

# “—I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH—” (Matthew 16:18)

by Dale Rumble

## Preface

There is a confluence of events occurring in the church, among nations and in the heavens which will lead to the day of the Lord. However, one thing will be completed before that day comes: the church will be restored; the bride of Christ will prepare herself for her Lord's return.

*Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the **period of restoration** of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21)*

*Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. (Revelation 19:7)*

We Christians today are a privileged people, for we are living in a time of promise and restoration. The Lord is building His church; He is raising up an army equipped with the gospel of the kingdom to reclaim for Himself that which has been stolen by the enemy. He is a God of restoration and renewal!

*Then I will make up (restore) to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the stripping locust, and the gnawing locust...and you shall...praise the*

*name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you .... (Joel 2:25-26)*

While it is a glorious time of restoration, it is also a time of testing, of shaking and preparation for climactic spiritual warfare. The church can only be built by the Lord. Believers are anointed to lay foundations and care for His people, but only the Lord can cause spiritual life and structure to take place. What He builds **will not be** made up of two classes of believers: performers and spectators. It **will not be** a place to go for entertainment. It is His body on earth; He initiates what is to take place in the organism of life which is His body.

The present day type of “super churches” and “super ministries” are not His measures of spiritual success. What man builds, he controls; what the Lord builds, He controls! And what the Lord is building, He will use to accomplish His purpose at the close of this age.

## RESTORATION

Since the time of Martin Luther there has been a continual restoration of spiritual truth; truths once held precious by the first Christians, but which were lost during a period of declension that lasted for over a thousand years.

The history of church restoration is filled with examples of Christian groups who became content with where they were in God, and with the truth they possessed. Because there was no hunger to press into new truth, these believers were left behind when the cloud of restoration moved on. The result was that human programs replaced the moving of the Spirit among them, and the people settled down to an orthodoxy of the status-quo.

It is vital for us to recognize how much more land there is to be possessed today, lest we too, be left behind admiring what we possess and failing to see the glory ahead.

There is **never** a time when we should be satisfied with where we are in our walk with God, either as individuals or as a church. The words of Paul express what the proper heart attitude should be:

*...not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)*

A church will not benefit from a restoration of spiritual gifts and the fivefold (ascension gift) ministries of Ephesians 4:11 apart from a renewal of humility, righteousness and prayer. Hearts must be prepared! In fact, an emphasis on the supernatural workings of the Holy Spirit apart from these attributes of character can hinder the cause of Christ.

It is imperative that leaders do not become sidetracked with secondary concerns and miss the thrust of restoration. It is so easy to become overly involved with ministry needs and programs to the neglect of more important things. What we are in God will always be more important than what we do for Him. To repent and be purified is to be restored.

I believe the following three aspects of restoration are critical and essential to the church at this present time:

to become more a people of His presence.

to build stronger bonds of relationship in the family of God, especially between leaders in assemblies and between assemblies.

to ensure that local assemblies are built after the pattern of New Testament churches. The interface of God's government among His people today is focused here. He must be allowed to build His church in His way. Individual leaders have specific and limited ministerial functions; therefore, the diversity of all the fivefold ministries is required in assemblies to equip the saints as local expressions of the fullness of the Lord's life and government. The quality of "what we are in God" will be seen here; for it is in local assemblies that saints mature in Christ and establish relationships, from which ministries are raised up and released to build the body of Christ world wide. Thus, the local assembly is key in restoration truth today.

## THE BLINDERS OF TRADITION

Because of the lack of apostolic and prophetic ministries during past moves of restoration, all available truth was not properly integrated into the various new bodies of believers that emerged over the years. A rigid definition of orthodoxy led many groups to reject new truth. This has given rise to the numerous denominations within Christendom today. As God calls His people from various religious backgrounds into the move of His Spirit today, it is important that blinders of tradition do not distort the vision and pattern of the house that He is building. The following seven truisms concerning the church address many of these traditional issues:

1. The church is not an organization; it is an **organism of spiritual life**. An assembly is a local expressions of the body of Christ.
2. A church is not a group of believers united in membership by a creed; it is a community of believers who are in **covenant commitment** to the Lord and one another.
3. Believers are not committed to the church for the sake of Christ; they are **committed to Christ** for the sake of the church.
4. The ministry orientation of a local church is not primarily pastoral, it is **apostolic**, For this reason, Christ has placed in the church, **first** apostles (1 Corinthians 12:28). This apostolic emphasis is the basis of church reproduction. The Lord is raising up spiritual fathers today to address this need.
5. Positions of responsibility in the church are not offices that operate when men occupy them; they are **spiritual functions** for which men have been given grace and an anointing to serve. When there is not anointing there will be no valid function.
6. There are no clergy and laity classes of saints; believers are individually **members of the body of Christ**, with each one anointed for his or her vocational calling in God.
7. A local church does not govern itself as a democracy; it is a **theocracy** under the authority of Christ Who anoints a presbytery of men to oversee the assembly. These overseers are not men who rule by dominating the people, rather they are servants who lead by example. This seventh item is often a difficult truth for many to embrace. For this reason it will be addressed in detail.

## ELDERSHIP: PLURAL AND COLLEGIAL

This subject invariably raises questions; questions that are honest but which arise out of the tradition of hierarchical leadership that emerged late in the first century and which is still common today. For this reason, I will treat the topic by answering the seven questions asked most frequently:

1. Is it scriptural for the oversight of an assembly to be shared among a plural company of men? Answer: Yes, once the assembly has been properly established and there are men qualified to be set in place as elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Titus 1:5). There is no scripture that identifies a local church leadership position where one individual gives direction to elders, or through the elders, to God's people. This role belongs to the Lord. God's word does not command His people in a church to be subject to **a leader**; He commands them to be subject to their **leaders** (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The words, overseer, bishop or elder in scripture are used synonymously in referring to those who shepherd a church. However, by the second century, the writings of men such as Ignatius and Irenaeus reveal that one of the presbytery, referred to as the bishop or pastor, had been elevated as a singular authority over the other elders. This was the beginning of hierarchical church government.

2. What does "plural equality" imply? Answer: It does not mean that the men in question are equal in stature, ability, visibility or experience. They are simply equal in bearing **responsibility for oversight** of the assembly. Elders are collegial; they are not clones. They will be different both in personality and in the

nature of their specific ministry. Some will manifest a greater ability to counsel; others will be more gifted at teaching or evangelism. One with a prophet's heart may be used by the Lord more often to speak directly to the people. Such differences **should exist** in an eldership for diversity is needed to represent the Lord more completely in the shepherding function. In addition, some may be men who also work in secular employment. That does not make them any less than the other elders. Full time support should be more related to translocal ministry demands than to local shepherding needs.

3. What are the reasons for plurality? Answer: There are four primary purposes:

**Accountability:** we cannot trust our own heart and judgment; each of us needs someone to watch over our personal life as well as the quality and priorities of our ministry. Those who shepherd others are not immune from the need for shepherding; and they **cannot** be shepherded from a remote location. One has only to look at the number of prominent ministers who have fallen into sin to understand why this is so. When leaders walk in an accountable submission to one another, anything which arises between them that could cause division must be faced and dealt with immediately. Confrontation is an inherent part of accountability. It is dangerous for a man to be raised up in a prominent ministry if he is not covered by brothers who love and care for him. This was the reason why God intended Jonathan to walk in covenant with David, so that later he could sit beside him on the throne and speak into David's life to keep him from error (1 Samuel 23:17). Jonathan's failure to walk out his covenant with David is reflected in the sins that David later fell into while king.

**Diversity:** the service of a godly pastor portrays the Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. An anointed teacher also reflects the teaching ministry of the Lord; the same is true for the other ministries. It is the diverse ministry in a college of men overseeing the assembly that **more fully** reflects the complete ministry of the Lord Jesus. The result is a **better capability** to equip the saints for service and bring them to maturity.

**Developing ministers:** the local assembly is God's seminary for the training of elders and the release of translocal or traveling ministries. This will involve such men proving faithful first in places of limited responsibility, such as a home church leader where an anointing to oversee the lives of others can become apparent. **After** they have proven faithful, and **if** they exhibit an anointing for eldership, a transition to greater responsibility can occur. As the specific nature of the ministry of such men become more apparent it should be encouraged by their peers. In this manner, **all of the fivefold ministries** can be expected to emerge from an eldership over time. The release of ministries in this fashion to other areas is the **reproductive** principle by which new assemblies are raised up. Thus, an assembly functions as a living organism, not as a static organization. In a mature assembly, there should be a continual flow of men into the ministry of deacons, some of whom will go into eldership, and some of these on to a translocal ministry. There is no "positional limitation" on the number of ministries, including elders. Growth is horizontal in numbers, not vertical through levels of authority, and is limited only by **qualifications** not by vacancies or job opportunities.



**Character:** Plurality provides a better check and balance of the daily lives and character of leaders. Should a leader fall into sin, there will be far less chance of a major impact on the church than in the case of a single leader. To be successful, plurality does require a **greater measure of character**, for it will not work apart from a deep bond of trust and commitment between the men involved.

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

There will be many marvelous opportunities for the Lord to deal with flaws in the hearts of those who walk in the collegial bond of eldership. This government structure will not work **unless and until** there is mutual recognition and submission to one another. Humility, probably more than any other character trait, is required for this to take place; and what marks a bondservant more than humility and meekness?

It took forty years in the desert for the Lord to prepare Moses to lead God's people into the promised land. This preparation focused on character formation; Moses became the meekest man in the earth. When God called him to this task, Moses replied:

*Let me know **who** you will send with me. (Exodus 33:12)*

He had learned he could not walk in leadership alone. He saw his need for other men to help him.

Eldership is a call to function as servants (Matthew 20:25-28). The issue is not how much authority one has, but how well do others submit to it. A hierarchy encourages the concept of ruling rather than serving. There is less chance that the people will get their eyes on a man when there is no one dominant

authority figure. Elders are to be examples to the flock in their humility and submission to one another. The validity of their authority is not found in lording it over the sheep, or over one another, but in the example they set.

*...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but **proving to be examples** to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)*

4. Are all “ascension gift” ministries elders? Answer: No, a young man may possess the call and anointing of one of these five ministries but be too young, or have personal or family reasons why he cannot assume the responsibility of eldership.
5. Can a man be an elder based on administrative capability alone, and not be one of the five ministries? Answer: No, there must exist grace to shepherd and equip the flock.
6. Does this mean a church should never be under a single leader? Answer: No, an experienced pastor is better than a plurality of novices. Also, one who fathers an assembly functions in a “one man” ministry until such time as there arises from the congregation those to whom the Lord has given grace for eldership. This apostolic ministry can be in the form of a team, but the authority of the team lies with the apostle. The step of formally identifying and setting elders in place is an apostolic responsibility. This was the context of Paul’s commission to Titus for Crete:

*“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5)*

Thus, there are two **interdependent** authorities related to local churches:

Apostles who appoint elders.

Elders who, in time, will release from their company apostles and other ministries (Acts 13:1-4).

7. Is it not true that the first church at Jerusalem was under the leadership of one man, either Peter or James? Answer: No, the following history of events clearly show a plural leadership at all times:

Acts 2-5 The apostles were jointly united in leadership during this period.

Acts 6 When the **apostles** in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God under Philip's ministry **they** sent Peter and John there.

Acts 11:30 Elders in Jerusalem are mentioned for the first time. We are not told who they were, except for the apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:1), and Judas and Silas who were also prophets. (Acts 15:22,32) These elders, along with other **apostles**, provided the oversight at Jerusalem.

Acts 15:2 When Paul faced the issue of heresy coming from Jerusalem he did not go to resolve it with James or Peter alone; he came to meet with the **apostles and elders**.

Acts 15:22-28 The decision of the council of leaders was a plural one: *"The **apostles** and the brethren who are **elders**...since **we** have heard...it seemed good **to us**...therefore, **we** have sent Judas and Silas...for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit **and us**..."*

One might ask, how will the church govern the world if it does not learn to govern itself properly today?

## APOSTOLIC FOUNDATION

The following four requirements qualify a man as a valid apostle:

God's grace. As for all ministry, there must first be grace for this calling (Ephesians 4:7-11, Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 15:10).

Representative character. Not merely one with more righteous conduct, but one with the character qualities of a bondservant (1 Corinthians 9:11-19; 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7, 10-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; 2 Timothy 2:24-25).

The quality of church(es) he has built prove him to be a "master-builder" (1 Corinthians 3:10). He should be able to point to an assembly and say as Paul said of the Corinthians:

*...for **you are the seal** of my apostleship in the Lord.  
(1 Corinthians 9:12)*

The first three are absolute requirements; the fourth one is not unique to apostles. I refer to supernatural signs and wonders (2 Corinthians 12:12). Such signs should follow any ministry who is preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

The manner in which "apostolic quality" is built into the foundation of a local assembly can be explained with the following analogy. When a baby is conceived in the womb of a mother it begins with a deposit of life that contains the necessary genetic information. As the cells multiply and specialize, in time, organs will be formed. The body becomes "ORGAN-ized." What has happened is that structure has emerged out of life. It is the same in a church; life begets structure, correct structure can never produce life.

However, the baby lives, not only because it has a complete number of healthy organs, but because of the **life flow between** organs. Each organ is functioning for the benefit of the whole body; there are many members (or organs) but one body. The organs are synergistically related. This is also how members are to be built together in the church. Having all ministry functions present is **not sufficient**; there must be a **relationship** of life between them to produce proper health and wholeness in the body. Sometimes a child is born with a physical deformity. Perhaps one of the organs in the body was improperly formed, or some functional relationship between organs was missing. Generally, the cause of such a misfortune is that certain genetic information was missing at conception. Life was present, but some of the pattern was missing. Life brought forth structure, but the structure was deficient.

This also occurs in churches. A foundation can be laid without all of the pattern present. Men and women have been saved, filled with the Holy Spirit and built together on the Lord Jesus; but the vision for their foundation was imperfect. The result is a lack of wholeness in the body that emerges. Unfortunately, the pattern of what was built in such an assembly will then be reproduced in other assemblies raised up by ministries from this church. It is a principle of reproduction that the original pattern will be repeated. This is why it is vital to build correctly in the first place, and why church restoration is so important. If a hierarchical structure is built into a local church, inevitably, this flaw will occur in subsequent assemblies birthed from that assembly, and it will also be manifest in the manner in which these churches then relate to one another and to the rest of the body of Christ.

We might be surprised at how many frustrated apostles and prophets there are today trying to be “good pas-

tors” in traditional churches. They are unable to fulfill the call they feel in their heart because of the authority constraints of the old wine skin they are in.

There are vital differences in the worlds approach to government and that of the Lord. The following two models are commonly used in the secular world; these may exist separately or be used in combination.

1. The “army/business enterprise/chain of command” model. Decisions are made at the highest position of authority and are then passed down through successive levels of authority to be carried out. People respond to the authority of an office in their obedience.
2. The “democratic/sharing decision-making responsibility” model. The area of decision may be based on a number of defined options passed down from a higher authority to the people, who are now free to choose an appropriate action. The resulting decision may be simply the matter of a majority vote, or it may come out of response to the authority of one among them who demonstrates a higher level of knowledge and competence, or one with a more commanding personality.

In these two models, people respond to either the **authority of an office**, or to the **authority of competence/personality** of an individual, neither of which is appropriate in the church. In fact, when God’s people backslide they fall into these models of behavior (Judges 21:25; 1 Samuel 8:4-22; Ezekiel 34).

The Lord’s model for the local church is to invest His authority in a collegial company of godly men who are His servants; men committed to serve the church and to walk before the people as examples of His will. **Character** and **service** is the basis of their authority. Love provokes

obedience. The Lord seeks obedience in response to His love for us. He does not demand submission because of His great power and authority but because of what He has done for us. If men fail to willingly respond to the authority of His character, they will eventually be forced to respond to the authority of **His** office.

Apostolic authority must follow the same principle. Because Paul laid down his life as a bondservant in building churches, he could command obedience on the basis of his character and service among them (1 Corinthians 9:4-19; 2 Corinthians 12:12-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

## WHAT LIES AHEAD?

What should we expect to happen next in the Lord's great work of restoration? There are three things in particular I believe we will see in the days ahead:

1. A major emphasis from the Lord on obedience and character. Where sin is not repented of in the church, it will be exposed. As the Lord builds up Zion, He will judge and purge the spirit of Babylon from among His people. Thus, there is a great need to spend more time in His presence; to understand His call on our life.
2. A significant increase in supernatural ministry. I believe this is why character is so important. God is going to manifest greater power in evangelism and spiritual warfare throughout the earth by the gospel of the kingdom. The emphasis will be to reach out more to the poor and those in great bondage, not only to see souls saved, but to see the government of His kingdom established in the church.

3. There will be an increasing number of local expressions of the body of Christ established by apostolic and prophetic ministries. Among these bodies of believers, regional churches will emerge in geographic areas. Apostolic and prophetic men from different churches will begin moving in relationship and submission to one another. They will relate to one another just as elders do in local churches. This will represent a new dimension in restoring the church from the controlling influence of man. As such churches increase in numbers, there will be temptations to introduce organization in the name of maintaining order. Any such control, or hierarchical form of government, **must be avoided**. The focus of restoration is **always** that Christ more fully becomes head over all things in His church.

There is one thing to keep in mind as we move forward with these expectations into the future: The glory of the latter house will be greater than that of the former. The early church is only the pattern for restoration. The glory and magnificence of the church that the Lord comes for will far transcend that of the early church. It will be totally victorious without spot or blemish, crowned with the glory of God. **THIS IS OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE!**



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