



Biblical Eldership

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If God Says It, That Settles It

When men ordain elders, they are simply putting their stamp of approval on something that God has already done. They are saying “amen” to the work of God in the lives of the eldership candidates.

It may amaze some of us, but nowhere in the Bible do we read of any of the apostles setting a singular pastor into oversight ministry of a local church. Neither do we read of Jesus ever training any of His apostles to do such a thing. Then when we read Paul’s instructional letters to two emerging apostles, Timothy and Titus, we see that he did not even *suggest* that they set in a singular pastor. Nor do we read of him doing so in any of his other epistles. So we must question where this practice came from.

As believers, we accept that God’s word is infallible. Yet it is possible to then build in His house in such a way that we undermine what He has said. But if the word of God states something, then we must respond appropriately. Have you ever seen the bumper sticker that says, “If God says it, then I believe it”? I would like to put out one that states, “If God says it, that settles it whether you believe it or not.” In other words, we must come into conformity with the word of God and then take our stand upon what He has said.

Give Us a King

God used Moses who was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ¹ to lead Israel in the wilderness for forty years after their captivity in Egypt. In his wilderness oversight of the nation, instead of simply acting alone, he distributed governmental administration of the nation upon seventy elders. Then when the people came into the Promised Land, the Lord ruled through a succession of judges of which Samuel was the fifteenth. But notice what happened next.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. (1Samuel 8:4 – 7)

How sad is that? Israel had rejected God from being the singular head of the nation. A quick study of their national history reveals that “as the king went, so went the nation.” We see this fact confirmed in both Israel and Judah when the nation divided after the reign of King Solomon. Israel was led by a succession of wicked kings and finally ended up in the Assyrian captivity; then Judah, with a mixture of both evil and godly kings ultimately wound up in captivity to the Babylonians.

Thereafter Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah; and he said to the sons of Israel, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘I brought Israel up from Egypt, and I delivered you from the

1 Moses does not symbolize in the Old Testament what some people consider the New Testament ministry of a senior pastor – a term found nowhere in the Scriptures, except in reference to Jesus Christ the Chief Shepherd.

hand of the Egyptians and from the power of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you.’ “But you have today rejected your God, who delivers you from all your calamities and your distresses; yet you have said, ‘No, but set a king over us!’ Now therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your clans.” (1Samuel 10:17 – 19)

Notice the peoples’ response.

Then all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, so that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil by asking for ourselves a king.” Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have committed all this evil, yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. (1Samuel 12:19 – 20)

Samuel then went on to encourage the people that the Lord loved them and would be with them. In spite of what they had done, He would still reveal himself among them. God’s longsuffering mercy is indeed amazing. Because of her wrong decision, Israel was now in a grave spiritual place and heading off in a wrong direction. The nation had chosen to place themselves in the unbiblical position of having a succession of kings to influence the nation, for good or evil. After many years, what was God’s observation?

They have set up kings, but not by Me. (Hosea 8:4)

Then He asked His people a question.

Where is your king, that he may save you? Where are your rulers in all your towns, of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes’? So in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away. (Hosea 13:10 – 11 NIV)

One lesson we learn in reading the prophet Hosea is that Israel’s kings could not deliver the people from anything. But have we in Christ’s Church really learned that lesson yet?

Heaven's Promised King

Thankfully, God had made a promise.

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. (Isaiah 9:2)

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6 – 7)

Jesus is God's promise. What is amazing is that when our Lord walked among them, the teachers of the Law did not recognize the Law walked out! As the One whom God had promised, Christ came to establish a kingdom in which He would be the sole head, the sole ruler. And the promise of scripture is that He would uphold it with justice and righteousness forevermore. A quick observation – forevermore is not over yet. Therefore, He continues today to be the singular head of His Church in His kingdom.² As Isaiah prophesied, the government rests on His shoulders. But as noted earlier, we can agree theologically with His headship and yet also build in His house in such a way that we undermine it.

Remember what Jesus said about the religious leaders of His day.

They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love

2 See Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23, Colossians 1:18; 2:19, 1 Corinthians 11:3.

the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:4 – 12)

Do not be called leaders? Are we not to have teachers, leaders and fathers in the Church today? Yes, of course. But we are not to be *called* teachers and leaders. In other words these are not titles, they are descriptions of how certain believers function. One can recognize a teacher because he teaches. Someone is a father because he has children. But the minute we describe someone as “father so-and-so” or “pastor so-and-so” we have clearly disobeyed the Lord’s command. Though Jesus was bringing clarity to His disciples on how the scribes and Pharisees functioned, His words also reveal a prevalent wrong way of thinking in His Church today.

Spiritual Authority

When Jesus finished His sermon on the mount, everyone was awed at His teaching.

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28 – 29)

The reason they were amazed was because He did not teach as their scribes did; He had spiritual authority.

Even today, when believers live what God has shown them, their lifestyles will manifest spiritual authority even when much around them stands in opposition.

When God tests our faith, He will often use the shaking we are experiencing to reveal to us what we really believe. And He will do it by pointing out to us our tendency to fall back on certain practices. For example, in the early 1970s when God was moving to more perfectly establish His government in local churches across the land, He raised up men who were very gifted in presenting the truth of plural/collegial eldership. And many believers listened, responded, and attended seminars and conferences on this subject. But when one of those who taught fell into some personal problems, many of the groups that were attempting to implement his teaching simply went back to their former way of functioning.

But there were others who wanted God's government more fully established in their hearts and lifestyles and who faithfully sought to continue on in what He had revealed, even in the midst of the shaking. And God's word has worked as leaven in His house; it continues to spread. And He will continue to demonstrate His spiritual authority as He reveals His purpose among His people and as we respond in obedience.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18 – 20)

The nature of true spiritual authority is that it is given by God, acknowledged by men, and never grasped by those called to leadership. In Jesus' case, all authority was given to Him. He then turned around and began to give authority to apostles, prophets, and all those called to represent Him. Apostles then helped to identify and verify the authority that Christ had given to others, especially to elders.

Elders never delegate spiritual authority, but they will delegate administrative authority to deacons, home group leaders, worship leaders, etc. But all authority is given and then demonstrated through the way we

live our lives. After Pilate mentioned that he had the authority to release Him, Jesus responded: *“You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above.”* Again, all authority is given, even political authority.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Romans 13:1 – 2)

Called to a Work

Paul had received training at the feet of the well-known Rabbi Gamaliel, and had become a Pharisee, a religious leader. He had persecuted Christians, seeing them put to death, and even held the robes of those who stoned Stephen to death. As an emerging Jewish Rabbi, he had grown up under the official/positional approach to religious government. But then one day God intervened. While on a mission to persecute believers he found himself on his face before the Lord. There on the road to Damascus a light blinded him and He heard a voice from Heaven. *“Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”* Immediately, he knew that God was speaking to him. *“Who art thou, O Lord?”* (I bet he was thinking, “just don’t be Jesus.”) How do you think he felt when he heard the answer? *“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”*

What a wake-up call! God kept him blind for three days, led about by others as he thought through the implications of what he had just experienced. But after he got his sight back, when he tried to interact with the disciples to tell them that they were right and that he was now one of them, they were not real open to the idea. *“Wait a minute. You’re the guy who killed my uncle and imprisoned my family.”* Though he was now a believer, many simply did not believe him. At the same time, Paul still had much to unlearn and relearn. But as he came through these experiences, God brought him into great insight and understanding of His

ways. That is why he could teach and write what God gave him with such great spiritual authority.

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

Notice that he did not write this letter to the pastor of the church but to the whole church including the elders and deacons. The leaders were seen as among the Body. Today, there is simply too much of the practice where leaders see themselves as separate from the people and functioning from a position over them. “I am in authority here.” No. We demonstrate spiritual authority by the way we serve as bondservants of the Lord Jesus Christ. In almost every introduction to his epistles, Paul would refer to himself as a bondservant and an apostle of Jesus. Before he referred to his apostolic function, he would first refer to his role as a bondservant of Christ. And it is from the company of bondservants in any local church that the overseers will select other elders, as well as deacons, home group leaders, etc.

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires (Greek, OREGOMAI – “to stretch oneself, to reach out after”) to the office of overseer (Greek, EPISKOPE – “inspection, superintendence”), it is a fine work he desires to do. (1Timothy 3:1)

The word “office” does not actually appear in the Greek in the above verse and it is not used to describe eldership anywhere in the New Testament. What Paul is actually saying is that “if any man aspires or reaches out after the function of overseeing”, it is a good work he desires. The apostle is talking about a certain work or activity in God’s house that the Lord considers valuable. But many have the tendency to think of service for God in terms of organizational offices and positions. And the minute we have an office we have a position that we feel the need to protect and defend. The result is complication in the process of brotherly accountability, especially when one see his “position” as being hierarchically above others.

When the disciples said that they had left everything to follow Jesus, He responded that in the regeneration they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Not content with her boys only sitting on thrones, momma Zebedee immediately began asking the Lord if they could sit one on His left and the other on His right. Where did that ambition come from; was it healthy? Consider Jesus' response to what He saw in her, something probably in all of us.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. (Matthew 20:25 – 27)

Jesus did not hesitate to confront "positional thinking" when he saw it. Success in God's kingdom is not about "having the best seat in the house." The ministries Paul listed in Ephesians Chapter 4 are not positions of power to be pursued by those seeking kingdom success; they are functional expressions of the grace of God distributed to some among His people to equip them, that the Body of Christ might come forth. Or to put it another way, the Lord will use these ministries to make His Bride ready. The conclusion of God's work among His people prior to Christ's return will be the Church made ready as a bride for her Groom. Here is God's goal. Healthy plural eldership will make room for the local church to function as a body, *a corporate expression of the bridal intimacy the individual believers have with Christ.*

I remember attending a church meeting as a young Christian where a man in a three-piece suit greeted me at the door. He shook my hand and welcomed me in to see what was going on. A little while later this same man went up front, stood behind the pulpit, and welcomed everybody. Then, he proceeded to lead the worship service, took the collection, prayed over it, preached the sermon, and then prayed for everyone who came forward to respond to the message. After that, he rushed to

the back and shook everyone's hand as they left. Someone said to me, "Isn't he a gifted man?!" I said, "No. He's a man functioning as a whole church!"

God's purpose is that the whole Body of Christ would function properly. Every believer has potential in God. Instead of dominating the gathering of local believers, local church leadership faces the task of helping them to discover and then express the resident grace of God in their lives.

The Necessity of Humility

An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. (1 Timothy 3:2 – 6)

What was the condemnation incurred by the devil? According to Isaiah Chapter 14 and Ezekiel Chapter 28, Lucifer was the anointed Cherub who covers. What these scriptures seem to indicate is that he functioned with authority until merchandizing was found in him. I always thought that merchandizing had to do simply with buying and selling. But if someone used his function or ministry to benefit himself, to serve for personal gain, he would be doing exactly what Lucifer did. Though this angel sought to attain equality with God, Jesus saw him fall as lightning from heaven. Not a good result for the wannabe.

Similarly, a newly saved young man will often have foolish thoughts. For example, when I first came to the Lord I was sure everybody should listen to me. Trust me when I say that as I look back on my heart attitude in those days, I simply was not ready to be in leadership. Paul

wisely warns us that the danger of premature ordination is that a young leader would likely fall into the same condemnation that Lucifer fell into. So we must be wise about the timing of laying hands on men called to the role of oversight.

Paul also gives similar qualifications for deacons in his letters to Titus and Timothy. While a deacon does not necessarily have to teach the Scriptures, both elders and deacons must be of sound character. Here is God's priority. The reason why some leaders end up running away with their secretary is because not enough attention was given to the issue of sound character when they were being considered for ordination. Also, such men often did not walk in a relationship of accountability to others. And then, believe it or not, many of these same men want to come right back and continue in ministry. One who had divorced his wife and then run off with another woman came to my door one day and wanted to know one thing – "Owen, how do I get back into ministry?" I couldn't believe it. His priority was not the great sin he had committed, the clear misrepresentation of Christ he had been, or how others might have stumbled in their walk with the Lord because of his bad example, but how soon he could get back into his influential role among God's people. Talk about a disconnect from Heaven's eternal values!

Recognize God's Appointments

Local leadership is set in, or ordained in the local church by the Lord as recognized by existing local elders (if there are any at that time). Also, the believers in that assembly as well as the prospective man's wife and family will recognize God's call on him. Apostolic/extra-local ministry will then confirm what has become obvious to the local believers. In an authentic ordination, men are simply putting their stamp of approval on something that God has already revealed.

But many churches do not function like this. Some assemblies after experiencing a particular shaking want to know how to get a new pastor.

So they invite certain men to come and candidate for the position. But my question is, "Why not just build with the biblical model?" For example, what if I dropped dead one day and my wife put an ad in the paper saying, "Wanted – new husband. Must be able to function with seven children, fifteen grandchildren, and four great grandchildren." Then on the next Sunday morning, suppose that three different men showed up saying they would like to apply. If she decided to marry one of them based on a kiss and how they related to the kids over the course of a couple of hours, I think we would all agree that her approach was just plain crazy! And yet, this is how many churches seek out new leaders.

We must recognize God's appointments in His house.

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

Many have said that Paul's list reveals hierarchy. However, the apostle's vision was not for an organizational hierarchy, but for a functioning expression of Christ's Body. What he lays out in the above verse is how a church evolves. God sets ministries in His church not based on their education, wealth, personality, or the status quo but rather on how they function in His grace. First an apostle goes and lays the foundation of Christ in the hearts of people ((1Corinthians 3:10 – 11). Then a prophet comes and adds insight to the people's relationship with and understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ (He himself is the foundation). Or a prophet might also work simultaneously with an apostle; scripture teaches that these two ministries – the apostles and prophets are the ones who lay the foundation (Ephesians 2:20). Then a teacher will build upon that groundwork with theological insight and teach about what has happened so far in the life of the local church. And God will confirm the Holy Spirit's work with miracles and healings.

An observation – when some believers talk about healing, they refer mainly to the miraculous cure of physical ailments. But it is just as viable a healing when we see someone repent, come to know the Lord, and

then experience the healing process of their soul as they are conformed to the image of Christ. While it is wonderful to see bodies healed of cancer, arthritis, etc., how much more significant it is when one is changed eternally. Both aspects of healing reveal God's kingdom. May both increase!

Indeed, miracles begin happening and healings begin taking place. And those with the gift of helps (Greek, ANTILEPSIS – help, relief) begin stepping up to strengthen the church. Not only this, God then raises up administration or government (Greek, KUBERNESIS – steerage, pilotage, directorship). This word is used several times in scripture (see Acts 27:11, Revelations 18:17) referring to the pilot of a ship, one who is given to directing the vessel based on the wind and the water.³ Spiritual leadership helps to guide the church based on the water of the Word and the Wind of the Holy Spirit. Then as they evaluate what the disciples believe and share with one another, they must do so based on the Word of God; the Scriptures are our infallible rule of faith.

Barnabas and Saul

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:1 – 2)

Here we see that ministering to the Lord in worship is vital because He will then speak to us in that atmosphere. And those of us who have learned to be led by the Spirit can then begin to proclaim what God has said. The Christian life is not about simply going to a church building

3 In my opinion, it is out of these helping and administrative gifts that pastors will emerge to assist with other elders in the care of the flock.

and listening to sermons that we never do anything with. Such a lifestyle is religious. But how awesome it is when we discover the direction of the Holy Spirit for us as individuals as well as for our local fellowship.

And significantly, worship and prayer go together like hand and glove. Many times when the Lord calls His people together to seek Him in prayer, it is only a few who respond. On the other hand, if we hear of a prophetic meeting where we might receive a personal word from the Lord, the meeting is often packed. Why? Something is wrong. Our times of prayer and worship should be permeated with prophetic responses from the One we are ministering to. May the Lord help us in this.

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2 – 4)

God used these apostles to start new local churches. Notice Solomon's key thought from the Psalms.

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. (Psalm 127:1)

The Lord has been building His house for centuries, and His work continues today. He is building His Church all across the nations. Authentic apostolic ministry today will communicate to others what God has been demonstrating in their own lives for many years. In other words, they will make evident in new places what God has already been doing in their home fellowships. The Lord's strategy is to draw from the pool of gifted people who are already living in kingdom obedience locally. Indeed, the local church is the chrysalis where the real work of transformation is done. We crawl into that environment as worms and God takes us through a process from which we emerge as butterflies with the power to soar. But we must be careful not to bail out of the chrysalis until we are properly formed. A butterfly without fully functioning

wings is not pretty to watch, and it will probably become lunch for hungry predators.

Something to take note of is that Barnabas and Saul did not set in a singular pastor in any of the new local churches they planted.

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

The apostles always appointed elders in a plurality. Such an approach was a safeguard. In my life, because I co-labor as a co-elder with other men in my local church, plurality of eldership is a safeguard for me and for my family. The elders in my home church pray for me and send me out when I am invited to minister in another local church. My wife and family are also involved in the process. And in each local church that I visit, I come submitted to the local elders. I always seek to be accountable to others for what I say and do. Again, it is a safeguard for each local church where I minister, it is a safeguard for my home church, and it is a safeguard for me, and for my family. Christ's church is to be a safe place.

Defining the Term Elder

Notice how the Scriptures define an elder.

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (Greek, PRESBUTEROS – an older man) of the church. (Acts 20:17)

Then Paul gave the elders some instruction.

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

The above Greek word for overseer comes from the words EPI and SKOPOS. The idea is to scope out, or to see over. So an elder is an older man who oversees. As overseers they were to shepherd (Greek, POIMAINO – to tend as a shepherd, i.e., to nurture, to pastor) God's church. So according to scripture, the terms elder, overseer, and shepherd describe the same ministry. Simply put, an elder is an older man who gives oversight as he shepherds or pastors or cares for God's people.

As I see it, an elder in a local church will function in one of the ministries listed in Ephesians Chapter 4. In other words, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who meet the character qualifications listed in 1 Timothy Chapter 3 and Titus Chapter 1 are the elders in a local church. And they will equip the saints.

But how do they shepherd the people? What we generally see in many churches today is the singular pastor. But Christ has given the five-fold ministry until the whole Church comes to full maturity. So we need them all functioning in the Church today. And this raises an obvious question. If the elders are the equipping ministers listed in Ephesians Chapter 4, how do they function as shepherding overseers? How does a teacher pastor others?

A teacher would simply come alongside and ask how you are doing and if you are reading the word. An evangelist would shepherd by coming alongside to know if you are sharing your faith. A pastor would come alongside and want to know how your relationship is with your wife, your husband, and your kids. A prophet would come alongside to challenge and encourage your relationship with God. Are you hearing His voice and are you responding to Him? And finally, an apostle would shepherd by coming alongside to see if Christ is really the foundation and center of your life. He might also recognize others called to extra-local ministry and begin to prepare them to someday go out on a ministry team.

So an elder is an older man who gives oversight and shepherds or pastors others out of who he is by the grace of God. He definitely is not someone trying to function as a whole church. The only place in our English Bible where we see the word “pastor” is in Ephesians Chapter 4 verse 11. But the Greek word there is POIMEN. And it means a shepherd. So a pastor and a shepherd are the same thing. And the equipping role of a pastor is that he shepherds people by functioning in the grace of God. He is not someone holding an office or a position.

By His grace, God has given to His Church a variety of spiritual gifts, different ministries, and a diversity of functions all administered by one Spirit, by one Lord and God working all things together. How blessed we are!

Notice Peter’s words to the believers in the dispersion.

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

Again, we see the three terms that scripture uses in reference to elders in Christ’s Church. As older men (Greek, PRESBUTEROS) they were to shepherd (Greek, POIMAINO) God’s flock, exercising oversight (Greek, EPISKOPEO). In this passage we find the *only* reference in the Bible to a Senior Pastor, and it clearly refers to Jesus Christ. That is why we take issue with anyone who refers to himself with this term when it clearly refers to the Lord Jesus. How sad it is when men either take to themselves that title, or let others call them that. Jesus said to not *be* called Rabbi, or Teacher. In other words, do not let people refer to you that way. When we let others speak in that manner of us, it reveals some-

thing in our humanity that loves a certain glory belonging only to God. Let us all turn from this practice.

It is the same with the title “Reverend”. The Bible uses this term only in reference to God himself.

He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name. (Psalm 111:9 KJV)

Only God is to be revered. Why would any man use a term that would place him on the same plane as God? Yet this practice is accepted today in many churches.

Loss and Restoration

When you read the writings of those who were the disciples of the first apostles, and men of the second and third centuries such as Ignatius, Polycarp and Clement, and the apostolic fathers, you will begin to notice three important developments. The first was the gradual disappearance of apostolic and prophetic men in the life of the Church. Second, God’s people began to move away from the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. In other words, men began to organize what they thought should be happening in the life of the local church instead of trusting the Lord to coordinate His people. And third, the Church began to accept the teaching that clergy and laity were two separate classes of believers. But this is simply an unbiblical concept that the Lord Jesus hates. Some scholars believe the apostle John was addressing this very subject in his “note” to the Ephesians.

Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Revelation 2:6)

The word Nicolaitan comes from two Greek words – NIKOS (which bears the idea of conquest, or conquering), and LAOS (which simply means people). But the Lord does not want His people conquered, sup-

pressed, or put under the control of their leaders; He wants His Body released!⁴ Every believer has a spiritual gift(s), a function. What the world desperately needs is Christ revealed in a corporate body where He is the one Singular Head coordinating His people, and humble men are serving His interests by helping His people hear Him more accurately. God's answer for the earth continues to be Jesus Christ! The government of God's eternal kingdom is on His shoulders; it can rest nowhere else. Godly leaders will equip and help His people to come into the realization of Heaven's vision.

As apostolic vision was lost, the Church eventually came to the period known as the Dark Ages. Bibles were chained to the altars of the local church buildings, and if someone actually tried to read the Scriptures for himself, he could be killed as a heretic. But in the midst of such a dark time, Martin Luther received the revelation of justification by faith. He suddenly realized that it was not by works that one was saved but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he came out of the organized religion of that time and changed his ministry description from priest to pastor. He also rejected the teaching that church leaders had to be celibate. And ever since those days, God has been restoring one truth after another piece by piece.

In fact, notice what the apostle Peter had to say.

So repent (change your mind and purpose); turn around and return [to God], that your sins may be erased (blotted out, wiped clean), that times of refreshing (of recovering from the effects of heat, of reviving with fresh air) may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send [to you] the Christ (the Messiah), Who before was

4 In some churches, leaders function in a plural clergy/laity mode. They have seen the truth of plural eldership, but they have not understood the truth of the Body of Christ functioning. At the same time, there are other churches where singular pastors have the truth of plurality in their hearts, but they just do not know how to get there. I have been able to work with some of these men and it is exciting to see God bring change in their hearts.

designated and appointed for you—even Jesus, Whom heaven must receive [and retain] until the time for the complete restoration of all that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for ages past [from the most ancient time in the memory of man]. (Acts 3:19 – 21 Amplified Bible)

The heavens will retain Jesus until the period of the restoration of all things. What will be restored? Well one thing is for sure – whatever was stripped out and lost over the years in God’s Church will be returned, only in greater measure.

Consider the prophecy of Joel in the light of the Dark Ages of the Church.

What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. Awake! (Joel 1:4 – 5)

The prophet pictures for us Israel as a vine that had been stripped to the point of almost complete destruction. Similarly, think of what it would have been like for us if we had been born into God’s kingdom during the fourteenth century. Frankly, I am so thankful that I was born of the Spirit in this generation where freedom in the Spirit flows like a river, where we have the liberty and freedom to do what we are doing in these days. But at the same time, we also see great opposition, where men and demons seek to shut down the work of God. We live in an amazing and exciting time where many are arising against Christianity and specifically against the biblical vision of Christ central and supreme in His house.

In Conclusion

Look around today at the growing number of churches where leaders are functioning in plurality. God bless all the men walking in this truth. The prophet Daniel says that the kingdom that Jesus would establish

would be an *everlasting* kingdom. When Christ returns, He will see that kingdom represented and revealed on earth among the nations. But this vision of Christ manifest and revealed among His people will not work apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit operating in broken/humble people.

Younger men who think they have it all figured out will stumble badly. Men standing in the place of Christ as though they were the head of God's work will know deep chastening from His hand. But humble men who are being conformed to the image of Christ will give everything to see Him restored to His rightful place among us as the Head of His Church. In order to come to God's glorious climax of the ages, we must repent and return to Him with all of our hearts so that times of refreshing may come from His presence, so that He might send Jesus the Christ the One appointed to rule.

When God's people do return to where every person functions, where one has a psalm, another has a revelation, someone else has a teaching, and all things are being done for edification, all under the oversight of humble men equipping and training us to find our place in God – when that begins to happen, the Holy Spirit will break out in freedom among us. The gathering of the local church is in fact a meeting with Jesus, the King of kings, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. And He speaks to us in many different ways through a great variety of people. Arise oh Lord in Your people. Fill us with your Presence and make Yourself known among the nations.

Amen.

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