

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

—AN ECCLESIOLOGY FOR TODAY—

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Introduction

The Three Commissions

There are three great commissions contained in scripture that pertain to the church. The first is one assumed by the Lord, which assures the church of her final triumph and is the basis for the other two commissions.

*And upon this rock (confession that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God) **I will build My church**; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. (Matthew 16:18)*

It is certain that all labor in vain who choose to build in His church independent of Him or contrary to His ways (Psalm 127:11). His strategy is perfect, and this guarantees the final, glorious consummation of His purpose for the church.

The second commission is familiar to every believer for it is the command to the church to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission began at the Lord's ascension; and when it is completed, the Lord will return. The gospel is more than an invitation to accept Jesus as one's Savior, it is a call to give oneself totally to Him. It is the gospel of His kingdom.

*Go into all the world and **preach the gospel to all creation.** (Mark 16:15)*

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. (Matthew 24:14)

The third commission is expressed in Ephesians 4:11-13. It concerns the responsibility and grace that five specific ministries have been given to equip the saints for their work of service in the body of Christ, which includes preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

*And He gave some as **apostles**, and some as **prophets**, and some as **evangelists**, and some as **pastors and teachers**, for the **equipping of the saints for the work of service**, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

This tract has been written to provide greater understanding of the third commission, considering those things which lie ahead for the church. Clearly, it is *very* important. More than knowledge and good preaching techniques are involved in the equipping process. It is the basis of attaining spiritual unity and maturity in the body of Christ. It is a *vital* requirement in the preparation of the church for her ministry at the close of this age.

Renewal and Restoration

Church restoration, which began in the early sixteenth century with the teachings of Martin Luther and the Anabaptists, was a slow methodical phenomenon for approximately four hundred years. However, the Lord ushered in this century by restoring truth of “the baptism in the Holy Spirit,” and because of His greater presence in the church, there has been an ever increasing acceleration of restored truth. The Lord is doing a *quick* work in righteousness as He prepares His body for the climatic event that will close this age (Acts 3:20-21). The prophet Joel prophesied that a great outpouring of the early and latter rain of the Holy Spirit would restore the church to fruitful abundance in the end times. The Lord would make up for the years lost by what the swarming, creeping, stripping and gnawing locusts had destroyed in the church over the years (Joel 2:23-27).

I believe that at no time has any individual Christian ever been denied the revelation and experience of a truth in scripture when they sought the Lord in faith with all their hearts. However, the times of restoration to the church are in the heart of the Lord. For example, there have been individuals down through (apparently) every generation of

the church who were baptized in the Spirit, but it wasn't until the beginning of this century that it was restored as truth to groups of believers in the body of Christ.

As a result of this particular restoration, the early part of this century was marked by more anointed ministries and restoration of the nine spiritual gifts.

The middle of the century saw the "Latter Rain" revival restore new dimensions of spiritual worship, and truth concerning the laying on of hands by a presbytery for prophetic confirmation of the calling and ministry gifts of individual believers.

In the early 1960's, the charismatic renewal began spontaneously in which the Lord poured His Spirit out upon those who were receptive in many of the denominations that comprise Christendom. The results were mixed, from little response in some bodies to a remarkable acceptance in others. Most believers in these bodies sought for spiritual renewal of their particular denomination. In this way, many members entered into a richer and more fruitful walk with the Lord. It has also been the means of evangelizing those in these churches who were members in name only. This has been particularly true in the Roman Catholic church. However, renewal has been essentially confined to individual believers with little or no effect on the inflexible wineskins and authority structures of institutional churches.

During the charismatic renewal, the Lord began to raise up apostolic men with a burden and vision to see churches built as local expressions of the body of Christ. The clergy-laity distinction was replaced with an emphasis on the vital and unique place that *each* member is called to fill in the life functions of a local body (1 Corinthians 12, 14; Romans 12:1-6). Local church oversight was patterned after New Testament examples. Each assembly was autonomous and under the oversight of elders who were a collegial group of men chosen because of godly *character*, their commitment to be *servants*, and because they possess the *grace* of one of the five ascension gift ministries of Ephesians 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher). Without these ministry graces, they could never fulfill the equipping and shepherding responsibilities (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:5-9).

Equipping and shepherding responsibilities should *not* be separated; to properly shepherd believers includes equipping them.

God's governmental interface to His people in a collective sense, is at the local church; there is *no* higher level of oversight. It is here that

spiritual resources are to be focused for equipping the saints and releasing ministry.

This brings me to what I believe will be the next phase of church restoration. Just as the most recent emphasis has been a work of the Holy Spirit in *individual* believers, the next emphasis *will be a work of the Spirit in the church*. The Lord is going to raise up men in the fivefold ministries who will have a heart to work together in equipping the saints. Their vision will be to *complete* the church for a great demonstration of the power, love and righteousness of God to the world. The church is “growing up” from a state of childhood to that of a strong, young man. The Lord is going to judge sin in His house and raise up a glorious church without spot or blemish. She will be equipped for spiritual warfare in order to bring in the great harvest of souls that precedes His return. We are living in a wonderful hour!

The days in which this takes place will be times of great difficulties, persecutions, economic distress, wars, plagues, socio-political opposition, etc. These things constitute an environment that will help bring great unity among believers. The ultimate goal of the Lord is *not ecumenism*, but *one body in Christ*, “one new man” in the earth. This is what we are to prepare and equip His people for. The Holy Spirit will be manifested not only in mighty demonstrations of *power*, but also by demonstrations of *unity* in the days ahead. The result will be a great harvest of souls. Following this ingathering the Lord will return for His bride, and then He will judge this world in wrath.

Understanding the Task

What It Means to Equip a Believer

The word “equipping” is translated from the Greek word KATARTISMOS, which comes from two root words, KATA meaning “according to,” and ARTIOS meaning “complete.” Several other translations of the Bible use the words “perfecting” or “completing.” The thought communicated implies a *total readiness* within the context of what one is called *to be and to do*.

There are three essential areas in which believers are equipped for their work of service in the body of Christ.

1. Godly character
2. As a priest (prayer and worship)
3. Vocational giftings

To the same extent that any of these areas are neglected or deficient, one's service will also fall short. It should be noted that gifts and ministries are transient, being confined to this life, while the other two are eternal. Therefore, they are the most important areas to be addressed in the equipping process.

Who Does the Equipping?

Scripture is clear that elders of a local assembly are solely responsible in the Lord to shepherd and feed the flock of God entrusted to their oversight (Acts 14:23). It is equally clear from scripture, that the Lord has deposited grace and anointing in the five ministries of Ephesians 4:11 to equip the saints. It is good to remember that only the grace and anointing of the Lord can equip a person in spiritual things. In order to reconcile those two assignments, it is apparent that elders *must be men graced with one of the five ministry gifts*. Since men must also satisfy requirements in character, home order, experience and secular life to qualify as elders, there will be men in the assembly whose anointing makes it clear they have a call to one of the five ministries, but who cannot yet meet all the requirements for eldership. Such men could be used in the equipping process under the supervision of the elders. Home group leadership is a possible example of their service. Indeed, every active member of a body can contribute to the equipping of others through prayer, spiritual gifts and ministries of relationship.

The mantle of responsibility to ensure that a necessary diversity exists, as needed, to equip the saints rests upon the elders. This becomes a much easier task once there are other assemblies in a region with whom ministries can be exchanged; and especially when traveling, apostolic and prophetic ministries are available to strengthen churches.

The local church is God's seminary. A seminary by definition is "an environment in which something originates and from which it is propagated." Everything which the Lord has created with life is able to reproduce itself; a local expression of the body of Christ is no exception. Although evangelistic ministries may be involved, the apostolic and prophetic ministries are *necessary* to lay the foundation for a true

New Testament expression of the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:20-22). Developing this fathering aspect of church reproduction is part of the equipping task.

In a very general sense, one can express the purpose of each of the fivefold ministries as follows:

- In their *burden*—the Lord wants His people to be *evangelistic* so that the gospel will always be proclaimed.
- In their *knowledge*—He wants His people to be *teachers* so that they can instruct one another in His ways.
- In their *heart*—He wants His people to be *pastoral* so that they will love and care for one another.
- In their *lives*—He wants His people to be *prophetic* so that *how* they live and *what* they minister expresses the “now” word of the Lord.
- In their *vision*—He wants His people to be apostolic so that they will always minister out of His purpose. Vision includes both foresight and insight; foresight into *what* God purposes to do, and insight into *how* to move with Him.

One Body in Christ

The Discipline of the Lord

The word “discipline” is defined as “rules that govern one’s conduct.” The Lord Jesus embraced a most severe discipline in order to bring all believers into *one* body under His leadership. His purpose is *not* centered in good leadership or church government; it is centered in the unity and maturity of His body.

It was necessary for Him to shed His blood in order that our sins might be forgiven. However, the Lord’s great agony, humiliation and suffering accomplished *much more*. The emphasis of the following scripture dealing with His death also indicates His purpose to bring forth His disciples in a one *united* body of believers. He will bring this to pass as He restores the church.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our

*peace, who made both groups into **one**, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing **in His flesh** the enmity which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that **in Himself** He might make the two into **one new man**, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in **one body** to God **through the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:13-16)*

The phrase “by the blood of Christ” is the one and only way for mankind to receive forgiveness of sins and be reconciled to God. The phrases “in Himself,” “in His flesh” and “through the cross” were a part of His discipline in which He paid the price for all transgressions inherent in the human nature that keep believers from being one body. These include sins such as religious bigotry, racism, social or national elitism, respect of persons, human traditions and dogmatic positions. Our worth in God is equal, whether we are Jew or Gentile, slave or free man, and male or female (Galatians 3:27-28). Jesus paid the price to be the one *Shepherd of the flock* (John 10:16). This truth must be *well* established in the hearts of those being equipped, for the great work that the Lord will do at the end of this age can *only* take place through a people *united* in Him.

The Discipline of Elders

There is a threefold discipline that local elders must embrace if they are to equip the saints successfully for service as a local expression of the body of Christ.

1. First, there *must* be a commitment to diversity at the equipping level. There is no way that traditional methods can be adequate; one man leadership, bible schools and teaching orientations based on a clergy-laity distinction will *always* fall short. The greatness of any one minister can *never* match the value of diversity resident in the Lord’s investment of grace and anointing in His fivefold ministries. The first discipline of church leadership thus lies in *humility* and a *willingness to lay down personal prominence* and walk together in collegiality with other men; diversity with harmony.

When we consider the Lord’s handiwork in creation, we begin to catch a glimpse of what He purposes to do in the church. Flowers exhibit a manifold diversity in color, scent, and shape. Planets

and galaxies in the heavens are diverse in their structure, orbit, size and radiance. Birds exhibit a great variety in their songs and plumage. Precious stones are diverse in their colors and hues, each one testifying of a unique inner crystalline structure. It is the aggregate or *integrated total* beauty of *all* diverse parts that express the full glory of God's handiwork in creation; so also is it to be in His people. Each believer has been created with a unique personality and different inner capacity for expressing the life of God. There are no spiritual twins! When we come to Christ, He changes our nature into harmony with His own, but our personalities remain unique. This diversity must be retained within us as we are equipped for our work of service. If there was but one minister to equip a congregation the diversity would be greatly restricted. Thus, diversity of ministries is required to fully equip the saints. This diversity is why the Lord speaks of His people as "living stones." Stones vary in shape, color and size. The human mind-set is to build with bricks which stresses conformity in ministry, dress, worship, techniques, etc.

*Now there are **varieties of gifts**, but the same Spirit. And there are **varieties of ministries**, and the same Lord. And there are **varieties of effects** (i.e. because of our inner differences), but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)*

2. Secondly, elders are responsible to provide an environment suitable for equipping the people. The pulpit ministry in the congregational meetings, although essential, is not sufficient. More than a proclamation of truth is required if that truth is to become a living reality in the lives of those who hear it. There is also need for the informal atmosphere in small group gatherings, where believers are committed to help one another "work out" and "put on" the truth they are taught in central meetings. The essential dynamics of these small groups are members encouraging, admonishing, loving and challenging one another in their pursuit of the Lord. It is also the place where members can begin to "practice" their ministries; and where mistakes can be made without embarrassment. The oversight of these groups is also a place of training. Men, who the elders believe have a call and potential for eldership, can be delegated authority to exercise an accountable oversight of the groups. The early church, while it evangelized in

the synagogues, was largely built in homes (Acts 2:46-47; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philippians 1:2).

Thus, the elders face a discipline of not only preaching and teaching truth, but also being responsible to see that truth fleshed out in the lives and service of the saints. As this takes place, the diversity of gifts and service that the Lord builds into His people will begin to be manifest.

3. Thirdly, there is one more discipline for elders to embrace if the people are to come into their place in Christ. They must be *examples* of all that they teach. They *cannot* lead people into truth unless they themselves walk in truth (John 17:19).

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Therefore, I exhort the elders . . . proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:13)

. . . in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:12)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example . . . in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9)

An example is always the best teacher!

The Discipline of Those Being Equipped

No believer can be equipped by others if he is not wholly open and committed to what the Lord would do in his life. This is the discipline all face when they seek to find that unique service the Lord calls them to in His body. There are six progressive steps in this discipline.

1. Commitment to *one* local church and its eldership as a place to become rooted in the Lord.

2. Commitment to be faithful in a home church. Many saints, over the history of the church, have attained great stature in character and ministry without ever experiencing the training of small groups. However, the emphasis today is not to raise up a

few great men and women in Christ, but to raise up a church where members are strongly bonded together in Christ.

3. A commitment to accept other members in the group. There will be no progress until participants can accept one another just as Christ has accepted them (Romans 15:7). Personality traits, biases, traditions, etc., must cease to be important so that family relationships can be developed in the Spirit.

4. A commitment to recognize one's need for other members in the local group. The reality of 1 Corinthians 12:21-22 must come alive in each heart. We do need one another!

5. A recognition and acceptance of one's own personal call and place of service in the body. It should become apparent to each member that they wear a pair of spiritual shoes that fits no one else (1 Corinthians 12:15-17; Romans 12:3-6).

6. The last step only becomes viable once the preceding five have been taken. This is a willing commitment to become open, honest and vulnerable with others of the group in dialogue, personal interaction, body ministry, confrontation and counsel. This is the process by which spiritual joints, sinews and tendons are developed that bond members together in a family relationship. This process will address a number of "non-church" issues such as home order, family priorities, and secular employment.

The long-range goal of the above steps is to equip members to be led of the Spirit in their specific sphere of service, and be willing to serve, being accountable to others in the Lord for their service.

The Equipping Process

Principles of Spiritual Equipping

The dynamics of making disciples and equipping them for service requires two distinct meeting environments; the large central gathering and a small group meeting usually held in selected homes. Of course, there will also be unstructured "one-on-one" encounters for the purpose of counsel, prayer and encouragement. However, regardless of where training takes place, there are certain invariant principles of the Spirit which must be constantly emphasized to keep the process from

becoming simply a transfer of information. The following are nine of the more important principles; each one is shown with the Spirit's emphasis contrasted to what man sees as important.

1. Revelation vs. Education.

Revelation is the language of the Spirit. All that God has hidden from man, has been hidden in order that it might be revealed to those who seek Him. All who are equipped must learn this language (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 16: 16:25; Ephesians 1:17-23; 1 Corinthians 2:7-16).

For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light. If any man has ears to hear, let him hear. (Mark 4:22-23)

2. Obedience vs. Knowledge

To receive revelation of truth, and to not obey that truth is like one eating food which he cannot digest; it will accomplish nothing! There are many Christians whose only emphasis is seeking new truth. However, God seeks for obedience in us *above all else*. Knowledge by itself alone only brings pride (1 Corinthians 8:1). To be equipped for service is to bring the imaginations and speculations of our thought life, concerning what we would like to do, captive in order to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Luke 6:47-48). Today, in particular, is a day calling for obedience in the church.

3. "Who" vs. "How and Why"

The way of uninspired theology is to define service in terms of methods and techniques. If one knows "how" to do something, he will not feel it is necessary to seek God for help. His method then becomes the "defined means" for this particular service. Without the Lord's anointing the means becomes a rigid, inflexible "monument" as to how things will be done. This, of course, only leads to death. The progression is: man - method - means - monument - mortuary.

When the unexpected occurs in one's service, the way of the flesh is to ask, "Why did this happen?" The Lord wants to equip us to not ask, "Why," but "Who!" We need to know whether the adversary is responsible, whether it was a consequence of our own actions or whether the Lord has acted. Thus, we need only to seek the Lord for answers. The way of the Spirit is always to seek Christ, not answers. He is the One who establishes our steps in His way. Christianity is first of all a Person, who also is the way; it is never a philosophy or religious method (Proverbs 16:9; 20:24; Romans 8:14; Hebrews 12:2).

4. The Purpose of God vs. the Needs of Mankind

Many ministry endeavors and church strategies for service arise out of sincere desires and soulful emotions to meet needs. While the intention and zeal are good, the motivation is wrong. The purpose of God was established before the world was created, and it is *invariant and eternal*. Furthermore, His purpose is based on His foreknowledge of all needs in all persons in every generation. Each believer has been called to serve God so that His purpose in that particular generation can be accomplished. The call of God to each one of us is always accompanied by sufficient grace for whatever service we are called to, as well as for whatever circumstance we may face in our response (2 Timothy 1:9). Why did Jesus minister in certain cities of Israel rather than others? Why did He heal only one person at the pool of Bethesda? Why did He not speak out against slavery, etc.? The answers to such questions are hidden in the purpose of His Father. Likewise, in the purpose of God there is a unique place of service defined for each one of us from the foundation of the world. To seek the Lord and find that place is our first step of service, and it is also how the Lord will meet the needs of others through us.

5. Character vs. Deeds

The way of our flesh is to evaluate success in service by counting numbers; Sunday school attendance, size of the membership role, the number of decisions for Christ, the number healed, etc. Quality, not quantity, is the way of the Spirit. In the end it will also yield the greatest quantity of fruit. What one is in Christ, determines the worth of what one does for Christ. Saints are not equipped to build “large churches” or to achieve numerical success; they are equipped to accomplish those deeds prepared for them from the foundation to the world. (Ephesians 2:10). Key in doing this is learning to enter into His rest while becoming more like Him and more yielded to Him (Hebrews 4:10-11). It is His life in us, His anointing upon us, that does the work (1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 3:16, 20; 6:10). It is never a waste of time to sit in His presence when we are busy in service. There is no greater work than becoming like Jesus.

6. Diversity vs. Conformity

One major reason for the many schisms in Christendom is the religious practice of conforming groups of believers into various distinct theological molds based on doctrine, ministry, conduct, government or vision. Whether the primary issue was governmental or an interpretation

of scripture (i.e. Catholicism or Protestantism) the end result was the same, “establish our conformity regardless of how it divides the body of Christ.” Such conformity is a work of human ecclesiology. The way of the Spirit is to guide saints to one standard, being conformed to the image of Christ. Within that standard and under His headship, they are equipped to manifest the *great diversity* implicit in the body of Christ. The Lord is building His house with living stones of different shapes, sizes and colors (1 Peter 2:4). There are *no bricks* in it!

Furthermore, this diversity *must not* be tainted by exclusivity; for there is no elitism, competition or schism in the Godhead or in the kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:1-6). Therefore, such things should not exist in the body of Christ.

7. The Sovereignty of God vs. Circumstances

The way of the flesh is to equate our capability for success in service to the circumstances we face. When they are formidable, we lose faith to move forward; or if we see no obstacles, we rush forward in our own strength. One who is equipped in the Spirit recognizes that success does not depend upon circumstances whether good or bad; it depends upon our willing obedience and recognition that the sovereignty of God undergirds whatever He has called us to do. He who calls us is faithful and able to bring it to pass. If we don’t obey, He will raise up someone who will. The entire word of God rests upon His sovereignty, much like a great weight would be supported on a table with four legs. If one of the legs were missing, the table would collapse. The table surface corresponds to the sovereignty of God. The four legs represent four unchanging characteristics of God and mankind; if one of these is taken away the sovereignty of God would collapse. These four “legs” are:

- The character (love) of God
- The foreknowledge of God
- The grace of God
- The free will of man

It is these four attributes of God and man, not circumstances, that make it certain we *can* fulfill our call in service, for they express the Lord’s blend of Himself and His body. Of course, grace is the basis of His power. If our will was not required, we would only be robots; our faith is expressed through our wills (James 2:17). However, if the grace of God was missing we could neither be or do anything for Him. The *whole* plan of God flows out of His character, expressed in the love He

had for sinners by sending His own Son to die for them. Because of His foreknowledge, we can be *absolutely* confident that God has never reacted to any unexpected event, and that where the *church* is, and *we* are today, is *precisely* where He knew we would be before the foundation of the world. Thus, our faith and confidence in service must be grounded in the sovereignty of God.

8. Bondservants vs. Rulers

The Lord's plan for man is that he rule over all creation (Hebrews 2:5-8). This is part of the inheritance of those who are sanctified and prepared for it. Our place of future authority depends upon how well we serve today (Luke 19:12-26; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26-27, 3:12, 5:9-10, 20:4-6, 22:3-5). The way of the flesh is "rise up, take control and rule." The way of the Spirit is the way of brokenness, to put on the Lord's yoke of meekness and lowliness and learn to serve. The Spirit does not equip us to serve as slaves, for a slave serves because circumstances compel him to do so. He prepares us to become bondservants, for they enter into servitude of their own free will (Exodus 21:50).

*Have this attitude (of heart) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus; who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant**, and being made in the likeness of men . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. **Therefore, also God highly exalted Him** (Philippians 2:5-9)*

Leadership will only be successful in equipping saints to serve if they themselves are good examples of bondservants (Matthew 20:25-28). New Testament apostles spoke of themselves as bondservants; this was so real to them that it was an integral part of the gospel they preached (2 Corinthians 4:5). When leaders are not equipped in this area of character, they seek to "rule well" rather than to "serve well." If men cannot walk together in submission to each other and serve one another, the easy way out is to create levels of authority with accountability only in one direction; and thus, hierarchical government is born. This is a key issue today in restoration of the church, for *servanthood is an essential requirement for the leaders who God is raising up to guide His people in the days ahead.*

9. Spiritual Warfare vs. Warfare in the Flesh

There is a great deal of concern today in the church concerning such issues as abortion, humanism, the teaching of evolution, terrorism, etc.

The way of the flesh is to spend much time and resources on lobbies, legislation, elections, demonstrations, etc., as the church's strategy of warfare. Such efforts are not wrong, and within limits should be pursued. However, the forces behind these ungodly trends are Satanic, and can only be defeated by *spiritual* warfare. The church is to be a prophetic voice for God against such things; she is also to pray for their removal and be prepared to battle in the Spirit against them. She is opposed by an organized hierarchy of Satanic hosts, apparently structured in four levels (Ephesians 6:12). These are as follows:

- **Satan**, who sees himself as god of this world
- **Principalities, princes or rulers** are fallen angels who Satan has placed over geographic areas. Their mission is to bring forth and multiply specific forms of evil over the region they seek to control (Daniel 10:13, 20).
- **Authorities** are fallen angel who are apparently directed by principalities.
- **World forces of darkness** are demons, spirit beings who are apparently confined to the earth. Under the direction of fallen angels they tempt, corrupt, seduce and afflict mankind with activities such as war, terrorism, the occult, false ministries, humanism, sickness, perversions, deceptions, etc.

A major part of equipping the saints concerns spiritual warfare. They must be able to discern between “works of the flesh” and demonic activity. They must also know how to put on the armor God has provided and to rely on His strength (Ephesians 6:10-18). There must **never be any fear** of Satan when they confront him or his agents.

Through His death and resurrection Jesus triumphed over Satan. In doing so, He disarmed all rulers and authorities; however, He did not remove them from their place in the heavens. Believers in a region are to recognize the authority of evil that is over them. They are to preach the gospel, proclaiming the victory of Christ, cast out demons and stand united in prayer against the forces of wickedness in the heavens.

The above nine maxims are spiritual truths which need to be *reinforced constantly* in the hearts of the saints, lest they forget and lapse into their own ways. To be equipped *is not a one time experience*; it is a *continuing* process.

The Central Meeting

Elders need to maintain a clear distinction between the ministry content of home churches and the central meeting. Home churches must not become miniature replicas of the central gathering. For example, teaching would not be a primary emphasis in the home groups, and the laying on of hands for impartation and directive prophecy should be confined to the central meeting. In a limited sense, these two meeting environments are analogous to the lecture auditorium and the laboratory at college. Students are taught the theoretical content of their particular course of study in the lecture room; they then go to the laboratory for assignments that demonstrate the truth of what they were just taught. The following is a topical overview of the various classes of ministry an eldership is responsible to provide in the central meetings in order to equip the saints:

1. Foundational Teaching

The essential foundational truths that establish new converts in Christ and His finished work at Calvary (Hebrews 6:1-2).

2. The Gospel of the Kingdom

The Lord's strategy for the end times is a *restored church* equipped with a *restored gospel*. The *only* gospel ever given to the church is the gospel of the kingdom. It is therefore, the basis of *all* ministry of the Spirit in a *threefold* sense. First, it is the message of God's saving grace including His love and compassion for the poor and oppressed; second, it is the message and commission for spiritual warfare; and third, it includes all ministry that establishes the order of God's government. Thus, ministry in the home that brings godly order to pass is an expression of the gospel of the kingdom. It is the message that establishes the oversight of Christ in a restored church, and it is the message that will bring *all* enemies under the Lord's feet so that He comes to have *first* place in *everything* (Colossians 1:18). It is also an everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6). Thus, this gospel encompasses more than salvation of lost men and the destruction of Satan's works; it is also the gospel of the glory of Christ which will *always* be proclaimed long after this age ends (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The gospel of the kingdom is the message with which the Lord will wash His bride in order to cleanse and clothe her in a glorious robe of righteousness. It is also the message that clothes her in military fatigues and army boots for spiritual warfare.

3. Prayer and Worship

For meetings to bring life to the body they must be led by the Holy Spirit. The Lord always has a purpose for each gathering. He will have certain things in His heart to express to His children. However, we also have a responsibility. Prayer is always the first act of our faith. The time spent in prayer before the meeting usually establishes the quality of what takes place. The Spirit's direction for the meeting will become apparent as the saints come into the Lord's presence in worship and praise. As they are free to move spontaneously in spiritual songs behind the leading of minstrels, and as prophetic gifts, exhortations and revelations come forth, a specific theme generally becomes apparent. It is also necessary to know when to be *silent* while in His presence during worship. The Lord must be worshipped but He *must also be heard!* As we express our love and praise to Him, He will respond to us. In this way His direction is made known (Ephesians 5:18-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 19-21).

. . . When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

While elders do oversee the meeting, they *must not control* the sequence of events, unless correction is needed. A song leader or meeting director makes such a meeting difficult and often impossible. The Lord's desire is to use *many* members in the flow of body ministry. A prophetic spirit resting upon the minstrels is much more important than their music ability. A good musician without this anointing should sit in the congregation and *follow* the minstrels until the Lord may, or may not, release him to use his gift in praise. The diversity of gifts and ministries of the Spirit that constitute a "good" meeting requires prepared hearts and freedom for spontaneity. Prayer and worship provide the gateway for this to take place.

4. Revelatory Ministry

As pointed out, prayer and worship in the Spirit open the door for revelatory ministry in a meeting. Revelation may be one or more prophetic messages directed to the congregation as a whole to provide direction for that meeting. However, it may also be a number of messages intended to comfort, exhort or encourage specific individuals. These may be words of knowledge or gifts of prophecy. In such messages, there can be a *predictive* sense to the words. However, *directive* words should only be given to individuals by a person who has been seasoned in prophesying and recognized by *their accuracy* as a prophet, and then only when elders are present (i.e. a presbytery). This kind of ministry is

vital in the equipping process for it *confirms* the call and gifting the Lord has placed on individuals. It can also be used to bring salvation to some who recognize that only God could be speaking to them. Prophets bear a great responsibility before God to represent Him accurately, not only in content and timing of their words, but also in their heart attitude when speaking. They should not dilute the impact of the Lord's words by adding their comments, opinion or small talk. They must manifest integrity in *how* they speak as well as in *what* they say. The way to becoming a prophet is a process.

It ought to be clear that the *only* place directive prophecy may be given is where the eldership is present. If other members "hear" such words from the Lord, and that is possible (especially when the Lord is perfecting a future prophet), their message must be submitted to the leadership. Where such guidelines are missing there is great danger of confusion arising from people prophesying over others out of emotions or "wishful thinking." *At all times*, prophecy is to be judged (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). Revelatory ministry serves to keep all eyes on what the Lord is saying at the *present* time. When this ministry is lost, over a period of time the hearts of saints will become dull of hearing. They begin to go their own way emphasizing yesterday's theme. The prophetic eyes of the assembly begins to close, and the focus of the church begins to drift into human programs geared to meet needs, and pulpit ministry becomes more given to imparting information (Isaiah 29:10-13). Elders must always seek for the "*now*" word of the Lord, and point the people constantly to Him and His purpose as it is unfolded to them. His purpose is centered in building His glorious house; the place of His eternal rest; the city from which His government will go out over all creation, the bride for His Son; the many sons, who by overcoming, are being conformed into the image of Jesus. To this end, He is raising up local expressions of His body throughout the world. As He pours out His Spirit upon His body in a great ministry of the gospel of the kingdom, He will meet the needs of *all* who respond to Him. This is the vision for today!

Revelatory ministry serves to keep our eyes on *Him and the future*, and not on past successes, failures, sins or tradition (Isaiah 43:18-19; Acts 11:27-28, 21:8-11). If a church only sees the needs of unsaved mankind, and gives itself solely to winning the lost, it would be like a farmer who harvested his crops without first preparing a barn to store them in. When the vision of a church is centered in the purpose of God, *every member can easily* find and fulfill their personal call in Christ. In the

days ahead, many lone-ranger and para-church ministries that were formed to address needs will disappear as the church is restored.

5. Impartation

On occasion the Lord will call or confirm the call of a believer into a specific ministry or to a new sphere of ministry. This should take place before the local body so that members will know how to pray and support the individual. This ministry should not be entered into hastily or without heart preparation of the candidate and the presbytery. Through prophecy and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, as hands are laid upon the person, there is an impartation of faith to embrace the call. Confirmation should be expected from other prophetic ministries in the body or the presbyter (Deuteronomy 34:9; Romans 1:11; 1 Timothy 1:18, 4:14; Acts 13:1-4).

6. Shepherding

The pastoral ministries in an eldership undergird and support *all* other ministries by their input to the secular and spiritual spheres of each member's life. Behind their counsel, care, confrontation, family and marriage instruction, and home church guidance lies one underlying goal, to see believers *conformed into the image of Christ*. This is the only standard of righteousness in the church, and it must *never* be diluted or replaced by church laws. Legalism is a great hindrance to true righteousness (Matthew 5:48; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 3:17-19). Character is not developed without pain. Strong winds produce deep roots. Our Father in heaven prunes and disciplines us in love so that we can become partakers of His holiness (John 15:1-17; Hebrews 12:5-11). Because His discipline is not pleasant, believers must be equipped to distinguish between attacks of Satan and the hand of God in the circumstances they confront. We are to *always* resist Satan and destroy his works; this all believers can do, for greater is He who lives in us than he who is in the world. At the same time, we are to recognize that when we are *totally* committed to God, *everything* that comes into our lives is there by God's permission. This is true whether it involves overcoming demonic activity or embracing and walking through an unpleasant, difficult circumstance. One produces faith; the other develops character. A vital part of shepherding is assisting saints to make this distinction, and where applicable, encouraging them during times of sufferings, trials, persecutions, testings and afflictions for these are what develop character (2 Corinthians 4:17; Romans 5:1-5, 8:17-18; 1 Peter 1:6-7, 2:21-23, 4:13, 5:6-10; James 1:2-4, 12).

*And we know that God **causes all things** to work together for good to those who love God, to those **who are called according to His purpose.** (Romans 8:28)*

*For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake. (Philippians 1:29)*

It must be well understood by all, that whatever one *builds* for the Lord in service, he can *destroy* by his lack of character.

Where verses in the New Testament encourage the reader to endure afflictions, the Greek word “*THLIPSIS*” is used which denotes tribulations, such as beatings and imprisonment. Another Greek word “*MASTIX*” is also translated as “afflictions” in the gospels (Luke 7:21; Mark 3:10). However, when this word is used it always refers to evil spirits and sicknesses which we are to resist.

The following are two other ministry functions related to shepherding. The first is the *very important* service of older women instructing younger women on how to love their husbands and children, and how to relate to their husband in managing home affairs (Titus 2:3-5). This input can be most valuable in establishing proper priorities for the husband's ministry. The second ministry function concerns youth meetings, especially those from twelve to around eighteen years of age. There are not two classes of spiritual gifts, one for teenagers and one for adults. Spiritual worship, gifts of the Spirit along with prayer and intercession should be a part of youth meetings. Leadership of this meeting should come from a married couple who have both the burden and anointing for it and who are skilled in relation to young people.

7. Traveling Ministries

The saints must be taught to see the Lord's church as He does, one body in Christ, regardless of how it may be segmented into organizations. They must not view their local body as an isolated “island of truth,” an entity without need of the wider body. A sense of belonging needs to be developed, first to the overall church of their locality, then to the church of that region, to the national church, and finally to the body of Christ worldwide. The practical aspects in bringing this to pass lies with local leaders, and in particular, with those men graced with a translocal call of ministry. It will not be a primary concern of pastors since their hearts are altogether focused on caring for the sheep entrusted to them. This pastoral orientation is a major reason why traditional churches have largely been unsuccessful in working together as one church in their locality. Thus, the primary key in establishing this vision lies with those

elders who have a translocal ministry, especially the apostles and prophets.

When translocal ministries are released to travel, they are sent forth as an extension of the local body; the saints are to view what they do and where they go as something of which they themselves are a part of. They are to pray and financially support them equally as much as local activities. It is important, therefore, that the teams return and report all that the Lord did in and through them. This reinforces the local church vision of those churches visited as being an extension of themselves, not in an organizational, but in a family sense. Thus assemblies are relationally and organically bonded together in the life of Christ. In the same manner traveling ministries will come to strengthen, encourage and equip them. In all cases, visiting ministries, including apostles and prophets, do *not* function from a higher level of authority than the local elders, nor do they minister out of a governmental role. They come as bondservants to minister out of the grace upon them in a relationship of trust and mutual accountability with the elders. This quality of relationship may take time to build but it is *absolutely necessary* if the same degree of life that binds members together in local assemblies is to unite assemblies together in larger geographic expressions of the body of Christ. There must always be an openness and willingness to serve the traditional institutional churches with the same attitude when the Lord opens such doors. Thus, traveling ministries are vital contributors in the equipping process. It is not simply a matter of having one each of the five ministries. The anointing and grace will vary between men who have the same call. Each one will be unique in their personality, and in the manner they minister out of their priesthood (prayer and worship), their manhood (family, secular and social), their servanthood (life laid down to serve others), and their fatherhood (reproducing in others what Christ has built into them). Only the Lord knows what is needed at any time in an assembly. The elders must recognize and receive those whom He sends to them. They must also be conscious of when to release men from themselves to travel, watering and equipping established churches or planting new expressions of His body (Acts 13:1-4, 14:21-28, 15:30-32, 36, 18:26-28).

As men emerge in home church leadership who clearly have the grace of God upon them for one of the fivefold ministries, they will become part of the local eldership as the various qualifications listed in the epistles of Timothy and Titus are satisfied. Some of these men will possess a call to translocal spheres of ministry. Once this becomes apparent, these men will be given opportunities to travel with existing

translocal ministries to gain experience and be equipped for future service.

Finally, the hearts of elders must be the hearts of bondservants. Hearts given to equip men to attain a stature and grace for ministry that is *beyond* theirs. As the Lord restores His church, *all* dimensions of ministry will grow in excellence, just as it declined during the falling away of the first church. The early church is the *pattern* for restoration, but it is *not* the objective. The final glory of the church will *far exceed* anything ever seen before on earth (Haggai 2:6-9).

There is a snare that leadership must be aware of and avoid. Men among them who are more visible before the people because of a greater measure in which the Lord uses them in spiritual gifts or prophecy, have to be *certain* that no one begins to build their faith on them rather than on the Lord. This is a very real and subtle danger whenever there is a strong ministry within an eldership.

Home Church Meetings

The first requirement for a house church is a Christian home that is in order, where the peace of God rules. Ideally, the husband should be one of the leaders since he is head of the home.

The optimum number for attendance is generally between ten and twenty; once attendance exceeds a range of twenty-five to thirty, the atmosphere becomes more like that of a congregation. When this occurs, there is usually a growing lack of willingness in some to participate in open “give and take” of exhortations, praying for one another, sharing scriptures and testimonies. A family atmosphere is reinforced when all age levels are present. There should not be home meetings for only one class of believers (i.e. singles, the elderly, etc.).

Home meeting oversight presents an ideal opportunity to equip men for leadership. These would be men who apparently have a call to eldership but are not yet able to meet all the qualifications for elders. Two or more men would serve in this capacity over each home church. Their authority to exercise oversight is delegated by the elders to whom they are accountable. Since they are being trained and tested in their place of oversight, they must recognize their service as that of a deacon. Thus, they can be replaced, or asked to lay down their ministry when home or work pressures are too high (1 Timothy 3:10). Also, some may find that they do not have grace to cope with the responsibility. Experi-

ence shows that home location and leadership are often subject to change in house churches. The responsibilities of home group leaders is essentially threefold:

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- To care for the saints and oversee meetings.
- To receive input and counsel from the elders, to work with them and be accountable to them.
- To function collegially with peers so that a godly, mutual dependence builds them together as one person in the eyes of the people. This is an essential part of their training for eldership.

There is no such thing as a *self-made* spiritual leader!

The overall objective for home church meetings can be reduced to one word, “life.” Leaders are to seek the Lord for guidance on how to motivate the saints toward personal interaction. The first step is to encourage everyone to be relaxed, informal and open to move with the Spirit. An atmosphere of expectancy and spontaneity is required where diverse, latent gifts can be discovered and exercised. For this reason, leaders will guard against any one person monopolizing the meeting. They will also prevent cliques from forming. The emphasis is to be a *family*, with everyone having opportunity to speak. If irrelevant subjects are introduced, the leaders will move with grace to quench them. In all of this, leaders set, or maintain direction of the meeting *without controlling* it.

The following ministry activities jointly form a syllabus for equipping the saints:

1. Prayer and Worship

Ministry to the Lord *always* comes first. One will have little grace to serve in gifts and ministries of the Spirit if he has not first embraced the service of being a priest unto God. One virtue of small groups is that worship in the Spirit is contagious; one or two can affect the others. The elders must ensure there is grace and gifting for worship present in home groups. If good worship and prophetic flow develops in a group, over time the Lord will generally bring forth a diversity of service that is unique for that group. If this flow is not present, the group will tend to become a carbon copy of some other group. Prayer and worship are *indispensable* for fruitful home church meetings.

2. Evangelism

Every newborn child of God is able to bear effective witness to what the Lord has done in his or her life. Unless witnessing is encouraged immediately after conversion, the burden to do so is often crowded out by subsequent training and teaching. For this reason, evangelism should be given high priority in the service of a home church. It is good to set time

aside each week to testify of God's grace in the area of outreach. As saints grow in the Lord, and are equipped in new dimensions of character, relationship and ministry they are to recognize that they are now more capable witnesses for Christ (Matthew 5:13-16; Ephesians 5:13-15; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2; Isaiah 50:4).

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned as it were with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person. (Colossians 4:15-16)

When individual believers experience the thrill of seeing souls brought to Christ in group encounters, they will find it much easier to move out in personal evangelism. Thus, it is good for each home church to seek the Lord for direction in how to approach this service. It is easier to just copy what another group is doing; but there is greater virtue in hearing from the Lord, for He may lead in a way and to people no one has considered. The following are some evangelistic activities the home groups in our local church have undertaken:

- Visiting home for the elderly
- Drama
- Newspaper ads directed to groups such as Jehovah Witnesses, with personal or recorded messages for those who phone in response to the ads
- Door-to-door visitation
- Staffing attractive booths for evangelism at local fairs and business shows

This subject would not be complete without pointing out the great importance of follow-up ministry for those who make decisions for the Lord.

Finally, home churches should *not* be closed to the unsaved; members should be encouraged to bring unsaved neighbors, strangers in need, friends or relatives to find the Lord. Those who will be saved provide opportunity for the home group to experience the initial ministries to new converts that are so important, such as water baptism, baptism in the Spirit etc.

3. The Practice of Ministry

Physicians practice medicine, and Christians practice ministry; and neither one becomes perfect at it in this life. The place to practice ministry

is not in central meetings, but in the home church atmosphere. Maturity comes from practice and making mistakes. Each home group is a very limited expression of the body of Christ. However, every member in the group has graces of the Spirit with which to bring divine influence into the lives of others. And whether the group is large or small, the principle of body ministry is always the same, to exalt and honor the Head by edifying and caring for members of His body (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24).

When there are present those who are afflicted and oppressed, who are not in any position to bring life to others, they must have first priority in the flow of the meeting.

Strengthen hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and make straight paths for you feet (i.e. set an example) . . . see to it that no one comes short of the grace of God . . . (Hebrews 12:12-13, 15)

It is no different than when we hurt some member of our physical body; everything else is set aside until it is ministered to first. Hopefully, prophetic direction for doing so will come from the Lord. If not, the leaders must ask the Lord for wisdom in addressing these needs. One of the elders in our local church gave me the following example of how the Lord led him in such a situation. A very discouraged sister was present. He asked everyone present to silently pray for her and ask the Lord for a word of encouragement to give her. After a period of prayer, they all went to her in turn and gave her their word. The result was a prophetic flow of encouragement that transformed the sister's countenance and spirit.

It can be appropriate for a leader to ask all in the group to stir up a specific gift of the Spirit and to follow him in its ministry. The same approach can be applied to bringing forth spiritual songs of worship. If there arises uncertainty over some issue, it can be instructive to request all members to pray and ask the Lord for a word of knowledge. If the Lord does give a word, its validity will be apparent to the leaders.

Another option is pointing the people to the grace of God by opening the meeting for testimonies of victories that have been recent experiences in lives. Occasionally, it is good to have the people prepare to discuss specific topics that are pertinent to their growth in Christ. The following are suitable examples:

- How our words and attitude affect others
- What does it mean "to carry our cross"?

- How to face and deal with unpleasant circumstances
- How to present Christ to family, friends and strangers
- How to motivate others to commitment
- How far our submission to one another goes
- How should we welcome new converts to meetings?
- Specific social issues: how we are to pray and what are we to do about them?
- Our experiences in the ministry of hospitality
- How should we respond to cults?
- How to build good relationships in our neighborhoods/at work
- The disciplines of prayer and Bible study
- What God's grace meant to me
- Personal and family goals in Christ
- How can we as a group better serve the Lord?
- How can we better serve one another?
- How to improve family devotions
- How can we serve other local churches, especially denominational assemblies?
- How the Lord taught me to love His people

Home fellowships provide an excellent place of ministry transition for young people. Teenagers will enter more quickly into worship, sharing, etc., with adults in a small meeting than they would in a large central gathering. Therefore, it is important that they be active in home churches as well as in youth meetings. Because they are the next generation of the Lord's body, leadership should be concerned with helping them make a quick transition to "adult service" in this hour of church restoration.

4. Building Lives Together in Christ

When believers are linked together by superficial relationships and commitments to one another, they will be quickly torn apart in times of trouble and persecution. The great harvest of souls that will be gathered at the close of this present age takes place in times of unprecedented distress, trials, persecution and spiritual warfare. This will require a *strong*,

united body of believers. Therefore, the Lord is restoring truth on those qualities of the Holy Spirit that bond members together as a functioning body in Christ. Nominal church membership has little or no relevance. Although it is a work of the Holy Spirit, we must be yielded, cooperative vessels who have a vision to replace facades with honesty. The major reason for this particular ministry function is to deepen the love of God in the hearts of His people for one another.

Each believer is an individual stone intended for use in the Lord's house (1 Peter 2:1-5). However, in its original state a stone is not yet ready for service. It must first be sanded and shaped to fit the place it is destined for; then it must be cemented (by the love of God) to the stones surrounding it. It is the personal interactions, the "give-and-take" of admonishment and encouragement that sand and shape us to fit together with brothers and sisters.

Iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Faithful are the wound of a friend . . . (Proverbs 27:6)

Similarly, two members of the Lord's body who work together in service must be united by a healthy "joint" of relationship. This relationship must remain strong as they serve the rest of the body. There must be strong "tendons" and "sinews" holding the two members in place as they move in unison to serve (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 2:19). The stones, joints, tendons and sinews all tell the same story. Our human nature wants to go its own way independent of others; but God says, "*Learn to love and serve one another; learn to give and receive admonishment in that love; your strength in service lies in being built to your brothers and sisters (Colossians 3:16).*"

These qualities are not developed in the setting of a traditional meeting. They require more informal times of companionship such as table fellowship, retreats, occasions to share another's joy or sorrow, bearing one another's burdens, times of giving comfort and encouragement, etc. (Romans 12:13). The Lord will allow needs to develop in certain ones so that as others reach out to help, deeper bonds of compassion and relationship will be built (Ephesians 4:28; Titus 3:14; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Trust and relationship bring a willingness to be more open and honest with others. This vulnerability becomes a basis for the Lord to adjust certain character traits (Romans 15:14). Everything spoken in godly admonishment to one who is *not* willing to be open and honest will be interpreted as personal criticism and bear no fruit. These dynam-

ics of relationship, honesty and admonishment are a *continuing process*, for one *cannot trust* the state of his own heart.

For this reason, the eldership also must frequently meet together, not just on church issues but to be in each others lives. Their relationship requires constant attention, for if contentions or stress arises among them it will be felt by the people even if no details are known. There is *no one* in the family of God who does not have shortcomings in some area of their life. The important thing is to recognize it when others point it out, and to repent and change. God's word has answers for any personal need or sin. If such things are not dealt with immediately, they become more ingrained in one's character. When this occurs, it becomes vital that repentance and renewal take place, for the individual is now open to demonic activity. If there is no repentance the issue of character flaws can become a matter of spiritual warfare. At this time, some of the traits and sins open to demonic oppression are also candidates for spirits of infirmity, both physical and mental.

Table 1 illustrates the progression of many common faults from sin to demonic activity. A major problem is that many simply do not recognize such traits in their lives as sin. This is the reason why we need the inputs of trusted brothers and sisters into our lives. Discipline is a key word in the process of building character. It can take three forms. First, our heavenly Father prunes us through the discipline of trials and tribulations to redeem faults in our nature that we may not even be aware of (John 15:1-17; Hebrews 12:5-11). Second, we exercise self discipline to strengthen areas of our lives we recognize as weak or vulnerable (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). Third, one who refuses these first two disciplines and who continues to sin can face church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17-18). *All* discipline is to be redemptive in purpose.

Those responsible to equip others must discern such trends in anyone entrusted to their charge. They must also know whether they are dealing with sin in the flesh or demonic activity. In addition, a sickness that is natural (i.e. physical) in cause must not be confused with a spirit of infirmity (James 5:14-16; 1 Corinthians 12:9-10).

TABLE 1 - CHARACTER, SIN AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

THE PROBLEM SIN	WHEN NOT DEALT WITH	DEMONIC ACTIVITY
WORRY	GREAT ANXIETY, FEARFUL	DREAD, TERROR, SPIRIT OF FEAR
DISCOURAGEMENT	DESPAIR	HOPELESSNESS, SPIRIT OF SUICIDE
BAD COMPANY AND HABITS	PORNOGRAPHY	UNCLEAN SPIRIT, LUST, PERVERSION
LOW SELF WORTH IN CHRIST	LONER, WITHDRAWN, AVOIDS FELLOWSHIP	SPIRIT OF CONDEMNATION AND REJECTION
NO CONTROL OF THOUGHTS	LIVES A FANTASY	SPIRIT OF DECEPTION, OCCULT
"KNOW-IT-ALL"	UNTEACHABLE	FACTIOUS, DIVISIVE SPIRIT
UNFAITHFUL & UNDEPENDABLE	COVENANT BREAKER	SPIRIT OF HARLOTRY
NO JOY, ALWAYS GRIEVING	HEAVINESS OF HEART	SPIRIT OF DEPRESSION
ANGER THAT IS UNCONTROLLED	RAGE	SPIRIT OF WRATH
DESIRE FOR WORLDLY THINGS	DEBT, POOR STEWARDSHIP OF MONEY	SPIRIT OF IDOLATRY, SPIRIT OF POVERTY
DISHONEST	HYPOCRISY	LYING SPIRIT
TOO SELF CONFIDENT	NO HUMILITY OR SUBMISSION	SPIRIT OF REBELLION
PUTTING DOWN OTHERS	BOASTFUL	SPIRIT OF PRIDE
UNFORGIVING	ROOT OF BITTERNESS	ACCUSING SPIRIT
SELFISH AMBITION	FLATTERY, MANIPULATIVE	CONTROLLING SPIRIT (JEZEBEL)
SUPERSTITIOUS	USES FLEECE, LACK OF FAITH TO HEAR GOD	HOROSCOPES, OCCULT
FAITH ONLY IN TRADITION	LEGALISTIC	RELIGIOUS SPIRIT
DISCONTENTED	BACKBITER, FAULTFINDER	CRITICAL SPIRIT, SPIRIT OF HATRED
JEALOUSY, ENVY	GOSSIP	SPIRIT OF SLANDER
LACK OF PRAYER	WRONG PRIORITIES	SPIRIT OF CONFUSION
FAITH IN MATERIAL THINGS	GREEDY	SPIRIT OF COVETOUSNESS
REJECTS COUNSEL	INTEREST IN ANY NEW DOCTRINE	SPIRIT OR ERROR, CULTIC SPIRIT

By “reading between the lines” one finds an excellent example in the New Testament of a married couple who were well equipped for their work of service by Paul, the apostle. The couple in question was Aquila and Priscilla. Their history in scripture covers roughly seventeen years, from AD 53 to AD 67 (the dates are only approximate since bible scholars do not agree in the dating of epistles). There is no evidence that Aquila was ever considered an elder. Table 2 illustrates their recorded history of service.

TABLE 2 - THE HISTORY OF AQUILA AND PRISCILLA	
DATE/SCRIPTURE	EVENT
(AD 53) ACTS 18:1-4	Couple arrived from Rome, worked with Paul as tentmakers, received input on evangelism and for themselves.
ACTS 17:18	Paul took them to Ephesus as pioneers.
ACTS 18:24-26	They ministered foundational truth to Apollos, and did so in a humble way showing the character of Christ.
(AD 55-56) 1 CORINTHIANS 16:19	They now have a church in their home at Ephesus.
ROMANS 16:3-5	Back in Rome, and have a church in their home. Paul implies they have helped all the churches of the Gentiles.
(AD 67) 2 TIMOTHY 4:19	Paul imprisoned; they now are working with Timothy. Apparently back at Ephesus.

A summary of their seventeen year ministry reveals seven *significant* observations that show how well equipped they were.

- Their secular and spiritual lives were *one*.
- Husband and wife served together as *one* ministry.
- They were able to financially support themselves even when they were mobile.
- They were willing to move geographically as the Lord led.
- They were committed to work with and under foundational ministries.
- They evangelized in the synagogues.
- Their ministry emphasis was focused on *home churches*.
- Above all the record shows that their commitment to Christ included their ministry, their work, their home, as well as their hearts.

May the Lord raise up more couples like Aquila and Priscilla today!

There are two additional benefits of home churches which are not immediately apparent. The first one takes place over time as a local church grows in numbers and introduces home groups in various neighborhoods of its locality. These groups on the periphery of the area, within which believers attend church, become candidates for new local assemblies. It may consist of a single home church or be the union of several. In any case, members will already be established in foundational truth, many will be well equipped, they are committed to the local elders and their home group leaders from which eldership of the new church will come. It is a relatively easy task to begin a new local expression of the body of Christ. The process is similar to mitosis which is nature's way of multiplying living cells by dividing them. The gospel of the kingdom is likely to have greater impact on an area when there are five churches who work together, each with two hundred members, than it would have if there was one church with a thousand members.

The second advantage is one I refer to as "hidden leaders." In 1966, a well known Christian leader visited China to discover the status of Christians in that land. He wrote a book on what he found. He was astonished at the number and quality of underground churches that met only in homes. He pointed out that when sudden cataclysmic persecution came from the communists, the first act was to kill or imprison the leaders. This was catastrophic to the nominal traditional churches. Leaders had to compromise or be removed. In the typical centralized church structure there is no one to take their place, and without leadership the church ceases to be effective.

However, in the decentralized structure, where there is no clergy-laity distinction, and where each member is being equipped to serve; should persecution come and elders are taken away, the "hidden



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leaders” of home churches become the new elders. Meetings would remain confined to homes, but there would be little impact on the effectiveness of ministry.

[“China Miracle; A Silent Explosion”; by Arthur Wallis; published in 1986 by City Hill Publishing, England; IBNO-939159-00-7.]

Conclusion

Unprecedented days of turmoil and change lie ahead. Deep darkness and deception is coming upon the world. However, it will be also a time of the *greatest demonstration* of the gospel of the kingdom ever witnessed by mankind. The body of Christ is being prepared as an ark of safety for all whose hearts will turn to the Lord. New dimensions of power and unity will be manifest by God’s people and be used to bring thousand upon thousand from the nations into the church. A transcendent glory will rest upon the church. In that day the Lord *alone* will be exalted as members of His body lose their identity in Him (Isaiah 60:1-5).

We are living in crucial days of *restoration and transition*. Significant *changes* must be made by many if they are to be participants and not just spectators of these events. The infrastructure of church bodies must be prepared to accommodate great numbers of new converts, many with severe problems. The Lord has restored the pattern for building local expressions of His body in order that the saints might be equipped for the great work that will close this age. However, the harvest is *so immense* that the *whole* body of Christ must work as *one* under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Differences in such things as church government, doctrinal emphasis, etc. *must not hinder* the unity that will be necessary for this great work to take place. Leaders must not judge and tear down methods or ministries of other Christian bodies; they are to reach out as *servants* to help and seek to be allies in the fields of harvest. Above all, they are to give themselves as men of truth to equip those saints entrusted to them for their work of service and for their place in the glory to come.