

A Biblical Philosophy of Ministry

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Preface

With the Bible as the basis or foundation, philosophy is used here in the sense of a formulated system or belief regarding the ministry of the local church. This study is presented only as an overview and not intended to be a detailed explanation of this subject. For a more detailed investigation of the issues presented here, the reader is encouraged to consider the Bibliography at the end of this overview.

PART I: The Identification of the Church (Understanding the Character of the Church)

Manifold Descriptions of the Church and Their Purpose

The Varied Descriptions of the Church

In a context dealing with the purpose and ministry of the church in the world, Peter addresses his readers as: (1) living stones who were being built up for a spiritual house, (2) a holy and royal priesthood, (3) a people belonging only to God, and (4) aliens and strangers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9, 11). These are similes of identification which call attention to who and what the people of God are, but there is another purpose as well. Peter also wants us to reflect on what the people of God ought to be doing. We are to be engaged in building up this spiritual house, offering spiritual sacrifices in the worship of God, proclaiming the excellencies of God to a world lost in darkness, and abstaining from fleshly lusts so that we can keep our behavior, our manner of life and testimony, excellent before an unbelieving world lest we ignore and discredit our witness.

Throughout the New Testament, the writers employed numerous descriptive terms to call our attention to the nature and identity of the church. It is defined by a variety of literal terms and portrayed by one rich analogy after another. The church is likened to salt, light, sheep, a bride, a spiritual temple, a household, members of Christ's body, branches in the vine, athletes, soldiers, and heavenly lights. Its people are called children of God, adopted sons, priests, servants, bondslaves, stewards, and partners with Christ, just to name a few. One author estimates that there are over eighty images or figures of the church.¹

As Saucy suggests, The nature of the church is far too broad to be exhausted in the meaning of the one word *ekklesia*. . . . This richness of description precludes a narrow concept of the church and warns against magnification of one aspect to the disregard of others.²

The Purposes of the Varied Descriptions

We might well ask the question, why such a variety of descriptions? Notice that most of these pictures imply action and ministry. They describe the character, conduct, and calling of the church. Undoubtedly, God has painted such pictures in Scripture in order to challenge, motivate, and charge us into action. It is absolutely impera-

¹ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 28.

² Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, Moody Press, p. 19.

tive that we grasp this vision of who we are as God’s people, where we are, and why we are here—God’s representatives in an alien country. And the hope is that we become gripped by this truth or we will fail to see and respond to the purpose for our existence.

Two Models of the Church Compared and Their Products

The Two Models Compared³

CATEGORY OR ISSUE	TRADITIONAL MODEL	BIBLICAL MODEL
Concept of Church	Organization	Organism
Believers	“Members” (as in a club)	Disciples of Jesus Christ (members of the Body)
Involvement	Spectators (observing action)	Participants in the action, ministers
Head	The people	Jesus Christ
Authority	Constitution plus “proof texts”	The Whole Word of God
Government	Democracy (of and by the people)	Theocracy (of God via Word and H.S.)
Selection of Leadership	Election	Appointment (depending on God to raise up gifted men and cause us to recognize them as leaders)
Basic Ministry	Conducting services	Equipping, meeting needs
Place of Ministry	Church building (at stated times)	Anywhere (all the time)
Primary Concern	Programs, things, buildings, etc.	God’s glory, people
Objective	Build up the local church (club)	Build up the Body
Determining Factor	What the people WANT (peace at any price)	What the people NEED (according to the Word)
Great Commission	Get converts (addition)	Make disciples (multiplication)
Field	Our own area	The world
Purpose of Assembling	Entertainment, evangelism in the service	Stimulate to love and good deeds; encourage and equip the saints
Emphasis	Meetings, setting and breaking records	God, individuals, families, quality plus quantity
Pastor-Teacher	Administrator, speaker, visitor, employee (belongs exclusively to this church)	Teacher, counselor, shepherd, equiper (belongs to body, works primarily with this assembly)
Attitude toward Pastor-Teacher	The “minister” (professional)	One of “many” ministers
Board	Administrators, decision makers, occupied with facilities, etc.	Multiplicity of leadership; unified; working together to equip the saints for ministry.

³ This was taken from material prepared by M. C. Harman, Barcroft Bible Church, Arlington, Virginia.

Resources	Human ingenuity, available funds, etc.	Word, prayer, H.S., spiritual gifts, and ministries
Methodology	What we're used to, feel comfortable with	Whatever the situation demands as long as it is true to God's Word and honors the Lord
Procedures	Beg, plead, cajole, etc. for workers	Trust God to raise gifted individuals (if HE isn't interested; WE won't be)
Leadership given to	Anyone willing	Faithful, available, teachable people
Finances	Needs dealt with only with available funds	Determine needs, then TRUST GOD to work through His people
Staff	Hired employees who carry out the policies set by the people through the Board	Associates for full-time involvement; a TEAM to assist in functioning of the Body
Salaries	Determined by "what I make" or "what I think" (staff viewed as employees hired by men)	Determined by biblical principles (e.g., 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Staff viewed as those sent by God to whom the assembly bears responsibility
Attitudes	Conditional acceptance	Unconditional acceptance
Ultimate Concern	Our church; what others think	Exalting Christ; what God says
Result	Rev. 3:1b Like the church at Sardis: you are alive, but you are dead	Eph. 4:11-16 Body built up to maturity functioning as God intends

The Two Products

Quite obviously the biblical model leads to a healthy, ministering church whereas the traditional model leads to a sterile, ineffective church where the affliction of "spectatoritis," the rust of institutionalism, and the self-indulgence of consumerism has all but reduced the church to invalid status. Rather than the picture of a well-trained soldier or athlete, the church today looks more like a patient dependent on a host of life support systems.

This naturally leads us to what the church ought to be doing in the light of who it is.

PART II: The Vocation and Operation of the Church *(Understanding the Calling and Conduct of the Church)*

Purposes of the Church

The great purpose of the church is to be to the praise of God's glory and grace (Eph. 1:6, 12). The praise of God's glory occurs when people come to Christ and become conformed into His image. Saving sinful people and making them like God's Son manifests the glory of God's divine essence (His love, grace, mercy, power, goodness, sovereignty, and holiness). In this primary purpose, the church is to be used of God to bring people to Christ and see them transformed to His character (Col. 1:28). Included in this are three major objectives which the church must intensely pursue.

Exalting the Lord

Everything that the church does must first and foremost exalt and honor the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17).

Equipping the Saints

“Equipping” is one of the primary ways to help people become like Jesus Christ. This is accomplished as the gifted people of the church pour their lives into others and they in turn reach out to others with the vision of every believer a minister and an ambassador (Eph. 4:11-16).

Evangelizing the Lost

If a church is not reaching out to the lost, it is not fulfilling one of the great reasons God has left her on this planet. When we do not evangelize, we fossilize (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Col. 4:3).

Priorities of the Church—Its Ministry Objectives

Purposes or goals are only accomplished when we set objectives that move us toward our goals and work at reaching them. God has established certain vehicular objectives which will carry us toward His ultimate designs for the church, but we must know what they are and be committed to their use. So, what are they?

The church is to function under two forms. First, the church is to be *gathered* for instruction, edification, worship and fellowship. However, true worship and fellowship is seen in Scripture as an outgrowth and a response to biblical revelation. Second, as a further outgrowth of the church gathered and the impact of that on its spiritual life, the church is *scattered* throughout the week for the purpose of evangelism and ministry. The church must evaluate what it is doing. Are its activities, programs, committees, etc., contributing to the major purposes and objectives according to its calling as the people of God, or has it lost its way in institutionalism.

The Church Gathered—Edification—Equipping Saints

Ministry of the Word—Instruction Through . . .

(1) **Preaching** (Ezra 6:14; Neh. 8:8; 2 Tim. 4:1-3). The Word of God must be faithfully preached from the pulpit: (a) inductively, (b) exegetically, and (c) expositionally.

(2) **Teaching** (Ezra 7:10; Acts 20:20; Col. 1:28). The Word of God must also be taught in both large and small group settings. This involves questions and answers, and practical dialogue together around the Word with practical applications that hit people where they live.

(3) **Training** (2 Tim. 2:2-4). Believers must be trained in such practical aspects as how to study their Bibles, how to pray, how to witness, how to walk in the power of the Spirit, etc., that they may, in turn, be able to train others.

(4) **Exhorting** (Col. 1:28; 3:16). The church must be exhorted to positive decisions for Christ that promote commitment and Christ-like values and living.

Ministry of Worship—Exalting God by . . .

(1) **Giving Praise and Thanksgiving** (Heb. 13:15; Col. 1:12; 3:15-17). Believers need to be taught and challenged to live by praise and thanksgiving as they share together in the riches of Christ. To encourage this, the church needs some public opportunity to express its adoration to God individually as well as corporately.

(2) **Singing and Making Melody** (Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). As with all other aspects of worship, music must be the product of spirit-motivated expression to God and should be designed to encourage and unite hearts together in adoration of Him.

(3) **Baptizing** (Matt. 28:19; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is to be a public demonstration of a believer's faith, understanding of his or her position in Christ with its ramifications, and this includes commitment to walk with Christ in newness of life.

(4) **Taking Communion** (1 Cor. 11:23-24). As a public act of worship, the communion service should be designed to promote soul searching, evaluation, and reflection on the Savior and what He means to our life. It is a

Redeclaration, a testimony of one's faith in Christ in both His first and second advents, a **Remembrance**, an act of worship by which we remember and count on the person and work of Christ as the source and means of life, and an expression of the **Relationship** of harmony and oneness of mind in love, values, and commitment that should exist in the body of Christ.

Ministry of Fellowship—Sharing Together by . . .

(1) **Encouraging** (Heb. 10:24-25). Believers must be challenged to encourage one another in the practical areas of the Christian life. A key part of this could be small groups which provide for individual sharing, encouragement, and accountability.

(2) **Counseling** (Rom. 16:14; 1 Thess. 5:14). As believers within the body are built up in the Word, trained for ministry, and exercise their gifts, they should naturally be able to meet many of the counseling needs within the church.

(3) **Disciplining** (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1-4). Because of the clear mandates of Scripture, church discipline is not an option. It is vital for the purity, power, progress, and purpose of the church. Without this restorative ministry, conditions continue which defile, weaken, hinder, and divert the church from its holy calling. However, discipline must be carried out with biblical attitudes, motives, and goals.

(4) **Sharing, Giving** (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 6:7; 1 John 3:16-17). The church must be taught the principles of grace giving, eternal priorities, and encouraged to sacrificially meet the needs of the ministry of the church and others through words, deeds, and gifts of love.

(5) **Laboring Together as a Team** (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 14f; Phil. 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Recognizing the body concept and learning to work together as a team with every believer knowing and using their gift(s) is critical for the proper and effective functioning of the body of Christ.

(6) **Helping** (Rom. 15:1-3; 16:2; Phil. 2:4; 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:14; Tit. 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14). As members of the body of Christ, we need one another and we must learn to care for one another. Another dimension of a healthy church is taking interest in those who need help, being zealous and ready for every good deed in order to meet pressing needs.

Ministry of Prayer—Calling on the Lord by . . .

(1) **Confession** (1 Cor. 11:28; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:13). Believers should be encouraged to keep short accounts with God in order to keep a conscience void of offense and stay in fellowship for the purpose of God's glory, effective prayer, meaningful worship, biblical understanding and growth, and effective ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(2) **Adoration** (Eph. 3:20-21). Believers need to be challenged to make every aspect of their life an act of worship to God by which they count and act on the glories of God's person and grace. Unless this is true, the Sunday worship service becomes mere lip service, an exercise of self-worship by which people seek to satisfy selfish ends while they manage to keep their hearts from God (Isa. 29:13).

(3) **Intercession and Petition** (Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:2-3, 12; Phil. 4:6-7; 2 Tim. 2:1f). Effectual prayer for others, for oneself and family, for the nation and its leaders, and for the ministry of the church is crucial to all that the church is and does.

The Church Scattered—Evangelization—Penetrating Society

Doing Good—Our Walk—Modeling the Word (Titus 3:1, 8, 14)

(1) **Making Friends** (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:33; John 4:4f; Gal. 6:10a; Tit. 3:14). Believers must be taught and encouraged to build bridges and develop relationships with the lost. Penetrating society for contact is vital to evangelism. People must learn to help their neighbors, show mercy, and, according to their ability, give to those in need to demonstrate the love of Christ and build bridges for the gospel.

(2) Preserving (Matt. 5:13-16; 2 Thess. 2:6-7). The calling of the church is not to control the political process at local, state, or national levels, but to seek genuine political and moral reform by spiritual renewal through prayer and reaching our society for Christ because it is impossible to effect genuine political reform through legislation without spiritual reformation.

Sharing the Gospel—Our Talk—Giving Out the Word (Col. 4:5-6; 1 Thess. 1:7-8)

(1) The Means—Personal Witnessing (Rom. 10:17; Luke 10:2). The church must be involved in an active ministry of sharing the gospel to the lost. This should involve an outreach to all ages and groups in order to fulfill the great commission.

(2) The Methods—Sharing, Refuting, Reasoning, Persuading, Demonstrating, Proving (Acts 9:22; 17:17; 18:4, 28; 19:8-9; 1 Pet. 3:15). While only the Spirit of God can illuminate a person's heart to the truth of the gospel, God still uses the witness of the believer.

The Motivation—Preparation Through Training

Because of this, the church must be taught, trained, and challenged not only to share its faith, but to be able to give a verbal defense for what it believes (Eph. 4:11f; Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20).

Performance Standards of Success

False Standards of Measurement

Biblical success for a church should never be measured in bodies, bucks, and buildings, or names, numbers, and noses, or in action, activities, and busy agendas, or even in the presence of sound beliefs and teaching. Even a casual reading of the letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 make this clear.

True Standards of Measurement

The basic question is not how many people are present, but how Christ-like are the people? How much are they allowing the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to impact their lives? How well are they fulfilling the great purposes of Scripture? Are the people growing in the Word and in their relationship with Christ? What kind of families does it have? What kind of values, priorities, and pursuits are controlling the lives of its people? Are they honest in business, trained to share their faith, involved in ministry and penetrating society—the work place, their neighborhoods, friends, associates, and family?

PART III: The Direction, Administration, and Organization of the Church

Principles of Leadership in the Church

The Principle of Identification

Because of confusion regarding the roles of pastor and flock, a confusion created largely by certain cultural expectations that have developed over the years, it has become even more imperative that we all have a clear biblical understanding of who the leaders and people are if churches are going to have effective ministries. Why? Because it affects what they do and expect from one another. (Compare Eph. 4:12; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

The Leaders

The leaders of the church are referred to as “elders” (*presbuteroi*, Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17), “overseers” (*episkopoi*, Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1), “leaders” (*proistameno*i, Rom. 12:8; 1 Thess. 5:12), and “pastor/teachers” (*poimenas-didaskalous*, Eph. 4:11; cf. also Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet. 5:2 with 1 Tim. 3:2, “able to teach,” 5:17b, and Tit. 1:9). Though each of these terms may describe the different aspects of leadership, they seem to be used interchangeably to designate the same office. Above all, as Ephesians 4:11f makes clear, **they are equippers** whose agenda (priorities, allotment of time, and duties) are to be ordered by the Word of God, not by the agendas of people following their cultural expectations set by the traditions of men.

The People

The people of the church are ministers who are to be trained for the kind of growth in the Word that results in changed lives and ministry. Pastors/elders are to be a gifted, trained, and skilled believers whom God has called to lead a group of fellow priests or ministers, not a minister who leads a group of lay spectators. [See Appendix A for elaboration.]

The Principle of Pastoral Priorities in Responsibilities

The Necessity of Establishing Priorities (Acts 6:2)

When the apostles were confronted with how to meet the needs of the people, they first approached the problem by establishing priorities. They said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Biblical priorities must determine responsibilities.

The Necessity of Training and Delegation (Acts 6:3-4; Ex. 18:1f; 1 Tim. 4:6, 11-16; 2 Tim. 2:2, 15)

Facing the limitations of one man, the necessity of priorities, and the giftedness of the body of Christ naturally leads to the importance of training and delegation. Neither Moses, following Jethro’s advice, nor the apostles ignored the legitimate needs of the people, but neither did they allow themselves to be distracted from the primary needs of the people and the priorities of the Word. It becomes important, therefore, for pastors to train the body of saints in the basics of the Word and delegate various aspects of ministry to other members of the body according to their gifts and the Lord’s leading in each believer’s life.

Personal Priorities for Pastors or Elders—The pursuit of God (Matt. 6:33)

God is the central priority. Everything else flows from this center like spokes in a wheel (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:34-35; 23:6).

- (1) A strong marriage relationship (Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 3:4).
- (2) Training and disciplining one’s children (Eph. 6:4; 1 Tim. 3:4-5).
- (3) Serving the church in his pastoral responsibilities as set forth in Scripture (1 Pet. 5:2-3).
- (4) Modeling the character of Christ (1 Tim. 4:12, 15; 1 Pet. 5:3).
- (5) Modeling the great commission: doing the work of evangelism with neighbors, friends, relatives, etc. (1 Tim. 3:7).

Please note: Serving the church is not number one on the list of personal priorities. It is one of four key responsibilities. Too many men have ignored this and have broken up on the rocks of adultery or divorce or have experienced spiritual burnout because they put their ministry ahead of their relationship with God and ignored their families.

Pastoral Priorities for Pastors/Elders

PRIMARY

(1) Prayer, in-depth Bible study, and spiritual preparation for teaching and communicating the Word. Teaching then becomes an overflow of a life bathed in the Word (Ezra 7:6-10; John 15:7; Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:1-3, 16; 1 Tim. 4:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:15).

(2) Preaching and teaching the Word (1 Tim. 4:6, 11-13; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Cor. 9:16). Some Goals:

- Teach the people to love the Word of God (Isa. 66:2; Ps. 1:1-3).
- Lead people to submit to the authority of the Word and to see obedience as a major goal of their lives (Josh. 1:8).
- Demonstrate that the proclamation of the Word is critical to worship (John 4:24).
- Motivate people to look for and live in view of the coming of the Lord (Tit. 2:1, 11-15).
- Motivate people to good deeds or ministry (Tit. 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14)

(3) Discipling leaders and future leaders (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2)

SECONDARY

(1) Calling, visiting, counseling (Rom. 15:1-4; 1 Thess. 5:11-12; Jam. 1:27; 5:14).

(2) Administrative functions: thinking, planning and organizing, letters, etc.

The Principle of Plurality and Equality

In keeping with maintaining the priorities, the limited capacity of one man, and the giftedness of the body of Christ under His headship, authority, and preeminence, New Testament leadership appears to have been plural and equal with no system of hierarchy. Certain men will naturally function as leaders among the leaders because of their training, giftedness, wisdom, knowledge, and experience, but all are equal and accountable to each other. (Compare Acts 15 and the leadership demonstrated by James among the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Also compare Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 5:17.) See Appendix B for elaboration.

The Principle of Selectivity and Quality

The most important element in selecting leaders is their spiritual qualification. Selection is the process of applying biblical standards to the selection of leaders, but these are to be leaders chosen by the Holy Spirit. It means the greatest need is not leaders, but spiritual men. It also necessitates the intentional training and preparation of men to take a leadership role (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1f; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:6f).

In his classic on leadership, Oswald Sanders writes,

The Holy Spirit does not take control of any man or body of men against their will. When He sees elected to positions of leadership men who lack spiritual fitness to cooperate with Him, He quietly withdraws and leaves them to implement their own policy according to their own standards, but without His aid. The inevitable issue is an unspiritual administration.⁴

Choosing men according to biblical standards means we must seek to select only those who have modeled commitment and obedience as an emergent leadership. This creates standards and establishes training examples who model the message (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3).

⁴ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 98.

The Principle of Purity of Philosophy

(1) **Definition:** Philosophical purity simply refers to an agreement, especially among the leaders, but extending to a broad base in the congregation, concerning (1) the purposes, goals, and product of the church, (2) the priority of certain ministries over others (exposition, training, evangelism, etc., versus some of the typical expectations that people have regarding the church), and (3) the methods used to reach those objectives.

(2) **Description:** Philosophical purity means unity or oneness of mind, harmonious agreement, but not necessarily unanimity, the complete agreement on all issues (cf. Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 1:10). Unity means coming to a working agreement based on a common objective.

(3) **Necessity:** Philosophical purity is vital to the kind of ministry that is able to multiply itself in growing, mature people who become engaged in the work of ministry in evangelism and edification.

(4) **Key Scriptures:** John 17:11-23; Eph. 4:3-16; Phil. 1:27; 2:2.

The Principle of Servant-Like Ministry

The church must be led by those who have the heart and life of a servant whose motives are pure (John 13:1f; Luke 22:26; 1 Thess. 2:3-8).

The Principle of Autonomy

Each local church is a separate entity in and of itself with its own God-given leaders and is answerable directly and only to Christ (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:3).

Principles of Administration and Organization for the Church

Principles of Administration

The following is summarized from *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*:⁵

(1) **Face the Reality of the Problems:** Problems do not go away, they only get worse. They must be faced and dealt with according to the principles of Scripture.

(2) **Develop a Clear Understanding of the Problem Before Seeking Concrete Solutions:** This means getting all the facts available and then prayerfully seeking biblical solutions.

(3) **Delegate Responsibility to Qualified People:** This principle follows naturally the “establishment of priorities” as seen in Exodus 18 and Acts 6. Note: Scripture stresses that this must be done with people who are qualified spiritually and by their ability (gifts and training as is needed).

(4) **Establish Priorities According to Biblical Agendas:** In solving problems and meeting the needs of people, we must, as emphasized above, act in accord with God’s priorities or we create overload and burnout (cf. Ex. 18:18).

(5) **Solve Problems Creatively Under the Leading of the Holy Spirit:** It is easy to get locked into administrative routines that kill the freedom of the Spirit of God to lead us in different ways and use our God-given creativity.

Principles of Organization⁶

(1) **Organize to Apply New Testament Principles and to Accomplish New Testament Purposes:** Organization must never become an end in itself. We must seek to develop structures for the church which will help us

⁵ Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*, Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1974, p. 147f.

⁶ Getz, p. 155f.

accomplish New Testament purposes and objectives. When an organizational form ceases or fails to do that, it needs to be abandoned.

(2) Organize to Meet Needs According to Biblical Standards: We must never organize to organize. The New Testament church organized only when a need arose and only as long as the need existed.

(3) Keep Organization Simple: This follows the former. Organization must be functional to accomplish biblical purposes, goals, etc., and to meet needs. A good test: is the structure serving the goals or has it become an end in itself? Is it serving or is it being served?

(4) Keep Organization Flexible: Biblical leaders were never locked into organizational structures.

PART IV: Primary and Critical Foundations For the Church

The Authority of Scripture Over Belief and Practice

The prophet wrote, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). The authority of the Word of God is crucial and foundational to all that it is and does. We must not operate in a way that contradicts what is written in Scripture (1 Cor. 6:4). (Compare also 1 Tim. 1:10-11; 4:1-6; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Mk. 7:8-13; Col. 2:22.)

The Necessity for Clear Vision of the Church and Its Purpose for Being

Vision (seeing as God wants us to see) is crucial for the people of God. It is through vision that we know and stay aware of who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. Without vision, a church will end up in a maintenance program maintaining the status quo. This results in a church going nowhere (Prov. 28:18).

As God’s people, we need vision. We need to see the greatness of God and what is ours in Christ, but not simply for our own strokes or personal blessing. We need to see the world as God sees it and where our responsibilities lie as members of the body of Christ. This means a vision for (1) every member ministry, and (2) what ministry consists of in biblical terms.

The Pursuit of God—The Need for Abiding

This involves the principle of “from the inside out” (cf. Matt. 6:33; John 15:1-7; Eph. 3:16-19 with Isa. 29:13).

We are a consumer-oriented, self-centered, self-indulgent society bent on pleasing ourselves rather than seeking to know and love God. We tend to seek the wrong things and asking the wrong questions. We ask, “What can this church do for me? What can I get out of this church?” rather than “Can I know God here? What can I give, how can I serve?” We tend to worship worship and what we get out of it—a good feeling, a rosy glow, entertainment, etc., rather than thinking about God Himself and how His truth should impact our lives for God and the world. How do we turn this around? We begin by making God the number one priority and seeking to genuinely walk with Him in honest fellowship through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Personal Commitment to God, to the Great Commission, and the Stewardship of All We Are

To truly know God is to love God, and to love God is to be committed to Him and His purposes. It is to live with a view to eternity when we will be forever in His glorious presence. When this is not fundamental and kept in focus in the ministry of a church, the people will naturally withhold their lives because earthly and material treasures will be more important (Matt. 22:36-40; 6:19-24; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 4:16-18).

The Priesthood of Believers and the Principle of Every Believer Gifted by God for Service

There must be a commitment to teach the priesthood of believers and promote its implications for ministry along with its natural companion, the truth concerning spiritual gifts. Why? So more and more believers function as a body in unity with diversity. This is vital to an effective ministry. “Spectatoritis” is an ailment in the church that must be remedied if the church is to count for God (Rom. 12:3f; 1 Cor. 12:4f; Eph. 4:7f; 1 Pet. 2:5-11; 4:1-12).

Addendum A: The Team Concept of the Body of Christ

(Every Member a Minister)

The church is not a one-man team with the minister and the so-called laymen. Sadly, and to the hurt of the body of Christ, there still exists today a spirit of clericalism—the expectation that the professional clergy does the ministry. Though the belief that pastor-teachers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry is widespread and well known, it is rarely practiced and sorely hindered by pastoral expectations that simply do not line up with Scripture. Churches give lip service to the truth of Ephesians 4:11-16, but have a hard time managing to apply it because of these long-held expectations. There is still an iron-clad expectation that the pastor is to function in three areas:

(1) He prepares, teaches, and preaches the Word

This is a biblical expectation.

(2) He is also often expected not just to be the church manager, but the main administrator

He is to keep the administrative machinery oiled and running. In other words, churches often and unrealistically want a theologian, Bible expositor, and a corporate executive all rolled up into one. Some men may have all these gifts, most do not, but even when they do, is it biblically right to expect one man to do it all? Hardly!

(3) He must care for the flock

This includes everything: hospital visitation, home visitation, counseling, conducting funerals, officiating at weddings, attendance at all committee meetings, Sunday school parties, socials, and so on. If he is not involved in all these things and at all these functions, he is sometimes labeled “uncaring,” or is criticized with remarks like, “He does not have a pastor’s heart.” This is not necessarily true because it is a matter of priorities (cf. Mk. 1:35-39) and even giftedness (Rom. 12:3-8). His commitment to teaching the Word and training people can be a greater display of love and compassion because this ultimately meets the greater needs (Acts 6:2-5).

Some of these expectations are legitimate, but some of them must also be shared by other members of the body, starting with the pastoral team (the other elders), then the deacons and extending to the whole body (Eph. 4:16). The above list of expectations leaves little time for the main function of those who labor in the Word and teaching. The study and exposition of the Word and the equipping of the flock for the work of serving or ministry is the biblical mandate and priority for pastor/elders who follow the scriptural mandate.

The false expectations of our day have caused pastors to become general (generic) in their ministries because they too often let people set the agenda for them—not the Lord. They serve the people, but not Christ. Christ and the priorities of Scripture must set the agenda for a pastor’s ministry just as our Lord allowed the Father’s will to set His agenda regardless of the pressure of people (cf. Mk. 1:35-39). When the pastor serves people, he serves their vested interest and expectations. When he serves the Lord, he serves their best interest. Only when we serve Christ can the best interests of people be served. When this is not the case, you have burnout and frustration from trying to satisfy the whims, expectations, and desires of the flock which vary almost from person to person.

Like the great commission, we have worshipped Ephesians 4:12-16, but we haven’t obeyed it. This obviously needs to change. Pastors and churches need to develop a new mind set. They must see and make room for pastors to function in a more specialized role—the role of equippers. The ministry of “equipping the saints unto the work of ministry” must set the agenda. The biblical priority is functioning as teacher/equippers who get the work of ministry done through building others. It means the multiplication of ministry through every member (Eph. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Every believer is a priest of God to whom God has given personal stewardships, the stewardships of time, talents (including our spiritual gifts), truth, our bodies as God's temple, and treasures. This means personal responsibilities to be faithful to these trusts from God. This also means a team ministry with pastor-teachers (or the pastoral team) building up the saints unto the work of the ministry (their places of service and ministry) unto the building up of the body of Christ—the spiritual (*qualitative*), physical (*quantitative*), and organic growth of the church (the development of ministries)—through the exercise of these stewardships (Eph. 4:12). This means the leadership **PLUS** the rest of the flock serving and striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27)

Addendum B: Church Leadership

The leaders of the church are divided into two groups, elders and deacons. While considerable scriptural direction is given concerning the function and responsibilities of the elders, little or none is given for the deacons. Their function seems to be that of helpers to the elders in the work of ministry. Though the men chosen in Acts 6 are not identified as deacons, they may illustrate the concept of helping the elders in meeting the needs of the flock. We should not, however, limit the work of deacons to merely physical things for some of these men as Philip the evangelist and Stephen were gifted and served in the communication of the Word.

No little debate exists among conservative scholars regarding the number of elders each church had in New Testament times and should, therefore, have today. Some argue for the single pastor/elder while others argue for plural elders/pastors for each local church.

With one exception, whenever the New Testament speaks of elders or overseers, it speaks of them in the plural. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (pl.) in each church in the region of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:23). When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he addressed the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1). While some passages suggest the presence of an elder who became the spokesman for the leadership and may have even functioned as a leader among the elders, there is no suggestion any place of one man who was viewed as the pastor. Such a person was always accountable to the other elders and never ruled in a hierarchical fashion as was the case with Diotrophes (3 John 9-11).

Still, there are those who argue for the concept of one pastor or senior pastor. Their primary arguments are as follows:

(1) Biblical history illustrates God's use of one man as a leader of His people—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. It is argued that some churches claim to have a plurality of elders with no single leader, but objective observation clearly demonstrates one man often provides special leadership to the rest. But we are not under the Old Testament system, and the fact one man may function as a leader among the leaders is a poor argument for calling one man “the pastor.”

(2) When God began forming the church and planting churches, he used teams of men like Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but central to each team was the apostolic authority of men like Paul and Peter. They provided leadership among the leaders. But Paul and Peter were apostles with the foundational gift of an apostle, a gift especially used to establish the church (Eph. 2:20-21). Further, later on in his ministry, Peter saw himself as a fellow elder (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1).

(3) In Acts 15, concerning the dispute over grace and keeping the law and circumcision, several of the church leaders took prominent leadership, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, but James is the one who gave the verdict and seems to have functioned as a kind of president of the council or leader among the leaders. But such a fact gives no more authority for “the pastor” concept than the fact that Peter was the spokesman for the apostles during the Lord's ministry on earth.

(4) Early church history, specifically the writings of Ignatius, teach us that a single pastor or overseer, assisted by other elders and deacons, became the widespread pattern within the churches by the turn of the century.⁷ But church history should not become our authority for theology, especially if it flies in the face of the plain teaching of the New Testament.

⁷ Bruce Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1982, p. 85.

(5) Finally, it is argued that several New Testament passages lend further support to the single pastor or at least leave room for this concept:

- 1 Timothy 3:1-12: All the terms describing the overseer or elder (both terms refer to the same office) are in the singular while all those describing deacons are plural. The Greek text employs the singular article with a singular noun, “the overseer” (*ton episkopon*) in verse 2. Some argue this shows that Paul had in mind a single pastor for each church. But the singular is a classic illustration of the generic article which looks collectively at a group or a class. Clearly the majority of commentators agree with this usage for the article in this passage. This is supported by the context of 1 Timothy and the plural used in 1 Timothy 5:17. Perhaps an illustration will help. If I were to say, speaking of our government, “If a man desires the office of senator, . . . for the senator must be, . . .” how would you understand this statement? Knowing the makeup of our government, you know I would be talking about a group, a class of men we call senators.
- It is often argued that the early church met in houses and probably had one elder for each house at least in the beginning stages until the church grew when more pastoral help was needed. Several of these churches constituted the church in a particular city. Even in Acts 14:23 where we are told elders were appointed in every church, this is a distinct possibility. When he speaks of “elders in each church,” Luke may be referring to the church as a whole in each city with its several house ministries. They would say the text is speaking of what they did in the three cities, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:21f). This idea, they would argue, finds support in Titus 1:5. But this is all supposition. The fact still remains that Scripture teaches a plurality of elders were appointed in each church.
- Revelation 2-3: Each message to the seven churches is addressed to the angel, *angelos*, of the church. Unless this is a guardian angel, which is very unlikely, the message is addressed to one leader who is responsible to present the message to the flock. In Acts 20, elders (plural) are gathered, yet in Revelation 2:1, one messenger is addressed. Why? The fact is, we really do not know. Perhaps the Lord simply singled out one leader to be the messenger of this special message to each of these churches. Regardless, the abundance of evidence in the rest of the New Testament supports a plurality of elders who operate on a parity with one another.

When considering all the data, three things seem to surface.

(1) All elders are pastors and should be engaged in the work of ministering the Word to the flock. But in many churches today, the leadership is divided into pastors and elders and deacons, or ruling elders and teaching elders with the ruling elders functioning more like glorified deacons or administrators who are engaged in very little pastoral ministry. They aren't really functioning like shepherds. Note the following:

- 1 Timothy 5:17 does not distinguish between two types of elders, “ruling” and “teaching.” First, the qualifications required of elders teach us that both functions were to be united in one person. Second, the differentiation in this verse is between those who do the work of study and teaching with less energy, devotion, and excellence and those who work harder and with greater commitment.
- In nearly every passage where elders or overseers or the leaders of the church are referred to, they are mentioned in connection with their responsibility to communicate the Word in some fashion (Acts 15:6; 20:27-32; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Tit. 1:9; Heb. 13:7; cf. also Eph. 4:11).
- All the elders will not, of course, have the same abilities and will vary in their giftedness, as in a pulpit ministry, but they should all be able to teach: be knowledgeable and trained in the Word and able to communicate it (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). In many churches, administration is the primary function of the board of elders. Some will undoubtedly excel in administration, but teaching is a crucial function to their work as shepherds.
- Their **MANDATE** is to lead and protect the flock, their **METHOD** is by teaching and example.

(2) Among the elders there may need to be one who functions as a leader and trainer of the others at least in the initial stages of the ministry (2 Tim. 2:2). In time, more elders may need to become full-time in ministry and supported by the church as the needs develop.

(3) The rotation system of elders seems to have no biblical support and may be more harmful to a church than it is protective. A church should have no more elders than are spiritually qualified and normally these should

continue to serve unless they need a sabbatical for rest or some other ministry. Rotating elders every three years, for instance, removes needed and effective leadership and often results in replacement with those who are less qualified.

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