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## ***The Disciple-Making Minister***

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

### **Chapter Eighteen The Ministry Gifts**

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift....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 (Eph. 4:7, 11-13, emphasis added).

And God has appointed in the church, first *apostles*, second *prophets*, third *teachers*, then *miracles*, then *gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues* (1 Cor. 12:28, emphasis added).

The *ministry gifts*, as they are often called, are the callings and various abilities given to certain believers that enable them to stand in the offices of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher. No one can put himself or herself into one of these offices. Rather, one must be called and gifted by God.

It is possible that one person might occupy more than one of these five offices, but only certain combinations are feasible. For example, it is possible that a believer might be called to stand in the office of pastor and teacher or of prophet and teacher. It would be unlikely, however, that one could stand in the office of pastor and evangelist simply because the pastor's ministry requires that he remain in one place serving a local flock, and thus he could not fulfill the calling of an evangelist who must travel frequently.

Although these five offices are all gifted differently for different purposes, they have all been given to the church for one general purpose—for the "equipping of the saints for the work of service" (Eph. 4:12).<sup>1</sup> *The goal of every minister should be to equip holy people* (which is what the word "saints" means) *for acts of service*. Too often, however, those in ministry act as if they are called, not to equip holy people for service, but to entertain carnal people who sit in services—church services. Every person called to one of these offices should constantly evaluate his contribution to the "equipping of the saints for the work of service." If every minister did, many would eliminate numerous activities erroneously considered "ministry."

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<sup>1</sup> This is just another way of saying, "For making disciples of Jesus Christ."

## Were Some Ministry Gifts Only for the Early Church?

How long will these ministry gifts be given to the church? Jesus will give them as long as His holy people need to be equipped for service, which is at least until He returns. The church constantly takes in newborn Christians who need to grow, and the rest of us always have room to mature spiritually.

Some have unfortunately concluded that only two kinds of ministries exist today—pastors and evangelists—as if God has changed His plan. No, we still need apostles, prophets and teachers as much as the early church did. The reason we don't see examples of these gifts among much of the church around the world is simply because Jesus gives these gifts to *His* church, not the phony, unholy, false-gospel church. In the phony church can be found only those who make a feeble attempt to fulfill the roles of some of the ministry gifts (mostly pastors and perhaps a few evangelists), but they hardly resemble the God-called and anointed ministry gifts that Jesus gives to *His* church. They certainly aren't equipping the holy people for acts of service, because the very gospel they proclaim doesn't result in holiness; it only deceives people into thinking they are forgiven. And those people have no desire to be equipped for service. They have no intention of denying themselves and taking up their crosses.

## How do You Know if You are Called?

How does a person know if he or she is called to one of these offices in the church? First and foremost, he will feel a divine calling from God. He will find himself burdened to fulfill a certain task. This is much more than simply seeing a need that could be filled. Rather, it is a God-given hunger within that *compels* a person into a certain ministry. If he is truly called of God, he cannot be satisfied until he begins to fulfill his calling. This has nothing to do with being appointed by a man or a committee of people. God is the one who does the calling.

Second, the truly-called person will find himself equipped by God to fulfill his God-given task. Each of the five offices carries with it a supernatural anointing that enables the individual to do what God has called him to do. With the calling comes the anointing. *If there is no anointing, there is no calling.* One may aspire to function in a certain ministry, attend Bible School for four years educating himself and preparing for that ministry, but without the anointing from God, he has no chance of true success.

Third, he will find that God has opened some door of opportunity for him to exercise his particular gifts. In this way he can prove himself faithful, and eventually he will be entrusted with greater opportunities, responsibilities and gifts.

If a person hasn't felt a divine inner compulsion and calling to one of the five ministry gifts, or if he isn't aware of any special anointing to fulfill a God-given task, or if no opportunity has arisen to exercise the gifts he thinks he possesses, that person should not attempt to be something God has not called him to be. Rather, he should work to be a blessing among his local church body, his neighborhood, and at his workplace. Even though he isn't called to the "five-fold" ministry, he is called to serve using the gifts God has given him, and he should strive to prove himself faithful.

Although Scripture mentions five ministry gifts, this does not mean that every person who stands in a certain office will have an identical ministry. Paul wrote that "varieties of ministries" exist (1 Cor. 12:5), making variations between ministers who stand in the same office possible. Furthermore, there seem to be various levels of anointing resting upon those in these offices, so we could further categorize each office by degree of anointing. For example, there are some teachers that appear to be more anointed in certain ways than other teachers. The same is true of the other ministry gifts. I personally believe that any minister can do things that will result in an increased anointing upon his ministry, such as prove himself faithful over a period of time and deeply consecrate himself to God.

## **A Closer Look at the Office of Apostle**

The Greek word translated *apostle* is *apostolos* and literally means “one who is sent.” A true New Testament apostle is a believer divinely sent to a certain place or places to establish churches. He lays the spiritual foundation of God’s “building” and is somewhat comparable to a “general contractor,” as Paul, an apostle himself, wrote:

For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise *master builder* I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it (1 Cor. 3:9-10a, emphasis added).

A “master builder,” or general contractor, oversees the entire building process—he envisions the finished product. He’s not a specialist like the carpenter or the bricklayer. He *may* be able to do the work of a carpenter or bricklayer, but probably not as well as they can. Likewise, the apostle has the ability to do the work of an evangelist or pastor, but only for a limited time as he establishes churches. (The apostle Paul usually remained in one place from six months to three years).

The apostle is best at establishing churches and then overseeing them to keep them on God’s course. An apostle is responsible for installing elders/pastors/overseers to shepherd each congregation he plants (see Acts 14:21-23; Tit. 1:5).

### **True and False Apostles**

It seems that some ministers today, longing for authority over churches, are quick to proclaim their supposed calling to be apostles, but most have a big problem. Since they’ve established no churches (or perhaps only one or two) and don’t have the gifts and anointing of a biblical apostle, they must find gullible pastors who will allow them to have authority over their churches. If you are a pastor, don’t be fooled by these self-exalted, power-hungry false apostles. They are usually wolves in sheep’s clothing. Often they are after money. Scripture warns against false apostles (see 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2). If they have to tell you that they are apostles, that is probably an indication that they are not apostles. Their fruit should speak for itself.

A pastor who establishes his own church and stays to pastor it for years is not an apostle. Such pastors, *perhaps*, could be referred to as “apostolic pastors” since they pioneered their own church. Still, they don’t stand in the office of apostle because an apostle continually plants churches.

A truly God-sent and anointed “missionary,” as they are often called today, whose main calling is to establish churches, would stand in the office of an apostle. On the other hand, missionaries who work at setting up Bible schools or training pastors would not be apostles but teachers.

A true apostle’s ministry is characterized by supernatural signs and wonders, which are instrumental in helping him establish churches. Paul wrote:

In no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles (2 Cor. 12:11b-12).

If a person doesn’t have signs and wonders accompanying his ministry, he is not an apostle. Obviously, true apostles are rare, and they don’t exist in the phony, unholy, false-gospel church. I find them mainly in the places of the world that still have virgin territory for the gospel.

## **The High Rank of the Apostle**

In both New Testament lists of the ministry gifts, the office of apostle is listed first, indicating that it is the highest calling (see Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28).

No one begins his ministry as an apostle. A person may be called to be an apostle *eventually*, but he won't start out in that office. He must first prove himself to be faithful over a period of years in preaching and teaching, then, eventually, he will stand in the office God has prepared for him. Paul was called from his mother's womb to be an apostle, but he spent many years in fulltime ministry before he finally stood in that office (see Gal. 1:15-2:1). He actually began as a teacher and a prophet (see Acts 13:1-2), and was later promoted to be an apostle when he was sent out by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 14:14).

We find mention of other apostles besides Paul and the original twelve in Acts 1:15-26; 14:14; Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 8:23; Gal. 1:17-19; Phil. 2:25 and 1 Thes. 1:1 with 2:6. (The word translated *messenger* in 2 Cor. 8:23 and Phil. 2:25 is the Greek word *apostolos*.) This dispels the theory that the apostolic office was limited to only twelve men.

Only twelve apostles, however, can be classified as "Apostles of the Lamb," and only those twelve will have a special place in the millennial reign of Christ (see Matt. 19:28; Rev. 21:14). We no longer need apostles like Peter, James and John who were uniquely inspired to write Scripture, because the Bible revelation is complete. Today, however, we still need apostles who establish churches by the power of the Holy spirit, just as Paul and other apostles did, as described in the book of Acts.

## **The Office of Prophet**

A prophet is one who receives supernatural revelation and speaks by divine inspiration. Naturally, he is used frequently in the spiritual gift of prophecy as well as the revelation gifts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and discerning of spirits.

Any believer may be used of God in the gift of prophecy as the Spirit wills, but that does not make him a prophet. A prophet is, first of all, a minister who can preach or teach with an anointing. Because the prophet seems to be the second highest calling (see the order as it is listed in 1 Cor. 12:28), even a fulltime minister would not be placed in the office of a prophet until he has been in ministry for some years. If he does stand in that office, he will have the supernatural equipment that goes with it.

Two men who are named as prophets in the New Testament are Judas and Silas. We read in Acts 15:32 that they delivered a lengthy prophecy to the church in Antioch:

And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

Another New Testament example of a prophet would be Agabus. In Acts 11:27-28 we read:

Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius.

Notice that Agabus was given a word of wisdom—something about the future was revealed to him. Of course, Agabus didn't know everything that would happen in the future, he only knew what the Holy Spirit willed to reveal to him.

In Acts 21:10-11, there is another example of the word of wisdom operating through Agabus' ministry. This time it was on behalf of one person, Paul:

And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

It is scriptural under the new covenant to seek personal guidance from prophets? No. The reason is because all believers have the Holy Spirit within them to guide them. A prophet should only *confirm* to a believer what he already knows is God's direction in his own spirit. For example, when Agabus prophesied to Paul, he gave him no direction as to what he was supposed to do; he only confirmed what Paul had known for some time.

As stated previously, Paul stood in the office of a prophet (and teacher) before he was called to the ministry of an apostle (see Acts 13:1). We know that Paul received revelations from the Lord according to Gal. 1:11-12, and he also had a number of visions (see Acts 9:1-9; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 2 Cor. 12:1-4).

As with true apostles, we don't find true prophets within the false church. The false church would (and does) shun true prophets like Silas, Judas or Agabus. The reason is because true prophets would bring a revelation of God's displeasure of their disobedience (as did John to most of the churches of Asia Minor in the first two chapters of Revelation). The false church isn't open to that.

### **The Office of Teacher**

According to the listed order in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the office of teacher is the third highest calling. A teacher is one who is supernaturally anointed to teach the Word of God. Just because someone teaches the Bible does not mean he is a New Testament teacher. Many teach simply because they like to or feel obligated to, but a person who stands in the office of teacher is supernaturally gifted to teach. He is often given supernatural revelation concerning the Word of God and can explain the Bible in a manner that makes it understandable and applicable.

Apollos is a New Testament example of one who stood in this office. Paul compared his apostolic ministry and the teaching ministry of Apollos in 1 Corinthians by saying:

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth....I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it (1 Cor. 3:6, 10b, emphasis added).*

Apollos the teacher did not do the original planting or laying of the foundation. Instead, he watered the new sprouts with the Word of God and built walls on the existing foundation.

Apollos is also mentioned in Acts 18:27:

*And when he [Apollos] wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*

Notice that Apollos "helped greatly" people who were already Christians and that his teaching was described as "powerful." Anointed teaching is always powerful.

For the church, the teaching ministry is even more important than the working of miracles or gifts of healings. That is why it is listed before those gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28:

*And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings (emphasis added).*

Unfortunately, believers are sometimes more attracted to seeing healings than to listening to the clear teaching of the Word that will produce spiritual growth and holiness in their lives.

The Bible speaks of both preaching and teaching. Teaching is more logical and instructional, whereas preaching is more inspirational and motivational. Evangelists generally preach. Teachers and pastors generally teach. Apostles preach and teach. It is to be regretted that some believers don't recognize the value of teaching. Some even think that the only time speakers are anointed is if they are preaching loud and fast! That is just not so.

Jesus is the best example of an anointed teacher. His teaching was such a predominate part of His ministry that many addressed Him as "Teacher" (Matt. 8:19; Mark 5:35; John 11:28).

For further study about teachers and teaching, see Acts 2:42; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:22-26; 13:1; 15:35; 18:11; 20:18-20; 28:30-31; Rom. 12:6-7; 1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 6:6; Col. 1:28; 1 Tim. 4:11-16; 5:17; 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2:2 and Jas. 3:1. The last scripture listed tells us that teachers will incur a stricter judgment, and so they ought to be very cautious what they teach. They should only teach the Word.

### **The Office of Evangelist**

The evangelist is one who is anointed to preach the gospel. His messages are designed to lead people to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are accompanied by miracles that attract the attention of unbelievers and convict them of the truthfulness of his message.

No doubt there were many evangelists in the early church, but only one man is listed in the book of Acts as being an evangelist. His name was Philip: "And entering the house of *Philip the evangelist*, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him" (Acts 21:8, emphasis added).

Philip began his ministry as a servant (or perhaps "deacon") who waited on tables (see Acts 6:1-6). He was promoted to the office of evangelist around the time of the persecution of the church that arose in connection with Stephen's martyrdom. His first preached the gospel in Samaria:

And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was much rejoicing in that city (Acts 8:5-8).

Notice that Philip had one message—Christ. His goal was to begin making disciples, that is, obedient followers of Christ. He proclaimed Christ as miracle worker, Son of God, Lord, Savior and soon-coming Judge. He urged people to repent and follow his Lord.

Also notice that Philip was equipped with supernatural signs and wonders that authenticated his message. One who stands in the office of evangelist will be anointed with gifts of healings and other spiritual gifts. The false church has only false evangelists who proclaim a false gospel. The world is full of such evangelists today, and it is obvious that God is not confirming their message with miracles and healings. The simple reason is because they are not preaching His gospel. They don't really preach Christ. They usually preach about people's needs and how Christ can give them abundant life, or they preach a formula of salvation that doesn't include repentance. They lead people into a false conversion that salves their guilt but doesn't save them. The results of their preaching is that people have even less of a chance of ever being born again, because now they see no

need to receive what they think they already have. Such evangelists actually help build Satan's kingdom.

The office of evangelist is not listed with the other ministry gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28 as it is in Ephesians 4:11. I assume, however, that the reference there to "miracles and gifts of healings" applies to the evangelist's office since those characterized Philip the evangelist's ministry, and they would naturally give supernatural authentication to any evangelist's ministry.

Many who travel from church to church calling themselves evangelists are not really evangelists because they preach only in church buildings to Christians, and they are not equipped with gifts of healings or miracles. (Some pretend to have such gifts, but they can fool only the naive. Their biggest miracles are getting people to fall over temporarily when they push them over.) These traveling ministers may be teachers or preachers or exhorters (see Rom. 12:8), but they do not stand in the office of evangelist. It is possible, however, that God might begin a person's ministry as an exhorter or preacher and later promote him to the office of evangelist.

For further study concerning the office of evangelist, read Acts 8:4-40, a record of Philip's ministry. Notice there the importance of the inter-dependence of the ministry gifts (see in particular verses 14-25) and how Philip not only preached the gospel to the multitudes but was led of God to minister to individuals as well (see Acts 8:25-39).

It seems that evangelists are commissioned to baptize their converts, but they are not necessarily commissioned to minister the baptism in the Holy Spirit to new believers. That would primarily be the responsibility of apostles or pastors/elders/overseers.

### **The Office of Pastor**

In two earlier chapters, I compared the biblical role of the pastor with that of the average institutional pastor. There is, however, still more to say about the pastor's ministry.

In order to fully understand what Scripture teaches about the office of pastor, we need to understand three key Greek words. In the Greek language they are (1) *poimen*, (2) *presbuteros* and (3) *episkopos*. They are consecutively translated (1) *shepherd* or *pastor*, (2) *elder*, and (3) *overseer* or *bishop*.

The word *poimen* is found eighteen times in the New Testament and is translated *shepherd* seventeen times and *pastor* once. The verb form, *poimaino*, is found eleven times and is most often translated *shepherd*.

The Greek word *presbuteros* is found sixty-six times in the New Testament. Sixty of those times it is translated *elder* or *elders*.

Finally, the Greek word *episkopos* is found five times in the New Testament, and is translated *overseer* four of those times. The King James Version translates it as *bishop*.

All three of these words refer to the same position in the church, and they are used interchangeably. Whenever the apostle Paul established churches, he appointed elders (*presbuteros*) whom he left to take care of the local congregations (see Acts 14:23, Tit. 1:5). Their responsibility was to act as overseers (*episkopos*) and shepherd (*poimaino*) their flocks. For example, in Acts 20:17 we read:

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the *elders* [*presbuteros*] of the church (emphasis added).

And what did Paul say to those church elders?

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers* [*episkopos*], to *shepherd* [*poimaino*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts. 20:28, emphasis added).

Notice the interchangeable use of the three Greek words. They are not three different offices. Paul told the *elders* that they were *overseers* who were to act like *shepherds*.

Peter wrote in his first epistle:

Therefore, I exhort the *elders* [presbuteros] 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* [poimaino] the flock of God among you, 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 Pet. 5:1-4, emphasis added).

Peter told the *elders* to *shepherd* their flocks. The verb that is here translated *shepherd* is translated (in its noun form) as *pastor* in Ephesians 4:11:

And He [Jesus] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as *pastors* and teachers (emphasis added).

This also leads us to believe that elders and pastors are the same.

Paul also used the words *elder* (presbuteros) and *overseer* (episkopos) interchangeably in Titus 1:5-7:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint *elders* in every city as I directed you....For the *overseer* must be above reproach (emphasis added).

Thus it cannot be reasonably debated that the office of pastor, elder, and overseer are not all the same office. Anything written about overseers and elders in the New Testament epistles is therefore applicable to pastors.

### **Church Governance**

It is also very clear from the above-quoted scriptures that not only have the elders/pastors/overseers been given the spiritual oversight of the church, they also have been given the governmental authority. Quite simply, the elders/pastors/overseers are in charge, and the members of the churches should submit to them:

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account (Heb. 13:17).

Of course, no Christian should submit to a pastor who is not submitted to God, but he should also recognize that no pastor is perfect.

The pastors/elders/overseers have authority over their churches just as a father has authority over his family:

An overseer [pastor/elder] must be above reproach....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?*) (1 Tim. 3:2-5, emphasis added).

Paul went on to say,



Let the elders [pastors / overseers] *who rule well* be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17, emphasis added).

Clearly, elders are to govern the church.

### **Unscriptural Elders**

Many churches believe their governing structure is biblical because they have a group of elders who govern, but their problem is that their concept of elders is incorrect. Their elders are regularly elected and rotated from within the congregation. They are often referred to as "The Board of Elders." But such people are not elders by biblical definition. If we simply examine the requirements that Paul enumerated for a man to be an elder, this becomes quite clear. Paul wrote that an elder occupies a fulltime, and thus paid, teaching / preaching and governing position in the church (see 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 5:17-18; Tit. 1:9). Very few, if any, of the people who sit on church "elder boards" fit those qualifications. They are not paid; they do not preach or teach; they do not work fulltime for the church; and they rarely know how to manage a church.

Unscriptural church government could very well be the cause of more problems in local churches than any other thing. When the wrong people are ruling a church, there is trouble coming. It can open the door for strife, compromise and the total demise of a church. An unscriptural church governing structure is like a welcome mat for the devil.

I realize that I'm writing to pastors of institutional churches as well as house churches. Some institutional church pastors may be pastoring churches that already have unscriptural governing structures in place where elders are elected from the congregation. These unscriptural governing structures usually cannot be altered without strife developing.

My advice to any such pastors is to do his best with God's help to alter the governing structure of the church and endure the possible inevitable temporary conflict, as future regular conflict is inevitable if he doesn't do anything. If he succeeds by enduring some temporary strife, he will have avoided all that future strife. If he fails, he can always start a new church and do it scripturally from the start.

Though painful, in the long run he will probably bear more fruit for God's kingdom. If those who are currently governing his church are true disciples of Christ, he does have a chance of successfully convincing them to change the structure if he can respectfully convince them from Scripture to make the needed changes.

### **The Plurality of Elders?**

Some like to point out that elders are always spoken of in Scripture in the plural, thus purportedly showing that it is unscriptural to have a single elder / pastor / overseer leading a flock. This is, however, not conclusive proof in my opinion. The Bible does indeed mention that, in certain cities, more than one elder was overseeing the church, but it does not say that those elders were co-equal over one individual congregations. For example, when Paul gathered the elders from Ephesus (see Acts 20:17), it is quite obvious that those elders were from a city in which the overall body consisted of thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of people (see Acts 19:19). Thus there had to have been many flocks in Ephesus, and it is quite possible that each individual elder oversaw an individual house church.

There is no example in Scripture where God called a committee to do any task. When He wanted to deliver Israel from Egypt, He called one man, Moses, to be the leader. Others were called to help Moses, but all were subordinate to him, and like him, they each had individual responsibility over a certain sub-group of people. This pattern is repeatedly

found in Scripture. When God has a task, He calls one person to take responsibility, and He calls others to help that person.

Thus it seems unlikely that God would call a committee of elders of equal authority to oversee every little house church of twenty people. It seems like an invitation for strife.

This is not to say that every house church should be overseen by one and only one elder. It is to say, however, that if there is more than one elder in a church, the younger and less spiritually mature elder(s) should submit to the oldest and most spiritually mature elder. Scripturally, it is the churches, not Bible Schools, that are supposed to be the training grounds for young pastors/elders/overseers, and so it is quite possible and even desirable for there to be several elders/pastors/overseers in a house church, with the spiritually younger being disciplined by the spiritually older.

I have observed this phenomenon even in churches that are supposedly overseen by “equal” elders. There is always one who is looked up to by the others. Or there is one who is dominant while the others are more passive. Otherwise eventually there is strife. It is a fact that even committees always elect one chairperson. When a group of equals sets out to do a task, they recognize that there must be one leader. So it is in the church.

Additionally, the responsibility of elders is compared to the responsibility of fathers by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:4-5. Elders must manage their own households, otherwise they are not qualified to manage the church. But how well would a family with two equal fathers be managed? I suspect there would be problems.

Elders/pastors/overseers should be networked in the larger local body so there is mutual accountability among fellow-elders who can help if there is ever a problem that requires them. Paul wrote of a “presbytery” (see 1 Tim. 4:14), which must have been a meeting of *presbuteros* (elders) and possibly other men with ministry gifts. If there is a founding apostle, he too can be of service if there are problems in a local body that are the result of an elder who has erred. When institutional pastors go astray, it always results in big problems because of the structure of the church. There is a building and programs to maintain. But house churches can be instantly dissolved when a pastor goes astray. The members can simply join another body.

### **Authority to Serve**

Because God gives the pastor spiritual and governmental authority in his church, this does not give him the right to dominate his flock. He is not their Lord—Jesus is. They are not his flock—they are God’s flock.

Shepherd the flock of God among you, 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 for the flock.* And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:2-4, emphasis added).

Each pastor will have to give an account for his ministry some day before the judgment seat of Christ.

Additionally, in financial matters, a single pastor/elder/overseer should not act alone. If there is money being collected regularly or sporadically for any reason, others within the body should provide accountability so that there will be no mistrust regarding the handling of funds (see 2 Cor. 8: 18-23). This could be an elected or appointed group.

### **Paying Elders**

It is clear from Scripture that elders/overseers/pastors are to be paid, as they are fulltime workers in the church. Paul wrote,

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

The subject is clear—Paul even uses the word *wages*. His more vague phrase of letting the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor is easily understood when the context is considered. In the verses just before, Paul unmistakably wrote of the church's responsibility to support financially widows who otherwise would not be supported, and he began by using the same expression: "Honor widows who are widows indeed" (see 1 Tim. 5:3-16). So in this context, to "honor" means to financially support. Elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, receiving at least twice what is given to widows and more if they have children to support.

The institutional church around the world supports its pastors for the most part (and even in poor nations), but it seems that many house churches around the world, especially those in the West, do not. This, I believe, is due in part to the fact that many people's motives in the Western world for joining house churches is that they are really rebels at heart, and they are looking for and have found the least demanding form of Christianity that is available on the planet. They say they joined a house church because they wanted to escape the bondage of the institutional church, but they really wanted to escape any degree of commitment to Christ. They've found churches that ask for no financial commitment, churches that stand in sharp contrast to what Christ expects of His disciples. Those whose god is money and who prove it to be so by laying up their treasures on earth rather than in heaven are not true disciples of Christ (see Matt. 6:19-24; Luke 14:33). If one's Christianity doesn't affect what he does with his money, one is not a Christian at all.

House churches that claim to be biblical should be supporting their pastors, as well as taking care of the poor and supporting missions. In giving and in all financial matters, they should far excel institutional churches, since they have no buildings to pay for and no program staff to pay. It takes only ten people who do nothing more than tithe to support one pastor. Ten people who give 20% of their income can fully support one pastor and another missionary who lives at the same standard as their pastor.

### **What do Pastors do?**

Imagine asking the average church attendee, "Whose job it is to do the following things?"

Who is supposed to share the gospel with unsaved people? Live a holy life? Pray? Admonish, encourage and help other believers? Visit the sick? Lay hands on and heal the sick? Bear the burdens of others? Exercise his gifts on behalf of the body? Deny himself, sacrificing for the sake of God's kingdom? Make and baptize disciples, teaching them to obey Christ's commandments?

Many church attendees would, without hesitation, answer by saying, "Those are all responsibilities of the pastor." But are they?

According to Scripture, every believer is supposed to share the gospel with unsaved people:

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Pet. 3:15).

Every believer is supposed to live a holy life:

But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1Pet. 1:15-16)

Every believer is supposed to pray:

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:16-17).

Every believer is expected to admonish, encourage and help other believers:

And we urge you, *brethren*, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men (1Thes. 5:14, emphasis added).

Every believer is supposed to visit the sick:

I was naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me (Matt. 25:36).

### **More Responsibilities**

But that is not all. Every believer is supposed to lay hands upon and heal the sick:

And these signs will accompany *those who have believed*: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; *they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover* (Mark 16:17-18, emphasis added).

Every believer is to bear the burdens of fellow believers:

Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Every believer is expected to exercise his or her gifts on behalf of others:

And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:6-8).

Every believer is supposed to deny himself, sacrificing for the sake of the gospel:

And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If *anyone* wishes to come after Me, *let him deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:34-35, emphasis added).

And every believer is expected to make and baptize disciples, teaching them to obey Christ's commandments:

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps *and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19, emphasis added).

For though by this time *you ought to be teachers*, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food (Heb. 5:12, emphasis added).

Go therefore and *make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them* in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all that I commanded you*; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup>

All of these responsibilities are given to every believer, yet most church attendees think these tasks are given just to pastors! The reason is probably because pastors themselves so often think these tasks are solely their responsibility.

### **So What are Pastors Supposed to do?**

If all these responsibilities are given to every believer, what then are pastors supposed to do? *Quite simply, they are called to equip the holy believers to do all those things* (see Eph. 4:11-12). *They are called to teach those holy believers to obey all of Christ's commandments* (see Matt. 28:19-20) *by precept and example* (see 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:12-13; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:16-4:4; 1Pet. 5:1-4).

Scripture couldn't make this clearer. The biblical role of the pastor is not to gather as many people as possible at Sunday-morning church services. It is to "present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28). Biblical pastors don't tickle peoples' ears (see 2 Tim. 4:3); they teach, train, exhort, admonish, correct, reprove and rebuke, all based on God's Word (see 2 Tim. 3:16-4:4).

Paul listed some of the qualifications for a man to stand in the office of pastor in his first letter to Timothy. Fourteen of the fifteen have to do with his character, indicating that the example of his lifestyle is the most important thing:

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, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, 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, lest he 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 may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Comparing these qualifications with those that are often listed by institutional churches that are searching for a new pastor reveals the primary problem with so many churches. They are looking for an employee manager/entertainer/short-speech-giver/administrator/psychologist/activities and program director/fund-raiser/friend-of-everyone/work horse. They want someone to "run the ministry of the church." The biblical overseer, however, above all else must be a man of great character and commitment to Christ, a true servant, because his goal is to reproduce himself. He must be able to say to his flock, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

For further study concerning the pastor's office, see also Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim. 5:17-20; and Tit. 1:5-9.

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<sup>2</sup> If Jesus' disciples were to be expected to teach their disciples to obey everything He had commanded them, they consequently would have taught their disciples to make disciples themselves, baptizing and teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. So the making, baptizing and teaching of disciples would have been a perpetual commandment that was binding upon every successive disciple.

## **The Office of Deacon**

In closing, let me briefly mention something about deacons. The office of deacon is the only other office in the local church, and it is not among the five-fold ministry gifts. Deacons have no governing authority in the church as do elders. The Greek word translated *deacon* is *diakonos*, which literally means "servant."

The seven men appointed for the task of daily feeding the widows in the Jerusalem church are usually considered to be the first deacons (see Acts 6:1-6). They were chosen by the congregation and commissioned by the apostles. At least two of them, Philip and Stephen, were later promoted by God to be powerful evangelists.

Deacons are also spoken of in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1. Apparently this office can be filled by a man or woman (see 1 Tim. 3:11).