

The New Testament Church Planting Process

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This article is presented to lay out the apostolic process by which local assemblies are planted and established.

*Then He taught them many things by parables,
and said to them in His teaching:
“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow” (Mark 4:2-3).*

THE BIBLE LIKENS THE WORK OF PLANTING a new assembly to farming. The field is the hearts of men and the sower is the preacher of the gospel. The seed the preacher sows is the Word of God, or specifically, the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of God manifested in the flesh (Mark 4:14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:16). Peter tells us that we become “born again” through this implanted Word.

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever... Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:23, 27

Like a seed, the gospel has power within itself. When planted in the right kind of ground, which is an open, yielded, submissive heart, it will bring forth the desired spiritual fruit. Paul wrote of “the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit...”(Colossians 1:5-6).

The Bible provides us with a specific instance of this happening in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, after Peter has preached the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and declared Him to be both Lord and Christ, the Bible says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized... (Acts 2:41).” There was good ground in Jerusalem on that day.

We can see from this passages that three things are required to successfully plant a new assembly:

1. A sower (someone to preach the gospel).
2. Seed (the true gospel of Jesus Christ).
3. Good ground (people with open, yielded, submissive hearts).

When these three things come together, spiritual life is brought forth.

Return to the Radical

Some church planters today have failed to consider that the Bible lays out a clear and specific pattern for planting an assembly and bringing it to maturity. The present method of evangelism is often backwards when compared to the New Testament pattern. For many, the objective is to try to get people to come to a specialized building (called a church) using a variety of man-made programs. We see the opposite of this in Jesus Christ's model of evangelizing as demonstrated by the early Christians. The apostles and their contemporaries did not wait for the lost to come to them; they went to the lost, befriending them and meeting with them in their homes and public places. They focused on relationship first, then the gospel—not exclusively, but as their general strategy.

This is the apostolic pattern. When there is difficulty in making a connection, the biblical principles of relationship can be taught so that, if possible, biblically-defined relationships can be formed. When appropriate, people can be confronted in love, not to condemn, but to remove the behavioral or attitudinal obstacles to relationship. For the seed to be effectively planted into an open heart, there must be connection and relationship. This forms the basis for speaking the truth in love.

In contrast, the modern approach often goes something like this: Get someone to come to a “church building” to attend a “church service.” After a time of singing, read a text from the Bible and preach. There are two appeals calculated to bring the visitors to salvation. The first is, “You don't measure up to the Scriptures.” This is essentially a message of truth without grace. The second is, “Come and receive what God wants to give you.” This is essentially a message of grace without truth. At some point later in the process, there may be an effort to establish a relationship. Often, however, no attempt is made to establish a biblically-based relationship with those to whom the gospel is being “presenting.” In fact, many present-day believers, including church planters, have very little comprehension of what a biblically-defined relationship even is.

Is there really an apostolic pattern for founding and forming a local assembly? This is like asking, “Is there a pattern for the body of Christ?” Clearly the answer

is yes. In the days of Moses, the tabernacle represented the body of Christ, God's dwelling place on the earth. But Moses was not given the option of building it any way he wanted; God required him to build it His way, instructing him, "According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it" (Exodus 25 9).

The tabernacle was only a shadow of what was to come. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory..." After Jesus was born, He served as God's dwelling place on the earth. But His flesh was not formed in an arbitrary way. He was "the Word made flesh." After Pentecost, the Church, expressed largely through local assemblies, became God's earthly habitation. As Paul wrote to the assembly in Corinth, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

If the tabernacle was built according to a God-given pattern and if when God was manifested in the flesh, that flesh was formed in accordance with the Word of God, then how can we think God does not have a specific pattern for His Church? We are the body of Christ!

The gospel of Jesus Christ will not reach the whole world until local assemblies become fully apostolic in the complete New Testament pattern. To those who would consider this a radical idea, we freely accept that assessment. According to *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913), the word "radical" is derived from the Latin root *radicalis*, which means "having roots, pertaining to the root, or proceeding directly from the root." Because of this core meaning, it has come to mean "reaching to the center, to the foundation, to the ultimate sources, to the principles." It therefore means "original; fundamental; thorough-going; unsparing; extreme; as, radical reform." Since our wholehearted desire is to see the original New Testament pattern restored and adhered to, then what we propose in this article is absolutely radical!

Paul, the Sower

Since we have more information in the Scriptures about Paul's planting work and methods than anyone else, we can conclude that he is the example of a church planter that God wants all church planters to use as their model. Speaking as the planter of the assembly in Corinth, Paul writes this...

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one

will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder [skillful architect] I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:6-11).

This passage describes the cooperative work of two apostolic gifts in planting and building up the assembly in Corinth. Notice that Paul says they are "one" (working in unity); yet they are each accountable for the quality of their work on an individual basis ("each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor").

Paul likens planting and raising up a local assembly to both farming and construction in this passage. He says, "I planted" – "I laid the foundation." He then says, "Apollos watered" – "another builds on it." He then explains, "You are God's field" – "you are God's building." Paul described himself as a "wise master builder" – literally a skilled architect. In other words, he knew what he was doing. He wasn't just reacting to circumstances and he wasn't figuring things out as he went along. When Paul went into a city, he went with a plan for building a church. He had the blueprints.

Acts 18:1-11 describes Paul's work in laying the foundation of the church in Corinth. This passage begins, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth." After connecting with Aquila and Priscilla and making arrangements to work with them, the Bible says he "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks (v.4)." Here we see Paul engaged in the work of planting the seed. This passage shows us that Paul's first efforts were directed toward those who already knew something about the Bible. He reasoned with them concerning their understanding of the Scriptures. But when his companions arrived, he preached the gospel outright.

Verse 5 says, "When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ." He had now declared the full gospel: Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies, the one to whom they must now bow the knee. But when this message was largely rejected, he then moved on to another group. Verse 6 says, "But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" He then connected with a man named Justus, who is described as one who "worshiped God." Verse 8 then reports, "Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

How wonderful! Many people in Corinth heard, believed, and were baptized. What was it they heard? Clearly it was the gospel. Certainly Paul knew the instruction Jesus gave the apostles when He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). They heard the gospel, they believed it and were baptized.. This process is laid out clearly in Romans 10:14-17....

How then shall they call on Him [baptism, see Acts 22:16] in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Before anyone can believe and call on the name of the Lord by being baptized in the name of Jesus, a preacher must first be sent, he must preach the gospel, and someone must hear. Only then can a person believe and be baptized. And this is exactly what happened in Corinth. Paul called this planting the seed and laying the foundation.

One Foundation

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

In the foundational stage of planting an assembly, the focus must be on Jesus. He is the Cornerstone, He is the starting point. Paul affirmed this when he wrote, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Paul didn’t say that “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was all he preached; he said it was all he knew. You see, “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” was not only his message, it was also his manner of living.

Paul went on to say, “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:3-5). What does he mean by “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”? He means

that part of his plan was to intentionally demonstrate both the Spirit and power of God to the people of Corinth.

This is an often overlooked yet essential part of laying the proper foundation. This is what we sometimes call “humble servanthood” or “servant leadership.” How did Paul do this? What did the demonstration of the Spirit and power look like? The following passage provides an excellent answer to this question. Please read it slowly and thoughtfully.

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. 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! 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; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you (1 Corinthians 4:9-11).

This is the demonstration of God’s Spirit and power. It has nothing to do with the appearance of power and might and everything to do with living as Jesus lived. This passage also shows the Spirit of Christ Paul walked in.

If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ... For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more (1 Corinthians 9:11-12, 19).

This is also the demonstration of God’s Spirit and power as is the following passage.

And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Laying the foundation of an assembly means preaching the gospel and demonstrating the humble serving spirit of Jesus Christ. The objective is that those coming to Jesus would be established in their own personal relationships with the Lord, learning from the beginning that being a Christian is not just a matter of receiving blessings, but also a matter of serving other people in humility. This is a missing ingredient in the foundation of many assemblies.

The Sower is Also the Seed

He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one” (Matthew 13:37-38).

In this parable, the seed is not the gospel; it is the one preaching the gospel. The field the preacher is planting in is the world. This is because Jesus has told us to go into all the world and preach the gospel. But just before His crucifixion Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24). Before the seed can become fruitful, there must be a dying.

Paul, as the wise master builder, understood this principle. He wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). The reason Paul could go into city after city, facing hatred and opposition, preaching the gospel and demonstrating the Spirit and power of Christ, was because he saw himself as already dead. He realized that his life really wasn't his life at all; it was the life of Jesus living and working in Him. He realized He was not his own; he had been bought and belonged to another.

The life of Jesus operating in us is called “grace.” This is the spiritual power that enables us to accomplish the work God calls us to accomplish. Paul explained it this way, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9-10). It was grace working in Paul that empowered him as the sower and the dying seed in Corinth. He wrote, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation” (1 Corinthians 3:10).

These verses help us understand the preparation that goes into planting a church. It is primarily character preparation. Paul had to completely die out to his personal dreams and desires and agendas, and become fully committed to serving Jesus – however, wherever, and whenever.

Overview of the Process

And He said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on

the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29).

This parable tells us that growth takes place over time and that there are specific stages in the growth process. First the seed is planted – the gospel is preached. Then the tender young blade sprouts up – a new assembly forms under direct apostolic oversight. Then the mature head comes forth – an established assembly no longer dependent on one man for its survival begins to function under the oversight of a team of qualified men called elders. Finally, the ripened grain appears – an assembly begins to reproduce itself by sending out apostolic teams to plant new assemblies. The ripened grain becomes the seed for planting a new crop.

The process of planting and establishing a local assembly can be divided into three phases:

1. The preparing phase.
2. The planting phase.
3. The perfecting phase.

In the first phase, those who will be doing the initial planting must prepare themselves for the task. In the second phase, they go out and do the work of planting the assembly. In the third phase, they place the maturing assembly under proper biblical oversight. We have already looked at the preparing phase, so now let's look at the work of actually planting the seed and laying the foundation.

The Planting Phase

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

In the 13th chapter of Acts, the eyes of the Lord found Paul and Barnabas and identified them as men who were qualified to plant new assemblies. Acts 13 and 14 provide an overview of God's process for planting, establishing, and providing oversight for a local assembly. The passage begins this way.....

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and

teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:1-3).

Notice that there were at least five men praying together. As they prayed, God selected two of them, Saul and Barnabas, to go out on a special mission. Notice also that the Holy Spirit did not specify an office they were to hold, but rather a work they were to accomplish. They were then appointed and sent out by the local assembly to do that work, presumably to work under the oversight of those leaders. The story of their church planting concludes with these words.....

From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:26-27).

They completed their work and reported back to the ones who had recognized God’s purpose in them and sent them out. In other words, they did not operate independently but under full accountability to the overseers of the local assembly that sent them out to plant. This is a concept that is frequently ignored. Instead of following the pattern in the Scriptures, many modern church planters send reports to an organizational board with whom they have little or no personal relationship.

Church Planting Gifts

Church planters must be divinely gifted and equipped for the work. To try to accomplish a divine work without the divine gift is dangerous. At best it will result in frustration. At worst it could result in total shipwreck. Ultimately, it is the gift that accomplishes the work. (“I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”)

What gifts are needed to plant new assemblies? Ephesians 2:20 says that the Church is built on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.” Throughout the book of Acts, it is apostles and prophets who lead the way in raising up new assemblies. For example, Paul is identified many times as an apostle. Barnabas is also called an apostle in Acts 14:14. Barnabas may have also functioned as a prophet. Acts 11:24 describes him as “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” In Acts 13:1 he is listed among the

prophets and teachers at Antioch. The name Barnabas means Son of Encouragement, or more literally, Son of Prophecy. Paul later worked with Silas, who is clearly identified as a prophet in Acts 15:32. In the plan of God, the foundations of local assemblies are to be laid by those with apostolic and prophetic giftings.

Ephesians 4:11 says that Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as gifts to the Church. Yet many have erroneously believed that the most important of these gifts are pastors, teachers, and evangelists. Biblically, however, these gifts come into more significant operation after an assembly has been established. For example, when Philip the evangelist attempted to start an assembly in Samaria, even though he was doing his very best, he couldn't really get it going until the foundational ministries of Peter and John arrived. Peter and John are both identified as apostles, but we also know that John had a very powerful prophetic gifting, since he is the author of the book of Revelation.

A careful evaluation of gifts must be undertaken before starting out to plant an assembly. Being a good preacher and/or teacher and having good pastoral skills is not enough. There must be an apostolic and/or prophetic gifting.

The Apostolic Team

We can see in the Acts 13 model that the work of establishing local assemblies was assigned to teams of men. First of all, in this case Paul (Saul) and Barnabas, an apostle and a prophet headed up the team. This makes sense, since the foundation of the church includes apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). But the team was not limited to these two men. Acts 13:5 says, "They also had John as their assistant." And Acts 13:13 says, "Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga." We see that it was an entire party of men who were assigned this work. Not all were apostles or prophets, but all were participating in the apostolic work of laying foundations under the oversight of the wise master builders (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Church planters must not approach this work as soloists. It must be a team effort. Psalms 127:1 says, "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Jesus said that He would build His Church, but notice that the laborers are plural.

An apostolic team should include people whose gifts and equipping enable them to function in the following ways:

1. The ability to organize and oversee the work.
2. The ability to prophesy.
3. The ability to effectively witness and teach home Bible studies.
4. The ability to play music, sing, and lead praise.
5. The ability to minister to young people.
6. The ability to preach the gospel in an evangelistic manner.
7. The ability to pray and minister as people seek to connect personally with Jesus.
8. The ability to disciple people and equip them for the work of ministry.
9. The ability to organize events and special meetings.
10. The ability to manage legal and business matters.

This does not mean that there must be one team member for each of these functions; only that capabilities in each function must be represented somewhere in the team.

It goes without saying that all people involved in the start up of a new assembly must be fully committed to the cause. They should be committed to prayer and fasting, to loving the unlovable, and to working under the supervision of the team leaders with a cooperative spirit.

Concerning the wives of team leaders, 1 Corinthians 9:5 says this: “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” A believing wife is a faithful, humble, submissive wife. It is vitally important that the wife of a church planter be, at a minimum, cooperative. It is not required that she be an active part of the work (her gifts should determine the nature of her involvement). But it is important that she not oppose the work. A wife’s opposition or unwillingness to cooperate will be a virtually insurmountable hindrance and needs to be resolved before you start out.

Preaching the true gospel without compromise.

Acts 13:5 says, “And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” Preaching the gospel includes telling people who Jesus is (the one God manifested in the flesh); what He did for them (died for their sins, was buried, and rose on the third day); and how they must obey this gospel (repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit). These elements are foundational.

In laying the foundation, it is vital that Jesus Christ be emphasized in every aspect of church life. Any other foundation is sand. Be careful not to inadvertently encourage people to look to you or anyone else. You may be doing foundational

work, but Jesus is the foundation.

Church planters should expect the adversary to oppose them right from the start. Acts 13:6 says, “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus...” Opposition often comes in the form of people who appear on the surface to be spiritual. Stay close to the Lord and He will get you through every battle. Acts 13:9 says, “Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him...” Remember, the devil is a baby killer, and he will do everything he can to defeat a church planting team before the assembly can be firmly established. The key to defeating him is to always be full of the Holy Spirit.

Church planters should expect confirmation of their word by the power of God. Acts 13:12 says, “Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” If you preach the Word without compromise and stand against the adversary in the power of God’s might, then you can count on Jesus to confirm your word with signs following. The kingdom of God is not simply in word, but in power. Paul preached the simple message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified so that the people’s “faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

After Paul had preached the gospel to the Corinthians and the local assembly began to take shape, the Bible says, “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:11). Paul was careful to establish the new believers in a personal relationship with God. After people have obeyed the gospel, they should be immediately taught and encouraged in three areas:

1. Prayer.
2. Praise.
3. Study of the Word of God.

These are the foundational elements of a relationship with God and the development of Christian character.

The Perfecting Phase

And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus (Acts 18:27–19:1).

In the book of Acts, after local assemblies were planted, the apostolic team would move on, sometimes of necessity due to persecution and sometimes because the work was firmly established. In this case we see Apollos doing the work of watering and building up the assembly after the founding team departed. On occasion if a work was not satisfactorily established, the team would leave members behind, as in the case of Timothy and Titus. Their job seems to have been to keep the work going under the leadership of the founding team until such time as elders could be appointed.

It seems likely that Paul left someone from his team at in Corinth, or possibly, since he was there for a year and a half, he appointed elders before he departed. The point is, once a work was established, the apostolic team appointed men from within the local body to oversee the church. Acts 14:23 says, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Notice that it was elders (plural) in every assembly. That is, every local assembly was placed under the oversight of a team of men called elders or overseers (bishops, KJV).

These men were not randomly selected and they were not voted in by the congregation. They were selected and appointed by the apostles or their representatives according to a specific set of qualifications. These are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These men are referred to in the New Testament as elders (mature men), overseers (those who watch over and supervise others), rulers (leaders), stewards (those who manage and care for the property of another). The work they do is called, in a general sense, shepherding.

Nowhere do we find local assemblies operating under the leadership of a single man holding supreme authority. That position is reserved for Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church, which means He is the supreme authority in every local assembly.

The work of oversight is described by Paul in Acts 20:28, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” The description is expanded in 1 Peter 5:2-3, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

Peter understood the principle of leadership established by Jesus in Mark 10:42-43, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you.” They were not to rule over God’s people as the Gentile rulers did.

They were to serve them, teach them the Word, and live before them as godly examples. Peter understood this when he wrote that elders are not to be lords over God's people. Paul understood it when he wrote that he did not have dominion over their faith.

After the planting phase of a new assembly, the work of evangelists, pastors (shepherds), and teachers becomes increasingly important to the continued growth of the church. This does not mean that the influence of the apostles and prophets ceases to exist. Clearly Paul wrote to the churches he established and periodically visited them. Because of his labors, his wisdom, and his godly example, his words continued to be esteemed long after he passed the oversight authority on to others.

Appointing Deacons

Deacons are those appointed to function as servants of the assembly. They may serve in a variety of ways meeting a variety of needs. Their purpose is to help maintain unity in the assembly and enable the elders to stay focused their primary function, which is prayer and the ministry of the Word. In the New Testament, deacons were appointed by either the apostles or elders from among those who were respected by the assembly for their faith and spirituality. The Bible provides specific qualifications a man must meet before he can serve as a deacon. These are found in 1 Timothy 3.

Leadership Development

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops (overseers) and deacons (Philippians 1:1).

Where do elders and deacons come from? They must be developed from among the body of believers. The following describes a process whereby deacons and elders can be developed and appointed from within a local assembly. (Note that the chart progresses from the bottom up.)

Steps	Who and what to look for.	What to do.
7	Elders (or other believers) who are clearly functioning in an apostolic or prophetic gift.	Send out with a team of workers to plant new assemblies.
↑ 6	Elders (or other believers) who have gifts and ministries that would edify other assemblies.	Release from some local responsibilities for trans-local ministry.
↑ 5	Elders who have gifts and responsibilities that require a full-time effort.	Release from employment by providing financial support.
↑ 4	Home group leaders who are clearly exhibiting an equipping gift.	Equip, test, and appoint as elders those who qualify.
↑ 3	Deacons who are showing strong leadership abilities, a sacrificial spirit, and a potential “equipping gift” (of Ephesians 4:11).	Equip, test, and appoint as home group leaders those who qualify.
↑ 2	Faithful men who are demonstrating a heart to serve and a teachable attitude.	Equip, test, and appoint as deacons those who qualify.
↑ 1	The general assembly of the believers.	Teach, test, and observe believers.

Note: This chart depicts a general pattern, not a rigid step-by-step process. There may be situations where a man is appointed as a home group leader who has not previously served as a deacon, or as an elder who has not previously served as a deacon or a home group leader. The key is that each man be required to demonstrate the qualities described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and prove his character over time. Serving first as a deacon and then as a home group leader

seems to be a reasonable way for a man to develop his gifts and prove his character, but it may not be the only way.

From among the congregation, perhaps even from within the eldership, men will rise up with apostolic and prophetic gifts who will be called by God and appointed and sent out by the elders to plant new assemblies in other areas. This is the fruit of a healthy, mature, perfected plant. And this should ultimately be the fruit of a healthy, mature, perfected assembly.

Concluding Thoughts

There is a key difference between a founding apostle providing oversight to a local assembly in the planting phase and the tradition of men of a “pastor as single overseer.” One is the plan of Jesus Christ for planting a new assembly and one is not. The apostolic oversight is for a limited time; the tradition of men “pastor oversight” does not have a time limit.

1. Accountability in the life and work of a founding apostle is accomplished through a number of different areas of the New Testament pattern. In the correct New Testament local assembly structure, all believers are accountable to one another. Home church relationships provide this foundational accountability in the local body. A founding apostle in a properly structured local assembly will have experienced this accountability as a new convert where accountability becomes integrated into his concept of being a Christian.
2. The apostolic gifting and qualifications for oversight will have been tested and developed in the home churches. Often an apostolic church planter will have first served in an eldership before being sent out by the assembly to plant a new assembly.
3. Founding apostles report what they are doing to the assembly that sent them out to plant the new assembly. The assembly that sent them will send other members of the assembly to the new assembly to help. There is an ongoing relationship between the assembly that sent the planter and the new assembly. There may be relationships between the new assembly and other local assemblies.
4. There is accountability within the apostolic team that is planting the new assembly.
5. The new converts in the new assembly are taught the New Testament

structure for a local assembly. They are taught the plan for oversight of the local assembly and what needs to take place to form an eldership as the assembly matures.

In the early church, the apostolic team who founded a local assembly appointed elders at the time when the assembly had enough gifted and biblically qualified men to do so. The apostolic planting team (apostle, prophet and other helpers) had this step in mind from the origin of the new assembly and employed a plan and process to have such a group of men ready to move to oversight by eldership as the assembly matured. The appointment of elders to form the eldership is directed and decided by the Head of the body. Jesus makes these appointments through the founding apostle of the assembly. Prayer and fasting precede the appointments to confirm the will of the Head. After an eldership is formed, additional elders are added by agreement of the eldership as they seek and confirm the will of the Head. The founding apostolic team is not involved in this process, it is the responsibility of the eldership oversight in the local assembly from the time the eldership is appointed.

The question arises: What do we do today since most of our assemblies are not planted in the pattern of the early church? This is not a simple or easy question as there are a number of issues that must be addressed beyond the formation of the eldership. Several important questions are: Since the assembly was not founded in accord with the apostolic pattern, how was it founded and in what ways is it deficient? Are the potential elders properly gifted and have they met all the biblical qualifications? Does the person who is currently exercising oversight in the assembly meet the biblical qualifications for an overseer described in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and elsewhere in the Scriptures? Does the person who is currently exercising oversight in the assembly and who will appoint the elders have an apostolic gifting?

This is as close as most assemblies will be able to do in lieu of not being founded in the correct New Testament pattern. Hopefully the person making the appointments will have an apostolic gifting and vision; if not there will probably be serious problems in the eldership as it attempts to function. We need to seek the Head of the body diligently to help us overcome our current unscriptural circumstances as we work to become more like the church recorded in the book of Acts.

Note to the reader:

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