



Shepherd My Sheep

**...on the apostolic foundation
that Jesus laid for
shepherding His sheep...**

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Preface

There is a wind of change blowing across the church world today. To some it is like a gentle breeze; to others it is a gale that threatens the status quo. God is beginning to shake everything that can be shaken (Hebrews 12:25-27). He is restoring His church!

Why make changes? After all, there are many mega-churches and superministers with wonderful agendas and programs to promote the gospel! All looks successful; why rock the boat?

The reason for restoration is quite simple. Instead of turning this nation to righteousness, the church in America is becoming more and more like the world. The divorce rate for Christians is no less than for unbelievers; local church growth is largely through recycling believers more than by evangelism; there is growing emphasis on spiritual gifts while fear of God and moral standards are falling, and disunity between local churches cripple the testimony of the gospel.

The church needs a return to the same purity, power and quality of life in Christ that the first church possessed. These early Christians were distinguished by the relational love that knit them together. Jesus was the center of their faith, and their unity in Him made them a living expression of the kingdom of God on this earth. Their leaders were bondservants of righteousness. They impacted the known world of their day.

God has purposed to again manifest His glory in the church, and in a final conflict with the forces of darkness, to bring in a great end-time harvest. For this to take place, the area where change must begin is leadership in the church; for people will become like the men they follow. To grasp what is involved, one must carefully examine leadership in the early church.

This tract has been written to unveil the major stones of truth that Jesus laid in the first church for shepherding His sheep. These are the areas where the wind of change is beginning to blow!

Introduction

Approximately forty years—that is the period of time that is being examined. It covers the era in which Jesus personally taught His twelve apostles, plus the years of their ministry to Israel and in building the church, including other contemporary apostles such as Paul, and concludes with the documentation of their teaching and events in epistles that would later become the New Testament.

This tract examines the scripture record of this initial generation of the church to discover the apostolic foundation laid by the Lord Jesus for shepherding His sheep; a foundation that is desperately needed today.

Why is this foundation so important? We are entering an era of much shaking, a paradigm shift in the heavens, as the Lord restores and prepares His church to reap a final harvest of souls. Multitudes will be saved as entire nations are impacted by the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 24:14; Isaiah 60:1-7). It is clear from scripture that much of this harvest will come from the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (Luke 14:21). Present conditions in the world attest to this truth. There are over 16 million refugees worldwide; over 34 million persons are infected with AIDS; there are over 13 million AIDS orphans (children whose parents have died from AIDS). According to John Williamson, author of *CHILDREN ON THE BRINK*, a report from the U.S. Agency for International Development, this figure is projected to reach 29 million by the year 2010. It is expected that by the year 2025 over one quarter of the world's population will be poor and living in squatter's settlements. Over one third of the earth's population is under fifteen years of age, a percentage that is growing. The Bible speaks of the evil that exists in the last days; men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, unholy, without self-control, treacherous, brutal, lovers of pleasure, etc. (2 Timothy 3:1-5). These qualities characterize today's world population of approximately 7 billion persons, a figure which is expected to reach 8.6 billion by the year 2025.

This is a picture of the field from which the end-time harvest will be gathered, and it reveals features that will mark the souls of many who will be swept into the kingdom becoming sheep that need shepherding.

While it is apparent that a mighty move of the Holy Spirit is required in power evangelism, it is also apparent that much spiritual change is required to prepare the church for shepherding and nurturing those who will be saved, many of whom will be from the youth, the poor, the handicapped and the off-casts of society. The Lord builds His house from material that the world throws away; broken boards, warped shingles and bent nails. All of whom are precious to Him, and they need to be shepherded, disciplined, and loved.

The first disciples significantly impacted the pagan world of their day. Multitudes were saved and strong churches were established in different lands. Key to their success were the teachings of Jesus on shepherding which are being addressed in this booklet. It began with the personal ministry Jesus had with the twelve apostles while He was on earth and it continued through the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit as Jesus led them in building His church.

Since this first generation of believers had no church buildings, religious institutions, seminaries or Para-church programs, it becomes apparent that what was successful in the beginning will likely be essential for the church at the end. It requires more than human psychology to shepherd and disciple end-time converts into becoming the glorious church and the bride that Jesus will return for!

Although all scripture is valuable, and can be applicable, a careful search through the word of God reveals that there were **six foundation stones** of truth that Jesus used to establish strong shepherding ministries for His church.

These six truths are the subject of this tract. The following is the first such truth that **Jesus, Himself, is our Shepherd**. He is the Head of His body and the Shepherd of His church!

The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23 is the fountainhead of biblical truth on divine shepherding. This psalm unveils the specifics on how the Lord loves and cares for His children throughout their lifetimes; through good times as well as through difficult and traumatic times.

The acts of shepherding grace, which are listed below, apply **through faith to all believers**.

- The Lord supplies whatever it is that we find we lack in our walk with Him. He is personally involved in **each** of our lives. (verse 1)
- He leads me to places of nurture and rest. (verse 2)
- When I fail, He restores my soul, restoring my relationship with Him. He shows me how to walk in righteousness. (verse 3)
- He delivers me from personal fears in times of crisis, sickness, spiritual warfare and even death. The discipline of His rod and His staff correct me from going my own way. This gives me comfort, and protection from my enemies. (verse 4)
- When facing enemies, I am anointed with the Holy Spirit and fed with bread from heaven. I find divine sustenance during times of affliction and persecution. I overflow with blessings from heaven. (verse 5)
- As I find my place in the eternal purpose and house of God, I can bless others with the goodness and mercy that follows me. (verse 6)

It is important to note that all of these shepherding blessings **are between the Lord and each individual sheep**; they are personal with no suggestion of an intermediary.

The first truth that we are considering is that Jesus taught His disciples that **He, Himself, is the Shepherd of all His sheep!**

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold (i.e. the Gentiles); I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me. (John 10:11, 14, 16, 27)

Since Jesus purposed to appoint godly men as under-shepherds in His church, it is most important that such men recognize and honor His place as the **one and only Great Shepherd of the sheep** (Hebrews 13:20). The following verse is always true of Him:

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes. (Isaiah 40:11)

Under-shepherds are **not** to function as intermediaries, as men between the Lord and His sheep, who interpret His voice to them. They are to teach the flock, by word and by example, **how to hear and obey His voice**. If they fail to do so, and seek to control and manipulate the sheep, they will cripple the headship of Christ in the assembly, and prepare the way for institutionalism.

Although men serve the Lord as builders and shepherds, Jesus is **the Builder** of His church, and He is **the Shepherd** of His flock. This is the **most important** of all the six truths on shepherding that we will be considering.

The second truth concerns the **motivation** of those men whom Jesus calls to be under-shepherds in His church:

Motivation to Shepherd

There are many motives that drive men to seek positions of leadership in the world, but there is only one motive suitable for shepherding in the church.

Jesus defined this motive when He called Peter to become an under-shepherd representing Him to His sheep. Peter's selection as an under-shepherd was not based on his education, ability, experience or social stature. It was based solely on the first commandment—notice the emphasis on love in the words of Jesus:

*“Simon, son of John, **do you love Me** more than these?” He (Peter) said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love Me?**” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, **do you love Me?**” . . . And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things, You know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My sheep.” (John 21:15-17)*

It was divine love that motivated the good Shepherd to lay down His life for us. Love for Him, and for what He has done for us, is the best persuasion we have to convince others to entrust their souls to Him. The examples that under-shepherds set of their love for Jesus will attract the sheep toward the same intimate relationship with Him. The example that they set is important, for sheep will become like their shepherds.

When the Lord judged the shepherds of Israel, as recorded by the prophet, Ezekiel, the faults that He listed against the shepherds were also reflected in the behavior of the sheep (Ezekiel 34: 1-9, 20-22).

Peter exhorts under-shepherds to be good examples to the flock.

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

Paul, the apostle, also emphasized the example of godly role models set by leaders.

Be imitator of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. (1 Corinthians 4:16)

There is no greater example of the love of God than to lay down one's life for his friends (John 15:13).

This leads us to the third truth on shepherding; the **commitment** that is required to support one's motivation to shepherd others.

Commitment to Shepherd

To have any practical meaning, motivation will always demand **practical commitment**. God was so motivated by His love for lost mankind that He committed His Son to death on the cross!

To be motivated by love for Jesus to shepherd His sheep, requires a willingness to lay down one's own life if necessary. **It is a commitment to servanthood**; to serve those who He loves!

Jesus made the nature of such commitment very clear to the twelve apostles as He taught them of the relationship they were to have with the flock, and with one another, based on their love for Him.

*But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you **shall be your servant**, and whoever wishes to be first among you **shall be your slave (bondservant)**; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but **to serve, and** to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-26)*

Jesus, Himself, set the pattern for commitment to all believers, and especially for those who represent Him as shepherds in His church.

...taking the form of a bondservant...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:7-8)

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

The root and fruit of Satanism is promotion of self. In contrast, the heart of God's call to all who serve Him, is to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow Him. Commitment can cost us our lives!

It is very easy to voice motivation and commitment, but walking them out is another matter. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!

This leads us to the fourth truth on shepherding, which is: **God's glory, the divine character of heart**, that makes it all possible! This is where the rubber meets the road.

Character to Shepherd

The body of Christ is an organism that lives from the presence of the life-giving Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus is head of His body; He is the One who is building His church, and He is the Shepherd of His flock.

However, these things will only be functionally true in the church to the extent that, first of all, Jesus is Lord in the hearts of leaders. If such lordship is missing, and men attempt to govern through legislated rules on behavior and ministry, the result will be a man-led church, an organization. This must be avoided!

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. (Matthew 7:33)

At the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, the nation of Israel evaluated righteousness in terms of obedience to the Law and to many Rabbinic teachings and edicts.

However, since the church was to be a family, a community of Spirit-led believers under the headship of Christ that represented the Kingdom of God on earth, it was essential that under-shepherds be holy men of great integrity and prudence whose lives express kingdom righteousness. Oversight

must reflect the character of Christ! This is the fourth truth on shepherding. It is the very heart of all that shepherding entails!

*And the Lord's bondservant must **not be quarrelsome**, but be **kind** to all, able to teach, with **gentleness** correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. (2 Timothy 2:24-25).*

In addition to His teaching, Jesus demonstrated the glory and character of His Father in all that He did (John 14:7-11).

God had specifically defined His goodness and glory to Moses (Ex. 34:6-7). He declared that His glory (or character) was made up of the following seven virtues: compassion; graciousness; slow to anger; abounding in mercy; abounding in truth; willingness to forgive iniquity, transgressions and sin and He was a just God.

All of these qualities were present in the life of Jesus:

*And He is the radiance of His glory and the **exact representation** of His nature. . . . (Hebrews 1:3)*

The subject content of the “Beatitudes,” and related chapters, is eternally important for all believers, but it was of paramount importance to the first apostles of the church, for they were destined to become stones in her foundation (Revelation 21:17). Everything concerned kingdom ethics and godly discipleship.

In training the twelve apostles, Jesus spent more time on heart righteousness than any other subject. The following are some examples of Jesus’ teaching on righteousness from Matthew’s gospel:

- qualities of heart righteousness (Matthew. 5:6-16, 27-48; 6:19-24; 15:1-20)
- practicing “hiddenness” (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18)
- forgiveness (Matthew 5:22-24; 6:14-15)
- prayer (Matthew 6:6-13; 7:7-11; 18:18-20)
- taking up one’s cross (Matthew 10:32-40)

The most significant character trait emphasized by Jesus was **humility!**

It has been said that most men will benefit when tested by adversity; but a situation that will truly reveal what is in a man's heart is when he is given authority over others! How often this has been the source of failure in leaders. It requires humility for men to lay down their control and allow Jesus to be head in the church. My personal experience in over forty-five years of ministry is that failure in the character of leaders has been the greatest reason for local church splits and divisions.

The following are some pertinent scriptures on humility that Jesus taught His disciples: Matthew 5:3, 5; 11:28-29; 18:4. The following are further teachings on humility that Jesus authored through the Holy Spirit after His ascension: Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12-18; Ephesians 4:1-3; 1 Peter 5:5-6; and James 4:6.

It has always been true that:

He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His ways. (Psalms 25:9)

One of the most striking scriptures on the importance of humility in shepherding is found in the book of Revelation. The context concerns the role of Jesus as shepherd of His church after she has been taken to heaven.

*For the **Lamb** in the center of the throne shall be their **shepherd**, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:17)*

Considering the glory of His Person and all that He had done for His people, one would expect this scripture to refer to Jesus as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" or as "Lord of lords and King of kings." Instead, the shepherd is a Lamb!! And that is not all; the Greek word used for lamb in this verse is not the word AMNOS, which is used in the gospels for Jesus. AMNOS refers to a full grown lamb. The Greek word ARNION, used in this verse, means a diminutive or very small lamb. What is the significance of this word? First of all, it denotes lowliness and dependency. It expresses how Jesus came to earth in submis-

sive obedience to His Father to become the sacrificial lamb; and then, with the same humble dependence on His Father, He shepherds the church. Secondly, this word reveals the truth that to be a shepherd, one must first be a lamb. How can I shepherd others, if I myself am without oversight?

A shepherd whose life is an example of godly accountability to his peers, is one who the sheep can easily trust and follow. This is one reason why Jesus ordained that local churches were to be overseen by a collegial company of elders. Team ministry requires humility, humility and more humility!

The culmination of church restoration, which is certainly coming, will be the glory of God that rises upon her! Since the glory of God and the glory of man **cannot** coexist, God's glory points to a people who have clothed themselves with humility toward one another, and to leaders who are bondservants, men who know Jesus through the fellowship of His sufferings and the work of His cross in their lives. How can one shepherd others without a heart of compassion; and how can one develop compassion apart from times of great difficulty and breaking, in which God's love and compassion is experienced? (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

What part does humility play in the exercise of spiritual authority? This question leads us to the fifth truth on shepherding—**authority** to shepherd.

Authority to Shepherd

We have seen that proper motivation and commitment to shepherd **must be based on godly character**. The same is true in the exercise of authority.

The issue is not whether a shepherd has enough authority to make decisions. Authority to minister is implicit in the gifts and calling of God. He would never call anyone to serve without giving him sufficient grace and authority to do so.

The real question is this, "How does one conduct himself in service so that the God given authority of his ministry is rec-

ognized and received?” The question might also be stated as follows, “How is one to be spiritually authoritative without being an authoritarian?”

The answer is found in the example set for us by Jesus, Himself. Since He possesses all authority in both heaven and earth, He could order His followers to, “Obey Me or I will force you to submit!” Instead, He entreats us by all that He has done for us, by the love He has showered upon us, and by the promises He has given to us if we obey Him. He lovingly extends grace, mercy and compassion to **encourage us toward obedience**.

True love **demand**s a response. More than anything else, His love will bring a willing response to His authority and will do so without mitigating one’s fear and reverence for Him.

A similar example is found in the manner by which Paul established his apostolic authority with the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 2:1-13).

Paul reminds these believers of the manner in which he first came to them, and how he had conducted himself in ministry among them. Specifically, he points out the following facts:

- There was no flattering speech and no pretext for greed (verse 5)
- There was no seeking of personal glory (verse 6)
- He proved gentle among them like a nursing mother would tenderly care for small children (verse 7)
- He demonstrated his love for them by working hard night and day, so as to not be a financial burden to the church (verse 8, 9)
- His conduct had been devout, upright and blameless(verse 10)
- He had proclaimed the gospel to them; he had exhorted, encouraged and implored each one, much like a father would his own children, to walk worthy of the God who had called them into His own kingdom and glory (verse 11, 12)

Paul concludes his review with them as follows:

*And for this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it, **not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God...** (verse 13)*

Paul could have began his ministry by asserting his authority as an apostle of Christ, Instead, he humbled himself and demonstrated the heart and way of a bondservant of Christ by his conduct in ministry. **Character validated his authority** to the church! This is an eternal principle in shepherding.

Jesus taught the twelve apostles on this subject as follows:

But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your leader, that is Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matthew 23:8-11)

Jesus was **not** being critical of the ministry functions that He referred to: the disciples were to be teachers, fathers and leaders. However He was against the use of titles in ministry.

Institutions of the world operate their various areas of responsibility through defined levels of authority that are vested in offices. One who is elected or appointed to an office has the right to exercise the authority that has been allotted to that particular function. Such an individual is given a title that defines his authority. This is evident in government, military and business circles.

However, God does **not** operate in this manner. Which is why Jesus forbade His disciples from using titles, for their authority to minister is resident in the grace and anointing of their call and gifting from Him.

Roughly a generation after Paul's death, the church began to fall away, a declension that continued into the Dark Ages. It became a religious institution that adopted structures patterned after organizations of the world. The church operated

through levels of ecclesiastical authority vested in offices. The reformation removed the office of Pope in Protestant churches, but did little to remove the use of titles and offices. Reformation was not restoration!

Contemporary editions of the Bible began to reflect this condition by translating some Greek words so as to accommodate what had become a practice in churches. For example, the Greek word EPISKOPE, which means “an overseeing,” became translated in certain verses as “office of overseeing,” even though there is no Greek word for “office” in the New Testament.

In addition, a related word EPISKOPOS, which means “overseer” became translated in some verses of scripture as “bishop.” The implication in doing so is that bishop refers to an overseer, with a higher level of authority than other overseers in a church. Exactly the same Greek word is used for both overseer and bishop, which indicates that the word of God makes no such distinction. However, institutional churches of the day had established hierarchical levels of authority, one of which was bishop. This practice may have prompted a bias to the Bible translators.

A verse of scripture, that in many Bibles, reflects these two mistranslations is 1 Timothy 3:1.

*Faithful is the word. If anyone reaches out to **overseership** (the office of a bishop) he desires a good work (The Interlinear Bible)*

There were **no** offices in the first church, and titles were **not** used! Paul was emphatic in declaring his apostolic ministry in the epistles which he wrote to churches, but he did so as follows, “Paul, an apostle.” He **never** used the phrase, “the apostle Paul.”

The Greek word PROISTEMI is a verb that expresses the exercise of oversight by church overseers. The translation of this word is, “to put before,” “to stand before” or “to lead.” It points to the importance of overseers being examples to the flock.

In certain verses of many Bibles, this word has been translated “to rule.” If the intent of Jesus was to express the thought of ruling or reigning, the Greek word ARCHO would have been more appropriate.

Apparently for the same reasons that “office” and “bishop” appeared in Bibles, the choice of “to rule” may well have been chosen to reflect **what actually existed** in church institutions at the time of Bible translation. Unfortunately, these three words can be used by church leaders to biblically justify acts of domination and control over the sheep. Such manipulation is **contrary** to the foundation that Jesus laid for shepherding His sheep!

A fundamental truth in the body of Christ is the universal priesthood of believers—all are equal as priests of God (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

After the early church fell away into religious institutionalism, titles were introduced to distinguish from other believers, those who ecclesiastical authorities considered to be the only priests. Thus, believers were divided into two classes: clergy and laity, with the former possessing authority to minister. The title “Reverend” is one example of this practice. This word, which is still common in Christendom today, comes from a Hebrew word meaning “awesome,” denoting one who was to be revered as having authority to minister.

In conclusion, the authority for church oversight is **not** resident in titles or offices. The authority of shepherds will be demonstrated and visibly seen in their godly character and deeds; bondservants who are willing to lay down their lives for the sheep.

The first sphere of oversight for a shepherd is not the church, it begins in his **home**. This introduces the sixth and last body of truth on shepherding that we will examine.

The Home of a Shepherd

In the days of Malachi, the prophet, the moral fiber of family life in Israel was not strong (Malachi 2:13-16; 4:5-6). With no historical record of renewal, one can assume that the same condition existed at the time of Jesus.

However the Lord's strategy was for the family to become the elemental unit of His church. How did He accomplish this?

It began with His instruction to the twelve apostles. To prepare them for their future ministry in building the church, Jesus first taught them, and then sent them throughout Israel to preach the gospel of the kingdom, He commissioned them as follows:

*These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them saying, . . . go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. and as you go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the leper, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give. . . . And into whatever city or village you enter, **inquire who is worthy in it; and abide there until you go away.** And as you enter the house give it your greeting. And **if the house is worthy**, let your greeting of peace come upon it. . . . (Matthew 10:5-13)*

The word "worthy" is translated from the Greek word AXIOS, a word which means "of weight" or "of worth." It speaks of one who Jesus would consider worthy in person and deed. A worthy home in Israel would certainly include being hospitable to strangers, for that was an important practice in Judaism.

In essence, Jesus instructed the apostles to relate their ministry in each locality with a man of that community whose person and home were an example of good morality. By staying in such a home while in an area, their ministry of the gospel became identified with a worthy man and his family.

The objective was not to minimize the synagogue, but to link godly homes with the gospel of the kingdom in every city or village that they visited in Israel. **A family orientation of the gospel came into being!**

The divine strategy behind the Lord's instruction became apparent after His ascension. When the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, these apostles continued the same practices that they had employed in their ministry to Israel. They went forth proclaiming the gospel everywhere, **and they built the emerging church in homes!**

There were no church building for almost 250 years. Indeed, the mind-set of the first Christians was "to be the church," not of "going to church." The following scriptures identify the use of home by the early church: Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20; 21:8-11; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 1:2; Collosians 4:15. The apostles used the synagogues to evangelize, but they built the church in homes.

The church in each locality was made up of assemblies of believers in the homes of "worthy men." In this manner the Lord began to build His church with the family being the elemental or primary building block.

A man's oversight of his own family is the **first level of shepherding in the church**, and this is particularly important for the overseers.

In the early years of the church, the apostles introduced the following two terms for the under-shepherds: "overseers" and "elders." The latter word was used to denote maturity or spiritual experience; the former word defined the nature of their service. The word, presbytery, denoted a council or body of elders (1 Timothy 4:14).

The early church grew quickly as new converts were added daily. In time local churches, such as the church at Antioch, consisted of a significant number of home assemblies, each one being a home overseen by a "worthy" man.

The apostles traveled among these local churches, ministering in homes, as well as in the open, or in public buildings if they were available. They also established oversight for each locality by selecting from among the "worthy" men of the area, a number of men whom they believed the Holy Spirit had called to be elders of that city. This selection was made after a time of prayer and fasting. The apostles then appointed these men as

an eldership for the church at that locality (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). There is no biblical evidence that any one of these elders was given authority over the others. The elders were a collegial brotherhood of men, who undoubtedly differed in ministry grace, visibility before the flock, gifting or ability, but who were accountable to one another. They were bondservants, who along with the other saints, were jointly a local expression of the body of Christ.

The Lord's purpose was, and still is, that **every** saint be equipped for the service to which he (or she) has been called by God. The shepherding and equipping responsibilities **cannot** be separated in the oversight of a local church. The different grace and gifting of elders help to provide the diversity necessary to equip the saints. The word of God and these five ministry graces, as the following two scriptures indicate, are the Lord's agents for equipping His saints.

*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. (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

*All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, **equipped for every good work.** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

The ultimate goal in shepherding is to **disciple believers to be like Jesus**. This requires elders who are examples of Him. If equipping is made the ultimate goal, the emphasis becomes performance and not relationship. Paul expressed it well in his epistle to Ephesus.

*Until we all attain to 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 4:13)*

This objective mandates that much prayer and wisdom is required before appointing elders whose lives and ministries will facilitate such spiritual growth in the church body.

The qualifications that the apostles used to select these elders are taken from the following epistles: 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-11; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

When one examines these qualities, which are listed below, it is apparent that **all** the previous five bodies of truth on shepherding are present.

- He must be above reproach, both in the church and in the community (i.e. a “worthy” man)
- He is to be the husband of one wife (i.e. a one-woman man). This scripture, and others, make it clear that women are not called to oversee the church. However, an elder’s wife may be anointed with spiritual gifts that complements and completes her husband’s ministry as an elder.
- He must manage his household and family well (i.e. a “worthy” home)
- He must be hospitable (i.e. a godly home environment of hospitality to strangers; one that exemplifies the qualities for a church in the home)
- He must be apt to teach (i.e. he knows the word of God; he holds fast to it and he can instruct others)
- He must be gentle, just, good, devout, self-controlled and uncontentious. Such virtues are not only good examples to the flock, they also promote harmony and accountability with their peers. Elders are not men who do their own thing; they are men who are relationally bonded together as one man in serving Christ and caring for the flock.
- He is not to be a new convert. If a man is appointed to be an elder because of strong gifting and abilities, but who has not yet demonstrated prudence, accountability or a tested character, he could easily become conceited and be snared by the devil. This could do great harm to the church.

In summary, we see that the sixth foundation truth which Jesus put in place made the family the basic, or elemental, unit

of church shepherding. This truth mandates that specific family qualifications must be met by overseers. As the families go, so goes the church!

Looking back over these six foundation stones, we find that a common thread ties them all together. It is **righteousness**—a promise of the glory that is coming to a restored church!

Let us next examine some of the difficulties that may arise in building upon the foundation that Jesus has laid for shepherding.

Shepherding the Flock

There are many issues from which questions can arise in the dynamics of shepherding. I have selected the following, which I will attempt to answer as I believe the apostles would have answered them in the early church.

Doctrine

There would be no salvation apart from the word of God. However, scripture alone is not the center of our Christian faith. A primary objective in shepherding is to teach and maintain the true center of faith that binds all believers together. This is the life-union that we have with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This communion, or KOINONIA, is the essential spiritual life that binds all believers together in the body of Christ. The Lord Jesus, Himself, is the **one and only center of our faith**; and faith in Him brings the life that unites us in God. As scripture is anointed by the Holy Spirit, it reveals the living Word with whom we have fellowship (1 John 1:1-7). If doctrine is made the basis of unity, it will divide the body of Christ since there will be different interpretations of scripture. Godly shepherds will always facilitate the headship of Christ in the flock. He is the center of our faith!

The Headship of Christ

The early church did not look upon Jesus as a theoretical head of the church, or as an honorary figure head; He was truly

their functional head! What does headship mean? First of all, it denotes source (i.e. the head of a river is its origin).

Since Christ was sent to earth by His Father, scripture teaches that God is the head of Christ. When Christ created Adam, the source of life breathed into Adam came from Christ. Thus, Christ is the head of man.

The first woman was made from a rib taken from the side of Adam, along with the life that previously had been breathed into him. As a result, man is the head of woman (1 Corinthians 11:3).

When Jesus hung on the cross, a spear was thrust into His side and out came blood and water. The redemption of **every** believer is based on their faith in His shed blood. In this sense, the church has come out of Christ, so that He is head over **all things to the church** (Colossians 1:18). The significance is this, that **all** ministry, **all** government and **all** direction-setting in the church are to begin in Him. He is the source of what takes place in His body, just as a C.E.O. sets direction in a business enterprise.

Body Ministry

Since Jesus is head of His body, all anointings, unctions to minister, directions to act and church decisions are to flow from Him out to appropriate members. When this takes place the resulting obedient responses by members is body ministry. Because of immaturity, often a mixture of God's will and the will of man will be experienced in open meetings.

This is why it is important for elders to teach the flock how to recognize His voice and how to obey. The elders are responsible to oversee what is taking place, and to strengthen, encourage, correct and counsel members. They are also to guard against false teaching, gossip, religious spirits, backbiting, slander and those who would promote themselves. Elders are to be led by the Holy Spirit. They must not have soulish motivations or hidden agendas. They are not simply men who make decisions; they are to seek by consensus, to know the mind of Christ, and then to act as one man in caring for the flock.

Finally, body ministry should not reflect any “clergy-laity” distinctions; no one is more important than others.

*So we, who are many, are **one** body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:5)*

The following scriptures express the dynamics of body ministry in the early church: Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14; Ephesians 4; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-21; Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:19-25; 1 Peter 4:7-11.

Small Group Meetings

Consider the responsibilities of elders in seeing the following verse of scripture fulfilled.

*What is the outcome then, brethren? 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)*

Imagine three to four hundred believers in an open meeting, where there is freedom for every person to minister or express their opinion. The result could be chaos! It requires more than directive teaching to equip believers how to fulfill this verse. The answer lies in small group environments, where believers learn both by practice and instruction, to open up their lives to brothers and sisters, how to build relationships, to become accountable, how to pray and to share the life of Christ with others. In time, believers will discover the reality of KOINONIA and what it means to be a member, in particular, of the body of Christ.

Small group meetings are not only the optimum spiritual workshop in laying foundations for new churches, they are also essential for continually building up members in Christ, no matter how large the church may become. The elders are responsible to ensure the quality of life and oversight of these meetings.

As believers mature in Christ, and the church grows in numbers, there will be opportunities to minister in larger gatherings. The issue at all times is knowing how and when to respond to leadings of the Holy Spirit. This will require

knowledge of what spiritual gift or ministry has been entrusted to them. A key contribution to such equipping comes from the different ministry gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11-16. No church will be complete with their own supply of such ministries, and the elders must seek to know who and when to invite translocal ministries to come and help equip the saints, including themselves.

As believers mature in Christ, there will be an increasing amount of shepherding take place by members learning to care for one another. We recognize that this is the will of God from the many commands that He gives His people to do so. Consider the directive verbs in scripture that define how we are to build relational bonds with one another, and thus care for each other; each of the following verbs are followed by “one another:” be devoted to; be kind to; confess to; care for; be patient with; show preference to; comfort; admonish; honor; bless; build up; love, etc. These are ingredients of the divine cement that bonds believers together in caring relationships. They are qualities that are best developed in small group meetings. Such maturity lessens the work of overseers in the assembly as members develop caring relationships for one another.

Discipline

Discipline is a subject that everyone would like to ignore; however, it is essential to protect the life of a local church.

. . . reproofs for discipline are the ways of life. (Proverbs 6:23)

What if an elder falls into sin? An accusation should **only** be received against an elder when there are at least two witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). If an elder has, indeed fallen into sin, he is to be exposed publicly. This is necessary because he has been set before the church as an example of a righteous man; therefore this discipline must be public as an example to warn others (1 Timothy 5:20).

The following scriptures reveal two failures by the elders of the church at Corinth in exercising discipline. First, they failed to act when the problem became known (1 Corinthians

5:17). Secondly, they failed to minister forgiveness when the guilty person had repented (2 Corinthians 2:1-8).

True discipline always has its origin in the love of God. He disciplines us because He loves us (Hebrews 5:5-11).

When discipline is without love, it is an unredemptive expression of punishment, rather than godly judgment which will reflect God's mercy.

The discipline of reproof is not confined to the ministry of elders. It is to become a normal part of body ministry as maturity and wisdom grows in hearts.

*And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are **full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and able also to admonish one another.** (Romans 15:14)*

The following are other pertinent scriptures on discipline: Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Secular Employment

To understand how elders in the early church addressed their material needs, one must view the issue through two sets of eyes. First, through the eyes of the leaders themselves. They saw themselves as bondservants of Christ, with nothing that they possessed as belonging to them. Their provision was entirely in the hands of the Lord. They trusted Him to meet all their needs in whichever way He choose to do so. Their motivation to serve Him was **not** based on receiving finances.

*Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but **voluntarily**, according to the will of God; **and not for sordid gain**, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)*

These men were well aware of the promise that those who proclaim the gospel could receive their living from the gospel. However, they were also aware, from the example and teaching of Paul, that to set a good example to the flock by avoiding any appearance of merchandising the gospel, they could choose to

work with their hands (1 Corinthians 9:11-18; Acts 20:33-35). Whether they worked with their hands or not, all elders were equal in the eyes of the Lord.

Secondly, this issue should also be seen through the eyes of the flock. Believers were taught by the Lord of the many promises of supply in the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:25-33; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:12, 19). They were also instructed, that as one is blessed and enriched through the gospel, he is obliged to honor in a material way, those who have blessed him spiritually (1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Philippians 4:10-16; 3 John 5-8).

And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. (Galatians 6:6)

*Let the elders who rule (i.e. stand before) well be considered worthy of **double** honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)*

Since local churches were overseen by a plural company of elders, each one with a different ministry grace, experience, age, social background, and family needs, it is unlikely that all elders of a church were fully supported financially. It would be a situation that changed over time. The answer is not a formula, but of hearing the Lord.

In summary, the early church was not a financially driven enterprise. Unlike Christendom today, there was no merchandising of the gospel or professional career paths for ministers. Jesus was head over **all** things to the church in both the spiritual and material domains.

Conclusion

We have searched the New Testament record of the first church to discover the principles of truth that Jesus wove together as a foundation for shepherding His sheep. We found that the early church was not a democracy; it was not a collection of believers controlled by leaders who imposed their wills on the people, and neither was it a religious institution. It was a

living, spiritual body of believers under the headship of Christ, the great Shepherd of His sheep.

If the six truths that have been examined are divinely ordained by the Lord for His church, then they are to become the foundation for today's leaders to equip, oversee and disciple believers. These truths are important!

We may not know how to train such men; but what man cannot do, God can! Our responsibility is to repent where we have failed, and to embrace these truths with all of our hearts.

The need is not for super-apostles or super-pastors, it is for bondservants with God's love and vision packaged in human skin. They will be men who oversee the church when everything is quiet on the event horizon. However, when revival comes; when the Holy Spirit falls and manifestations begin, such as visions, prophecies, shaking, falling, laughter, weeping, etc., these men will keep eyes focused on Jesus and what He is doing in hearts, not on manifestations. They are men whose hearts will be fixed on the restoration of God's glory to His church!

Restoration is certainly coming (Acts 3: 19-21)! Winds of change are beginning to blow. Today we see several significant evidences of restoration. One is the growing number of souls being saved by God's sovereign power as the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed, primarily in Africa, Asia and South America. The Lord is using communication technologies, such as radio, the Internet, satellites and television, to proclaim the gospel to all nations. Another evidence of restoration is the worldwide move to cell-based churches, as God restores the truth of body life. A third important evidence is the growing commitment to repentant prayer, intercession and worship.

However, there is little movement from the institutional structure of churches back to the biblical model of the early church, where Jesus is the functional head of His body. It is in this area of shepherding oversight that we must pray for restoration; for the purpose of God is to fill the earth with His glory, and to do so through the church (Isaiah 60:1-3; Habakkuk 2:14; Numbers 14:21).

There is going to be a great ministry by youth to the youth. I believe there is an army of young apostles (and prophets) being prepared in the womb of the church for the work of restoration that lies ahead.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will begin to call leaders of assemblies to unite as a godly eldership for their locality. It will require humility to defer to one another, to lay down personal agendas and come together in prayer and fasting; but it will lead to the glory of God!



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