, but all four examples describe churches (the people) meeting in private homes. We do not see in the Bible any example of special buildings for worship or meetings. All we see is believers gathered in private homes.

Granted, we do see mention of the Jewish temple, and also local synagogues. We also see mention of pagan temples and places/articles of worship of false gods (high places, alters, Asherah, and idols). However, we never see religious buildings or places associated with the followers of Jesus or Christian worship gatherings. Recall that we discussed that under the New Covenant, we are the temple of God, living stones built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, on the bedrock of Christ, Him being the cornerstone. God does not dwell in a man-made building.

*David* found favor in God's sight, and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says: 'HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?' says the Lord, 'OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE? 'WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?' (Acts 7:46-50)

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; (Acts 17:24)

However, God was pleased to make His dwelling among us, us becoming His temple.

Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (2 Corinthians 6:16)

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1)

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For

every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:1-6, see also Hebrews 10:19-25)

God is not restricted to a particular place to worship, but rather the Father seeks true worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth.

Our fathers [Samaritans] worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* [Jews] say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You [Samaritans] worship what you do not know; we [Jews] worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers [Christians] will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. (John 4:20-23)

Here are numerous examples of New Testament ministry occurring in private homes.

- Jesus in Matthew’s the tax collector’s home (Matthew 9:10)
- Jairus’ daughter healed in his home (Mark 5:38)
- Paralyzed man lowered from roof and healed (Luke 5:18)
- Zacchaeus saved in his home (Luke 19:5-9)
- Pioneer two-by-two evangelism, man of peace’s home (Luke 10:7)
- The Last Supper (Luke 22:10-12)
- Jesus’ appearance following resurrection (John 20:19)
- Pentecost (Acts 2:2)
- Ongoing fellowship of the saints (Acts 2:46, 5:42)
- Peter’s heavenly vision is Simon the tanner’s house by the sea (Acts 10:6...)
- Angel visits Cornelius (Acts 10:30, 11:13)
- First Gentiles converted (Acts 10:22, 11:12)
- All night prayer meeting for Peter in prison (Acts 12:12)
- Saul/Paul regains sight and is saved (Acts 9:10-19)
- Paul’s first fruit in Europe, Lydia’s household (Acts 16:14-15)
- Philippian jailer household saved (Acts 16:31-34)
- Paul teaching house to house (Acts 20:20)

- Aquila and Priscila teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26)
- Paul teaching from his rented house for two years (Acts 28:23, 30-31)

This is by no means an exhaustive list. It's abundantly clear that private homes were the location of a lot of significant ministry events in the New Testament. Special Christian buildings were non-existent in Scripture, or for hundreds of years after the birth of the Church. Yes, the apostles taught in the temple and synagogues to reach the Jews with the gospel. This was their practice until they were forcefully rejected. This was evangelistic in nature, and not Christian assembly.

All that said, recall the prior chapter (Chapter 13) about the significance of practices versus commands. It is abundantly clear in Scripture that not only did Jesus and the apostles conduct a lot of ministry in private homes, but ALL New Testament local churches (assemblies or ekklesia) met in private homes. There are no exceptions. This was their tradition or practice.

Yet nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to have our church meetings in private homes. Therefore, we have to make a judgement call on how we treat their practice as I detailed in the prior post.

- Option 1. Since Paul commanded us to follow his example, we are obligated to do what he did and meet in homes.
- Option 2. Since the apostolic churches met in homes, we are encouraged to meet in homes.
- Option 3. Since the apostolic churches met in homes, we are permitted to meet in homes and can't be forbidden from doing so.
- Option 4. We can ignore the fact that the NT churches met in homes, because we are not them. (This option assumes we can adopt our own unbiblical traditions.)

I stated earlier that I fall in Option 2 in this paradigm. I know very few who strictly subscribe to Option 1, requiring the meeting in homes. Many modern Christians today subscribe to Option 4, and have adopted the human tradition of constructing, maintaining, and meeting in special buildings set apart for religious purposes. And some of them even go so far as denigrating and even forbidding the apostolic and NT practice of gathering in private homes for fellowship.

We were constantly called devil-worshippers in Africa because we did not have church buildings. And others assumed we didn't have buildings simply because we couldn't afford it. They assumed once we raised enough funds we would construct or purchase a building.

This NT practice line item is actually of marginal importance. That's because the Bible offers no commands about where we assemble. We only have practices. Recall the church is the people. Where people meet matters little. The house is not the church. It's the church that meets in the house. You can have the church that meets under the tree. You can have the church that meets in the prison. You can have the church that meets in the nursing home. And yes, you can also have the church that meets in the special religious building.

It's what goes on inside the building that counts. What NT church practices was the church explicitly commanded to do. Recall that human traditions should only be permitted if they do not force us to disobey biblical commands.

Recall this list.

- Fellowship in homes
- The centrality of the Lord's Table (communion)
- Meeting on Sunday
- The participatory interactive service
- The operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Sharing a fellowship meal
- Confession of sins
- Washing of feet
- Singing
- Prayer for healing
- Women's silence
- Dress

We now know the top item above is only a practice and is not a command. Let us proceed and see how many of the other items are commands versus practices, and how practical obedience to those commands would be in a meeting hall setting as compared to someone's living room.





# Chapter 15: Why do the Brethren Assemble?

Why do Christians go to church?

In churches influenced by the Pentecostal or charismatic movement many will answer that the main reason they assemble is to worship God; this emphasis began with the movement of the Holy Spirit in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Protestants before that period might answer to be fed by the Word of God; the Protestant Reformation ushered in the sermon as the centerpiece of the meeting. The “dry” yet non-fundamentalist churches may emphasize fellowship as the main reason. For Catholics, the mass is the centerpiece of the church meeting. Interestingly, this actually has a historical basis all the way back to the church that met in the house.

Though all those reasons have some legitimacy in the primitive church, one reason stands out among the rest: partaking in the Lord's Supper (also described as communion, or eucharist).

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

When Paul and his numerous traveling companions arrived at Troas during his journey, he stayed with them seven days. It was on the first day of the week, called Sunday according to the Pagan naming convention which we still use, that the brethren were gathered to “break bread.” First note, Paul had all week to teach the brethren, and I am sure he did. However, his extended teaching was reserved for the day the saints were gathered together to break bread, Sunday.

Some moderns who dismiss a lot of church history enjoy spreading internet myths that Constantine or the Roman Catholic church somehow changed the day of worship from the Sabbath of the Law of Moses to Sunday because of Pagan influence. This is simply easily proven not true. The Sabbath (Saturday observance of the Law of Moses) was never observed by the Gentile Christians. Though some Hebrew Christians still observed (see Acts 21:17-25 for an explanation why, also covered in my prior post, Chapter 8: Teachers). Instead, the Christians gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday, which the

saints called the Lord's Day (see Revelation 1:10), because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead. Christian assembly on the Lord's Day is not an equivalent to Jewish Sabbath observance in the Law of Moses. They are completely unrelated. Therefore, the rules and prohibitions in the ten commandments concerning the Sabbath have absolutely nothing to do with Sunday or Christianity.

However, the saints did assemble on the Lord's Day. And we see that they assembled to break bread. This breaking of bread was a fellowship meal and sacrament, what they called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist. See Acts 2:42 and 46.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the leader verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the leader in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the leader, who assists the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in need, and those who are in prison and the strangers staying among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having brought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before Saturday; and on the day after Saturday, which is Sunday, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration. (Justin Martyr, ANF v. 1, First Apology Chapter 67, c. 150 AD)

The breaking of bread is a backwards reference to the Passover meal Jesus shared with His disciples the night before He was crucified, the Last Supper. And it is a forward reference to the wedding supper of the Lamb, the celebratory feast in His Father's kingdom. (Luke 22:15-16, Mark 14:25, see also Matthew 26:29 below)

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29, see also Mark 14:22-23)

(The complete passages concerning the Last Supper, including the lengthy dialog and teaching Jesus had with His disciples is recorded in Matthew 26:20-35, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-38, and John Chapters 13 through 17. There is a considerable volume of teaching that occurred the night before His crucifixion.)

Before we go deeper into the significance of this event, I want to make the connection between breaking bread and the Lord's Supper. When Paul was writing to the church in Corinth, he was chastising them for their irreverent and inconsiderate practices. I will provide the entire passage below and highlight portions to make my point before addressing the rest.

But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death

until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

Note that verses 20 and 33 above highlight that the gathering was intended to be the Lord's Supper eaten together. Paul rebuked them for not regarding it as they should. It was not simply a fellowship meal but was to be regarded with some reverence. It was a sacrament representative of the New Covenant. Sharing in this event was an ordinance of spiritual significance. Yes, there was a real meal with real food and drink; however, there was also spiritual significance to the practice. And here again Paul references the backwards view of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and the forward view of proclaiming His death until He returns. The early church likewise looked back and forward, finishing their prayer with the proclamation, Maranatha (meaning the Lord is coming or Lord come).

Now I want to get to the spiritual significance of the practice of partaking in the Lord's Supper. I think we all understand the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for salvation. Most accept that we are redeemed through Him and cleansed by His blood. We die with Him in baptism and rise with Him to new life in the Holy Spirit. (At least I believe most of my readers believe this, maybe not).

However, most modern Christians misunderstand and dismiss the significance of partaking in the Lord's Supper for cleansing. Yes, Jesus was crucified once, His body broken once, and His blood spilled once. However, our sin is ongoing and our need for cleansing is ongoing. If you believe in OSAS, I am certain to lose you here. Be aware OSAS is a new teaching, a recent human innovation unknown for most of church history.

I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." Then the Jews *began* to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us *His* flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:48-58)

In John 6:63 Jesus goes on to say that these words are spirit and life. Jesus wasn't promoting cannibalism. The outward act of partaking in bread and wine has a corresponding inward spiritual effect. Compare it to baptism. We know no one will be saved simply by getting submersed in water. If this were the case, bathing would be sufficient for receiving eternal life. However, when we repent and are baptized in Christ, our sins are forgiven, and we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38). The outward is water on flesh. The inward is salvation by the power of Christ (see 1 Peter 3:21).

In the same way, the morsal and the juice will accomplish nothing on its own. It's in faith, when we confess our sins, and appeal for His forgiveness, we are cleansed by His blood. Not cleansed by the juice we drink. Rather, we are cleansed by the blood spilled on the cross. We partake in the outward and God does something spiritually inwardly.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

This is a powerful passage. The Lord's Supper is often referred to as communion by modern Christians today. This may be because the KJV translation of 1 Corinthians 10:16 says:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)

The word translated communion above is the same word translated fellowship in 1 John 1:6-7. Consider the 1 John passage with communion in mind and 1 Corinthians 11 concerning personal inspection. James 5:16 also speaks of confessing our sins to one another so that we may be healed. Note 1 John was written to the saints (see 1 John 5:13), admonishing them to confess their sins so that the blood of Christ would cleanse them. This is not pre-baptism confession. They are encouraged to shed light on the darkness. In this way we can be in communion with Christ and one another.

Ephesians 4:26-27 says to deal with our sin promptly and not give the devil a place. Consider this admonition in light of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 that if one fails to examine himself properly during the Lord's Supper, he can become sick or even die.

The first century writing called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache) linked confession with the Lord's Supper.

But every Lord's day, gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. (Didache Chapter 14, ANF v. 7)

Must the confession of sins be public for the blood of Christ to cleanse us? I would say no. However, I will also say that there is power in public confession. One of the tools the Enemy uses to keep us in bondage is guilt, shame, and self condemnation. Recall that baptismal water does not save us, but rather the appeal to a clear conscience (1 Peter 3:21). Likewise, when we confess to the Lord, yet our sin is still our personal secret, we can often feel guilt and shame, and listen to the Enemy's lies of condemnation. The battlefield begins in the mind. And the Enemy can convince us that we can never be good enough, that if people knew our secret weaknesses they would reject us, and that we are condemned. When we publicly confess among brethren, and seek their support and accountability, we neuter the Enemy's lies.

We shed light on the darkness and are reassured our sins are cleansed and will be remembered no more (see Psalm 103:12).

The early church referred to the Lord's Supper as the thanksgiving (Eucharist in Greek), which was reserved for baptized believers.

Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks....But let no one eat or drink of Your Thanksgiving (Eucharist), but those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; (Didache Chapter 9, ANF v. 7).

Part of the suggested prayer for the Eucharist went like this:

If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen." (Didache Chapter 10, ANF v.7).

Recall earlier I mentioned they would close the Lord's Supper with Maranatha, meaning Lord come. There it is.

I include all these extra-biblical examples just to demonstrate that though my interpretation of the above Scripture passages may be foreign to many today, it was once orthodox.

With all that said I want to offer one more element to the Eucharist (Lord's Supper). It was not just token elements (bread and cup). It was part of a full meal. Looking back, it was in reference to observance of the Passover feast. Looking forward it's the kingdom feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9). In the meantime, the Eucharist is called the love feast (see Jude 12). Just like during the Last Supper, the elements were intended to be part of a full meal. This is evident when Paul rebukes some for eating their fill while leaving others neglected. It was intended that no one would go home hungry.

Now I want to explain some practical applications. The saints gather together on the Lord's Day. Many things yet to be discussed occur at the gathering. I will detail this in future posts. Then, the unbaptized are excused for the Eucharist. In fact, the term "mass" used by Roman Catholics literally meant dismissal. The mass was when the unbaptized were dismissed. In our churches, the saints continue with foot-washing, personal introspection and confession of sins, prayer, and the partaking of the elements. Then everyone convenes to share a

meal together (the meal can occur first or last; we prefer last). Simple enough, right?

Note the Roman Catholic Mass is not NT practice. The emphasis on the Eucharist is historical. The practices of reserving the wine for priests only and confession to priests only are innovations that render the mass spiritually worthless in my opinion.

Well, this is now where it gets a bit complicated if you desire to integrate NT practices with extra-biblical traditions. Though there is no explicit command concerning the frequency of partaking in the Eucharist, their practice was every Lord's Day gathering; yes, it was weekly. The Eucharist was the centerpiece of the gathering. Recognizing the spiritual implications, walking in perpetual freedom and a clear conscience, makes it all the more indispensable.

Sharing the Eucharist as described above can prove very difficult and complicated if gathering in a large meeting room with a crowd of people. That's why most churches partake in communion rarely, irregularly, or never. This is a great disservice to the saints needing that edge of freedom and empowerment, and mutual accountability communion was meant to facilitate. The meetings described in Scripture were in private homes, making it more personal, welcoming, and comfortable. Washing feet (actually a command in John 13:13-15, though not explicitly linked to the Eucharist outside the Last Supper account), confession of sins, and sharing a meal together are not very convenient or practical in the big building with row seating. However, in the home fellowship it all works perfectly. Though the big building is not prohibited by Scripture, in some ways the function of the church can be obstructed by the extrabiblical form.



## Chapter 16: More on Communion

In the prior chapter I wrote a straightforward treatment of the Eucharist as I understand Scripture and early church history. However, I did not give any attention to common misunderstandings and abuse, even weaponization of communion in some modern churches. Let me do that here in this post.

The core objective of communion is to be in fellowship with God and one another. Sin keeps us separated. We approach God individually and as a group with our failures and weaknesses and seek and receive His forgiveness. We disarm the Enemy by shedding light on the darkness and humbly receive the support and acceptance from our brethren in our pursuit of victory and holiness. The process results in humility, unity, a clear conscience, accountability, and ultimately, freedom and victory. The purposes of God are all good. However, man can interfere with God's good intentions.

Communion can be weaponized. It can be used as a tool to control people. Churches restrict participation in communion based on how holy or contrite they deem others to be. There is no biblical precedence for this. The concept of "proving" is not at all biblical. And there is no biblical precedence for having people refrain from participation because of personal sin. The onus is not on the church leadership to determine who can and can't participate. They have no such authority!

The only biblical way to prevent someone from participating in communion, is excommunication. This is a multi-step process that requires eyewitness verified biblically-defined sin. And only the church can excommunicate, not the leaders. Refer to Matthew 18:15-18 for details. I have included a prior Chapter on church discipline as the next chapter of this book, Chapter 17.

I have faced situations when some refused communion when they knew someone else was in sin. They were fearful that they would somehow be contaminated by the other person's sin. This is baseless. Jesus Himself shared the actual Last Supper Passover with Judas, knowing very well he was privately in sin.

And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. <sup>21</sup>But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. (Luke 22:20-21)

We should privately approach brethren who are in secret sin to encourage their repentance prior to communion. If the sin is public or provable, then the matter should proceed through biblical process detailed in Chapter 17. Meanwhile, they can't be restricted from participation. If the sin is entirely private and not commensurate with adjudication, pray for them to become convicted so that they can repent and gain victory. However, we are not their Holy Spirit. The admonition is that they properly examine themselves, not that we properly examine them. The risk of not properly inspecting themselves is upon themselves, not the others participating. And people should not be discouraged from participating. Instead, they should be encouraged to confess and repent.

I mentioned in a prior chapter that all baptized believers are free to participate. That may trigger some people because there are obviously so many flavors and brands of Christianity today. However, there is only one kingdom of God and membership is only defined as having repented, been baptized, and being born again. Therefore, we only require that they profess to having been baptized upon repentance and to being born again. They attest to being born again by affirming the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit in their life since they were baptized. This can be recognized by palpable change in their life with demonstrable fruit, a filling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, or activation and operation of supernatural gifts that were hitherto not present. Yes, it's by their own recognition that we receive them in communion. There is no other way. The system of letters from other churches is no longer valid since so many have been injudiciously excommunicated on unbiblical grounds.

I say this because many churches restrict participation in communion based on local church membership. That membership is also sometimes being used as a tool for coercion and control. In the circles I frequent, nearly all of my friends have been excommunicated for the same unforgivable sin, insubordination to the church leaders. And that insubordination has often been associated with pursuing God sincerely and challenging extrabiblical mandates in that pursuit.

This is a great time to cover the concept of church membership. Since being in communion with Christ and the saints constitutes membership in the kingdom of God, do we recognize local church membership? You may be surprised that I respond with a resounding yes, but not in the standard sense. Let me explain.

Yes, being baptized upon repentance and born again makes one a citizen (member) of the kingdom of God. However, local leadership is indigenous. The NT church appointed overseers/pastors/elders from among the local saints. If people are imported from outside, they can voluntarily identify with the membership and leadership of the local assembly or not. Though we may welcome visitors into communion, if they remain with the fellowship, they have to decide if they identify with the membership and leadership of the local fellowship. This is primarily because the leadership is responsible for overseeing the church and discipleship, as one who will give an account for their souls. That responsibility requires cooperation. It's all a voluntary paradigm. There is nothing by force or coercion. People are free to choose whether to become a part of a fellowship or not. I think instead of classic membership, a more accurate description of what I am describing is *fellowship agreement*.

Let me give you an example. In an area there may be six churches. All born again saints in those churches are citizens (members) of the kingdom of God. However, they do not all identify with the membership of every assembly or recognize every church leader as their leader. That requires a relationship and permission. The pastor of the local Baptist church is not my pastor. Nor are the members of the local Pentecostal church my pastoral responsibility. I can fellowship/commune with them, but I don't subscribe to and identify with their leadership or membership.

I also believe that those coming into the local assembly should know what they are joining. Unity of mind, love, spirit, and purpose, all in humility, is imperative for the health of a group (see Philippians 2:1-5 and Ephesians 4:1-6). I believe it is wise to articulate a *fellowship agreement* of the assembly up front, so that new prospects know exactly what they are subscribing to. If they can't agree with the foundation the local assembly subscribes to, it is better to permit them to find fellowship elsewhere than attempt to integrate them into a group knowing full well conflict and division are inevitable.

It is true that there is no biblical precedent for what I shared above. That's because the Apostles plowed forward, pulling everyone from the heathen and laying a single foundation. Today, in a post-Christian environment, with many flavors and brands, the forbidden "factions" in Galatians 5:19-21, we must articulate what the foundation is. A *fellowship agreement* meets that need. I don't subscribe to laying just any foundation; I am talking about articulating the apostolic foundation set forth in Scripture, on the bedrock of Christ, as understood by the earliest disciples of the Apostles, the paradigm set forth in these posts. Any other foundation is simply building with wood, hay, and straw.

I have included a *Sample Fellowship Agreement* as an Addendum to this book.

I expect many questions and much soul searching from all these posts. I can't address what to do in every personal situation. Church today has grown diverse and complicated. But I can say in all things pursue Christ and love freely. You can't go wrong following that advice.

## Chapter 17: Restoring a Brother in Sin

Often Biblicists are quick to refer to Matthew 18 (specifically verses 15-18) for *church discipline* with a complete disregard for the text.

“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:15-18)

If one sins, the brother approaches him privately. It does not say that the brother gossips to others, rats him out to church leaders, and then the church leaders confront him. Rather, the Scriptures direct the eyewitness of the sin to approach the brother. If he receives the correction, it ends right there in celebration. Because the context of the passage is restoring a brother (see verses 12 through 14) and forgiveness (see verses 21 through 35). Church discipline is not the intent. Nor is the process intended to be punitive.

Only if the brother refuses correction does the matter escalate. Then additional eyewitnesses are pulled in to convince the brother to repent. Again, there is still no mention of church leaders, but just involved parties. Only if he still refuses correction by the group does the matter escalate to the church. Again, not the leaders only, but rather the body (obviously this involved leadership). But only the body has the authority to adjudicate. Leaders are not authorized to pass judgement absent the congregation.

To recap, the sin is visible sin; hence, eyewitnesses. It's not a hunch, a feeling, hearsay, or some supernatural insight. It's a real biblically identifiable infraction. We are not talking about church-specific rules. We are not talking about interpretations that go beyond the text. If it doesn't meet these criteria, just pray about it or discuss the matter over lunch, encouraging only.

It's handled discretely at first. Only if the brother refuses correction does it escalate. And be patient. The objective is heart change and not simply outward conformance. But the heart can't be forced or coerced. The heart must be persuaded. It takes relationship and permission to speak influence into someone's life. Empathize with them. Most people feel shame for their mistakes and earnestly want to overcome them. If they double down on their sin, it's often because they don't think overcoming is feasible.

And the sin must be of sufficient seriousness to warrant condemning someone. Ask yourself, would I support subjecting this person to an eternity of hell fire for this crime. That's what biblical excommunication is. It's serious business. Don't major in the minors. And don't demand immediate conformance on stuff for which it took you a decade to understand. Be discreet, patient, and empathetic towards the weaknesses of your brother.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1-2)

You say, then people will get away with lesser stuff then. You don't have witnesses or chapter and verse for their particular heart issue you want ended. Be patient. Pray. Don't fret. Sin always comes out in time. It all sorts itself out. Ultimately, Our intentions are to assist our brother because we are contending for their victory over sin and salvation. If they remain in error, it's their risk, not yours. God is the judge. Your duty is to assist them towards victory.

And note that Jesus told us that the tares grow among the wheat (see Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). The angels will know the difference at the end. We were commanded to not pull them out because we might uproot the wheat trying to get the tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

Remember, restoration and forgiveness are the goal. God is in the long game. How we finish is the most important thing. It might be more convenient to just get rid of "troublemakers" to preserve the organization. However, leaders will give an account for it. Not for how pristine their organization or institution is, but rather how they handled the one who strayed from the ninety-nine. God cares for the

stray as much as the others. Don't throw them to the wolves. Don't be the wolf. Restore him.





## Chapter 18: When You Assemble...

I wrote earlier that the NT church met in private homes of the saints. I also wrote that communion was the centerpiece of that meeting. However, there was a lot more to it than just taking communion or having a fellowship meal.

What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:26-33)

What we see described above is a participatory, interactive meeting where each shares according to their gifts. Note the intent is not to give airtime to all who wish to speak or give equal airtime to each participant. Rather, it is affording the opportunity for all who have unction of the Holy Spirit to edify the body. The gathering is not intended to hear the polished oratory of talented men. And it's not just conversation among friends. Rather, it's an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to edify God's people through gifts imparted to the saints.

The examples of participation above are not exhaustive. However, note that they are all manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Leading songs, teaching, prophecy and tongues and interpretation are all spiritual gifts (manifestations). There are obviously numerous other gifts as well. Paul made clear that the greatest gifts are those that edify the saints. The important take away here is that the gathering of the saints is intended to permit God Himself to minister to the saints through gifts of the Holy Spirit operating through the saints.

Also note the participatory, interactive meeting is not only a New Testament practice; it's a command. I stated earlier that house church, or meeting in private homes of the saints, is not a NT command, but only a practice. The location of the meeting is not imperative.

However, I also stated that we are only permitted to adopt extrabiblical traditions if they do not cause us to disobey biblical commands. What I am saying here is that if meeting in a meeting hall or special religious building, the participatory, interactive service is still a must. In fact, Paul said it was the Lord's commandment.

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner. (1 Corinthians 14:37-39)

The Spirit-led, interactive, participatory service was not only their practice, but it was commanded. The only admonishment concerning this service was that it would be conducted properly and orderly. However, the tradition of a set order of worship and a pre-planned set apart "preacher" delivering a sermon is in direct conflict with this command.

The reason why I emphasize this should be clear. God intends to minister to His people when we gather. The leaders do not pick what they will serve out to the masses. God Himself, through the agency of the saints (including those leaders), inspires those saints by the unction of the Holy Spirit to minister to the assembly.

Some people balk at the idea of women being silenced in the churches as per verses 34 and 35 immediately prior to the passage above (I stated earlier that my interpretation of this, right or wrong, is only restricting women from teaching the Word of God, not operation of other gifts); however, EVERYONE is silenced in the majority of the churches today except the one selected to give the sermon that day. This is a travesty. The Bible is clear; God has gifted all saints. Those gifts are for the edification of the body. The result is not just the saints being silenced in the churches; God Himself is silenced in the churches!

There aren't many passages in the Bible that describe church services. We already detailed communion in the prior posts. We here covered teaching and operation of the revelatory gifts in a prior post. Here's another passage that covers several other NT activities.

Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:13-16)

Communion, confession of sins, teaching, prophecy, other revelatory gifts, prayer, worship and praise songs, healing: these are all part of the NT church experience. A participatory meeting where multiple brothers share the teaching takes a lot of pressure off the traditional pastor-type preacher to pre-prepare and give a center-stage performance. And the participatory meeting permits younger and newer Christians to stretch their wings and grow in a comfortable environment. The process encourages strengthening and development of the next generation of teachers and prophets. Discipleship is one of the main benefits of participatory, interactive meetings. Hearing from God being another vital benefit. Preventing false teachings is yet another benefit.

Some see that permitting anyone to contribute is risky for introducing false teachings. Actually, I see the opposite. If I were to go to just about any church and sit through the sermon, I would be able to pick out many things that are biblically and historically inaccurate. However, I would not be permitted to correct any of it. The system itself compels the entire congregation to sit through compromised teachings with no recourse. No one is given an opportunity to correct the pastor/preacher.

In the house church, if anyone teaches something in error, the others can respectfully and tactfully present the correction in real time. The entire process encourages humility and mutual respect. In a healthy fellowship those with disagreements on disputable matters will not focus on the differences but will instead emphasize other subjects. And visitors who may not be familiar with or aware of early church beliefs or practices might be given considerable grace if they are just attending a single meeting. Errors can be corrected later.

Those bent on stoking division and introducing pet doctrines will be politely corrected by the brothers in the fellowship. If they can't be

respectful and participate harmoniously after correction, the matter will be addressed appropriately. This is one of the reasons I believe it is important to articulate the foundation and points of agreement of a fellowship in a *fellowship agreement* up front so people can know what they are joining. If they can't subscribe to it, it's best they look elsewhere for the sake of peace. Paul said:

“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”  
(Titus 3:9-11)

## **Chapter 19: The Continuation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

This session is based on some of my older posts repurposed here. Enjoy.

There are actual cessationists and then there are practical cessationists. Actual cessationists subscribe to a theological construct to demonstrate that the manifestations (gifts, ministries, and effects) of the Holy Spirit have completely ceased at a somewhat arbitrary time in history. However, in my experience, they are completely selective (and therefore hypocritical) in their assessment of what has actually ceased. Often, they simply believe everything they personally have never experienced has ceased, but things with which they are familiar continued (pastor good, apostle bad; teaching and evangelism good, prophecy and healing bad). Because even if others testify of their experiences or they see video or live evidence, they are forced to deny what they hear or see because it conflicts with their theological construct. All this they cling to in spite of the clear historical record in the early church witness.

In my experience practical cessationists are more cunning. They claim they believe in the continuation of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they can forego the mental and theological gymnastics necessary to deny their modern existence, and do not need to hide from the clear record of history. However, they still deny the reality of the manifestations in their true sense. They instead redefine the manifestations of the Holy Spirit to fit their carnally devised equivalents (prophecy is teaching; word of knowledge is information from study; discerning of spirits is recognizing good versus evil). Just like the actual cessationists, they often deny anything they have never personally experienced. They instead can attack and even slander those who legitimately operate in said gifts. Some even go so far as to attribute the legitimate work of the Holy Spirit to Satan instead. This is very shaky ground indeed. Some things never change.

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." And He called them to Himself and began speaking

to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin"- because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mark 3:22-30)

I here want to provide my favorite quotation from the Ante-Nicene writings demonstrating that the gifts of the Holy Spirit did not cease, but rather continued. Then I have included an older post with my speculation as to why the gifts of the Holy Spirit had diminished.

Even as things are, if your thought is to spend this period of existence in enjoyments, how are you so ungrateful as to consider insufficient, as not thankfully to recognize the many and exquisite pleasures God has bestowed upon you? For what is more delightful than to have God the Father and our Lord at peace with us, than revelation of the truth, than confession of our errors, than pardon of the innumerable sins of our past life? What greater pleasure than distaste of pleasure itself, contempt of all that the world offers, true liberty, a pure conscience, a contented life, and freedom from all fear of death? What is nobler than to tread underfoot the gods of the nations—to expel evil spirits—to perform healings—to seek divine revelations—to live to God? These are the pleasures, these are the entertainments worthy of Christian men—holy, everlasting, free. Consider these as your circus games, fix your eyes on the courses of the world, the changing seasons, reckon up the periods of time, long for the goal of the final consummation, defend the assemblies of the churches, be startled at God's signal, be roused up at the angel's trumpet, glory in the hands of martyrdom. (Tertullian, ANF v. 3, 91, c. 197 AD)

Many date the gifts as having ceased at the end of the Apostolic era. However, the Ante-Nicene witness easily refutes this claim. I once compiled eleven pages of Ante-Nicene quotes citing exorcisms, healings, prophecy, tongues, and even raising people from the dead. When people say the gifts ceased with the Apostles, they are openly lying to promote their cessationist views. So, the more intellectually honest pick some random marker, the assembling of the Canon of Scripture in the fourth century as the event that ended the gifts. Yet

these same people openly recognize that the post-Constantine church had become a compromised institution.

Has anyone ever considered that the gifts may have decreased in measure as the church compromised in obedience and holiness? No! Really? They see the kingdom message and kingdom lifestyle gone and the church completely institutionalized at the same time period the gifts nearly completely disappeared and no intellectually honest person can put two and two together?! Read the quotes below and ponder what the writer is saying. The gifts were there, but only among the holy and obedient. Don't for a second believe the myth that Constantine or the ecclesiastical powers around him ended the reign of the pure church. It was on the demise already, having been fully prepared for its complete compromise. And with the great collapse of the pure and obedient Bride of Christ, went the Holy Spirit and nearly all His works.

Those who are truly His disciples, receiving grace from Him, perform [miraculous works] in His name, in order to promote the welfare of others, according to the gift that each one has received from Him. Some truly and certainly cast out devils. The result is that those who have been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe and join themselves to the church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come. They see visions, and they utter prophetic expressions. Still others heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and the sick are made whole. What is more, as I have said, even the dead have been raised up and remained among us for many years. What more can I say? It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the church throughout the whole world has received from God, in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and which she [the church] exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles, neither practicing deception upon any, nor taking any reward from them. For, just as she [the church] has received without charge from God, so does she minister without charge. Nor does she perform anything by means of angelic invocations, incantations, or any other wicked curious art. Calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, she has worked miracles for the benefit of mankind, and not to lead them into error. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ even now confers benefits. It cures thoroughly and effectively all who anywhere believe on Him. Irenaeus ANF v. 1, 409 (c. 180 AD)

Moreover, the Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and after His ascension He gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still

traces of His presence in a few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence. For the holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding. (Origen ANF v. 4, 615, c. 248 AD)

For they [the Jews] have no longer prophets nor miracles, traces of which to a considerable extent are still found among Christians, and some of them more remarkable than any that existed among the Jews; and these we ourselves have witnessed, if our testimony may be received. (Origen ANF v. 4, 433, c. 248 AD)

And there are still preserved among Christians traces of that Holy Spirit which appeared in the form of a dove. They expel evil spirits, and perform many cures, and foresee certain events, according to the will of the Logos. (Origen ANF v. 4, 415, c. 248 AD)



## Chapter 20: The Greatest Thing

So far I have written many things, things that can be cited and quoted and supported. However, the things that matter the most are less tangible, yet more important. I have so much percolating in me that I need to express. So, I will just spew it out in the final couple posts.

We can have the correct understanding of leadership and practices and still fall flat on our faces with ease. In America, the average life expectancy of a house church is relatively short. That's because most people come together running away from what they don't like rather than running towards what they seek. Or people have an idealistic view that if they gathered with their friends or others who believed just like them that they would have this utopian experience of what the church is supposed to be, only to find out it doesn't automatically work that way. Let me explain further.

In my experience, people seldom set out to start a home fellowship. Typically, people disenfranchised by institutional Christianity gather together because they can't find something out there that they can stomach. Therefore, the "church hurt" are what have made up so many house churches. The uniting factor is nothing more than a common disdain for institutional church. Therefore, they gather looking for a new relationship on the rebound of a messy divorce. You can only imagine how that can be a recipe for disaster!

What I am presenting here was never meant to be a Plan B. Apostolic church planting is God's Plan A. Christ said He would build His church, and in these posts (soon to be book) I have attempted to describe how He has done it before so we can understand the process. But herein lies my challenge: it's not only a process. It's not something you can simply do by checking the right boxes.

What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

The church is an organism. Paul and Apollos, the apostle and teacher, served their roles in planting the church. However, it was God who caused it to grow. We do our part and God does His part. Yet that doesn't mean everything will go without a hitch. It's not simply transactional.

The New Testament epistles give us a great sneak peak into the inner workings of the apostolic churches. As exciting and inspiring as the accounts are, they were also messy, to say the least. I have always said that ministry is messy. Because ministry is people and people are messy. It's how we relate to others in the messiness that will determine the ultimate health of a fellowship.

The quote above was Paul trying to correct the problem of jealousy and strife among the Corinthian saints. They had a problem with relationships. The letter covers a host of other relational issues as well. He states the disunity was the result of immaturity and carnality (as opposed to being spiritually minded). And in the letter Paul nails the solution: love.

But Corinth wasn't the only messy church. In His letter to the church in Rome, Paul identifies issues of disputes over differences of opinion and encourages them not to judge one another (Romans 14). In his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul urges them to walk by the Spirit, and not by the flesh, bearing the fruit of the Spirit which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," rather than the deeds of the flesh "which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these." (see Galatians 5:16-24) And in every letter to every church or leader, every epistle author addresses issues with sin, false teachings, and on and on.

James teaches that carnal thinking, jealousy, and selfish ambition are demonic and lead to every evil thing and that we should instead be: "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes

down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)

Jesus prayed three times the night He was betrayed that the saints would be united as He and the Father were one. And that the unity of the saints would be proof to the world that Jesus was sent by the Father.

“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23)

Recall that the reason Christ imparted gifts to men (the five-fold ministries) was to bring the saints to unity and maturity, into Christ. Therefore, Paul implored the saints to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, show tolerance for one another in love, with all humility and gentleness, with patience (see Ephesians 4:2-3).

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.” ... And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried

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about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:1-8...11-16)

The whole purpose of the leaders is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry to form Christ or develop Christ-likeness in the body. This formation is the purpose of the church. We are called to be united towards this aim: that we would pursue the renewing of our minds and possess the mind of Christ, and walk by the Spirit, and no longer by the flesh.

In his letter to the church in Philippi Paul encourages the saints to be humble like Christ, and united in mind, love, spirit, and purpose, considering others better than themselves.

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1-5).

The antidote to the problem of carnality, or demonic selfishness is simply permitting the formation of Christ within us: seeing what Christ sees, thinking like Christ thinks, and relating to others how Christ relates to them. If we could love like He loved, then the church would be complete.

Jesus said he had a new command: to love one another. He said the greatest commandment was love. He said that we would be known to be His disciples by our love for one another. Paul presented his solution to the relationship problem to the saints in Corinth with these words.

Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, does

not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

Here Paul shows how to love like Christ loved very practically in how we relate to one another. We approach each other with kindness and selflessness, yes. That is easily understood to map with our understanding of love. But he also said love is not being provoked; that means we do not react to being wronged. He said love does not take into account a wrong *suffered*; that means we forgive and harbor no bitterness or resentment. He said love bears all things; that means we put up with stuff we don't like. It says love believes all things; that means we assume the best about others even when it doesn't look good. He said love hopes all things; we not only believe the best about others, but we never give up on other people. He said love endures all things; that means we persevere under mistreatment with that hope we have for the betterment of others. This is all very instructive.

Jesus modeled it on the cross. When He was nailed to the tree, and people were mocking Him, having tortured Him nearly to death, stealing His clothing and all dignity, ridiculing Him, He looked to heaven and said: "forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Those men knew what they were doing. But Jesus showed us what "not being provoked, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things, and not taking into account a wrong suffered" looks like. Without Jesus being the embodiment of love, love incarnate, we would never have been given the opportunity to be redeemed and having been granted the opportunity to also become the embodiment of love through the One who dwells within.

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:19-21)

What does this love within the fellowship look like.

- The fellowship will engender developing authentic relationships.
- Great care will be employed to maintain unity without compromising truth.

- We must be patient and merciful handling differences and settling conflicts.
- We speak to edify the listener.
- Don't win the battle and lose the war. Don't destroy a relationship and therefore opportunity for ongoing influence and discipleship for the sake of being "right" on the matter at hand.
- Keep the long game in mind. It's how we finish that matters most. So be patient and permit people to understand things at their pace.
- We empathize with other's views.
- We earn the right to speak influence into others by relationship.
- We maintain a humble and teachable posture.
- We assume the best of others.
- We don't write people off but persevere towards their and our betterment.
- Show no partiality or favoritism, but rather treat everyone fairly.
- Look at others with spiritual eyes and see people as God sees them. Treat them accordingly.
- Be aware of the enemy's goal of stoking division and severing relationships and defeating the saints. Know who your enemy is. It's not the person in front of you. It's the unseen powers. Fight the real enemy and fight for the person in front of you instead of against them.
- Pray for one another.

I can go on and on. The passages throughout this chapter are replete with powerful admonitions on how we are to relate to one another. We must strive to be humble and love perfectly. We need to seek to possess the mind of Christ and see others how He sees them. A church that loves deeply and engenders authentic relationships can overcome many struggles and differences of opinion. The church that dwells on their uniqueness and adopts an elitist posture will repel authentic seekers of God, and as a result, be short lived.

Yes, our beliefs are important because they direct our practices. However, our heart condition is more important because our heart can produce actions born from sincerity. God wants true worshippers, who worship in spirit and truth. Outward compliance can be faked by

the one obeying out of anything other than love. And Paul said you can do many things, but if you don't have love, you are just a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal; it will profit you nothing.





## **Chapter 21: Closing Thoughts on Unity**

I want to cover so much more but I know this series has to end sooner or later, at least the book portion. The reason I started writing these Facebook posts to begin with was because people don't like reading long books. So, I decided to write a series of short posts instead. Then the posts accidentally became chapters of a book. Here I am again unintentionally writing another book. And I can't let it get too long or no one will read it. Therefore, this is the last post in the series, and chapter of the book.

I want here to continue on the concept of unity as stated in Philippians 2: "being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." We covered a lot about "mind" or what our understanding should be in our discussion of how to approach Scripture and the supremacy of the teachings of Jesus. We just discussed love in some detail in the prior chapter. We also discussed that one of the objectives to the interactive participatory service was to permit God to minister to His people by way of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, through His people.

Regular revelation from the Spirit of God should be commonplace as the people of God gather. However, such a level of movement of the Spirit is rare or even non-existent in a fellowship lacking unity of the spirit. I don't know exactly how to explain why with words. So let me give you examples instead.

We have had several prayer meetings in which we sought the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, yet He was elusive. Eventually someone would receive a revelation that the Holy Spirit was hovering about and eager to pour forth His presence but was being hindered by something specific. We would pray, repent, worship, or do whatever was necessary to break the hindrance and then the presence and power of God would pour forth.

Sometimes there were doubters among us. Sometimes there was hidden sin. It could be anything that resulted in a divided group. In Kenya we tended to see much more movement of power and revelations during our all-night prayer meetings and multi-day fasting meetings than during regular Sunday gatherings. The reason was that

everyone attended the regular larger public gatherings while the all-night prayer meetings and fasting meetings only attracted the serious and dedicated, and the nominal or lukewarm stayed clear. Among groups of more surrendered, spiritually-minded saints the Holy Spirit would flow more freely.

Recall how the manifestations of the Holy Spirit had diminished in the early church, although He was still active in those who were holy and governed by His presence. It's the same today.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit gave signs of His presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry, and after His ascension He gave still more; but since that time these signs have diminished, although there are still traces of His presence in a few who have had their souls purified by the Gospel, and their actions regulated by its influence. For the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding. (Origen ANF v. 4, 615, c. 248 AD)

If your gatherings have "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (see Galatians 5:19-21) or jealousy and selfish ambition, the Holy Spirit will remain elusive. For James said:

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing (James 3:16).

The Holy Spirit is called the Holy Spirit because He is Holy. We need to come to Him with a pure heart and a clear conscience. If anyone in the group is compromised, simply bring it to Him in repentance. Seek His forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal of the mind.

We are to release those towards whom we harbor bitterness or resentment. Be free before the Lord and He will be free towards the assembly. Recall that the greater gifts were for the edification of the body. Unity of that body is paramount for a fellowship to move in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Personal consecration (deep introspection and repentance) is necessary for the filling of the Holy Spirit and activation of spiritual gifts. However, participating in a group where the presence of the Holy Spirit is heavy, and the atmosphere is united in spirit, will permit

a freer flow and release of the Holy Spirit to the individuals within fellowship. Unity is crucial for Him to be welcomed and invited.

Another important element for personal spiritual health and well-being that is outside the scope of this book is deliverance (and accompanying emotional healing). I will refer you to see my other books or videos to go deeper into this important subject. However, I would be remiss not to mention them here.

The early church was adamant about the deliverance ministry. Much emphasis was given to deliverance for preparing candidates for baptism.

From the time at which they are set apart, place hands upon them daily so that they are exorcised. When the day approaches on which they are to be baptized, let the bishop exorcise each one of them, so that he will be certain whether each has been purified...Then, laying his hand on them, he will exorcise every foreign spirit, so that they flee from them and never return to them. When he has finished exorcising them, he shall breathe on their faces and seal their foreheads, ears and noses. Then he shall raise them up. (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions*, Chapter 20, c. 215 AD)

The ministry of deliverance was so common then, that they literally addressed whether or not deliverance ministers (exorcists) were to be ordained or not.

I the same make a constitution in regard to an exorcist. An exorcist is not ordained. For it is a trial of voluntary goodness, and of the grace of God through Christ by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For he who has received the gift of healing is declared by revelation from God, the grace which is in him being manifest to all. (*Apostolic Constitutions*, ANF v. 7, Book 8, Section 26)

Nowadays most denominations act like demons disappeared and no longer afflict people. This false supposition does a great disservice to the many struggling with things for which they should be free. Again, I refer you to my other books and teachings for more details on the subject. I do offer a word of caution: there are a lot of strange teachings out there on this subjects. I suggest you only offer your trust to those who are orthodox in their teachings and vetted in their Christian walk.

United *in purpose* is the final element Paul discussed in the Philippians passage above. We already mentioned that the purpose of the gifts/ministries was for developing the unity and maturity of the body: Christ forming in us. However, there is also God's overall goal of establishing His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. His means to accomplish this end is the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. And they are linked. Recall the Great Commission is making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded (see Matthew 28:18-20). Recall His preeminent commandment was to love, which is the Golden Rule. God desires that we make lots of people who transfer their allegiance from Satan, sin and the world, to Christ and His kingdom and then abide in His teachings by becoming agents of love on the Earth. And even signs and wonders and all good we do is intended to be love manifested (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). I contend that this is the purpose we are urged to be united towards.

The church is designed to be a mission machine towards advancing God's kingdom. It was never intended to be an organization or an institution. It is an organism. This means it was meant to grow, reproduce, and maintain it's health towards the accomplishment of God's objectives. Each part of the body works in unison with the other parts to accomplish this purpose. Some discrete objectives of the greater kingdom-advancement purpose are:

- a) Evangelism: saving and adding disciples from among the lost.
- b) Discipleship: bringing the saints to greater spiritual maturity: to live and love like Christ.
- c) Equipping the saints to reach their full potential in ministry.
- d) Mobilizing the saints to ministry.
- e) Bringing people to spiritual and emotional freedom and wholeness in Christ.
- f) Encouraging healthy relationships: with God, spouses, families, and communities.
- g) Development of leaders.
- h) Multiplication of disciples and churches.

The church was not meant to be a social club. It is not here for its own self preservation. The church is a group of people, called out from the world and united in Christ to accomplish His mission on the Earth. We are called to be His hands and feet and spread His good news of salvation. love, and purpose to those living aimlessly, without hope or

purpose, lost in sin and futility. This is what binds us together: a common mission. This purpose should unite us in prayer, direct our actions, and be the subject of our testimonies every time we gather. As we advance the kingdom of God, the exploits will keep the excitement palpable.

With the kingdom advance, the Enemy will counterattack. This results in more unified prayer and fasting. It results in more of a commitment to one another and the cause. And with each spiritual battle, come a new miracle and new victories and added faith and greater exploits demonstrating the power of God. The church as a mission machine is a self-reinforcing entity. It will grow, advance, and multiply.

With all that said, the passage I started this chapter is all about unity, yes. However, the context of the passage can't be ignored. Unity must be accompanied by "humility of mind."

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, *but with humility of mind* regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4, italics added)

I write this here because of something important I must cover in order for this book to be complete. That something is mutual respect for others. In my ministry journey, I was given the privilege of pioneering something new. That means I started with a blank canvas and was able to lay a foundation as set forth in the Scriptures to the best of my understanding. Certainly, I was an incomplete individual (and still am) working with my incomplete understanding. However, I was committed to practicing in accordance with what I saw set forth in Scripture to the best of my abilities (commitment high, delivery flawed at best). I wanted nothing more than to please God with my work and also wanted a church that was pleasing to Him.

That's all good. However, this can come with a price. Because if you are convinced you are doing everything right, that can by default lead you to believe that everyone else is doing things wrong. The trap is pride. The trap is judging others and dismissing their ministries as compromised. That pride can derail any goodness God may have

accomplished in your ministry pretty quickly. Because you invite all kinds of spiritual attacks that won't only impact your relationship with those outside your ministry, it will rot relationships within. The elitism and corresponding division are corrosive, destructive, and insatiable.

You may also belong to a church you believe has it right or has it wrong. Whichever way it is, it forms a comparison where *you personally* are right, and someone else is wrong. It may actually be true at some level. But our heart must be right towards others. Recall the passage on love in the earlier chapter and the one on humility above. Watch out for self-righteousness, pride, judging others, and being dismissive or condescending. Believe and hope all things. Be patient and pray for others. Don't expect what took you a decade to understand to be understood by others by simply telling them once or twice. It takes time. Remember, we are in for the long game. How people finish is far more important than how they start. Maintain relationship, and work more in prayer and less in words sometimes. Don't doubt that the Holy Spirit can reach where words don't.

This brings me to my final point. Stay in your lane. Do not feel any obligation or even permission to speak about outside ministries. Don't do it! Focus on your work and your call. If you see an outside ministry in error, teach the people you influence the right, without naming the outside ministry. You are responsible for the people God has put before you, not their people. They will be accountable to God for what they are doing. And they have the right to fail.

How would you feel if someone off the street told you how to parent based on their cursory understanding of what's going on in your unique family situation. It's not their job to parent your kids. However, if the advice was given by trusted friend for many years who has several children of their own, and they understand your situation and needs, you may hear them out. That is because we only have a right to involve ourselves in someone's domain by permission or through an established relationship. Now if the uninvited offered advice without understanding your situation and you refused it for whatever reason, how would you feel if they went around telling people what horrible parents you are? Or what if they never offered advice at all, but just saw you from a distance and started slandering you? How would you feel? I would assume terrible.

So, how is it that people can do the same thing for other people's ministries without a shred of conviction from the Holy Spirit?

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:4)

I make it my objective not to get involved in the affairs of outside ministries unless I am invited. I strive to not opine on the affairs of outside ministries apart from having an established relationship. I encourage all to not attack, slander, dismiss, or otherwise mistreat other churches and ministries, recognizing their autonomy and privilege to operate distinctly from my ministry. They may not look like us. But I recognize that they may have a slightly different call, intended audience, or cultural target. They have a right to be distinct. They have a right to be wrong in some areas. I trust and believe that God has the power to steer His people. He can do it. I don't believe I need to be their "holy spirit." If they ask my opinion, I will give it, thoughtfully and respectfully. Until then, I will just pray and be patient. You never know, maybe it's me that's wrong after all. It happens.





# **Addendum: Sample Fellowship Agreement**

Here is a sample *Fellowship Agreement* very similar to the document used by our local fellowship. You may notice that the contents of this agreement map precisely to the contents of this book. This was originally drafted as our fellowship foundation and served as our points of agreement when the assembly was established. All the families participating in the fellowship met and ratified the document as the fundamental standard which identified our group. We never intended to publish the document. We typically only share it with prospective individuals and families who repeatedly visit our fellowship or express interest in permanently joining us. In this way they can have clarity about what we are about and make a decision concerning their ongoing participation. We have little interest in welcoming people who are agents of disruption, disturbance, and division. By presenting our core values up front, we mitigate many potential undesirable future surprises.

I understand that some of you out there may not agree with everything in the document, or in this book, for that matter. That's your right. You have the freedom to edit or change it as you see fit. However, I strongly recommend adopting such a process. With so many flavors of Christianity out there, and all the quirks of every personality and the spectrum of baggage people bring into a fellowship, having a foundation and core values as a guide will greatly assist in sustaining the health and fruitfulness of the fellowship.

## **Sample Fellowship Agreement**

This document provides the basic foundation and points of agreement for the local assembly or fellowship.

- 1) Scripture is the final authority for belief and practice
  - a) The Church is under the New Covenant.
  - b) Christ's teachings are supreme.
  - c) Biblical commands supersede practices.
  - d) New Testament practices are worthy of emulating, but not binding.

- e) Human traditions are permitted but can't usurp biblical commands.
  - f) Though not considered inspired or authoritative, the Ante-Nicene (early church) witness is recognized as a valid source of insight for clarifying apparent conflicts in Scripture.
- 2) Love is the Greatest Commandment
- a) The fellowship must engender developing authentic relationships.
  - b) Unity is a great priority, and great care will be employed to maintain unity, without compromising truth.
  - c) We must be patient and merciful handling differences and settling conflicts.
  - d) We speak to edify the listener.
  - e) We empathize with others' views.
  - f) We strive to assume the best and maintain no record of wrong.
  - g) We maintain humility and a teachable spirit.
- 3) Biblical Leadership
- a) Apostles: pioneer missionaries or church planters. Foundation layers. Itinerant role.
  - b) Prophets: hearers of God's voice to the Church. Foundation layers. Local and itinerant role.
  - c) Evangelists: preachers to the unbelievers. Itinerant role.
  - d) Pastors: Elders who oversee the local church. Disciple-makers. Elder/Pastor/Overseer is a common role. Plural leadership serving locally and also regionally in support of fellowships lacking local elders.
  - e) Teachers: the work of a local pastor and also an itinerant role serving to support regional fellowships lacking local elders.
  - f) Deacons: stewards for the physical needs of the saints. Money bearers.
  - g) Recognized leaders are appointed by apostles, verified by the Holy Spirit, and ratified by the local congregation.
  - h) Leaders are encouraged to serve in their gifts and demonstrate their calls prior to public recognition. "Do the work, and the recognition will follow."
  - i) Qualifications for local ministers are detailed in Scripture. Itinerant ministers should at a minimum have similar character attributes as local ministers, but without the age or family requirements.

- 4) The Gatherings
  - a) Interactive and participatory: saints use gifts to permit God to minister to the saints.
  - b) Only baptized, born-again believers participate in Communion.
  - c) The Fellowship shares Communion regularly, ideally weekly at the Sunday gathering.
  - d) The fellowship meal is shared regularly, ideally at the Sunday gathering.
  - e) Teaching the Word is reserved for men. Women are free to use their spiritual gifts and participate in the gathering besides this one restriction.
  - f) The meeting is for edification of the saints, not evangelism.
  - g) Common activities include: praise and worship, testimonies, teaching, foot washing, confession, Communion, prayer, and a fellowship meal.
  
- 5) Church as a living organism and mission machine
  - a) The church is designed to grow and reproduce.
  - b) Evangelism is adding disciples from among the lost.
  - c) Discipleship is bringing the saints to greater spiritual maturity.
  - d) Healthy practices are utilized to produce healthy disciples.
  - e) Every saint is on the mission and is equipped and encouraged to engage in ministry, not just recognized leadership.
  - f) Multiplication of disciples and churches is a stated goal.
  - g) The Fellowship encourages healthy families and communities.
  
- 6) Church discipline
  - a) Restoration is the objective.
  - b) Initiated by the witness/offended.
  - c) Only biblically definable offenses are enforceable for correction.
  - d) Patience/time is permitted to process and repent.
  - e) The sin must be validated by multiple eyewitnesses to escalate to the church.
  - f) The offense must be of sufficient significance to warrant condemnation to be brought before the church for judgment. Lesser offenses should prompt additional teachings and discipleship only.
  - g) Only the ruling of the church is binding.

- h) Leaders can present biblical truth and wisdom during the case, but do not constitute any more authority than each member adjudicating the offense.
- 7) “Membership”
- a) Membership (citizenship) in the kingdom of God is recognized as having been baptized upon repentance and being born again.
  - b) “Membership” in the local assembly includes voluntarily subscribing to the *Fellowship Agreement* and identifying with the membership and leadership of the local/regional assembly.
  - c) Membership (citizenship) of the kingdom of God is sufficient to partake in Communion.
  - d) For people baptized prior to coming to the local assembly, they will be accepted into Communion upon their representation and confidence that they have been born again, having received evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. This can be the development of recognizable fruit of the Holy Spirit, the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit, or activation of spiritual gifts.
  - e) Baptism is by immersion. People baptized by other means prior to joining may be received in Communion if they are confident they are born again.
- 8) Respect for other representatives of the Bride of Christ
- a) Members of this assembly will not attack, slander, dismiss, or otherwise mistreat other churches and ministries, recognizing their autonomy and privilege to operate distinctly from this ministry.
  - b) This fellowship recognizes the opportunity and permission to correct outside ministries is only earned through relationships.
  - c) This fellowship will not interfere in outside ministries’ affairs unless requested to participate.
- 9) Spiritual gifts
- a) Christ sent the Holy Spirit to impart gifts to men for the edification of the Body.
  - b) The greatest gifts are those that edify the Body.
  - c) The church will encourage activation of spiritual gifts and their healthy and orderly use for the benefit of others and God’s glory.

- d) Supernatural insight alone is not to be used for executing the Matthew 18:15-18 process (the process requires eyewitnesses).
- e) Scripture is the test for supernatural insight; it will not supersede or contradict Scripture.
- f) Prophecy is welcomed, but subject to scrutiny of the saints and shared wisely.

10) Offerings

- a) Offerings and funds are administered and maintained by the local gathering, and not the conglomerate of gatherings.
- b) Offerings are collected weekly anonymously and discretely.
- c) In the absence of recognized deacons, the local gathering will select multiple members to oversee the offering together.
- d) A recognized deacon, or two of the three selected "interim deacons" will count the money together and record the amount in a record.
- e) Funds will be primarily used for meeting urgent or vital needs of the members, agreed upon outside assistance, or agreed upon ministry.
- f) "Interim deacons" must agree upon using funds.
- g) Issuing support for in-house ministers must be approved by the membership, not the deacons or "interim deacons."
- h) All local gathering members may see the offering record upon request.



## **End Notes: Early Church Evidence for Demons and Deliverance**

We are expelling demons all the time. So did the early church. Did you ever wonder why casting out demons is not a normal part of the Christian experience in the West? Do you really believe they are not there?

We do not, then, deny that there are many demons upon earth, but we maintain that they exist and exercise power among the wicked, as a punishment of their wickedness. But they have no power over those who have put on the whole armour of God, who have received strength to withstand the wiles of the devil, and who are ever engaged in contests with them, knowing that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Origen ANF v. 4, 653, c. 248 AD)

When Almighty God, to beautify the nature of the world, willed that that earth should be visited by angels, when they were sent down they despised His laws. Such was the beauty of women, that it turned them aside; so that, being contaminated, they could not return to heaven. Rebels from God, they uttered words against Him. Then the Highest uttered His judgment against them; and from their seed giants are said to have been born. But the Almighty, because they were of an evil seed, did not approve that, when dead, they should be brought back from death. Whence wandering they now subvert many bodies, and it is such as these especially that ye this day worship and pray to as gods. (Commodianus ANF v. 4, 203, c. 240 AD)

Now, of wicked spirits there is a twofold mode of operation: i.e., when they either take complete and entire possession of the mind, so as to allow their captives the power neither of understanding nor feeling; as, for instance, is the case with those commonly called possessed, whom we see to be deprived of reason, and insane (such as those were who are related in the Gospel to have been cured by the Saviour); or when by their wicked suggestions they deprave a sentient and intelligent soul with thoughts of various kinds, persuading it to evil. (Origen ANF v. 4, 336, c. 225 AD)

And the name of Jesus can still remove distractions from the minds of men, and expel demons, and also take away diseases; and produce a marvellous meekness of spirit and complete change of character, and a humanity, and goodness, and gentleness in those individuals who do not feign themselves to be Christians for the sake of subsistence or the supply of any mortal wants, but who have honestly accepted the doctrine concerning God and Christ, and the judgment to come. (Origen ANF v. 4, 427, c. 248 AD)

....demons which many Christians cast out of persons possessed with them. And this, we may observe, they do without the use of any curious arts of magic, or incantations, but merely by prayer and simple adjurations which the plainest person can use. Because for the most part it is unlettered persons who perform this work; thus making manifest the grace which is in the word of Christ, and the despicable weakness of demons, which, in order to be overcome and driven out of the bodies and souls of men, do not require the power and wisdom of those who are mighty in argument, and most learned in matters of faith. (Origen ANF v. 4, 612, c. 248 AD)

"These contaminated and abandoned spirits, as I say, wander over the whole earth, and contrive a solace for their own perdition by the destruction of men. Therefore they fill every place with snares, deceits, frauds, and errors; for they cling to individuals, and occupy whole houses from door to door, and assume to themselves the name of genii; for by this word they translate demons in the Latin language. They consecrate these in their houses, to these they daily pour out libations of wine, and worship the wise demons as gods of the earth, and as averters of those evils which they themselves cause and impose. And these, since spirits are without substance and not to be grasped, insinuate themselves into the bodies of men; and secretly working in their inward parts, they corrupt the health, hasten diseases, terrify their souls with dreams, harass their minds with phrenzies, that by these evils they may compel men to have recourse to their aid. And the nature of all these deceits is obscure to those who are without the truth." (Lactantius ANF v.7, 64, c. 304-313 AD)

Thus, when men at first for a little desire money, covetousness begins to grow as the passion increases, and finally the fall into avarice takes place. And after this, when blindness of mind has succeeded passion, and the hostile powers, by their suggestions, hurry on the mind, money is now no longer desired, but stolen, and acquired by force, or



even by shedding human blood. Finally, a confirmatory evidence of the fact that vices of such enormity proceed from demons, may be easily seen in this, that those individuals who are oppressed either by immoderate love, or incontrollable anger, or excessive sorrow, do not suffer less than those who are bodily vexed by devils. For it is recorded in certain histories, that some have fallen into madness from a state of love, others from a state of anger, not a few from a state of sorrow, and even from one of excessive joy; which results, I think, from this, that those opposing powers, i.e., those demons, having gained a lodgment in their minds which has been already laid open to them by intemperance, have taken complete possession of their sensitive nature, especially when no feeling of the glory of virtue has aroused them to resistance. That there are certain sins, however, which do not proceed from the opposing powers, but take their beginnings from the natural movements of the body, is manifestly declared by the Apostle Paul in the passage: The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. If, then, the flesh lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, we have occasionally to wrestle against flesh and blood, i.e., as being men, and walking according to the flesh, and not capable of being tempted by greater than human temptations; since it is said of us, There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." (Origen ANF v.4, 330, c. 225 AD)



## Where to Go from Here

I thank you for persevering to the end of this book. Regardless of where you currently find yourself in ministry or where you fellowship, I urge you to pursue God with all your heart, seek His perfect will for your life, and love others passionately, regardless of how they treat you in return.

In pursuing your next steps, pray to God and listen to what He tells you to do. Before making any abrupt decisions that affect others around you, seek confirmatory reports from the Lord or other trusted brethren who operate in revelatory gifts. Even tough decisions and tough situations can be endured with inner peace when you know you are in the center of God's will. Absent supernatural insight, see my advice below.

If you are a leader in an existing ministry, I urge you to major in the majors and pray about adopting as many NT beliefs and practices as practicable. However, pace yourself. Lead through persuasion, remain humble, speak from the heart, and be patient as people are given the opportunity to embrace the truth. Do not win battles to lose the war. Remember, if you sustain relationships, you have time to persuade people towards the truth. But if you move too quickly, you may have the "pure church," but no people. But the people are the church! So, take it slow.

If the religious system you are in does not permit abiding in NT beliefs and practices (specifically obeying commands), then pray whether the Lord wants you to step out amicably or implement what the Scriptures command in defiance to the system. This is a very sensitive situation necessitating the Lord's clear personal direction.

If you are part of a church and not in leadership, love and respect your leadership and love the brethren, but obey Christ at all costs. If the system itself does not permit you to obey Christ, then obey anyway and let them ask you to leave (or force you). I do not endorse stoking division. However, Christ said He would divide. Let obedience to Him be the source of any division.

If you are seeking more information or more personal direction concerning implementing the material presented in this book, visit

*The New Wine Renewed*

[www.livethebible.info](http://www.livethebible.info). There are free books, videos, and more on a host of topics such as the early church, discipleship, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, deliverance, healing, church planting, evangelism, and much more.

If you wish to organize a conference large or small at your location about this material, email me at [contact@livethebible.info](mailto:contact@livethebible.info).

If you wish to attend one-week crash course on the disciplines of the faith (discipleship 101 stuff, see the book *Christianity Arising for Details*), look at the dates and schedule at [www.kingdomdriven.org](http://www.kingdomdriven.org) and sign up for the Christianity Arising Conference. All conferences are located in Loogootee, Indiana and are free of charge.

We would really appreciate your prayers for Marc Carrier and the ministry team.

If you wish to financially support Marc Carrier or the ministry, you can make a tax-deductible donation at [www.Kingdomdriven.org/donate](http://www.Kingdomdriven.org/donate) or mail a check to:

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God bless you in your journey serving our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brother Marc