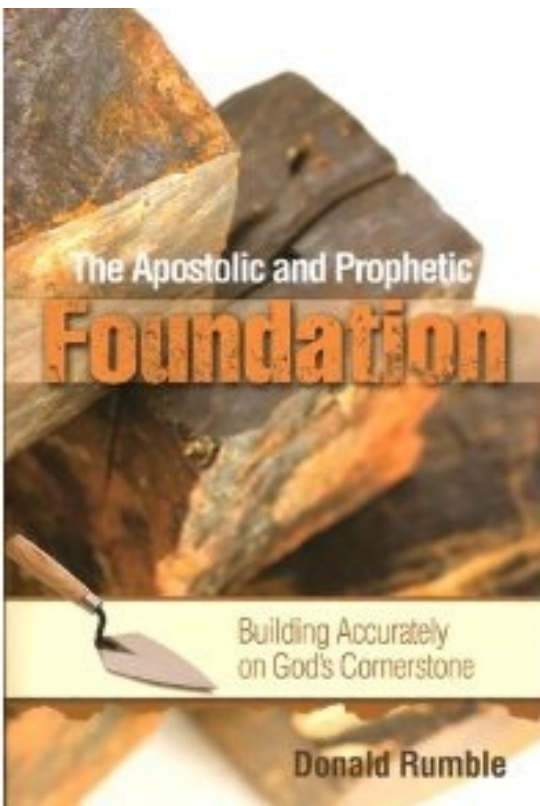


# The Apostolic and Prophetic Foundation

by Donald Rumble



I strongly recommend this book to every church leader who is either involved in or moving toward biblical eldership. It does not focus on the structural issues concerning elder-led assemblies but instead focuses on the spiritual issues. I consider it a must read. If you would like to obtain a copy of the book in paperback, it can be ordered at [ArsenalBooks.com](http://ArsenalBooks.com).

*David Huston*

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## Introduction

This book is intended to contribute to the growing body of literature on the theme of apostles and prophets. Whenever God restores truth, it is so the Church will *experientially grow into the reality of what He is revealing*. We have heard His emphasis concerning the restoration of these ministries and our response has been to verbalize it. This is good. We have also tried to implement it. This is also good, but it has had mixed results.

A danger lies in believing we fully possess what we are speaking about. Having correct terminology is not the same as walking in what God intended when He spoke. *His intent and our perspective of His intent are often not the same thing*. We know “in part” and are participating in an unfolding revelation of His person and purpose. He has much to reveal that we are not yet ready to receive. Today God is restoring these ministries to the Church and apostolic terminology abounds. However, we may not be as far along as we believe.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, his concern was not only *what* they built but also *how* they were building.

But let each one take heed *how* he builds.... (1Cor. 3:10)

Gold, silver and precious stones have to do not only with *what* is being constructed but more importantly with the *way* it is being done. Jesus is *the way*, the truth and the life (Jn.14:6). Many church leaders in our day point to *what* is occurring in their midst as a sign of God’s approval. People are being saved, numbers are increasing, elders function in team ministry, etc. However, as positive as these ingredients of church life appear, the question before us is whether or not we are learning and walking in God’s ways (Ps.103:7).

Today we stand at the end of the Charismatic renewal. That particular wave of God’s visitation has swept in from the ocean of His purpose and has now receded back again. Left in its wake are all the structures that have been built in the last twenty to twenty five years. Many of these church forms are important. However, the idea that these structures will be sufficient to contain what He is beginning to do is questionable. This raises the question, *Where is our commitment?* Is it to that which has been built or is it to Him who led us in the construction process?

It is true that we have come to understand certain aspects of moving in the Spirit. We have tasted an anointing for service, and God has blessed much that we have done. However, many of us have found our identity in our ministry. The words, “elder”, “pastor”, “prophet”, “teacher”, “deacon”, etc. have come to have significance when we think of who and what we are in God’s house. Here is an interesting question: What if He asked us to lay those terms aside? *What if we had to function in God’s house without them? What if we only had the grace and anointing of God coupled with the people’s*

*recognition of that anointing?*<sup>1</sup>

If we did not have the title of “elder”, “pastor”, etc., as a basis for why people should listen to us, would we still have authority in their sight? This is a crucial question. Are we training believers to respond to *the Lord*, or simply to men holding a position in the church? If the removal of “titles” changes the way we function, then I submit to you that perhaps our authority has become more positional than functional. Our activity has become more a reflection of what people expect of us rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the structure that formed over time through God’s operative grace in us gradually began to take precedence over the activity of God Himself. As a result, we have become stuck in a mold that seems to express order, but is in fact a restraint upon the initiatives of God. At this point, *corporate arthritis* has set in. This is a recipe for future shaking.

When the next wave of visitation arrives believers may well be motivated more to accomplish certain tasks within a set structure than to respond to God’s voice. Sadly, many today point to such activity as a mark of successful building; they are “equipping the saints.” No wonder Paul said that we must take heed how we build (1Cor. 3:10)!

*Lord, help us to wholeheartedly give ourselves to hearing and responding to You. By Your grace, continue to structure Your house through the initiatives of Your Holy Spirit in our midst. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> I am not suggesting that we actually get rid of these biblical terms. My question is rhetorical and is meant to stir an examination of how we function with their use in the Church.

## The Apostolic Task

### *Gathering Unto Men or Unto Christ?*

Paul's initial topic in his first epistle to the Corinthians concerns how an unhealthy view of the importance of men had divided the church at Corinth. Some were saying that they were "of Paul," some "of Apollos," and so on. Chapters 1 and 2 of the apostle's letter reveal why there is no basis to elevate men in such a manner.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1Cor. 1:26, 27, 29)

The foundation of a church is not based on the might nor the wisdom of men; it is based on Christ who is both the power and wisdom of God (1Cor. 1:24). Whenever a leader expresses godly wisdom, it is easy for others to think that he is very wise. If he is not quick to give all glory to Jesus, *the foundation is obscured*. Jesus is not seen as the source. *People are then attracted to the speaker more than to Him who is the Wisdom of God*. This leads to God's people gathering around men rather than being built upon Christ. Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that it was not his wisdom or power that established them.

I was with you in weakness...my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom...that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1Cor. 2:3 - 5)

The wisdom seen in Paul was of God. The world simply could not understand it. Such wisdom has not so much to do with the qualities of the man speaking as it does with the One anointing him to speak. If ministries are not faithful to point this out, they will build followings around themselves and the Church will be weakened.

Today, such man-centeredness is a very real problem. In any given locality, we can find sects and groups, each with its own prominent leader(s). The united house of

God is not in evidence; instead, divisions abound in the Lord's Church. It is interesting to note that Paul began his epistle by dealing with this topic instead of the problem of sexual immorality (1Cor. 5). I wonder how many in our day really understand this priority. It appears that none of the other truths of Paul's letter to Corinth could be adequately covered until *this* issue was first addressed.

Today, many Christian leaders are urging the Church to be more involved in social and political issues. Our responsibilities to the society in which we live are emphasized without seeing how our divisions undermine the message of life that society desperately needs to hear. We must come back to this foundational issue.

In city after city, there does not exist a united church. The divisions, sects, and groupings of God's people do not express the glory of God's house. It is no wonder the world considers the Church as irrelevant. We misrepresent God when we do not express the oneness of God!

How can our answers concerning social problems (or any other problems) have much impact when we do not function properly as His Church? We have settled for something less than God intended. This is not to minimize our responsibility to speak out concerning sin in society. However, we should first reexamine our foundations and *give primary attention to the apostolic vision of the headship and centrality of Christ in the construction of God's house.*

### *The Two-Fold Apostolic Task*

The unity that God is restoring to His people today is not expressed in uniformity but in diversity. He is establishing His character within each of His diverse children so that with all our varied giftings and personalities, we will not divide from each other but reflect the oneness that exists in Him. He is building His house for eternity. Foundational to this is the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries (Eph. 2:20, 21). The unified nature of the Church will become increasingly evident as God again raises up these two "ascension gift ministries" to serve His people. Unity in the Body of Christ may well be the most important objective of apostolic ministry. The Lord will not release the fullness of His authority and power to a divided, disunited Church.

Let us consider the apostolic task. The word "apostle" means one sent forth on a certain mission. Men were consistently sent on specific missions in the early Church: Paul and Barnabas from Antioch (Acts 13:3, 4), Judas and Silas from Jerusalem (Acts 15:22, 27), and Peter and John from Jerusalem (Acts 8:14).

Clearly though, the most significant apostle was Jesus, who was sent forth from the Father (Heb. 3:1). He is the perfect pattern for revealing the apostolic function. As we consider His ministry we are able to understand what constitutes apostolic servanthood. He was sent with a two-fold task. First, His ministry *among men before* Calvary:

I have glorified You on the earth. *I have finished the work* which You have given Me to do. (Jn. 17:4)

Secondly, His ministry *for men at Calvary*. There Jesus declared;

It is finished! (Jn. 19:30)

These two objectives should identify the work of every apostolic servant.

1. In Jn. 17:4 Jesus said that He accomplished His work. What was this work? It was to *accurately represent His Father on the earth*. This was His first task. No matter who He was with - the religious system of His day, a sick child, the multitudes, Satan, or His twelve apostles - Jesus always represented God perfectly.

He who has seen Me has seen the Father.... (Jn. 14:9)

...He has explained Him. (Jn. 1:18 NASB)

Similarly, *the first task of apostolic ministries is to accurately represent their Sender!* Notice that Paul never referred to himself as an apostle of Antioch; he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. He was not called to represent and duplicate the experience of Antioch everywhere he went; *his objective was to reveal Christ as the foundation, builder, and central figure of the house of God.*

We are not called primarily to represent a religious system or even a local church; we are ambassadors of Christ. We must represent *His* interests in the earth and not our own. To the degree personal desires and interests become mixed with our ministry, we cease to be apostolic. Too many men today come into various cities and towns with their own agendas. They want people to submit to their perspective of what God is doing (or what He is going to do now that *they* are in town!). True apostolic servants will seek to ascertain *what Jesus was doing in that area before they arrived*. After recognizing this, they will endeavor to align their efforts with His.

2. Jesus' second task was to *lay down His life as the foundation stone upon which the house of God would be built*. In His death He was the stone which the builders rejected. However, through His Father's predetermined plan He became the chief cornerstone of His house (1Pet. 2:7). Even though He was rejected by the religious leaders of His day, He was choice and precious in the sight of His Father (1Pet. 2:4).

God has purposed to build upon Him a house that will reflect the strength and glory of its foundation. Accordingly, the second task of apostles is to *lay down their lives in service unto God so as to accurately unveil Christ the foundation*. (We will look at this in more depth later.) When they do, what will be built through their ministries will not reflect their opinions, their ideas, their methods, their aspirations or even their interpretation of His instructions to them. *It will express Him!* He desires to raise up in



every place *an accurate, unique corporate expression of Himself*. For this task, God must raise up men who recognize their total inability to build anything for Him.

Thus says the Lord, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the Lord. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Isa. 66:1, 2 NASB)

A truly humble and contrite servant who recognizes the total impossibility of building a house for God will keep his hands off what the Lord is constructing. He will *recognize, point to and join in with* what *God* is bringing forth but will refuse to *organize* what he thinks *ought* to come forth. Finally he will take no credit for what emerges from the Spirit’s ministry.

*Lord, forgive me for when I have constructed in Your Name those things that were more an expression of my heart than of Yours. I lay down at Your feet all my own perspectives of what I believe You are going to do. Cause me to be more in love with Your person than with my opinions concerning You. And help me to discern the difference. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

## Apostolic Attributes

### *Apostles and the Apostolic Church*

Perhaps it can be said that prophets are concerned with the manifestation of God's glory in His house, and apostles are consumed with building God's house in such a way that His glory will abide in it. If there was only prophetic input, the church might be a bit chaotic. The house of God is not a mob of people each doing "his own thing."

There is a correct way to build so that order is preserved with the spontaneous prophetic moving of the Holy Spirit. Structure does not bring forth life, but life does give structure. *Correct building will be marked by the order and structure that springs from His life.* Much of what has been built in Christendom needs adjustment. There is a great need for those with insight on how to build.

Apostles are ones who are sent (Grk. APOSTOLOS - "one sent on a mission"). They are not pastors, teachers or evangelists who travel. The idea that apostles are local leaders who have attained a certain level of experience is without basis in Scripture. For example, it is possible for a young man such as Timothy to be an apostle (1Thess. 1:1; 2:6). On the other hand, God *may* choose to expand a man's heart, give him an apostolic burden, and release him to travel after he has been faithful pastorally in a local church for a number of years. That is His prerogative. The point is that an apostle is unique, with a specific calling, burden, emphasis and function. He will have unique insight into the mystery of the person of Christ and will seek to unveil Him as the foundation of God's house. There is indeed more to being an apostle than simply having a traveling ministry (Eph. 3:4, 5).

This is not to say that pastors or teachers cannot travel in an extra-local capacity in the Body of Christ. If the whole Church is to be apostolic in nature, then obviously pastors, teachers and evangelists must be apostolic as well. Apostles will impart the grace of God as the Lord causes the whole Church to become apostolic. However, that will not make everyone in the Church an apostle.

What exactly is an apostle? It is clear that teachers teach, pastors pastor, evangelists evangelize and prophets prophesy. But how does one apostle? This term is unique when considered alongside the other four ministries. For example, Paul and Barnabas came from a group of prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). It is likely that Paul was one of the teachers (2Tim. 1:11) and Barnabas one of the prophets. His original name was Joseph and he had been given the name Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”) by the twelve (Acts 4:36). Since encouragement is a key ingredient of prophecy (1Cor. 14:3), this could suggest a prophetic ministry in Barnabas. Yet both of these men became apostles (Acts 14:14).

This indicates that in New Testament times, an apostle would function as either a prophet or a teacher (or more probably as any of the four other ministries in a local church) before moving out apostolically. Yet not all prophets and teachers necessarily became apostles. For example, there is no record that Agabus - who was a prophet - ever became an apostle, even though he traveled among the churches. Thus, apostleship is a unique calling from God.

This raises a question: *How does an apostle who has previously functioned as a teacher differ from one who is simply a teacher?* There must be unique and identifiable elements of the apostolic ministry. Listed below are a few important attributes of all ministries. Let us consider how they apply specifically to apostles.

\* *Apostles are men of revelation.* Obviously, anointed teachers will function by revelation as well. However, apostles will have a dimension of revelatory insight that will bring a foundational impartation of Christ to those listening.

...when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, *as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.* (Eph. 3:4, 5)

That which comes forth from their ministry will reflect the anointing of the Holy Spirit and not just mere methodology. Indeed, they are to be men of the Spirit. Their concern is not to find out “what works.” Rather, their consuming passion is to see Christ revealed on the earth in corporate expressions of His life. This is why divine order is such an important issue to them. They do not seek to establish proper structure so *they* can accomplish what *they* want; rather they desire God’s order implemented so that *Jesus* may be revealed in great diversity all across the face of the earth.<sup>2</sup> Whatever hinders this must be confronted and set aside. They do not seek a place for *themselves*; they want only to assist in the construction of the house God is building for *Himself*.

The reason they plant churches is not so they can expand *their* sphere of ministry; rather, they seek to see *Him* extend *His* kingdom both in and through His people. Having a large ministry is simply not their priority. If there *is* an increase of their realm of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on God’s strategy concerning the connection between Christ’s body coming to maturity and the salvation of Israel, see *The Latter Day Glory* by the same author.

influence, it will merely be the by-product of the Lord increasing *His* government (Is. 9:7).

Some men are considered to be apostles because they have been gifted in an administrative capacity. One reason for this is our tendency to admire those “who can get the job done.” Everyone loves a winner. It is often impressive to God’s people when men “take the bull by the horns” and get things accomplished. In other words, many want more than talk; they want action. It is fine to preach about mystical things like the love of God, but how do we take it in practical terms to the world?

Men are often thought of as apostolic whenever they are able to bring theological truths into concrete activity and mobilize others to follow them in their particular burden. However, God’s requirements of builders in the construction of His house are very specific. There is more involved than simply doing impressive works in the name of the Lord. Above all, it is crucial that one be called of God to *be* an apostle.

\* *Apostles are called by God.* One cannot just decide on his own to have such a ministry. God sets the members in the body just as He desires (1Cor. 12:18). Notice how Jesus chose the twelve.

And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, *that they might be with Him* and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons. (Mk. 3:13 - 15)

The first priority of the apostle should be *to spend time with the Lord.* The message he carries will be formed in this place of intimate relationship with Christ. How can one be sent representing another if he does not take the time to wait and hear what is on His heart? Thus, *apostles are preeminently men of relationship. Their time with Him takes precedence over everything else.*

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. *And they realized that they had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13)

The lack of consistent intimate time with the Lord is probably the primary reason why many men propagate principles at the expense of imparting life. This is not to imply that teaching biblical principles is wrong; we do this whenever we minister His word. However, when we know what is on His heart for the moment, we can rise up to speak in His Name with the full power and anointing of His presence. There simply is no valid substitute for hearing from the Lord.

Since the very message we are called to convey is a Person, we must take time to behold and consider His glory, His beauty, His grief, His love, His righteous indignation, His purpose. The foundation to be laid is *a Person!* The Spirit we have received *...searches all things, even the depths of God.* (1Cor. 2:10 NASB)

Theology is not about the study of the *things* of God; it is the study of God Himself! This requires as much (if not more) time on one's knees as it does in books. Plumbing the depths of His heart is the necessary prerequisite to the miraculous event of communicating Him to His people. Any ministry of power to others will then come as a reflection of this priority. Many have done miracles in Jesus' name. This does not mean they were apostles. In fact, it may not even mean they extended God's kingdom.

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew (Grk. GINOSKO - this word implies a relationship) you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Mt. 7:22, 23)

Intimate communion and relationship with the Lord was the missing ingredient in the ministries of these individuals. They moved in the gifts God gave them, but they did not walk in the close fellowship with Christ that true Kingdom ministry requires. Thus, they worked lawlessness. In other words, they did what seemed best to them - and did it in His name. God has not called us to do "what seems best to us." He has called us to obey Him. The fact that God moved in power through spiritual gifts operative in their lives did not indicate His approval of their motives, methods or character. This is why Jesus instructed us to evaluate ministries by their spiritual fruit and not by their words or spiritual gifts (Mt. 7:15 - 23). Thus, signs and wonders by themselves cannot be the distinguishing feature of apostles.

\* It is also clear, however, that *apostles are to be men of power*. Jesus sent out the twelve to preach, cast out demons and heal the sick (Mk. 3:13 - 15). It seemed that wherever the apostles of the New Testament ministered, the power of God was consistently manifested. The Kingdom we have been called to extend cannot be brought to bear on society through words alone. We must have the power of God permeating our words, our prayers and our songs.

For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power. (1Cor. 4:20 NASB)

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (Acts 2:43)

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. (2Cor. 12:12)

\* *Apostles are bondservants* (2Cor. 4:5). They do not see themselves as more significant than others; they consider others more important than themselves (Phil. 2:3). They do not seek to *be* served, but to serve others that *they* might come forth in all God has ordained for them.

...And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls... (2Cor. 12:14, 15)

In our day, a father might work and save over many years so his child could attend college. So also Paul saw his calling to pour himself out that the Corinthian believers could come into all that God desired for them.

Some leaders believe that the people are to serve *them* and fulfill *their* vision for the local church. Any other vision than the one in the leader's heart would only produce a "*di - vision*." In other words, division comes from failure to support the goals in the heart of the leader(s). My question is, *What if the vision in God's heart for that fellowship is greater than what is seen by the leader(s)?* (By the way, it always is.) Overseers are not to be threatened by the emerging of Christ's perspective through other members of the body.

On the other hand, neither must there be any rebellion in the hearts of God's people because leadership has only a limited view of the Lord's purpose or a different view than they have. Both pride and rebellion are addressed when true apostolic men lay a foundation of servanthood. *All* believers will be challenged to not only serve each other but to hear from one another. Elders especially will be envisioned to *set the example of servanthood!* They will lead the way. Such an approach to leadership will result from the influence of the apostle's bondservant heart.

By definition, a bondservant is simply a slave (Grk. DOULOS). He does not belong to himself any longer; he is the property of another. His whole life is given to the purpose of seeing *his Owner's* vision (not his own) come to pass. He is aware that his Owner may speak through anyone He chooses (even a donkey if necessary!). When that occurs, obedience is always the proper response. A bondservant will not seek to perpetuate his own aspirations and desires. As James Garrett has written,

...no one fully understands lordship nor fully experiences lordship, without grasping the principle of the "DOULOS".<sup>3</sup> There always will be pressure on us to do other than and more than what God has called us to do.<sup>4</sup>

He goes on to say:

There are two words in the Greek New Testament that make us aware of two different "wills" of God. The first is the word BOULEE. This word and its derivatives tend to be used for God's irresistible will - His plan or purpose. This is going to be accomplished and nothing can prevent it.

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<sup>3</sup> James W. Garrett, *The DOULOS Principle*, (Tulsa Christian Fellowship, P.O. Box 50130, Tulsa, OK 74150), p. 4

<sup>4</sup> Garrett, p. 7

The second word is THELEMA. This word tends to be used in the sense of “wish,” or “desire.” God does not always get His wish or desire. For instance, it is not God’s wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (1Tim. 2:4, 2Pet. 3:9).<sup>5</sup>

However, it is obvious that many will not repent and so will perish.

As those who want to please the Lord and do His will, not only do we bow our knees to His sovereign purpose, but we long to bring joy to His heart as we embrace His wishes.

*\* Apostles are placed in the church first and exhibited as last.*

And God has appointed these in the church: *first* apostles, second prophets, third teachers... (1Cor. 12:28)

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, *last*, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. (1Cor. 4:9)

How can it be that the one ministry God sets first in the Church would be displayed as last? Yet this expresses the way of the Lord. Did He not say that the first would be last? When He began construction of His eternal dwelling, He started with twelve men whom He named as *apostles*. When He commenced to reach out to the Gentile world, He sent an *apostle* to the house of Cornelius. When He began to establish churches among the Gentiles around the Roman Empire, He sent the *apostles* Paul and Barnabas. Soon prophets and teachers were also appearing on the scene with increasing frequency. How is it then that the one ministry Jesus set first in His Church would end up being viewed as last?

Apostles are mindful that God’s value system differs significantly from man’s. In order for His house to reflect *His* personality and values, it must be built with a strict adherence to *His* tastes and desires. However, leaders who are constrained by the opinions of others will ultimately fail to build God’s house according to His plans. What others think of them will affect their response to the Lord. Clearly, the values and methods of man have long contaminated the house God is constructing. It simply does not reflect heaven as it should. *However, God intends to reveal the glory of His value system on the earth.*

How does one work with the Lord to this end? Probably the greatest hindrances are insecurity and the fear of man in the hearts of Christian leaders. The tendency is to see the cost of obedience and then pull back. When men give themselves unreservedly to the Lord and His ways (as bondservants), they will suffer persecution (2Tim. 3:12). Sadly, this often comes from religious people who think they are rendering service to

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<sup>5</sup> Garrett, p. 16

God. The primary reason they bring opposition is because *their* values and tastes are threatened by the structural changes sought by those with insight into God's heart. Thus, apostles by the very nature of their call will be seen as insignificant and irrelevant by many (those who are comfortably entrenched in their own perspectives of divine order). In such an atmosphere, apostles will say with Paul:

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. (1Cor. 4:10 - 13)

*Lord, we present our lives to You afresh, even right now. We want to be Your bondservants. Send us anywhere to serve in any capacity or to speak any word that is in Your heart for us to express. Lord, teach us Your ways that we may learn what is valuable to You. Cause us to become an accurate reflection on the earth of Your value system. We desire for men to look at us and not be misled concerning Your priorities. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



## Apostolic Functions

*\* Apostles: given by Christ as part of His plan to equip the saints.*

And He Himself gave some to be apostles...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry (Grk. DIAKONIA - service), for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11, 12)

Let us be very clear. The focus of this scripture is not that apostles equip the saints. Rather, it is the Lord Jesus who has a plan to do this.

The above verses do not say that He gave apostles to *do* the equipping, but so that the equipping might occur. It would not happen without their involvement. They are certainly part of the process, but they are not the source. The “five-fold ministry” is a key part of *His* plan to equip His people.

Part of our problem has been a tendency to equate “equipping” with the word “training.” R. Paul Stevens has this to say in his book, *Liberating the Laity*:

The Greek word for equipping, KATARTISMOS, is used as a noun only once - in Ephesians 4:12. But the word has an interesting medical history in classical Greek. To equip is to put a bone or a part of the human body into right relationship with the other parts of the body so that every part fits thoroughly.<sup>6</sup>  
...A Greek doctor would “equip” a body by putting a bone back into its correct relationship with the other members of the body.<sup>7</sup>

When it comes to the Body of Christ, *only the Lord can properly fit His people together* (1Cor. 12:18)!

He intends that His Church come to wholeness. Anointed apostolic ministry is but part of the Messiah’s plan to bring this to pass. He will anoint apostles with insight concerning the integration of His people into a corporate body at the local, regional and

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<sup>6</sup> R. Paul Stevens, *Liberating The Laity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 25

<sup>7</sup> Stevens, p. 111

international levels. We see a great need for just this type of ministry as we view the Lord's Church today. Too often *men* have attempted to organizationally fit together the Church both locally and extra-locally. Consistently, this has resulted in an individual placed in the top position of each of the various organizations or denominations that have emerged. However, what is needed is *apostolic foundational insight which maintains the Lord Jesus as the only head*.

On the natural plane, the human body gives us an example of the Lord's goal for us. Physical soundness is expressed when the many diverse parts of the human body work together in harmony and reflect the thoughts of the mind. Similarly, apostles and elders (other mature men in the five-fold ministry) are to oversee and contribute to the process of the many individual members learning to move as one with *Him*. The goal is not to simply move in harmony with the inclination of those who hold the top position in a particular organization or movement.

Similar to the Greek word KATARTISMOS is KATARTIZO which is translated as "mending" in verse twenty one of Matthew 4 and as "restore" in verse one of Galatians 6.

And going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, *mending* their nets. (Mt. 4:21)

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual *restore* such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. (Gal. 6:1)

In the preceding verse, Paul's reference is ministry to an individual. When one has fallen in sin, that person needs to be restored. This is primarily a restoration of relationship - both to the Lord and to the local church. Spiritual health cannot be achieved apart from proper relationship, both in the vertical and the horizontal dimensions. We have often missed the correlation between individual spiritual soundness and the necessity of being properly meshed with the Body of Christ. However, God has worked this into the design of His overall purpose. As Roland Allen has indicated in his excellent book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's Or Ours?:*

(Paul) did not teach (unbelievers) that they would find salvation by themselves alone, but that they would find it in the perfecting of the Body of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

God is after both *corporate* as well as personal spiritual health for His people.

and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame *may not be dislocated, but rather be healed*. (Heb. 12:13)

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<sup>8</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's Or Ours?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Co., 1962), p. 76

Our tendency over the years has been to view the passage in Ephesians 4 in terms of simply training individual Christians for service in the Church. However, Paul's concern was a godly body! We have not emphasized nor adequately assisted believers in learning how to move as one under Christ's headship.

We have thought that our mandate was simply to train each believer for their ministry. Even when we gathered the whole church together, the idea was still that each person would be more "equipped" to fill his or her unique role in the assembly.

While there is truth to this, I do not believe this was Paul's primary intent in the passage. The context of Ephesians 4 is corporate. The apostle envisions a mature corporate man emerging in the earth and growing up "in all things into Him who is the head - Christ" (Eph. 4:15). In other words, the Body would mature to the place where it would be apparent that the Head and body are working as one. For this to occur, there would have to be corporate mending and restoration (i.e., the forming of the image of Christ corporately), not just individuals trained in their gifts.

The equipping of the saints is the proper integration of the particular parts to form a complete organism. The mending, restoration and training of individual lives would only be accomplished within the context of the Body beginning to function with all its diverse gifts and operations. The result would be the emergence of God's corporate servant on the earth (Is. 41:8 - 16).

This corporate servant would be made up of individual servants progressively coming into greater wholeness through their proper relationship with both the Lord and His Church. As the Body of Christ began to both find its corporate identity and then also to move out in servanthood, it would be built up (similar to how a weightlifter builds up his physical body). Then we would see the unity of the faith "fleshed out" in clear unmistakable terms. This is God's objective (Eph. 4:11 - 16).

However, because our focus has been almost totally on the training of individuals within the Church, the consequence has been more a *disintegration* than the *integration* God has sought. We have not seen a practical building up of Christ's body, but of individual ministries, organizational movements and para-church organizations.

Teachers have tended to start assemblies that focus on sound biblical teaching and Bible schools that "equip" believers in the Scriptures. Prophets have started prophetic churches, prophetic movements and "schools of the prophets" in order to train prophetic people. Pastors have trained pastoral men to lead churches and care for God's people. Evangelists have consistently endeavored to stir up the saints concerning God's heart for the lost. (How we need godly evangelists to be properly meshed with local expressions of Christ's body! God's corporate servant will never come forth adequately without them.)

Yet, with all this activity, we have not seen the emergence of the corporate man that Paul described in Ephesians 4. Instead, we have seen division and fragmentation. The restoration of apostles to the Church in our day is part of Christ's plan to remedy this.

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be *perfectly joined together* (Grk. KATARTIZO) in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1Cor. 1:10)

\* *Apostles are implementers and articulators.* A quick glance at the New Testament reveals that it was penned primarily by apostles. *Apostles are men who articulate the mystery of Christ* (Eph. 3:3 - 5). Their concern is for theological accuracy. They will challenge any teaching that diminishes the person or work of Jesus or which draws attention away from Him.

When some questionable method (for attaining maturity, for hearing the voice of God, for bringing down spiritual forces of darkness, for establishing new churches, etc.) appears on the scene, they will find it difficult to remain silent for the sake of "unity."

To many believers, unity occurs when God's people rally around a present emphasis of truth that has produced favorable results in some leader's life, church or city. Our tendency is to gravitate toward "what works." However, what works in one city might be totally different than the way in which God intends to accomplish some of the same goals in another city.

It is true that we can glean much from those who have touched God's strategy for their particular area. Clearly though, we must learn to lay hold of the Head of the Church, find His mind and seek to implement His strategy for where we live. Apostles will not simply propagate some new method of church planting or spiritual warfare that seems to be working for them. They will have an anointing to help local churches see the practical steps needed to implement the present emphasis *Jesus* is making in *their* locale. Those who love Him will hear His voice and rally to *Him*. This is the key to true unity.

Today we have a generally workable system within Christendom where much is accomplished. We take pastors and put them into local church settings. We take evangelists and put them out on the streets or on TV. We take teachers and put them into classroom settings such as are found in Bible schools. Then we get rid of apostles and prophets. ("They were only for the early church.") As we view the present scene we think, "Well, what we have isn't bad."

But God is not at all satisfied with the present condition of His people. He is again raising up these two ministries on the earth. The problem is that they just don't fit the present system as it stands!

There are many men today in denominations and restoration churches who try to "fit the mold" of a good pastor, teacher or evangelist. But deep inside them there is a

different flavor to the burden they have in their hearts. Many have not understood the reason for their internal frustration as they tried to “fit in” with their group’s program. Some have indeed understood their call to the prophetic or apostolic ministry, but there has been no recognition of this by those around them.

Today, though, this is changing. The Lord is again raising up and giving apostles and prophets to the Church, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith...to a mature man....” (Eph. 4:13 NASB)

*Lord, only You can integrate Your people into a corporate expression of Yourself. Pour out Your Spirit upon us and do the work in us that is necessary. Raise up men in our midst who will be truly given to Your agenda, to building what You have foreknown from eternity. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

## Sweeping Away the Dust

### *Laying the Foundation*

The Lord takes longer to build His house than His people often feel comfortable with. He plans to live in it forever. Therefore, He builds according to His own specifications.

God's "specs" have to do with the hearts of His people. Bringing heart attitudes and motives into line with His holy character always takes longer than assembling and tuning a "well oiled machine." Those who are more concerned with quick results than with seeing that the holiness of God emerges in His people will take shortcuts and, in the end, will wind up with something other than what God intended. Remember, the goal is to reveal Christ. Apostles will endeavor to reveal Him as the foundation and builder of God's house.

...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone... (Eph. 2:20)

...as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation...For no other foundation can anyone lay than that *which is laid*, which is Jesus Christ. (1Cor. 3:10, 11)

This verse makes it clear that the foundation stone *has already been laid*. It was being set in place way back in the days of Isaiah.

Behold, *I am laying* in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation. (Is. 28:16 NASB)

Old Testament history reflects the activity of God in clearing away the ground and setting the stage that He may lay His perfect cornerstone into place. The question we face is, *How do we lay a foundation that has already been set in place by God?*

Again, the issue is not so much that we *work for* God as it is to *cooperate with* Him in *His* activity. We must *recognize Christ in His proper God-given place in the*

*midst of His people.* God has designed His Church to be built upon the person of His Son. But a major problem in the Church is the “dust” that religion has piled up concealing the Rock beneath. We must sweep aside everything that obscures Him! Many things, such as fear, insecurity, religious tradition, selfish ambition, jealousy, competitiveness and confidence in our own abilities will hinder the unveiling of Jesus Christ as Lord in the Church.

### *Removing Strongholds: False Teachers*

There are many strongholds in the Church that have been constructed in the minds of God’s people. These inhibit the revelation of the Lord in our midst. One of the functions of apostolic men is to help us recognize and remove these hindrances.

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and *every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God*, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2Cor. 10:3 - 5)

False teachers had come to the Corinthians and undermined Paul’s authority. The strongholds that had been constructed in the minds of the believers through heretical teaching had not only produced doubt in them concerning Paul (2Cor. 10:10, 11), but they had obscured God in their midst. These strongholds (fortresses) were lofty things or high places (Grk. HUPSOMA - “height” cf. Rom. 8:39) that were raised up against the revelation of God among His people. This is one of Satan’s primary objectives - to prevent God from receiving His proper recognition first in the Church and then also in the world. However, there is emerging a clear trumpet sound that Christ must come to have first place in everything - *especially His own Church* (Col. 1:18). He must break forth in our midst!

The restoration of the Church is not simply a restoration of certain truths and ministries to God’s people. *It is the restoration of God’s Son to His rightful place in our midst.* Divine order is reflected when a people on the earth give to the Son the same place of honor and authority that the Father has given Him in the heavens. Paul set out to recapture the thoughts of the people and bring them into obedience to Christ. Apostolic declaration of God’s word has the effect of exposing whatever is exalted among God’s people and thereby obscuring the Lord.

### *Strongholds and Insecurity*

Where do these high places come from in our midst? Have we constructed some of them ourselves? Rather than blame false teachers (obviously that can be one source),

let us repent for the ones *we* have erected. Many of us have gone through traumatic experiences (child abuse, rejection, parental neglect, etc.) that have produced insecurity in us. As a result, we have built strongholds of defensiveness, judgmental attitudes, anger and self-centeredness as places of security. We must recognize that *Jesus Himself can be our only stronghold*. He is our port of refuge (Ps. 62:8; 91:9)! We must run into Him, abide in Him - and there find safety.

The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe. (Prov. 18:10)

Whenever we construct anything in which to find security, we are establishing a false stronghold, an alternative to God. This is where idolatry comes from. Idolatry in the Church has its roots both in our pride, as well as in our doubt that He will be to us all that He has promised.

For example, greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5). When we do not trust God to be our sufficiency, we turn from Him and in our pride gather an abundance of material goods to make us feel secure concerning our future. Physical wealth can never bring the inner assurance that only the Lord can give.

Not only have many individual Christians sought safety in material wealth, many churches have done so as well. It is expressed something like this: “We *must* have a nice building in which to meet if we would be a successful church in this city.” Nice buildings to meet in can be a blessing. Clearly though, the thought pattern that a local church *must* have a building in order to impact its city is a stronghold that God wants to tear down.

The problem lies in our insecurity concerning what God has said about our identity. He identifies us as His people. However, many in our society (including some Christians) think of the church as a physical building. Church is a place you go to. If one “goes to church,” then it is important that “the church” reflect our heavenly priorities. In other words, we must put much time, effort and money into building something that “brings glory to God.” However, the Scriptures teach that God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. He is glorified when we submit to His Spirit as He works His nature and character into our lives. The result of misdirected priorities concerning buildings is that more and more attention is given to these natural edifices than to Him who is the Builder of His eternal dwelling.

### *The Organization*

Another stronghold (or high place) in our midst is the need some believers have for titles and organized structure. Again, whatever we construct to give us a sense of identity and safety is an alternative to Christ who is to be our only refuge.



Our tendency is to seek distinctiveness and usefulness by fitting into the defined positions of an organization. However, our true identity is found only as we abide in the presence of the One who created us. He has a unique place of service where He wants to meet with each of us. His purpose is to carve out from heaven a particular niche in His house for every one of His children and then woo us individually *to Himself* in that special place - so that where He is, there we may be also (Jn. 14:1-3). The key to finding our individual sphere in God's house is simply that we pursue Him!

Too often, His efforts to build His house in this manner are hindered by our attempts to "bring order." The false sense of security that comes from our endeavors to bring definition to a struggling group of believers is a stronghold that hinders the unveiling of the One who alone brings true peace and corporate formation. The Holy Spirit must be released in our midst to build His house; He must be free to set the course toward divine structure.

This is not to say that the local church is to be an aimless chaotic gathering. While a brand new group probably will appear somewhat haphazard, the divine pattern will emerge over time as God's people submit to His leading within them to serve. Local leadership will oversee this process. Apostolic and prophetic input can be a tremendous help during this time as well.

Apostles will not only seek to understand what the Lord is doing, but be sensitive to how the Holy Spirit wants them to guide, admonish, fine-tune, etc. It is precisely during this time of corporate structuring that the tendency to organize by human ability will be strongest. It must be resisted. Remember, we are to *recognize* what Jesus is bringing forth, rather than simply *organizing* what most quickly "gets the job done." What the Lord establishes through His life will then reflect His headship instead of the organizational and administrative skills of men. We flirt dangerously with idolatry when we do not understand these things (Gen. 11:4).

The Church is to express the character and nature of God. Just as Jesus represented the Father, so we are to represent Him. This is the essence of being an apostolic people. The alternative is idolatry.

Scripture forbids us to make any graven image in the likeness of God. Since He is infinite, how could finite man ever create anything that could adequately explain Him? It would always fall short of His glory and *misrepresent* Him. Yet this is precisely what we do when we attempt to corporately build through our own strength a work in His Name. Then, when we say, "This is what God is like," we guarantee His judgment upon our endeavors. The end result is often an organization with members who are more devoted to and identified with *it* than with Christ.

*Beholding His Glory*

The greatest “instrument” God has given to bring us corporately into the image of Christ is Himself. His promise to us is that as we behold *Him*, we will be changed.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2Cor. 3:18)

I always interpreted this verse as a promise to individuals. While this is certainly valid, it was not Paul’s primary thought. The Corinthian church was in need of major adjustment. While they had obeyed the apostle’s first letter to put out of the church the unrepentant immoral man (1Cor. 5:1 - 5), they had not properly recognized his response of sorrow and repentance. To minister to them, Paul began to contrast the Old Covenant of death, condemnation and impermanence with the New Covenant of eternal glory and righteousness (2Cor. 3:1 - 11).

When he looked at the Corinthian church, he could not see the abiding glory of God resting upon them as he desired. Yet he spoke with great boldness and hope concerning what God had promised (2Cor. 3:12). There *would* come forth a people ministering the Spirit and glory of God on the earth. One thing he refused to do was to be as Moses, who put something over his face to disguise the fact that the glory was fading.

...unlike Moses, who used to throw a veil over his face to hide from the gaze of the children of Israel the passing away of what was but transitory. (2Cor. 3:13 Weymouth)

Today, churches have often put on external “veils” to convey to the world and other believers that the glory is in their midst when in fact it has faded. However, theological degrees, beautiful buildings, clerical robes and talented musicians are no substitute for the glory of God. How much better it is to face up to the reality of emptiness than to communicate falsehood. The bottom line is that we either have His glory permeating our gatherings or we have artificial alternatives that mask our barrenness. These may seem impressive to men but they have no power to change lives.

To this day, the same veil that was upon Moses lies over the corporate heart of the nation of Israel (2Cor. 3:14, 15). That “veil” communicates to the Jewish people that the glory can still be found in the law of Moses. However, God is moving today and revealing His Son among them and...*when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.* (2Cor. 3:16)

The result is both liberty in the Spirit and a taste of the glory of God that is found in the face of Jesus Christ (2Cor. 3:17, 18; 4:6). Paul goes on to say that this was the hope for the Corinthian church. As they would all come (both Jew and Gentile) into the presence of God and behold His glory, they would experience corporate transformation.

Today, God’s glory is the only hope we have for the churches we serve. Too many believers think of Church restoration in terms of simply having gifts of the Spirit,

effective evangelistic programs, and some measured function of the five-fold ministries (apostles, prophets, etc.). However, a restored Church will only emerge when all “veils” have been removed. We must stop portraying to others a false picture of an abiding glory when we have substituted many things in its place. We must repent for supplanting the power of God with the strength of man. We must see our total inability to build God’s house in our own power and face up to our barrenness. Then as we turn to Him with an *unveiled* face we will behold and be transformed into the image of the One we are viewing. God will not be satisfied with anything less than the image of His Son in us. Jesus is our goal.

*Lord, sweep away in my own personal life any stronghold that I have constructed as a part of my personality for a place of security and refuge. I know that it will only hinder the revelation of You in my life. Bring forth a purity of expression of Your Spirit in me. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.*

Losing  
Control

*Breaking Out of Our Comfort Zone*

What does it mean for Jesus Christ to be the foundation of a local church? Simply this: *everything must depend on Him!* Our human insecurity causes us to build in such a way that, just in case He doesn't "come through," the work can still go on. Knowing how to have good meetings, whether or not God moves in our midst, is a sign of human religion. How foolish we are to continue in such activity.

We know we should be totally dependent on the Lord; yet something within us pulls us away from this. We somehow entertain the idea that our efforts will guarantee the success of His kingdom. The truth is that *He alone* is the guarantee that His efforts will succeed. Our hope must be in Him (1Tim. 1:1).

Christianity is to be a miraculous experience of God's life. If His manifest presence were to be suddenly withdrawn from a local church, all "business as usual" activity should stop while the people seek for a fresh outpouring of His Spirit. Nevertheless, instead of building this way, many leaders endeavor to "keep the ball rolling." Human effort actually increases! As a result, the tendency is then to try to *control* meetings, the focus of what is ministered, where people should relate, etc. It is true that oversight does involve watching over the flock of God, keeping error out, and warning younger sheep about situations where they could stumble. Clearly though, *godly oversight is not control.*

Human nature tends to wield too much control over what goes on in Christian gatherings. Our corporate times together in the river of God are spent with the water up to our ankles, knees, or waist (Ezek. 47). It feels so good to "touch bottom," enjoy the water of life and only go as far as is comfortable. *However, the river cannot take us anywhere until we totally trust Him and launch out to where it is impossible to stand.*

When we abandon ourselves to Him, the whole work rests solely on Him - and we lose control! At this point, meetings will begin to go in directions that the eldership did not plan beforehand. God does not always "read the bulletin" prior to the gathering to

make sure He is in order. Our attempts to keep Him within our “comfort zone” not only reflect our pride, they will consistently be inadequate. He is always breaking out of man-made constraints to express Himself more fully.

Jesus did not fit in the comfort zone of the Pharisees. He was just too different from what they were expecting from their Messiah. They were more comfortable with *their interpretation* of what Messiah *ought* to look like than with the reality of God Himself in their midst. When He walked out of the temple declaring it to be desolate of God’s glory, many did not understand the importance of what was occurring. Similarly, many Christian groups have experienced a diminishing of God’s manifest presence in their midst and have not understood either the significance or the reasons why.

### *Who’s Preserving Whom?*

As with many Jewish leaders of the first century, it is a tendency of some builders in our day to reject the Cornerstone.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. (1Pet. 2:7)

It is not that they reject Him as their Savior, but as the One on whom their whole ministry rests. In other words, they often get more enamored with results than with the process. “What works” can become more important than endeavoring to walk in harmony with God’s Spirit.

However, if God is building for His own eternal habitation, then *the way* in which His house is constructed is of paramount importance to Him. We must allow Him full access to the gatherings - so that He may bring His perspective of what the interior of His home ought to look like. Often though, it is easier to opt for “order” and *a measure* of God’s glory than to let go and allow God’s people to respond spontaneously to Him.

His life will produce what some might view as *disorder* - but which is, in reality, *the beginnings of a corporate move into new dimensions of God’s order*. We cannot structure the house of God! He alone is able to do that. He knows the unique place where each of us belongs. He knows the dormant grace that is in the hearts of those who have not been able to emerge in ministry because the structure of their local church afforded no opportunity.

Of course, this is not to say that we are not to recognize and suggest certain practical tasks that need to be prayerfully accomplished for the benefit of the local church. However, it must be the Holy Spirit who confirms in people’s hearts where they are to serve.

Some may say, “If I don’t maintain control, the work will fall apart!” But it is better to have God shake the work today and find out what will not stand than to wait for His return and find out too late that what was built has fallen.

Many feel that they preserve the life of God by what they have built. They look at their leadership, their home groups, their prophetic musicians, etc., and think, “Hallelujah, God’s life is flourishing in our city.” In reality though, what *we* build does not preserve *His life*; rather, it is *His life* that preserves *us* (Rom. 11:18; Jn. 15:4, 5). Where do we place our trust? Is it in our structure, our teachers, pastors, apostles, home group leaders and musicians? Or, is it in Him who is the life of His people?

Our human tendency is to get things turned around. While we desire to see His house built in our midst, we too easily fail to believe *He* will build it. So we put our hands on the work of the Lord and bring our strength to bear in “maintaining order.” Jesus gave us clear warning concerning man’s inflexible attempts to contain His Spirit. He said His new wine would destroy old wineskins. In trying to hold on to what we have, we guarantee that we shall lose it! On the other hand, inflexible corporate structures of themselves are not the primary problem; they are merely *symptoms* of old wineskins. First and foremost, God is after *our hearts*.

There is much prayer for revival today, yet many of us will be shaken when it comes. Many leaders will either endeavor to squelch it because it will upset their “normal” way of functioning and leave them without control, or they will try to grab hold of what God is doing and redirect it in a way more agreeable to their own concepts of church order. We must let go of the reins to have the freedom which God requires to restore His many-membered body. What the Lord seeks to do in the Church is to reveal new dimensions of His glory that will both surprise us and amaze the world!

### *Jesus Christ, the Sufficient Foundation*

It would be foolish for anyone to believe he fully understands what God is raising up. Our insight is limited, for....*we see in a mirror, dimly....* (1Cor. 13:12).

This raises an obvious question. How do we build in anticipation of a God who refuses to do things our way? Very simply: *we must build on a foundation that anticipates all that is to be built on it.*

If one plans to build a small doghouse, he doesn’t need a very large base; if he intends to erect a magnificent mansion, then a sufficient foundation must be set in place. The house that God is presently building is beyond what the whole Body of Christ (including its apostles and prophets) can conceive! How then are we to proceed?

If we simply minister our interpretation of who Christ is to people (dispensing information), then what is built will be limited by the limited definition we bring to the

foundation. On the other hand, if we impart *Christ Himself* through our lives and teaching, God's people will seek to increasingly know and respond to Him. Then, as all of us come more into harmony with Him, He will bring definition to the corporate structure of God's house.

### *Administering the Mystery*

Paul understood God's strategy and gave himself to proclaiming *the unfathomable riches of Christ* (Eph. 3:8). He preached and disseminated wealth that he discovered by revelation hidden in the Son. People were then drawn to the Lord Jesus to begin plumbing the depths of His person.

The treasures in Him were and are beyond human capacity to grasp. Something that is unfathomable is so deep that it is impossible either to understand with a finite mind or to communicate with a finite language. Yet this was the task before Paul - and it lies before us as well. Preaching the gospel is not hard; it is impossible! Apart from the anointing and grace of God, we will only give information. Even if that information is biblically accurate, it will not bring the power of God to bear on the hearers. What we then build corporately will reflect the limitation of our human understanding. However, God wants the Church to reveal His Son! Therefore God raised up Paul to

*...bring to light what is the administration of the mystery, which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things. (Eph. 3:9 NASB)*

God does not want the mystery of His Son hidden from the eyes of the world forever. He has a plan to administer it on the earth. Is it that He will raise up a few mighty prophets who will reveal the great mysteries of God's Son? Or perhaps some powerful intercessors will gain the insight we need. Or maybe a housewife? What do the scriptures say?

*...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (Eph. 3:10)*

God intends to reveal His multi-faceted wisdom to both the seen and unseen realms through His people! This precious treasure will only be disclosed as the whole Church is released to bring whatever facet of insight each member is carrying within. Jesus must be released to speak in our midst through whomever He desires. This is "according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

Of course, this does not negate the need for loving oversight of the gatherings. God wants those who are spiritually mature to train His people to become increasingly accurate in hearing and obeying Him.

When fellowships are formed and controlled by our hands we can only expect shakings; when they are fashioned by His life, we can expect glory and the revelation of God's manifold wisdom. Because He does love us, He will shake everything we have built that can be shaken so that we have the opportunity to repent and build correctly.

From Scripture we see how apostolic ministries of the early church were concerned with building properly. The apostolic burden today is to be the same - that God's house be constructed correctly. Even though much has been erected in the name of Jesus, it all falls short of God's ultimate intent. Mixture abounds. The Lord is going to root this mixture out of His Church. It may be difficult to let go of what we have grown accustomed to. However, if we desire His glory, we will make the necessary adjustments.

*Lord, first root the mixture out of my heart and then out of that which I do in Your name. Cause there to be a purity of Your life springing forth in me and in the fellowship of believers of which I am a part. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



## What About Elders?

### *Individual and Collective Foundations*

Apostolic ministry is responsible for laying proper foundations - revealing Jesus Christ as God's chosen foundation stone. If the foundation is faulty, the building will be weak.

Christians all recognize that *individual* lives are built upon the Lord Jesus, but many fail to see that He is also the foundation upon which our *collective* lives are built as a fellowship. In other words, we see our need to totally depend on Him to be our life, our strength and our salvation when it comes to living holy lives. We recognize our need to be born of the Spirit and continually filled with the Spirit. We believe that He can lead us individually into strategic situations and anoint us to bring words of life to unbelievers. But we then fail to believe He can orchestrate us into a unique expression of His mind when we gather together in one place. Hence, in order to prevent chaos and anarchy, we exercise as elders "authority" and set in motion our interpretation of what should occur.

### *Eldership*

One problem in the Church has been the use of titles and offices. These convey to the sheep the impression that there is authority resting in the one who merely has a title or who occupies an office. However, the only source of authority is in the anointing and the grace given to us. Howard Snyder said it well.

God provides for leadership in the Church through the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. This is God's ecclesiology.

Our understanding would be clearer if we remember the fundamental meaning of words that have come to be known only as titles. These terms were understood in New Testament times not as ecclesiastical titles but as practical functions.

Some of these terms had been used for leaders in Judaism (for instance, elder), while others were common in Greek culture. But each term was taken over by the church because it described an emerging leadership function.<sup>9</sup>

While we might identify our ministry function, we should not do so as a title. For example, Paul often referred to himself as, “Paul, an apostle.” This was simply a declaration of his function. He never introduced himself as, “The apostle Paul.” This would have denoted a title. What would the Church look like in our day if leaders laid down all titles and official positions of authority in the church?

At this point in our discussion some may feel that I am advocating anarchy. “The elders are not to run things, so let’s allow everybody to do whatever they want.” *May it never be!*

Divine order is exactly that. It is the *divinely* arranged assembly of the individual parts of Christ’s body into a collective whole. It is accomplished by His life residing within each member, as each one expresses that life.

This begs a question (*or two!*): How should those with the responsibility of church government function in this scenario? What is spiritual authority? How does it operate in the Church?

The Greek word translated as “authority” in the New Testament is EXOUSIA. A primary way in which the writers used this word was as, “the right to speak, act or belong”.

...He taught them as one having authority (EXOUSIA), and not as the scribes. (Matt. 7:29)

The difference between Jesus’ teaching and that of the scribes was that when He claimed to speak for God, He had *the right* to do so.

What gives a person the right, the authority to stand and speak on behalf of the Lord in our day? First, they must be sent by Him with a word from His heart. (Both the content of the word and the timing of its delivery are crucial ingredients here.) Secondly, they must speak it in *the way* that accurately represents Him. This requires the development of proper character in their lives.

Elders are to be men of proven character who over time are consistently found with the word of the Lord in their mouths. The people will respond to them not because they hold a title, but because they consistently impart God’s heart to them. How then does an eldership function in the local church? The answer to this comes in two parts.

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<sup>9</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Community of the King*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), pp. 82, 83

1. *God has called elders to be servants who lead the flock by example.*

A group of elders is to seek and comprehend the mind of Christ for oversight through prayer, fasting, studying the Scriptures and submitting to the various gifts of the Holy Spirit in each other. Often, because men fail to believe that collegial functioning will consistently work, one among them is appointed to be the “senior” or “presiding” elder who will then make the final decision in case there is an impasse. The New Testament writings reveal no such position in the early church. Alexander Strauch observes:

The New Testament does not give the slightest hint that the eldership is to be presided over by a pastor.<sup>10</sup>

He continues:

Shared, brotherly leadership by ordinary men, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28), is the structure established by the apostles because it best enables the church to function as the body of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Ordaining a “senior” elder before the flock gives the false impression that many cannot come to unity through genuine submission to the Spirit of God, the Scriptures and each other. As a result, faith is hindered in the hearts of God’s people that He will ever be able to unify the many diverse parts of His body. “If our elders can’t come to agreement as they seek to respond to God’s Spirit together, what hope is there for us as a fellowship to move as one?”

Unity then can only be conceived of as attainable through ecumenical and organizational methods. The key words become “compromise” and “submission”. Such an approach to unity requires men to *compromise* in order to find the middle ground that all can stand on, even if it means agreeing to things some consider wrong. It also demands that people *submit* to the plans of the one(s) in the leading position(s) of the association. Unity then is seen as the accomplishing of stated goals within a peaceful atmosphere.

However, unity in the biblical sense is *the revelation of the nature of God through a diverse people* (Jn. 17:11, Eph. 4:1 - 16). Organizational methods will never achieve the miracle of “bodyness” (many different people with distinct giftings moving as one under the headship of Christ). Real unity is miraculous and requires the glory of God (Jn. 17:21 - 23). We will never achieve it apart from absolute humility and brokenness on our part (the recognition of our total inability to produce it) and the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst to perform this great end-time sign to the nations (Phil. 1:27, 28).

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1986), pp. 12, 13

<sup>11</sup> Strauch, p. 16

This brings us to a significant point. We are not suggesting that an eldership is to function as a co-equality of men. It is obvious that the elders will each have different giftings, personalities, and levels of maturity. There will be great diversity in how each serves. For example, a prophet's contribution to the care of the flock will be totally different than that of a teacher or pastor. Yet they will seek to serve together, maintaining their unique approaches to ministry while also functioning in harmony with the Lord's mind (i.e., maintaining the headship of Christ).

This does not mean that each elder must be in on the discussion or handling of every problem that surfaces in the local church. Pastors need to be released to handle pastoral concerns without trying to get the teachers to think, act or serve like pastors. When theological problems do come up, they should see their own limitation and take advantage of the anointing that the teacher brings to the team.

Evangelists must be released in their concern for the lost as well as stirring up the saints toward the world. They must not be pushed into a teaching, prophetic or pastoral mold in their ministry just to fulfill some general idea of "the normal elder."

Prophets need to be prophets. If you want to drive a prophet crazy, just require him to attend "elders meetings" where a multitude of pastoral problems are constantly being discussed. In fact, the elders' meeting should not generally be dominated by the problems each is facing in his own sphere (Obviously, there can be some time allotted for this). Rather, time together should be for worship, studying the Scriptures, waiting on the Lord, prayer and building strong relationships with each other.

Good lines of communication as well as high levels of trust are essential ingredients if each elder is to be released into his own unique area of service. Without this release, the eldership itself becomes its own bottleneck. The need for each elder to constantly clear all decisions in his sphere with the other men will both hamper his freedom to obey the Lord as well as bog down the elders' meeting. Thus, what could have been precious times together before the Lord become nothing more than administrative decision-making marathons concerning numerous details of the church; they become business meetings.

Proper shepherding of the flock will only be fully realized when all the ministries are released to bring their particular "flavor" to the people. Harmony will only be achieved and maintained at the eldership level if these men move in the mind of Christ with hearts of humility and accountability toward each other. This then sets the example for the people to follow. The way into corporate unity is being "fleshed out" before them.

Scripture teaches that Jesus wants His Church to move in such conspicuous unity that even unbelievers will see it and marvel (Jn. 17:21 - 23). In order to accomplish this, He has given us His Spirit that we may know His mind and be transformed in character into His likeness.

Authentic unity will only be attained as we are filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit and become humble and broken people. Humble men and women do not attempt to push their ideas or interpretations of Scripture on others. They do not seek to manipulate others through their financial giving or their political maneuverings. Their pursuit is of Him and His purpose. On the other hand, neither will they simply yield to others for the sake of “peace.” Godly unity does not require the suppression of one’s conscience.

While it is true that those with an agenda to accomplish may achieve a measure of organizational unity around their ministry and their stated goals, they will not bring forth Christ’s body as a functional corporate expression of the Head until they lay aside their objectives and seek His. His plans in the comprehensive sense will only be understood over time as we listen for His voice through a *multitude* of counselors. Individuals alone will never ascertain the fullness of His purpose. “*We have the mind of Christ.*” We must listen for the word of the Lord through others in the church.

Elders must exemplify this lifestyle by learning to function in full view of the congregation as a plurality that comes into harmony through prayer, interaction, submission to each other - *and* listening for God’s voice through anyone (even the youngest believer in the church) that He might choose to speak through.

## *2. Elders are to oversee the functioning of Christ's body.*

Many have thought that elders are to mediate the mind of Christ to His people. But Scripture is clear that this is the Holy Spirit’s function (Jn. 16:13, 14). *The whole Church* is to be filled with His presence; God is to be free to speak through anyone He chooses.

On the other hand, body ministry will not necessarily occur just because everyone in a room has the freedom to talk. That may merely produce a religious form of “group therapy” - people gathered together for the purpose of talking about whatever is bothering them. Body ministry is a miraculous event, occurring when the mind of Christ is revealed through a diverse company of people. Jesus’ headship is expressed *when He speaks through whomever He wishes.*

One important factor is how to order our times of corporate worship. In too many places musicians function as a “musical clergy,” with the congregation being the laity. God identifies the songs to sing only to those playing instruments up front. The rest then wait on the musicians rather than on God! Is it possible we are beginning to run the risk of denying the priesthood of the believer in the realm of our corporate worship? The fact that God could have a song spring forth spontaneously from the congregation is downplayed for fear that the corporate time of worship will degenerate into a “songfest”

with everyone feeling free to call out their favorite songs. However, the Church needs to be *trained* in these matters, not denied the opportunity to arise.<sup>12</sup>

Many fellowships have recognized the truth concerning plurality of eldership. They realize that the generally practiced method of church government where one man pastors and leads the flock is unsatisfactory. One man simply cannot express to the gathered saints all the dimensions of Christ's leadership.

Only Jesus is apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher and evangelist all rolled into one. Even if someone did have a dimension of all five ministries functioning in his life, the task of caring for God's flock would still be too great for one man to handle. For one thing, there are only so many hours in a day. However, as good as it is to have a plural eldership, it is not enough. God is not restoring the five-fold ministries simply to care for and minister to His people. He has been bringing forth these servants in His Church that He might see *the whole body* start to function. If we do not understand this, we will wind up with a plural "clergy" doing the ministry and a "laity" that is perpetually being trained but never released to act.

By the way, how did the terms "clergy" and "laity" come to have such significance in the Church today? Consider this quote from an excellent book.

One of the first truths lost by the early Church, beginning with the teaching of Ignatius in the second century, was the fact that a local church is a spiritual organism, a local expression of the Body of Christ in which *each* member is anointed to function in ministry. The teaching of Ignatius was largely responsible for the emerging of two classes of believers, clergy and laity. Over time, the latter became spectators, with "valid" ministry being limited to a professional class of men qualified by education and ordained within a hierarchical order of leaders. The importance of God's anointing for charismatic spontaneity became secondary to teaching and dogma. To have a recognized ministry required one to become an ordained, full-time "clergyman." Anointed body ministry was thereby crippled, and man began to control what took place in church meetings.<sup>13</sup>

God makes no clergy - laity distinction among His people in the New Testament. He desires every member of His royal priesthood to hear His voice and be released to function in the gatherings. Along this line, there is a proper way for us to minister in the assembly. Everything we do must come from a humble heart that eagerly says, "Please adjust me where and when I need it."

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to imply that all believers will have the same degree of anointing or sensitivity in determining the specific songs as well as the timing they are to be sung in a meeting. Obviously, some are called to be psalmists (worshipping musicians) who will have a greater degree of visibility in setting direction during corporate worship.

<sup>13</sup> Dale Rumble, *And Then The End Shall Come*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1991), p.

...the wisdom from above is....open to reason.... (Jas. 3:17 The Jewish New Testament)

We must not pray, preach, prophesy, lead out in a song or exercise any public ministry in the congregation unless we are willing to be “fine tuned” in what we do. As a matter of fact, it would be helpful to *go* to those in oversight of the local church and communicate our desire for exactly this type of input. A greater degree of liberty necessitates a greater degree of accountability.

For too long, some have thought that teaching the saints only occurs in a classroom setting. Training involves much more than that. We must come alongside those we serve and bring our perspective concerning their activity among the people. (*“Brother, I thought what you shared had some real life in it. I think, though, that the last half came more from your own zeal to see the church change than from the Lord’s anointing.”*)

Elders must be men of discernment who do not move in a “know it all” attitude, but who really love the saints - if they would truly be effective in helping them move accurately in the realm of the Spirit. Encouragement is a vital ingredient in this process.

The gathering of the local church, whether it be a large meeting or a smaller home meeting, is to be more a spiritual gymnasium than a showcase. A gym is marked by practice, trial and error. It is not where people come to see a perfected process, but rather a process perfected. The whole idea of a practice session in a gym is that mistakes will be made. That’s why there are folks assisting those working out with the barbells as well as “spotters” watching over others on the trampoline, and so forth. The gym is a place of preparation!

Similarly, mistakes will be made when the saints gather. That does not necessarily imply disorder; it could simply reflect immaturity. There is a significant difference. God’s order is revealed more in a meeting where a young Christian rambles on too long in a prophecy while older ones exercise patience and mercy, than in a meeting where nothing “unseemly” happens, but freedom is stifled. Let us not evaluate the condition of the Church by looking simply at externals. Divine order among a gathering of young Christians will not look the same as it does among those more mature at moving in the Spirit. God requires more of those who have walked with Him longer.

*Lord, teach us Your ways and establish us as a corporate expression of Yourself, of what is in Your heart. You are the Word of God. Bring forth that which reveals the heart of the Father. Teach us not to simply build our interpretations of what You are saying. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Apostles, Elders  
And the Local Church

*Who is the Greatest?*

Too often, the pastors, teachers and leaders of worship all stand out in our assemblies while Jesus is not always so evident. It is easy for the saints to focus on ministries rather than the Lord when our meetings are “professionally run.” God is dealing with us to give His Son the preeminence in all that we do. How few speak in this manner:

...neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (1Cor. 3:7)

All too frequently, men imply how *much* they are needed, not how insignificant they are. It is so easy to create an impression in others of how indispensable we are even as we minister in His name. This weakness in our humanity speaks loudly of insecurity and pride.

For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. (1Cor. 3:4, 5 NASB)

If the Lord had not given opportunity, *none* of these men (or any of us) would have been saved. The Church is the result of God giving men the opportunity to believe the gospel. And the gospel is preached because God gives men the opportunity to share what He has done in their lives. The Church is the result of a divine “set-up”; we are in Christ by His design. If God had not created the situations where truth was proclaimed and received, there would be no churches. This perspective of God is key to ministering wisely in His house. Without it, we are prone to elevate men in an ungodly way.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. (1Cor. 3:6)

Notice Paul’s emphasis on God’s operative grace among His people. Men can plant and water, but without the miracle of life within the seed, there would be no growth. If one plants rocks in the soil, what can one hope to harvest? The best programs to



evangelize and train men in the Church are useless apart from His life. The maturation process is miraculous, both individually and corporately. The life of God can never be reduced to a method. While principles may apply in training others, in the end *God* will be glorified for what He has done in their lives.

Some point to “church planting” as the most important element of church growth. “There would not even be a local church here if it were not for that man’s ministry,” they say. “Why, he broke the ground! He rooted out the weeds and planted seed when there was no local church at all. Obviously he is the most important one. He is ‘the father’ of the work.”

Others point to the one who waters. “If he had not come along when he did, the church would have withered long ago. When he brought the water of life, there was a great blossoming! Fruitfulness and fragrance abounded after his input. Obviously, he is the most important.”

What do the Scriptures say?

So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. (1Cor. 3:7)

If we read this in a slightly different way without changing the meaning, it could say, “both he who plants and he who waters are nothing.”

We have allowed man to occupy too important a place in our thinking. As a result, the preeminence of Jesus has been undermined. Two significant problems we face in the Church today are both the insecurity of prominent men and the prominence of insecure men.

### *Apostles and Elders*

The apostolic foundation of local churches facilitates the headship of Christ, because it involves a collegial group of elders who oversee the work.

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Notice, Paul did not remain and function as an “arch-elder”; he commended them to the Lord. *Jesus* is the head of each local church. Apostles do not hold a hierarchical position of authority over the churches as a mediator between them and God. Their desire is to see local churches founded on Jesus Christ and overseen by a group of elders. Then they can move into new territory in order to see new fellowships of believers established. If they decide to settle down for a season in a local church, they must become a functioning accountable member of the eldership there. The only place in Scripture where

we see apostles recognized as a distinct group among the elders is the church at Jerusalem.

So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. (Acts 15:6)

Of course, Jerusalem was a unique church. This was the only place on earth where you had the twelve apostles of the Lamb as part of the leadership! It is probable that the presence of such well-known men brought its own unique problems. I am sure the tendency to elevate them in an inordinate way was quite strong. Consider the following quote.

One result of fearing man is to develop an unhealthy elevation of leaders. The teachers of mixture who came among the Galatians probably had this attitude toward the apostles in Jerusalem. In his letter, Paul takes time to underscore the humanity of those apostles. Why did he do this? Obviously, he was endeavoring to undo something that had been imparted to the Galatians. Paul was not maliciously exposing sin but underscoring their humanity as he “brought them down a few notches” in the eyes of the Galatians.

*But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) - well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. (Gal. 2:6 NASB)*

The men of reputation here included Peter, James and John (Gal. 2:7-9).

Paul also recounts an incident where Peter stumbled much like the Galatians were now doing (Gal. 2:11 - 14).

When men are elevated in an unhealthy way, God will see to it that they are brought down a few notches in our eyes. This is a fearful thing. However, it is a safeguard both for the church and for those in leadership.<sup>14</sup>

True apostles in our day will not see themselves as greater than others; they will consider others more important than themselves (Phil. 2:3; Rom. 12:10).

### *Honoring Jesus as the Head*

When a group of men stand together as elders under the headship of Jesus, the inherent diversity in leadership provides for a more complete servanthood oversight. The elders have the protection of peer-level relationships; good shepherding care can be more consistent and effective when there is a *team* of men sharing responsibility.

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Rumble, *Winds of Change*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1986), p. 47

The apostolic man who laid the foundation for the local church must not interfere with the headship of Jesus by functioning as a “second head” to the work. There is only one head of any expression of Christ’s body: Jesus.

Some have said that the gifts of the Holy Spirit operative in the Church are to express the *body* of Christ, while the leaders (the five-fold ministry, the apostles, etc.) are to reveal the *headship* of Christ. Such thinking is dangerous. Instead of leaders seeing themselves as simply part of Christ’s body with distinct giftings and responsibilities, they begin to see themselves as uniquely joined to the Head. The basis for clergy - laity distinction is established.

The truth is, leaders are part of the Body of Christ like everybody else. Their role is to oversee the people as each individual member hears His voice. Of course it is clear that God will speak through the elders to the church. But it is also true that He will speak through the church to them. We must honor the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst. God has sent *Him* to reveal the headship of Christ among His people.

When the Lord speaks, even if it is through the youngest member of the fellowship, all must submit to Him. We do not simply submit to a man who holds a certain “position” in our midst (even if he is an apostle). However, when the Lord *anoints* him to address us - which will occur frequently because of the nature of his calling - then the headship of Christ is being revealed. When there is a proper understanding of the Holy Spirit’s central role in revealing Jesus to His people, a spirit of control has no ground from which to operate in our midst. Elders will then move in an authority that reflects servanthood.

After laying the foundation at Corinth, Paul did not commend the church there to the “ministry team of elders” as those representing the Head; he entrusted them to Christ.

Some have said that the overseers of the local church are the head of that group as a husband is head of his wife. Thus, as the wife is to submit to her husband, so the church is to submit to the local eldership. However, for any overseer(s) to take such a position is to usurp the place that belongs only to the Lord Jesus, the One who gave His life for His bride.

Scripture teaches that the husband - wife relationship reveals the union between *Christ* and His Church, not the relationship between the elders and the church. The elders are part of that church and must be as submissive to the headship of Christ as any other member of the body.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to *one husband*, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to *Christ*. (2Cor. 11:2)

In light of this, it is also important to remember that God’s will is for the flock to give proper honor and recognition to those who walk before them as examples.

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and *to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*. Be at peace among yourselves. (1Thess. 5:12, 13)

Obey (lit. “be persuaded by”) 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. (Heb. 13:17 NASB)

God requires elders in His Church to be faithful men. They are called to stand before His people as examples of holiness, faithfulness and commitment to Christ. When believers slack off in their passion for the Lord, those in oversight will be stirred to intercede for them. They will speak out of their own times of intimacy with the Lord as they seek to inspire the saints toward greater love and obedience to Him. When they see and hear believers in their care misrepresenting Christ, they will seek Him concerning whether or not to admonish them and, if so, how to go about it.

In all such ministry, they must accurately represent God's heart and not their own frustration, impatience or anger. Ultimately, God will hold them responsible as those who must give account. Their accountability primarily will have to do with how obediently they responded to the grace of God in their lives to express His heart to His people. Believers should honor those called to this task and make it easy for them to come with instruction and admonition from the Lord. Such a heart in the people makes an elder's task a joyful and not a grievous one.

On the other hand, if an elder is not open to a corrective word from even the youngest saint in the gathering, how is he an example for the very type of behavior he expects from the people? All of us must be open to the Lord's word no matter who it comes through. However, elders will have grace in their lives to care for the flock from a perspective of *oversight*. In other words, they will carry something of God's heart for the whole group and not for just a few of the members.

The overseers of the church in every locality should consist of a collegial band of men called as elders from that area. These men cannot be independent; they must see their need for one another, come together in friendship, and commit themselves to serve in oversight of God's house under His presiding Shepherd (senior Pastor), the Lord Jesus Christ.

...and when the Chief Shepherd (Grk. ARCHIPOIMEN) appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1Pet. 5:4)

If apostolic men retain an “official governmental” status to the churches they father, they will undermine the collegial overseers of the assemblies. Local elders in a fellowship should seek to stand together with the leader(s) of other local churches in the area, thus forming the body of men responsible for God's house there. An apostolic man who has fathered a local church will always have a special relationship with the believers. But the authority he has in their midst will not be official in nature; rather, it will reflect

family relationship. His words will carry weight because of his proven love for those saints. They will know he has not gathered them unto himself to become part of his group of churches; he has built them upon Christ.

Apostolic men from different geographic locations who relate to various fellowships in a particular area should encourage and promote unity between those local churches. When apostolic men do not do this, there will be a continuation of the same divisions that existed before they first arrived. How then have they contributed to building the house of God?

Men who build something other than God's house (a sect, a movement, a "stream") are not functioning as master builders. A master builder is concerned with God's one house, and he knows that the correct pattern to build by will only be fully revealed in each locale as each member is built upon Jesus Christ as the foundation. He will completely give himself to the task of keeping the Lord Jesus central both in his own ministry and in the churches he serves. Finally, he will ensure that nothing in his own heart or building methods undermines God's work of uniting His people in the Spirit.

*Lord, move in our day to cause all the "streams" and movements of Your people to begin to see beyond the river banks of our particular brand of Christianity. Center us in Your Son, gather us into Your presence and reveal Your glory both in and through us for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Servants  
And Stewards

### *Exalting Men*

The church at Corinth was in trouble. They were exhibiting division in their midst instead of expressing the oneness of God. Some said they were of Paul, others were of Apollos, Peter, and so forth. They were clearly elevating men in an unhealthy way.

Whenever we exalt anyone, whether it be ourself or some gifted church leader, we pave the way for jealousy, strife and ambition. Divine order is not necessarily displayed in a group just because everything “runs smoothly.” If jealousy and ambition are in the hearts of those ministering, the assembly is out of order. James had something to say along this line.

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

At first glance, it might appear that James exaggerated. Jealousy and ambition are a *couple* of evil things, not *every* evil thing. However, it is a fact that *all* the problems in the universe began when Satan jealously rose up to seize God’s throne. From that act has come every evil thing in creation. This spirit must be rooted out of the Church.

### *Building Wisely*

Paul sought to build the Lord’s house with wisdom; he longed to see the headship of Christ implemented among God’s people. This was why he emphasized so forcefully to the Corinthians that apostolic planters and waterers of churches are not the ones who make the Church grow. *God gives the increase* (1Cor. 3:4 - 7). He had laid an apostolic foundation in their midst and now others were building upon it. But, he said,

...let each one take heed how he builds on it. (1Cor. 3:10)

Some were building wisely, with gold and precious stones. Others were building with wood and straw. A day of fire was coming and God would test the quality of every man's work (1Cor. 3:12, 13).

Then the apostle described three kinds of people.

1. *"If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward"* (1Cor. 3:14). These individuals built with gold for permanence and were destined for a prize.

Gold, silver and precious stones are rare. They must be sought and then dug from the depths. Today the Lord is calling us to plumb the depths of His person and purpose. The wealth of the Kingdom will not be found in "quickie" times of relationship with Him where we fit Him into our schedule. Instead, we must center our lives around Him. Such a lifestyle will endure the fire of His testings.

2. *"If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire"* (1Cor. 3:15). These were superficial. They built with wood (whatever was laying on the surface).

Today there is so much available to the Christian in the form of books, tapes and teaching materials that it is possible to know a great deal and yet be very shallow in our relationship with the Lord. Then, when the inevitable fire of testing comes, though the believer retains his salvation, he finds that much of what he has invested himself in has been consumed. We must learn this lesson well. These present testings are only a prelude to a day of fire coming upon all who dwell on the earth. God is preparing us now for that day.

3. *This third group sought to destroy God's house* (1Cor. 3:16, 17). They exalted men, followed after them, and encouraged others to do the same. This was to the detriment of the preeminence of the Lord among His people, and Paul minced no words concerning such activity.

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. (1Cor. 3:17 NASB)

The word "destroy" could be translated "to corrupt" or "to wither." Whenever a group (or individual) builds in a sectarian way, exalting themselves, their leader(s) or their doctrine, God will send the judgment of a corrupting influence into their midst, and they will begin to dry up. Mixture will grow in their theology, and dry doctrine will replace the water of life. Today, the spiritual landscape is littered with clear testimony to the accuracy of Paul's warning. Ecumenism is an insufficient response to the problem of the divided Church. *We must repent for exalting men, doctrines and methods of Church growth above Christ.*

At the root of such error and division is the sin of pride. God has made very clear the way of escape for any who want out of the present predicament.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, *let him become a fool that he may become wise*. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” (1Cor. 3:18 - 20)

Very simply, we must repent for thinking we have been so wise in what we have built. This is especially so for those who hold to restoration theology.<sup>15</sup> The more one knows, the more susceptible he is to pride (1Cor. 8:1). If we do not humble ourselves before the Lord, we will not even notice as He tearfully slips out the door, His precious presence displaced by “Ihabod...the glory is departed” (1Sam. 4:21).

Then Paul reiterates his main point.

Therefore let no one glory in men. (1Cor. 3:21)

He goes on to say that *all* these ministries belonged to the believers and they belonged to Christ and Christ belonged to God (1Cor. 3:21 - 23). However, Paul did want them to understand the *proper* way to relate to the apostles.

Let a man so consider us, as servants (Gr. HUPERETES) of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1Cor. 4:1)

### *Under-Rowers*

The above word translated as servants (HUPERETES) could be translated as “under- rowers.” The picture that comes to mind is that of a Roman warship powered by many slaves manning the oars. At the end of the ship was someone in authority who kept them all rowing in unison by beating out a rhythm on a drum. Individual slaves did not just row where or when they felt like it. They had to move in harmony with the one setting the pace.

Apostles are “under-rowers” of Christ. He sets the pace and direction for His ship. They do not have their own agenda, program and plan for local church growth. They are concerned only with moving in unison with Him and the other foundational ministries serving the Church.

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<sup>15</sup> Restoration theology holds that, over the years, the early Church fell into decline in various ways, and God is in the process of restoring her to the apostolic and prophetic simplicity of devotion to Christ. This involves the restoration of the five-fold ministries listed in Ephesians 4, the gifts of the Spirit, proper understanding of church government, etc., but primarily involves the restoration of Jesus to His central role in the corporate life of the Church.



## *Stewards of God's Mysteries*

The second thing Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:1 concerning the apostles is that they are stewards of the mysteries of God. Stewardship indicates the responsibility to care for another's possessions. While God reveals Himself to everyone in the Church, some are called to a unique responsibility of oversight.

It is true that He will come and unveil His presence to all who love Him. This is the basis for body ministry. Jesus will reveal mysteries of His kingdom to all who are humble in heart (Mt. 11:25). However, the apostles (and certainly other overseers as well) bear responsibility to make certain that the purity of God's truth is preserved as believers share what they perceive God is saying.

The Church today needs the apostolic impartation of Christ. The Lord must raise up in our day apostles who will be faithful to disclose the foundation of Jesus Christ and His purpose. Afterwards, what is shared in local assemblies must be in harmony with that foundation.

When Paul established the church at Corinth, he laid out clear apostolic directives concerning how the church was to function.

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and *keep the traditions as I delivered them to you.* (1Cor. 11:2)

Elders did not simply teach whatever seemed good to them. It had to line up with the apostolic substructure that had been laid at the beginning of their Christian experience.

For a bishop (overseer NASB) must be blameless, as a steward of God...*holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.* (Tit. 1:7, 9)

Today, what is taught and ministered in local churches must come into harmony with the heart and purpose of God as He again raises up apostolic ministries to serve His Church. Achieving this will be difficult because of the Church's confusion concerning what real apostles look like. Lord, give us true apostles in our day - men who long for Your preeminence and who will give their lives to see it implemented.

It is true that fathering a church (laying the foundation for a new church) is an apostolic function. However, this does not mean that all who have fathered churches are apostles. Just as one may prophesy a great deal and yet not be a prophet, so one may start a church without being an apostle. Similarly, one may have pastoral input into the lives of people without being a pastor. Every church should have pastoral, prophetic, evangelistic,

apostolic and teaching qualities imparted to her through the gift ministries listed in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. Many will prophesy in the church, but only a few will be prophets. The same holds true for apostles. A man is not necessarily an apostle because he has done some apostolic activity.

Just look across the spiritual landscape in our generation. It can be observed that evangelists, pastors and teachers have fathered churches. Some have concluded that such men must therefore be apostles. It is not necessarily so.

### *The Mystery of Christ*

Apostles and prophets have unique ministries with unique characteristics. One main distinctive feature is their insight into the mystery of God's Son. Notice Paul's words to the church at Ephesus.

...when you read you can understand my insight into *the mystery of Christ*, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, *as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.* (Eph. 3:4, 5 NASB)

God revealed the mystery of Christ to apostles and prophets. It is interesting to note that this scripture in Ephesians does not refer to pastors, teachers or evangelists. Of course, that does not depreciate the importance of these ministries or the fact that they have God-given insights, but we must appreciate the importance of apostolic and prophetic ministries if we are to grasp the mystery of Christ.

Much has already been written concerning the ministries of pastor, teacher and evangelist - which are of great significance in the Church. Clearly though, God must bring forth apostles and prophets if the Church is to be restored to the simplicity, purity and power recorded in the book of Acts. There are dimensions in the mystery of Christ that will not be understood without them!

Some have said that because the mystery was revealed to Paul and he wrote it out for us in the Scriptures, we have no need for apostles today. Notice, though, that Paul did not say he understood the whole mystery. He said he had an insight. The mystery was revealed to apostles (plural) and prophets (plural).

Notice also that Paul did not say that the mystery of Christ was only revealed to those apostles who wrote the inerrant Scripture. *Paul needed Apollos, Agabus, Silas and Barnabas and their insights concerning the mystery of Christ.* The early Church needed *all* these men and others as well for the revelation of Christ to be more fully made known in their midst.

Some would say that because the full revelation of Christ was given to those who wrote the Bible, no further revelation of the Son is available to the Church in our day. We

can only gain *illumination* of the full revelation that they received. This thought is stated to undergird the truth that the canon of Scripture is now closed (i.e., no new books are to be added to the Bible).

While it is true that the canon is closed, the idea that God has nothing further to reveal concerning His Son than what is recorded in the Scripture is questionable. Simply stated, God is bigger than the book He wrote! The Bible itself states that it gives but a *partial* picture of Jesus' *earthly* ministry.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (Jn. 21:25)

If the Bible contains only limited content concerning Jesus' earthly life, how much more is it true that the Scriptures give only a partial (though inerrant) picture of God in His *eternal* habitation?! God has much to reveal about Himself through dreams, visions, prophetic insights, etc. All these further revelations must line up with Scripture (God will never contradict Himself); and they will be imperfect, for we know and prophesy in part. Therefore, they are not on the same plane as the Bible. However, they are a necessary part of our arsenal to help us grow up spiritually and overcome the enemy's attacks.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to *the prophecies* previously made concerning you, that *by them* you may wage the good warfare. (1Tim. 1:18)

Personal prophetic ministry is biblical, and it does bring further revelation concerning God and His purpose for our lives. *Jesus did not say that His leaving was to our advantage so that He could then send us the Bible, but so that He could send us the Holy Spirit* (Jn. 16:7)<sup>16</sup> God has sent His Spirit for the express purpose of revealing His Son in the earth.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. (Jn. 16:13, 14)

We must have the spoken prophetic word as well as the inerrant written word if we would know the Son as God intends.

Some people, out of fear of deception, have found safety solely in the Scriptures, to the neglect of an intimate relationship with Christ. The Bible has become their fortress of defense against the many confusing winds of doctrine blowing across the land. Yet the Bible itself tells us that God Himself is to be our refuge and stronghold (Ps. 46:1; 62:6 -

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<sup>16</sup> See page 126 of *The World Aflame: The Welsh Revival And Its Lessons For Our Time* (Charlotte, NC: MorningStar Publications), copyright 1993 by Rick Joyner.

8). While the Bible is indeed an essential tool for knowing Him, it must not become a substitute for a living experiential relationship with the One who wrote it!

Suppose God spoke a clear prophetic word concerning what His intentions are for America over the next twenty years. Such a word would have to be evaluated through prayer, diligent study of the Scripture and confirmation through other prophets in the Church. But we must not close our minds to such an interaction with the Lord simply because of a fear that we might be led astray.

Our safety is not found solely in the fact that we have the Bible with which to appraise our subjective spiritual experiences. We also have the indwelling Holy Spirit who was given to lead us into all truth. Our confidence is not only in the Scriptures, but in the One who wrote them and who now lives in our hearts!

Today, we must have restored to the Church foundational men who have anointed insight into the person of Christ. There are some today who insist that the foundation of apostles and prophets was laid through the writing of both the Old and New Testaments. Since the Old Testament was written primarily by prophets and the New Testament by apostles, we now have no more need for these ministries. Again, notice that Paul said that God has *now* revealed the mystery of Christ to His holy apostles and prophets. He is referring to New Testament prophets. Men like Agabus, Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32; 21:10) contributed in a foundational way as they unveiled insights into the person of Jesus in the midst of the congregations.

This type of activity must now occur as well in our day when believers gather together desiring to live in harmony with the biblical accounts of normal Christianity. If God is restoring prophets to the Church, what do they look like? How do they function in the church? And what exactly is a prophet? In the next chapters we will look at these questions.

*Lord, bring forth a great company of apostles and prophets in these days. Unveil to us the mystery of Christ in dynamic brilliant glory. In Jesus' name. Amen!*

## A Look at the Prophets

### *A Costly Calling*

The word “PROPHET” is the English transliteration of the Greek word PROPHETES. It basically means “one who speaks on behalf of another.” To be a prophet of *God* is to be *His* personal spokesman.

As we shall see, God requires more from His spokesmen than simply conveying His words. The prophet’s ministry has to do with proclaiming His heart. What *He* is feeling and experiencing must be revealed. Therefore, He must bring those called to represent Him as prophets into harmony with His holy character. His priority is that all who minister in His name would be like Him. When there is a lack of conformity to His likeness, even accurate words will not only fall short of revealing Him in the way He desires, they may even misrepresent Him. This is no light matter.

*It is an awesome privilege to bear the word of the Lord. Therefore, God’s spokesmen must have their lives and messages integrated. History reveals that He often speaks as much through one’s actions as He does through one’s words. It is probably safe to say that the prophet’s life is the major part of the message he is sent to convey. God is revealed in a holy life.*

When we consider the prophets in Scripture, one thing becomes clear. These men paid great prices for the burdens they carried. Hosea knew the unfaithfulness of his wife so that he might understand God’s heart concerning Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him. Ezekiel saw his wife die and was forbidden by the Lord to mourn in order that he might *be* a sign to the people. Jeremiah was rejected by his own home town and became the object of an assassination plot. The words these men brought from the Lord were expensive beyond human capacity to bear apart from grace.

Prophets saw their whole lives altered that they might become fit vessels to reveal God’s heart. Truly the prophet’s ministry and the bearing of the heart of God cannot be confused with simply having the gift of prophecy or the word of knowledge.

Today we see many bringing prophetic words to the local church, receiving words of knowledge and ministering personal words of prophecy for individuals as well. Such ministry can be a great blessing to God's people. Clearly though, the function of a prophet, while incorporating these, will embody a great deal more.

While there have been many attempts to stereotype the prophet's ministry, the Scriptures reveal that they are as diverse a bunch of folks as any other group in God's kingdom. Elijah did many signs and wonders; John the Baptist did none. Isaiah prophesied in the king's court; Ezekiel was sent to the captives in Babylon. Jeremiah, a prophet to the nations, stayed home; Jonah, a prophet to Israel, was sent to a foreign city. The majority of king David's prophetic ministry found expression in song; Daniel seemed to articulate his prophetic words to the people of God only through writing. Moses commanded the people to destroy their enemies and take the promised land; Jeremiah counseled them to submit to Babylon and walk away from the land. Each prophet was unique and made a distinct contribution to the outworking of God's purpose on earth.

While prophets are unique, they will also have much in common. Their calling is to come into God's presence and receive His burden for His people. Their concern is primarily that the person and word of God be revealed in the Church. They are grieved and stirred to speak up when they see the Lord's people satisfied without the manifest presence of God in their midst, settling for ritual or traditional "ruts." The prophetic burden on their hearts leads them to upset the status quo.

Consider the prophet Amos as he confronted the religious system of his day:

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water.... (Amos 5:21 - 24)

This is a clear call to stop playing games and to begin bearing fruit for God. Only a deep hunger for God's manifest presence can bring true fruitfulness.

He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit.... (Jn. 15:5)

Prophets can seem a threat to those who are prone to systemize and program church life. Human tendency is to organize rather than allow the Lord to direct His people. The prophetic ministry is needed to keep churches from reflecting its leaders more than Jesus.

Whenever a group begins to resemble an organization more than an organism, the trumpet's call of a prophet's warning should sound. "*Where is the Spirit of God in all this?*" At that point either the prophet will be silenced and the system preserved, or the

prophet will be heard and change will take place. Unfortunately, it is sometimes easier to get rid of prophets than to change.

### *Interpreting Prophecy*

One mark of prophets is that they often just do not fit much of the religious world. Perhaps it is because of the unique grace of God on their lives that they are not *able* to fit. When God called a man in Scripture to be a prophet, it was to more than simply a ministry of bringing words to people. It was to a life of both intimacy with the Lord *and* persecution from those who were comfortable with their own religious life.

Prophets brought the imminence of God to His people. When a prophet spoke, the Lord could no longer be thought of as far off. His burden could no longer be relegated to another time or to another people. Men were brought face to face with issues through the power of God and could not ignore them. To reject the prophet was to reject the One who had sent him.

It is precisely because of this anointing to bring the immediacy of God and His purpose to the people that prophets can miss His timing concerning the very events they foresee. Unless a prophet has a clear word from God concerning exact dates (Jer. 25:11, 12), he must guard his words very carefully. Often the clearer a prophet sees something in the Spirit, the sooner he might tend to think it will come to pass. He can often be wrong in this.

The prophets in Scripture were not so much concerned with predicting exact dates and times. They were to bring the immediacy of the future into the present and thereby stir the people to respond to God in their circumstances. This would then *prepare* them for the future.

As a matter of fact, sometimes God had His spokesmen communicate the certainty of a coming event by speaking of it in the past tense (e.g., Is. 53). Hence, if they were not careful, it would be easy for them to look to their past while God was in fact pointing to the future. This is why prophets must differentiate between the word of the Lord and their interpretation of that word (i.e., *their* thoughts regarding God's intent when He spoke, concerning what the fulfillment of the word will actually look like as well as how it is to be properly applied, and what the correct response is both individually and corporately, etc.).

It is not necessarily the prophet's responsibility to interpret what he has prophesied. If he does, he must distinguish between the word and his explanation of it. His primary responsibility is to simply bring what God has shown or spoken to him as accurately as possible (leaving nothing out; adding nothing to it).

...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,

for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2Pet. 1:20, 21)

The idea that the prophet's interpretation of his own prophecy is of more value than anyone else's is quite dangerous. He could bring a valid word that all agree is from the Lord, but then introduce his own desires and theology into the picture and begin to move the church in a wrong direction.

To elevate the speaker's interpretation of God's intent above what other men are sensing is to move the prophet toward a place of unaccountability. While God gives the task of evaluating both the content (*Is it biblical? Is it from God or from the speaker's own thoughts?*) and spirit (*Does it reflect God's heart or simply the prophet's own emotions?*) of the prophet's ministry to other prophets and spiritual men in the church (1Cor. 14:29; 2:15), who is to determine how it is to be interpreted? God has given *His Holy Spirit* to His Church for this very purpose. Each member must hear His voice. Prophetically gifted believers and elders may *summarize* what they believe the Spirit is speaking to His people. They may also sense a corporate direction for the fellowship to take based on prophetic input. However, each individual must respond to God's personal application of His word to their life. There will be different emphases for each and different responses from each. A directive word to the whole church must be evaluated by the overseers (e.g., "*We need to respond to this.*" or "*Let us wait on God concerning this.*" or "*We need further confirmation before we act on this.*").

Of course, there will be times when the word will require an immediate response from all present. One example of this would be a word from the Lord for all present to humble themselves in His presence. Sometimes, the response of the hearers will be affected by the way in which the prophet delivers the word. It must come from a pure heart filled with the Lord's deep concern for those listening. A wrong motivation will "muddy" the word and cause confusion, and perhaps even produce the opposite of God's original intent.

At this juncture it is important to recognize two distinct types of prophets. Consider the following quote from one of the many recent books on prophetic ministry.

We have much to learn about the different types of prophets - some are "seers" who prophesy according to visions, dreams or other revelation knowledge they have received; others are what I would call the "nabi" prophet, from the Hebrew word for prophet that means "to bubble forth." A nabi prophet knows in part and prophesies in part; most of the time...it is like looking "through a glass darkly" (1Cor. 13:9, 12).

The author goes on to say that he is a "nabi type" prophet.

I see the thoughts about to be expressed in words only microseconds before they are spoken - just enough time to decide whether I have faith to speak it, whether I



am using the proper phrasing, and whether it would be wise to speak what I am perceiving (1Cor. 14:32; Rom. 12:6).<sup>17</sup>

As we have said, the prophet must differentiate between God's word and his interpretation of it. God has sent His Holy Spirit to reveal to us how prophecy is to be applied. This is true also in the case of a seer's ministry. However, in his case, the correct interpretation of what he has seen often *is* the word of the Lord. In other words, the seer will *see* (that's why they are called seers) visions and dreams that are often highly symbolic.<sup>18</sup> At such times, what he views is not in itself the complete message. Rather, it points to truth that God wants to reveal. John the apostle was a seer. The Lord said to him,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia..." Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands. (Rev. 1:11, 12)

The lampstands were not in themselves the message. They symbolized something else.

...and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. (Rev. 1:20)

When the Lord revealed to John what the lampstands represented, He was also showing us an important lesson for understanding visions and dreams. We must turn to Him and wait upon Him for the correct interpretation of what we have seen. What He then speaks to us is the word of the Lord. If we then prophesy this word, we must be careful to differentiate between what God has spoken and our interpretation of it (i.e., our opinions concerning its fulfillment, God's intent, its application, the church's response, etc.).

While the elders are called to oversee the flock, they must honor the Lord's headship in the outworking of what He has spoken. We will only fully realize what the final corporate picture looks like when we get there! It is important to understand that God will have many surprises in store for the prophets as well as everyone else when predictive words come to pass and the fulfillment does not look at all like any of us thought!

*Lord, bring to pass what You have seen from all eternity. Establish Your purpose. Jesus, increase our capacity to see more clearly the difference between what was in Your heart and our interpretation of what You meant when You spoke to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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<sup>17</sup> Dr. Bill Hamon, *Prophets And The Prophetic Movement*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1990), pp. 74, 75

<sup>18</sup> One example where a dream was not symbolic but quite straightforward in its meaning is when the angel appeared to Joseph and warned him of Herod's threats against the child Jesus (Mt. 2:13). See also Mt. 1:20 - 21; 2:19 - 21.

Prophets:  
Laying Foundations

*Prophets: A Foundational Ministry*

Prophets lay foundations in building God's house (Eph. 2:20). In other words, they bring a revelation of Christ through their godly character as well as their prophesying that not only encourages individuals in their relationships with the Lord but in their love for their fellow believers as well. Lives are built together because of their involvement.

Prophecy is to *edify* the church (1Cor. 14:4). This word "edify" is OIKODOME in Greek. It comes from two words, OIKOS - house and DOMEIO - to build. Therefore, prophets are to have the effect on the local church that construction workers have on an unfinished house.

While all prophecy is to edify, prophets will do so in a foundational way. They will impart the life of Christ through their ministry in such a manner that *believers will be strengthened to stand in the building and testing process* of God's house being constructed. For example, they will have discernment to recognize when people are beginning to lose heart and fall into apathy. Through their prophetic words they will put courage into the hearts of the saints by pointing them to God's presence and then calling them to commitment - both to the person of the Lord and to the task He has put before them.

We see one Old Testament example of foundational prophetic ministry in the days of Ezra. The Jews while seeking to construct the temple were experiencing opposition from their enemies. As the antagonism increased, they began to lose heart and even began to form a theology to support their inactivity.

Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: "*This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.'*" (Hag. 1:2)

It can be so easy to develop doctrine justifying our present condition in the Lord. This is one reason why prophets are often sent to challenge the status quo.

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; *and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.* (Ezra 5:1, 2)

Just as the Jews in Haggai's day knew opposition, the New Testament Church was under the legalistic onslaught of the circumcision party. According to these teachers, Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved. After this issue was recognized as error and resolved at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, two prophets were sent to the church at Antioch.

Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted the brethren with many words and strengthened them. (Acts 15:32)

As local churches go through traumatic times of testing, believers will be tempted to lose heart. Prophets will bring strength and encouragement as they deliver the word of the Lord - for they will stand in His presence, hear His burden and bring His perspective to the situation.

### *Watchmen*

Prophets, as part of their foundational calling, are watchmen in the city of God. They are called to appraise the spiritual condition of God's people (Jer. 6:27) and then to blow the trumpet of warning to alert them concerning the consequences of their sinful practices (Ezek. 3; Jer. 6:17).

There is a great need today for prophetic ministry to emerge and send forth a clear trumpet sound that reflects God's heart - instead of religious, legalistic or prideful heart attitudes. Prophets must be broken, humble men. They cannot have religious agendas to push. To the degree they sound forth their own legalistic bias, they cease to represent Heaven.

Even when their observations of the people may be accurate, if God has not sent them to speak concerning a particular issue, then they must hold their peace. Otherwise, He will hold them accountable. At that point the focus of the Lord just might be on the need for the prophets themselves to change! Perhaps their need is for patience or a greater commitment to intercede for the people.

On the other hand, if God does send them and they speak in such a way that they misrepresent Him (speaking from anger, competitiveness, personal frustration, etc.), He will take it very seriously. Moses was kept from the promised land for this very reason (Num. 20:1 - 12).

Prophets, while burdened about sin, *must focus on grace, for grace is God's solution!*

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of *the grace that would come to you* made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. (1Pet. 1:10, 11 NASB)

As the Old Testament prophets viewed the sinful condition of their society, God began to include them into His burden concerning His solution. The Spirit of Christ within them began to indicate great future glory based on the suffering of the Messiah. As they prophesied, it became clear that God's answer was grace! For example, Zechariah saw in the Spirit a great mountain (an obstacle) standing before Zerubbabel and hindering him from finishing the task of completing the temple. Whatever that obstacle was (It was probably personal sin in the life of Joshua the high priest [Zech. 3]), he saw God's remedy.

Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!  
And he shall bring forth the capstone (i.e., the finishing touches to God's project) with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" (Zech. 4:7)

When the job was finished, all focus would be on the grace of God that enabled men to cooperate with God's purpose. This verse speaks to more than just the dilemma facing Zerubbabel; it addresses the building of God's house in our day. The finishing touches to God's glorious house will come amidst great celebration concerning the grace of God!

...rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1Pet. 1:13)

Eternity will hold the same perspective.

...in the ages to come He might show (display, NEB) the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:7)

If prophets are to contribute foundationally in building God's house, they must be deeply conscious of His grace - both of their own need for it and for the central role it plays in forging a people of holiness. Such men will never be pharisaic legalists. They will not focus on externals such as jewelry, dress, makeup and hairstyle. Their emphasis will be the heart. They will exhibit a deep confidence in God's ability to change His people from the inside out.

Their words will penetrate through the religious smokescreens of those who know how to "play the game" of looking holy but who are really far from the Lord. When they

speaking, *they will impart God's power for people to turn from their ways and unto the Lord*, because they will minister His grace through their words (Eph. 4:29).

They will hate sin and will refuse to compromise God's holy standards, but they will also understand that law is no cure for the carnal nature. They will bring a dimension of the glory of God into situations where answers are needed for they will understand their call to convey far more than words.

They will recognize that *the Lord Himself* is the answer for what ails God's house and that *He* must be released through their ministry. Then seeing their own limited success at imparting His life, they will cry out for the Lord to arise first in their own lives and then as well in the hearts of the people.

*Lord, raise up such men all across Your body! Reveal Yourself in ever greater dimensions through the prophetic company You are bringing forth in this hour. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Prophets -  
Servants in the Church

*Prophetic Frustration*

Prophets will intercede for those to whom they are sent. They will do so because God will give them insight into both the present spiritual condition of His people as well as His purpose for them.

“Prophetic frustration” occurs when the prophet catches a glimpse of God’s intent and yet also recognizes how the people are presently settling for far less. Unless he is given to intercession and *a confidence in God’s ability to bring to pass what He has purposed*, he will become irritated at the people. Then if he is not careful, his words will harass instead of encourage them. All who speak on behalf of the Lord must be careful to convey His heart, not their own frustration.

...whatever I speak, *just as* the Father has told Me, *so* I speak. (Jn. 12:50)

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth. (2Tim. 2:24, 25)

Prophetic frustration is widespread in the Body of Christ in our day. The problem is that many prophetic people, having seen in many churches what the people are settling for, have become discouraged and simply left their group to look for a “better” one.

Leaving is not always the best course. Sometimes God wants people to stay and intercede for Him to birth His intent in that place. Since others in that group may not see accurately what they see, who will cry out with insight on behalf of that assembly?

On the other hand, God may very well lead them out. Not all who have left churches in a dissatisfied condition are rebels at heart. Many times people have left fellowships carrying a very real prophetic burden and have simply not been quite sure how to either explain it or to otherwise handle it redemptively.

The emerging prophetic company that God is raising up in our day *needs to be trained in its calling*. As much as pastors or teachers might like to make prophets fit into a “ministerial mold” where they look more pastoral or didactic, the Lord’s desire is far different. God has called the prophet to a unique ministry with a unique perspective. The contribution they are beginning to make and which they will continue to make to the Body of Christ in the coming years will bring immeasurable blessing.

### *Understanding God’s Order*

Today, one cause of concern to many prophets is the perception of many believers concerning church order. While God has restored much truth in our day *His intent is to increase our capacity to better understand what was in His heart when He spoke*. God must break us out of the limitations we have imposed on ourselves by our interpretation of His word.

Sometimes God will lead certain believers in directions that we just do not feel comfortable with. Our “check” (i.e., our sense of internal discomfort) concerning their course may come more from our commitment to a way of doing things than from the Lord Himself. “Idolatry of structure” occurs when guidelines concerning acceptable behavior and activity are drawn more from what has been built than from God. “We just don’t do it that way here.”

At issue is the fact that we have far more truth in our minds than we have reality in our hearts. We simply fail many times to express the love of Christ for those who fall short of what is obviously (to us) God’s will for them. The way in which things ought to be done can become more important to us than the people themselves - those for whom Jesus died!

Can we not see that divine order is more expressed among believers who love God and are willing to die for each other than it is in an external form of acceptable behavior? God is taking us beyond what we understand of His purpose. To do this He must fill us with His Spirit and stretch our capacity for more of Him in our hearts. We must learn to love as He loves, serve as He serves and judge as He judges.

If there is anything that causes prophetic frustration in the hearts of godly prophets, it is this settling for a concept of “normal” church life that appears on the surface to be biblical but at the heart carries the intolerance of the Pharisees.

Eventually, all prophetic people must learn to handle the tension between what they see in the Spirit as God’s intent versus the present real condition of His people. How they manage the resulting internal pressure will indicate to what degree they will make a significant contribution to God’s objectives in their locale. They must have hearts of bondservants and “come on board” with the rest of the people as the journey is made toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose.

Remember, it takes patience as well as faith to inherit the promises (Heb. 6:12). Just because they may see something in the Spirit concerning His goal does not mean that they are any closer to it than anyone else. As a matter of fact, there have been many saints over the years who may not have had a very clear vision of God's ultimate *corporate* purpose who yet lived exemplary, holy and humble lives. Prophetic insight comes by grace; it is not a mark of spiritual greatness. Humility is always the true mark of spiritual maturity in God's sight.

### *Spiritual Gifts and Relationship*

The goal before us is not that we all become prophets; it is that we become spiritually mature. Prophets are few in number when considered in the context of the whole Body of Christ. To pursue a prophet's call would only bring frustration if God has called us to serve in a different capacity.

On the other hand, all of us are called to be spiritual. We are to be men and women of the Spirit. We are to be filled with His presence, hearing His voice, walking in harmony with His character and heeding His message concerning the preeminence of His Son. This is what it means to be friends of God.

There are basically two ways of gaining insight in the Spirit. God will show us something based either on our spiritual gifts or our relationship with Him. These are not the same thing. Deception occurs when I hear Him through my particular gift and then conclude that I must be walking in close friendship with Him.

For example, a teacher may conclude that he is walking with God as he ought because the Lord reveals truth to him in the Scriptures. However, such an assumption may be dangerous. The same holds true for prophets. Those called to this ministry will hear His voice and have discernment in the Spirit by the very nature of their gifting. Such insight does not necessarily mean that they are yet spiritually mature or even that they are walking in obedience to the Lord.

Paul recognized two types of people in the church at Corinth that would have spiritual perception concerning both the problems there as well as his response to them.

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet (PROPHETES) or spiritual (PNEUMATIKOS), let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Cor. 14:37)

Both true prophets and truly spiritual men and women would hear God's voice in what Paul was saying.



One purpose the apostle had in writing this particular section of his letter concerned specifically how prophets were to function in the assembly. He laid out clear guidelines. Two or three prophets could speak in a meeting and the others were to evaluate both their spirits (heart attitudes) and words. The spirits of the prophets were to be subject to the prophets.

In our day, local elderships must learn to honor the function of the prophets in the church so that what takes place in meetings will accurately reveal the mind of Christ. While prophets will have unique perception concerning other prophets, it is important to remember that, "*he who is spiritual appraises all things*"... 1Cor. 2:15 NASB.

In other words, while prophets will have a unique function of insight concerning other prophets as well as the direction and purpose of meetings, this does not do away with the function of the elders. For example, there is the issue of timing. Sometimes two prophets may sense almost opposite directions for a particular gathering. At that point it seems there are conflicting "cross-currents" in the Spirit.

This is why we need the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation operative in our midst. Such wisdom may be found in any believer in the assembly, for all have received Christ who is our wisdom. However, the elders will bear responsibility for making the final decision concerning which way to go; they are the overseers. During such times of seeming contradiction, the Lord may have the church first respond in one direction. This may then lead to a focus on the second path either later in that particular meeting or perhaps the next time the saints gather.

Along with timing, there is also the issue of content. Sometimes a prophet may simply err and confuse his own thoughts with the word of the Lord. Prophets must be evaluated in this regard just like any other member of the Body of Christ who speaks in a public manner.

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. (1Cor. 14:29)

Also, a prophet must not dominate a meeting but make room for the Lord to speak through others.

But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. (1Cor. 14: 29, 30)

While a man may be accurate in his spiritual perceptions because of a prophetic calling on his life, he may not yet be ready for eldership. Biblical qualifications for eldership always emphasize character over gifting. It is the elders (These should be spiritual men!) who bear responsibility to oversee the functioning of the body, including the prophets. Of course, having mature prophets in the eldership will bring great strength to that team of men.

## *The Church - Apostolic and Prophetic*

Prophets do not approach the building process as apostles do. They are concerned primarily with the heart of God. They do not speak because something needs to be said but because God has spoken and released them to declare it. When they view the church, they are not concerned primarily with doctrinal orthodoxy but with how the people as a corporate expression of Christ reflect or fail to reflect God's heart. Proper doctrine is irrelevant if the people's affections are misdirected from the Lord.

Jesus is not returning for a bride with a full head and an empty heart! It is passion for us that brought Him the first time and it will be passion for us that will bring Him again. Our hearts must reflect that same yearning for Him or we will fail to comprehend our calling to be His bride. We must return to our first love, longing for intimacy with Him. In whatever ways we have grown cold, we must repent and turn again to the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

The Church is to be an apostolic and prophetic company. Today God is restoring apostles and prophets that we may be established in this truth. Through their ministry graces, *local* gatherings will become accurate corporate representations of the Lord Jesus. As a result, the *universal* Church will become a corporate expression of Christ in the earth. Building methods and heart attitudes that undermine rather than unite God's people under the headship of Christ must be set aside. Each step in this process will be painful for traditional ministry, but we will all ultimately understand the wisdom of God when we see His glory filling His house.

*Lord, give us prophets who are willing to be patient with the rest of the Body. And help Your Body to be patient as these who are Your gifts to Your Church learn how to walk in their calling. And bring us together into the fullness of Your purpose. Lord, build Your house in this hour and fill it with Your presence. Bring together all the diverse parts and help us to serve one another for Your glory and purpose. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

According  
to the Pattern?

### *The Superiority of Christ*

The book of Hebrews was written to address the problem of Jewish believers looking back to the Old Covenant as a basis for right standing before God. Many were going back under the Law. The writer confronts this by articulating the superiority of Christ over the Law and the prophets.

Whereas in the past, God spoke in a *partial* manner in many ways through the prophets, in these last days He has spoken in full measure to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1). Jesus is the fullest expression of the heart and purpose of God. He is the exact representation of the Father's nature. He holds all creation together by His word and He presently rules while seated at the Father's right hand (1:2, 3). All angels are inferior to Him (1:4 - 2:18). Moses, a hero in Israel's history, was but a servant; Christ is God's Son (3:1 - 6).

There simply is no comparison between that which is created and the One who was begotten from the Father. *Jesus* is the One we have been baptized into; we find our life in Him. Therefore, let us not go astray in our hearts as the Israelites did. They saw His miracles but failed to learn His ways. They hardened their hearts and, as a result, that generation failed to enter the promised land. Today we can make the same mistake. We can hear His word and yet not have it profit us if it is not united with faith in us. Thus, we will fail both to cease from our own labors and to enter our promised land (i.e., God's rest; 3:7 - 4:6).

### *Entering His Rest*

Under the Old Covenant the Sabbath day was consecrated unto the Lord. In the New Covenant He also sanctifies a special day,

...saying in David, "*Today*," after such a long time, as it has been said: "*Today*, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Heb. 4:7)

The day for wholly trusting in God - to do what He has promised while we cease from our efforts (at maturity, at building His house, at being successful, etc.) - is *today*. We must believe in the Lord's ability to do in the earth what He has vowed. There *will* be a generation who will one day see the consummation of all He has pledged.

And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." (Isa. 25:9 NASB)

While it is true that Israel did finally enter the land of Canaan, by and large, they never entered their promised land. Their history is one of constantly failing to learn God's ways and enter His rest. Thus, as it says,

For if Joshua *had* given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. (Heb. 4:8 - 10)

Therefore, we are called to diligently enter such a lifestyle. It does not entail rest *from* all work. Rather, it involves abiding in Him *in* the work He has given us to do.

Sometimes we just do not clearly recognize the difference between what has originated in His heart versus what has come from ours. But the Lord is committed to judging our thoughts and intentions, as well as differentiating for us between soul and spirit. He knows us intimately and understands how we are tempted in these areas. So let us draw near to Him, obtain mercy and *find* grace to help us (4:11 - 16).

Notice, we *receive* mercy; it is God's response to our failures. However, grace must be *found* in a time of *need*. The proud who point to all they do for God will not see their need for it. Until they humble themselves, they will not find it. On the other hand, the humble will see their inability to impress God with their labors and will cry out in their need for His ability to be operative in them. Thus, He will oppose the proud and give grace to the humble. This is His strategy.

The Old Testament priesthood was established by God to communicate His recognition of man's great need. He instituted the Law to establish a way for His people to come near through animal sacrifices and priestly intercession. As helpful as it was, it was but a "type" or "shadow" of Christ. However, His present priestly ministry is of a totally different order than that of the Old Covenant. It finds its roots not in Abraham or Moses but in Melchizedek (again, another picture of Christ). It is based on the power of an indestructible life and the eternal promise of God (5:1 - 6).

*God's Oracles*

Clearly, as we view the Old Testament Scriptures we see that the burden on God's heart was the unveiling of His Son. The New Testament Hebrew believers had lost sight of the whole thrust of the Law and the Prophets.

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

These believers did not have the New Testament Scriptures; their Bible consisted of the Old Testament writings. If they were going to walk successfully with God, they would have to see past the letter of what was written and find the New Covenant. God had "hidden His Son" beneath the surface of the Law. If when they gazed at it, they only saw the commandments, they would miss God's heart. They needed to gain insight into the oracles or burdens borne by the prophets of old. Thus, the writer of Hebrews was anointed by God to articulate to them the superiority of Christ over all religion (even one authored by God).

### *The Pattern*

One problem facing the Hebrew believers was that Jesus just did not seem to fit the order of religion that had been established under Moses. If He was God's high priest, why was He not from the tribe of Levi?

For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve *the copy and shadow of the heavenly things*, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*" (Heb. 8:4, 5)

God's desire was that the reality of Heaven be properly expressed on the earth. Moses had to be accurate in the construction process so that what he built did not misrepresent God's design. Because he obeyed, an accurate "type" or "shadow" of heavenly reality was revealed on the earth. The problem with these believers was that they were going back to "shadow" instead of seeing the reality that had cast it!

It has been said that as we seek to co-labor with God in the construction of His house, we must "build according to the pattern." Only then will we build accurately. However, if we do, the result will be as it was with Moses. We will produce only a "shadow" of the reality God is establishing in our day. In many ways it will look like "New Testament Christianity" on the surface. But it will lack the authenticity of being corporately born of God's life.

Today is not the day for bringing forth that which testifies of heavenly reality. We must have a heart for God to establish among us the heavenly reality itself! God finished with types and shadows under the Old Covenant. We are not called to find the right pattern and then implement it. We must respond to Him who is the head of the Church and submit to His initiatives as He implements His will among us.<sup>19</sup> We must become in practice a people seated in the heavens who express individually and corporately the mind and heart of Christ on the earth.

It is certainly true that Jesus fulfills “the shadow” found in the Old Testament tabernacle with its attending laws and priesthood. However, if Jesus alone is the total fulfillment then the following verse would make no sense.

Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these (i.e., animal sacrifices), but *the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these*. (Heb. 9:23)

The blood of animals brought a ceremonial purity to *the copies* of the heavenly things. However, the heavenly things themselves were purified by a better sacrifice. What are the heavenly things that needed cleansing? It is clear that Jesus did not need to be purified by the shedding of blood; we did. We are that people of the heavenly realms even though we are yet living on the earth. God has...

...raised us up together, and made us sit together *in the heavenly places* in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:6)

The heavenlies are not somewhere in outer space; they are but a breath away. As a matter of fact, God’s breath (His Spirit) has birthed us into that realm. It is the domain of the Lord and His angels.

We are to have insight into that dimension and walk in this life, reflecting the values and purpose of the One who reigns as absolute King there. The Church is called to reveal corporately God’s will on the earth in the same way that the human body reveals the thoughts of the human mind. We have been joined to Christ; He is our head. *May God help us to become in corporate practice what the Scriptures declare is true of us positionally.*

Since we are not to simply find a pattern in the Scriptures and implement it, how are we to build? Are there insights to be found in how Moses constructed God’s house in his day? We will look at this in the next chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> This is not to imply that since we are to listen to the Holy Spirit’s voice in our day we are to therefore disregard what He has revealed to past generations of believers. The present Church must pay attention to her history and recognize her spiritual roots.

*Lord, help us to be a people who live in the heavenly realms. Forgive us for being visitors rather than dwellers in the holy of holies. Establish the reality of Heaven in our midst that we may become a corporate expression, not of religion, but of Your very heart. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Built  
By Wisdom

*Free Will Offerings*

Moses obtained clear instructions from God on how he was to construct the Tabernacle. When he came down from his meeting with the Lord on the mountain, he gathered the people together and related His word to them.

Take from among you an offering to the LORD. Whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze.... (Ex. 35:5)

Notice, he did not try to coerce the people into involvement with the vision. He made it clear that this house would be built out of willing hearts.

In the same way, Christianity is a free-will offering. All service and giving unto the Lord is to come as an act of worship, not as a result of the manipulations of men who are endeavoring to build something for God. When *the Lord* builds His house, *He* stirs up the hearts of His people into sacrificial giving. Notice how God backed up what He had said to Moses on the mountain.

Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. (Ex. 35:21)

Often, it is difficult to wait for the Lord to arise with zeal in the hearts of His people. Leaders must be very careful in this regard. Our tendency is to get impatient with the flock and then speak out of frustration. If God has sent us into a particular situation, then He will arise to fulfill what He has purposed to do. We do not have to defend ourselves nor fulfill His vision in our own strength. God is at work! We must believe in Him.

*Needs and Service*



Not only did God stir up the people to give, He raised up specific men to help in the building process.

And Moses said to the children of Israel, “See, the LORD has *called by name* Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, ...and *He has put in his heart the ability to teach*, in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.” (Ex. 35:30, 31, 34)

Today the Lord raises up overseers to teach and assist the saints in finding their unique place of service in God’s house. While it is important that these men articulate the principles of Kingdom life found in the Scriptures, yet there must be more than this. There must be the impartation of God’s wisdom through their lives and ministries. The whole Church must be filled with the wisdom of God. This is key to building God’s house.

Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. (Prov. 24:3)

At issue is not the great amount of needs both inside as well as outside of God’s house. No one argues the fact that there must come change both in the Church and in the world. Souls must be saved, marriages must be restored, bodies must be healed, etc. The amount of need before us is staggering. At issue is, *what is to be our response?*

Do we simply try and meet whatever needs are in front of us? It’s easy to burn out doing this. Jesus lived thirty years before doing even one miracle. Obviously, the need of man was not the primary motivating force in His life; His Father’s will was.

Jesus did nothing of Himself. He only did what He saw the Father doing and He did it in the same manner (Jn.5:19). Similarly, we must come to grips with accomplishing the Father’s will on the earth. While it is clear that we cannot be callous to the suffering of people around us, our objective is the establishing of *God’s* perfect response to the painful cries of men. Jesus was God’s perfect answer two thousand years ago; He remains so today. Only now, Jesus is revealed in corporate expressions of His life, not just in one individual. The Body of Christ must arise in all its diversity of function. Notice how this will occur.

### *Building by Wisdom*

And Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan (lit. man *wise* of heart) in whom the LORD has put *wisdom* and understanding, to know *how* to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded. (Ex. 36:1)

We must see more than the need of man and the principles of Scripture. We must be filled with the wisdom of God. His wisdom brings with it the insight on how we are to respond to present need (both in the Church and outside of it). As each individual is confronted by both the specific deficiencies before them and God's insight on how to meet them, something amazing begins to occur.

Then Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, *everyone whose heart was stirred*, to come and do the work. (Ex. 36:2)

When the people received insight on how *God* wanted to accomplish certain aspects of the construction, they were stirred to action by His Spirit. Often today, when believers see deficiencies in the local church, the tendency is to “dump it” on the man (men) in “full time” ministry. “We need more involvement by the parents in the Sunday school.” “We need to reach out to the youth of our city.” “We need more evangelism.” “We need more intercession.”

As long as the assembly continues to burden a few with what is to be done by the many, we will continue to have burnout among the few! The Body simply will not emerge in such circumstances. Men are not put into “fulltime” ministry to meet the pressing needs of the saints and the world.

If need dictates a man's decision to leave “secular” employment, it will dominate his whole ministry. And he will burn out. There is only one reason why a man is released into financial support by his local church. It must be Father's will for him. Otherwise, need will direct his path and he will actually be a hindrance to the emerging of the Body of Christ (The tendency is to try and be the whole Body yourself!).

The Lord allows His people to see present need not so they can then put it on the leaders. Rather, they are to cry out to God for wisdom on how *they* are to respond to what they see. Of course, as they do this, it would be wise to look to the overseers for input in the decision-making process.

God has a *multi-faceted* response to the needs of His universe; it is the Church of Jesus Christ. He deposits a facet of His wisdom in each of His people and then stirs us to action in response to Him. Creation waits for God's sons to arise in His wisdom. The planet will not be satisfied with the revelation of a new method of church growth. Here is a very clear distinction: men make methods, God gives wisdom.

Our Lord has a statement to make to all rulers and authorities in heaven and on earth. That statement is too big for any individual to articulate. It requires a response from every one of us.

to the intent that now the manifold (or multi-faceted) wisdom of God might be made known *by the church* to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10, 11)

The eternal purpose of God is to reveal His wisdom through His people not only to the world but to the powers in the heavens. He has something to say into which angels are seeking to gain insight (1Pet. 1:12).

Apart from the Body of Christ arising in the wisdom of God, there simply will not be the impact in our spiritual warfare that so many today seek. The key to shaking the heavens is not simply that we see the emerging of apostles and prophets in the Church. Rather, it is that we see the people of God arise in His wisdom! Wise apostles and prophets will recognize this burden on God's heart and will give their lives to see it come to pass.

*Lord, pour out Your Spirit of wisdom upon us and stir us into action that You might be revealed in all the earth. Reveal Your plan not only upon the earth but into the heavens as well. Lord Jesus, bring down all that can be shaken in the heavenly realms and bring this age to an end. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Dressing for the Lord's Day

### *The Goal of God's Judgments: A Prepared Bride*

In this final chapter I would like to shift the emphasis from the Church's identity as both Christ's body and God's house to that of her calling to be His bride. While a large portion of Scripture is devoted to the theme of God building His house for His own eternal habitation, it is His marital relationship with His people that comes forcefully into view at the end of the Bible.,

Much of the book of Revelation focuses on the cosmic battle of the ages between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. However, God's total and absolute victory is never in doubt. In fact, His judgment on His enemies culminates as He fulfills His own very unique end-time goal.

For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and *His wife has made herself ready.*" (Rev. 19:2, 6, 7)

God is preparing a bride to rule with Him forever. The spiritual war we are presently in serves His purpose in readying us to fulfill that high and holy calling.

### *Proper Values*

Someone once said that the world's definition of the golden rule is that those who have the gold, rule. A quick look at the world's systems would seem to affirm this. But it is different in the Kingdom of God. Simply put, God's value system is totally opposite to man's.

When some rich men brought bags full of money into the temple treasury, the disciples were impressed...and Jesus yawned. But when the widow put her pitifully small contribution in, the disciples barely noticed...while Jesus was greatly blessed. They had been stirred by the amount of money; Jesus was impressed by the amount of self-sacrifice.

The problem the disciples had continues to plague us today. It stems from our tendency to evaluate by external appearances, while God always looks at the heart.

### *Jesus - Center Stage*

If we would be used by the Lord in preparing His bride, we must have the proper value system. Whether or not she is beautiful by the world's standards is really unimportant. God is not looking to impress *the world* with her so much as He is to impress His Son!

The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage *for his son*.  
(Mt. 22: 2)

The Kingdom of God is like a feast where the Groom (His tastes, His desires) is the focus. All spotlights are on Him! Even the bride herself is not the main event. Her beauty is only relevant to the extent that it pleases Him; her preparation has been solely for Him. To the degree she considers what others would like to see in her, she fails to fulfill her calling. Their evaluation is unimportant and irrelevant; His is of primary significance.

Does this mean the Church is not to take any consideration of the world? Of course we are. However, the world must not set our standard, define our task, nor issue our timetable. If what we minister to them is valued only by the benefit to them, then their evaluation of us will become all important.

But if what we do on the earth is an offering unto Christ on their behalf, then only His assessment will matter. In Revelation 19 the bride is said to have made herself ready. Ready for what? *For Him!* What confirms this? She has put on fine linen garments, which are her righteous acts.

In other words, her righteous deeds on the earth - her ministry to the world - reflect her preparation for Him (her relationship with Christ). The Church is to serve others at His command, not theirs. To the degree that she does so, she is adorning herself for Him. Of primary importance to her is what He thinks, not what the media say.

A Christ-centered people will impact the nations of the earth. A Church that simply focuses on the needs of man will continually react to crises that arise, rather than function as a prophetic voice reflecting the initiative of God.

## *Mammon and Beauty*

Why was mammon such a common topic of our Lord's during His earthly ministry? Mammon (riches) reflects *the power to beautify according to the world's standards*. It can purchase magnificent cathedrals, attendance at the finest seminaries, high-tech communication equipment to reach millions, political clout. This is not to imply that proper use of such things is wrong. However, attractiveness in the sight of God has nothing to do with them.

The world has its definition of beauty; God has His. Of the two, one is from a temporal perspective; the other has eternity in mind. One is short-lived; the other lasts forever. For too long the Church has been impressed with what has attracted men. What is our goal? To attract men to the Church? If so, then what they think of us will govern our actions. Or is our goal to become increasingly attractive in Jesus' sight? *Yes!* What *He* thinks is of supreme importance. Any bride that dresses to impress anyone other than her groom has wrong priorities. We are being prepared for a day that has been exclusively set aside for Him. It will be His day. That is why Scripture calls it "the day of the Lord." It will be a day to consume the temporary and confirm the eternal. We must "dress" in preparation for that day.

Of course, reaching out to lost men in the name of Jesus is part of the bridal apparel we are donning in this day.

*How beautiful* upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. (Is. 52:7)

God loves the lost; we are to do so as well. This is attractive in His sight. However, in this time of evangelistic emphasis, it can be easy to lose sight of God's priorities. Numbers can become the mark of a successful local church. Beautiful buildings can be seen as evidence of God's approval. Multi-million dollar projects done in the name of Jesus can seem impressive to many. Money then can become the key ingredient for "maintaining this ministry."

The real question is whether or not *God* considers it a spiritual success. This is an issue that Christian leaders must continually answer as they endeavor to serve God's people (assisting Christ's bride with her wedding dress).

The truth is that money itself never enhances the beauty of God's people in His sight. In fact, wrong attitudes toward it can quickly mar the eternal qualities of faithfulness so important to our Groom. Thus we may grow in increasing beauty in the sight of men while simultaneously causing grief to the heart of God. Jesus was so concerned with the seductive power of earthly riches that on several occasions He warned that it was impossible to serve both God and mammon. (Luke 16:13; Mt. 6:24)

## *Corrupted Theology*

To serve God means that He “calls the shots” in our lives; to serve money means that it does. This shift can occur very subtly. A project may start out with great enthusiasm as God leads His people in a new direction. The finances to accomplish it quickly flow in. As the endeavor nears completion, perhaps too much attention is given to the usefulness of the funds God supplied. Mammon begins to get a bit more credit than it deserves. Soon, actions are taken to get more capital. Thus, mammon is calling the shots as the need for money dictates the activity.

Instead of seeking God for His direction, methods that have worked before are enlisted again. Then, ever so subtly, our theology begins to give a greater place to earthly riches than God intended. “If only I had more money, I could really impact the nations with the gospel and help extend God’s kingdom.” Money is *not* the driving force behind God’s purpose. It is simply a tool in the hand of the Master.

Contrary to the impression left by some of our brothers on Christian television, the Lord has plenty of resources to accomplish what He desires. He does not need money; He created gold in the first place! He only needs our obedience with what He has already put into our hands.

## *Dressing for the Lord’s Day*

In light of this, how are we to “dress” for the day of the Lord?<sup>20</sup> First, we must understand what He defines as riches. If mammon brings an earthly beauty, what brings a heavenly one? And where is it to be found? We must be....

...knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:2,3 NASB)

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<sup>20</sup> I believe the Lord’s day will be exactly that - the day when the whole universe focuses on Him. It will be His day. Some have said that John was referring to Sunday when he spoke of being caught up in the Spirit on “the Lord’s day.” (Rev. 1:10) However, Sunday is referred to as “the first day of the week” in the Scriptures; the last day of the week is called “the Sabbath.”

The book of Revelation is truth that John saw as he was caught up in the Spirit into the day of the Lord! To say, “The Lord’s Day is not the day of the Lord” is to say, “The house’s roof is not the roof of the house.” We must be careful that we not twist the plain meaning of the Bible (*and even the English language!*) in our endeavors to gain spiritual insight.

The supreme riches of the universe are hidden *in the Son!* They are not found lying on the surface so that we can easily fit Him into our schedule in “quickie” five minute devotional times while we hurry about with “more important” things to do. God has called us to plumb the depths of His own being!

It is in knowing Him that we will receive insight concerning how to walk before Him and impact the nations. He has a plan. If only we would take more time to listen. Simply put, the treasures of eternity are the wisdom of God and the knowledge of His ways. As our ministry on the earth - both to the world and to the Church - increasingly reflects these, we will be literally adorning ourselves for the day of the Lord!

*Lord, we present ourselves again to You. Forgive us for wrong priorities, for fitting You into our schedules instead of centering our lives around You. We realize that the wealth of Heaven is found in You. We commit ourselves to pursuing You and spending time in Your presence. Teach us Your ways, reveal Your wisdom to us and cause us to learn Your value system, that our lives and ministries may be in harmony with Your process of preparing Your bride with Your eternal beauty. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*



## Epilogue

God is at work to both beautify His bride and establish His glorious house in these days. Only He can do this. The methodology of man is simply insufficient to achieve what God has purposed. We desperately need Him to come and fill us with His presence and change us from the inside out. Simply put, what the Church needs is to bear an abundance of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, there are many necessary ingredients that go into growing spiritual fruit in our lives. However, since God is not looking for the fruit of human effort but for the fruit of His own life in us, the most important ingredient is the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We must not consider Pentecost to be only an historical event. Rather, we must have an *ongoing* experience of the rain of heaven in our midst. He is as necessary to the Church as rain is to the land. We cannot produce fruit that reflects the character of God without the continual abiding presence of His Spirit *within* us and the continual outpouring of His Spirit *upon* us. God Himself is our hope of fruitfulness.

...Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field and the fruitful field is counted as a forest. Then *justice* will dwell in the wilderness, and *righteousness* remain in the fruitful field. (Is. 32:16)

Justice and righteousness characterize those who are bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Righteousness is found in a proper relationship with Him; justice is found in a proper relationship among men.

While righteousness is a gift from God, justice occurs in the expression of that righteousness toward others. Justice is found where men treat one another as the Lord intends. Men have always longed to be treated with fairness and dignity. Yet the lack of true justice has been a distinguishing mark of human history. Greater education has not established it. The disciplines of science, philosophy, and psychology have not brought it forth. Communism, capitalism, and socialism have all promised it; however, we always find much injustice in every society built exclusively on these economic ideals.

Justice is the mark of the Kingdom of God! All human attempts to produce it apart from God have failed and will fail.

God promised that when He poured out His Spirit upon His people, justice would be apparent in their midst (Is. 32:15, 16). Men would treat one another as they ought. Jesus pointed to this truth just before His ascension. He promised to pour out the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, and then He commanded them to *treat each other as He had treated them* (Jn. 14:16, 17; 15:12). *This* was to be the sign that they were followers of God's true Messiah (Jn. 13:35; 17:22, 23).

Without question, the Church has failed to express the Kingdom of God as she has been commissioned to do. As we see the many divisions in the Church and a lack of godly character, we ask, "*What is the solution?*" We need to humble ourselves before Him and seek a fresh visitation from Heaven. He is our only hope. He has promised that righteousness and justice will be found in our midst with the outpouring of His Spirit. History and personal experience have proven that He can be trusted.

Ultimately, the goal is Christ! Jesus has so identified Himself with His people that He speaks of us as a body, with Himself as the head. Thus, what is seen is not two separate, independent entities, but one corporate being - Head and body, which is Christ.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, *so also is Christ*. (1Cor. 12:12)

In this corporate man, each member retains his individuality; this must never be lost. Jesus retains His personal identity as King of kings, Lord of lords, the Great I Am, the One worthy to be worshiped forevermore. He is God. We also keep our individuality, for Jesus loves us and died personally for each of us. He wants to have a close, intimate relationship with every one of us. Yet, while we retain our individuality, each of us has lost our independence for we are now "*individually members of one another*" (Rom. 12:5).

We are literally parts of one another and in need of each other. Because the Church has not recognized this one basic truth, there has been division of what is indivisible, a weakening of what should contain all power, a tearing down of what is being built, and much death in what should be characterized by life. Sadly, many Christians are oblivious to the paradox of these things.

Little by little, though, the Body of Christ is coming together. He is restoring the Church; He is preparing His bride for His return!

Let us be people who contribute to this end.

Lord, may Your life be revealed in us. May Your holy character be increasingly manifest in our lives. And may the corporate expression of Your person be produced and put on display for all the nations to see. Lord, establish justice and righteousness in the land. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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### Epilogue

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