

The Unity Series

One Body

Vol. 1

Introduction: The *how* of unity

Do you love God's Church? This book is for anyone who does. If you love the Church, you will want it to be brought to complete unity, right? We know that Jesus longs for the unity of the Church. If that's what Jesus wants, it's what you should want too.

[Jesus said] I pray... for those who will believe in me through their [the apostles'] message, that all of them may be one, Father... I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one... that they may be brought to complete unity (John 17:20-23).

According to what Jesus says here, to be brought to complete unity, we need one thing in particular: glory. What glory do we need? The glory God gave to Jesus—the same glory that Jesus has given us, the glory of eternal life and power. God promised Jesus the glory of reigning forever in the Kingdom, and Jesus has promised us the same thing.

The people who glory in the Kingdom have believed that it's coming. Have you believed? If you have the hope of the resurrection, you have the glory of the Kingdom even now. With that glory, you have what it takes to contribute to the unity of the Church because the Church is that group of people that have decided to seek the Kingdom.

**God's
way of
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It's one thing to believe in unity, but it's quite another thing to actually accomplish it. God's way of accomplishing unity in his Church is giving us glory! You either have it or you don't have it. You have either believed in the Good News of the Kingdom, or you haven't. If you have the glory, you'll be useful for the Church. Otherwise, you won't be able to contribute to the oneness of the Body.

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*We dedicate this book to
Aiden, Phoebe, and Chris.*

*May your experiences
as God's Church
be the most enjoyable
experiences of your life.*

*Mom and Dad
December 2016
Bogotá, Colombia*

One Body

I. What the Church is not

- A. Not the Kingdom
- B. Not a human organization
- C. Not a business

A. Not the Kingdom

- 1. The bad news
- 2. The dry tree
- 3. Far from Pentecost
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- 10. Know what the Church is

We'll begin with a personal testimony, hoping that it will save you time and tears. So many people are let down by their churches. They become disillusioned and disappointed with the Church. I was one of those people. At one point, I was so focused on the Church that I lost sight of the Kingdom. I was seeking the Church, not the Kingdom of God. My closest friends were pastors, and my favorite books were about churches. I eagerly studied the doctrines of different Evangelical¹ denominations. Visiting churches was my pastime.

¹ What do we mean by *Evangelical*? It's not easy to define what an Evangelical is, but the common notion is:

Evangelicals are Christians who believe in the centrality of the conversion or "born again" experience in receiving salvation, believe in the authority of the Bible as God's revelation to humanity and have a strong commitment to evangelism or sharing the Christian message (Retrieved on October 12, 2015 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelicalism>).

Since we fit this description, we wouldn't argue with anyone who

I was so focused on the Church that I lost sight of the Kingdom.

I wanted to serve God in the most challenging ministries, so I became a preacher and missionary. After three years of full-time study in an Evangelical seminary, I was ordained a pastor. I had been preaching the Bible in churches before then, and had already been sent out as a missionary numerous times; but after my ordination, I began to labor full-time in the ministry. Going to Colombia, I served as an assistant pastor in an Evangelical church. By the year 2000, I had founded a new congregation with a friend. That church would be my heart's devotion for seven years.

Jesus' message was not "Seek the Church," but "Seek the Kingdom!"

It was there, pastoring in that Colombian congregation, where I came to realize that Jesus' message was not "Seek the Church," but "Seek the Kingdom!" It took me seven years until I realized that my heart was in the wrong place. It took me seven years to realize that I wasn't even preaching the Good News!

1. The bad news

The Gospel is the good news of the Kingdom. Do you believe that Jesus' news of the Kingdom really is amazingly good? It is. In fact, the Gospel is so good that it remains good news—even when the bad news is that the Church has failed. Can you recognize the fact that the Church will fail? The NT teaches that! Indeed, the Church

wanted to call us Evangelical Christians. Even Webster's Dictionary defines Evangelicals as those who are characterized by:

... emphasizing salvation by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ through personal conversion, the authority of Scripture, and the importance of preaching as contrasted with ritual (Retrieved on October 12, 2015 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evangelical>).

These two definitions reflect the best beliefs of Evangelicals. We share those beliefs; however, we don't share two man-made teachings very popular among Evangelicals: Luther's doctrine of "salvation by faith alone" and Athanasius' doctrine of the Trinity. These two teachings have become so engrained in Evangelical beliefs that no one who holds to the contrary could truly be welcome among Evangelicals. Because we don't hold to those two doctrines, Evangelical pastors reject us.

already has failed. Haven't you noticed?

The Church's failure consists of this: that the Church has ceased to teach the essential truths the apostles passed down to us. Without those doctrines, the Church has no spiritual underpinning. Without them, the Church must fall. Indeed, the Church has already become apostate. That's not such a difficult reality to grasp if you have studied the Bible—Israel apostatized time after time. The Jews had so many periods of apostasy that their backsliding became a consistent pattern. Is it any surprise to you that the Church is following in Israel's footsteps? Not only does history repeat itself, but the NT is replete with prophecies that the Church will apostatize.

... the Spirit speaks expressly, that in latter times some shall apostatize² from the faith, giving their

...the Gospel is so good that it remains good news—even when the bad news is that the Church has failed.

² This is certainly the best translation of the original Greek word *apostisontai* (ἀποστήσονται) which the NASB accurately translates as “falling away.” Better yet, the Apostasy could be translated as “the Great Falling Away.” Have you noticed the falling away of the Church? You won't notice it unless you first understand what the Church has fallen away from: not from the teachings of the Baptists, the Puritans, Luther, or Calvin. Those are not the benchmarks. The Church has fallen away from the teachings of the apostles!

What teachings are we referring to exactly? We mean the teachings of the apostles as defined in the doctrinal lists that the apostles have handed down to us. Review Hebrews 6:1-2 and Ephesians 4:3-6 and there you'll find the two most concise lists of apostolic doctrine in all the Scriptures.

How far away from the doctrine of the apostles is the teaching of modern pastors? We don't even have to go as far back as the apostles to see how far today's pastors are from the original teaching. Even if we compare the doctrine of today's church to the doctrines defined through the Nicene Creed (325 AD), today's pastors fall very short.

The men who wrote the Nicene Creed lived about 280 years after the apostles, so they were closer than we are to the apostles, although still far from apostolic purity. Read the works of the

mind to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1; Darby).

... [people are saying that] the Day of the Lord [the end] has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the end] will not come unless the Apostasy comes first, and the Man of Lawlessness [the Anti-christ] is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3; NASB).

Don't be traumatized by the Apostasy. Don't be taken aback by it. Rather, take courage. You are a first-hand witness of the fulfillment of God's Word. It's being fulfilled in your very generation! Since God said that things would come to this, and everything is happening just as he said it would—you can trust God more. Take comfort in the fact that the difficulties we face are an important part of God's great plan.

The teaching that the Apostasy is happening now is very difficult for Christians to assimilate—I know that because since 2005 I have by trying to explain it to Christians. Warning the people under my pastoral ministry about the Apostasy, I've noticed that very few are able to come to grips with it. Although most Christians will agree that the evidence proves that Apostasy is here, they aren't able to muster up the courage to fight against it—but let there be no mistake: God wants us to fight against the Apostasy.

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Try to find a Christian willing to fight against false doctrine. You'll find that it's very difficult. Spiritual warfare is only for mature Christians, and most Christians today are not mature. It's not their fault though—what pastor ever gave them solid foundations? Having been formed during

Nicene fathers and you'll see that they were not as inspired as the apostles, but you'll also notice that they were much more spiritual than today's worldly-minded pastors.

The men who wrote the Nicene Creed struggled with issues today's superficial pastors never even consider: the nature of Christ, monotheism, and the reality of Hades. To their credit, the Nicene fathers wrestled with the doctrine of the apostles. Today's pastors don't even know what the doctrine of the apostles is, much less wrestle with it.

times of apostasy, they are spiritual babes. Many are not even babes because they never even experienced repentance, never entered the covenant through baptism, and have not yet been born of the Holy Spirit. Most of them are deceived, thinking that they are Christians, when they've really not even started to follow Christ.

2. The dry tree

Let's accept reality. Let's fact the facts: These are not the times of revival many pastors say they are. On the contrary, these are the times of *the dry tree* (Luke 23:31; NIV), the dangerous times Jesus warned us about.

These are not the times of revival many pastors say they are.

... a great crowd of the people were following him [Jesus], and of women who were mourning and lamenting him. But turning to them, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children! For behold, days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that did not give birth, and the breasts that did not nurse!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'

For if they [the men who teach God's Word] do these things [crucifying an innocent man for telling the truth] when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:27-31; LEB)

Jesus lived in a time characterized by revival. There was a great harvest of souls, a spiritual awakening. Spiritual life was springing up everywhere. Like green wood, people were coming alive. It was a springtime for souls. Even though his contemporaries killed him, at least many of them paid close attention to Jesus—and some of them even repented later on. Thousands listened to his message, repented, and were baptized. That's why speaking to his apostles, Jesus said:

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest [God], therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Luke 10:2).

Jesus' words were true for his times; unfortunately though, the harvest has long past—have you noticed? Is that a

surprise to you? It shouldn't be. God warned us that the harvest would pass. The prophet Micah spoke of the times we now live in:

You will sow but you will not reap. You will tread the olive but will not anoint yourself with oil; and the grapes, but you will not drink wine (Micah 6:15; NASB).

3. Far from Pentecost

There is a movement in many Evangelical churches to return to the simple power of Pentecost. It's a good movement. I myself made it the emphasis of my ministry in Colombia. When I was pastoring there, I often told our people that the Church of Acts 2 (the one that started on Pentecost) was the model congregation. I hoped that we might relive those times, times when Peter preached and 3,000 souls were added to the Church. As I came to realize that today's Church is a dim shadow of what it was at Pentecost, I cried out "Woe is me!"

Woe is me! For I have become like the gatherings of summer [late gatherings], like the gleanings [left-overs] of the grape harvest, when there is no cluster of grapes to eat or early ripened fruit that my soul desires... But as for me, I will look to Yahweh; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me (Micah 7:1, 7; LEB).

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Times are tough. The Apostasy is real, but be encouraged. Just as the passage above ends on a note of hope, there is hope for the Church even today. Here's how to affirm that hope: Recognize that you have been chosen to get a big prize. Remember that when times are tougher, and the struggle is harder, rewards are greater.

The fact that you and I live in difficult times means that we have a golden opportunity—we can get greater Kingdom rewards than other believers, those who have not passed through hard times. So, when God chose us to face the Apostasy, he also chose us to receive a great reward! Many men and women have been called to serve God throughout history, but few have been chosen to serve him in this last hour, as we have. Didn't Jesus speak about us—the last

ones? Sure he did. He said we were the few, the chosen!

... the Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard... when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.’

...they each received a denarius... he [the landowner] answered one of them [the ones who were hired early in the day] and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong... I wish to give to this last man the same as to you...’

So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen (Matthew 20:1, 8-9, 13-14, 16; NKJV).³

As we serve in God’s vineyard, our hope is not in the vineyard itself. That would be like hoping in the Church. Our hope is not that we will have a harvest of souls—although that would be great. Our confidence is in the One who hired us. We trust in his goodness. We believe that he is a God of rewards.

Our confidence is in the One who hired us.

... anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

We look forward to the rewards that God will give us after serving him. Let’s say with Micah:

I will look to Yahweh; I will wait for the God of my salvation (Micah 7:7; LEB).

³ This passage refers to the fact that Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and the other prophets who have been waiting in Hades for a resurrection are still there waiting. Who are they waiting for? You and me. They will stay in Hades and wait for their resurrection until we finish our service to God. As it says in another passage:

... although they all were approved through their faith, they did not receive what was promised because God had provided something better for us, so that they would not be made perfect without us (Hebrews 11:39-40; LEB).

God will not let us down. He will pay us generously for our service. When he picked us to be the last to labor in his vineyard, he had the best of intentions. He knew exactly what he was doing. He was making us special. We are the few and the chosen.

4. Where are the righteous?

There's no denying that it's hard to find righteous people these days. It seems that they have all but disappeared, and there's a reason for it. The tragic truth is that powerful spiritual forces are compelling all of humanity to *weave together* a system, a new world order, in which God (and any religion that teaches about God) will be prohibited. Multitudes of weak Christians are being ensnared in that system by settling for:

- a watered-down Gospel
- teachers that tell them what they want to hear
- worldliness (often disguised as evangelism) in place of holiness

The World is weaving together a system, a system that will be perfectly suitable for the reign of the Antichrist. Did you know that the Antichrists' system is based on humanism?

...the Antichrists' system is based on humanism... an ideology that makes human beings the center of the Universe.

If it is, you'd better know what it's about, so what is humanism? In a nutshell, humanism is an ideology that makes human beings the center of the Universe. For a humanist, faith in God is a barrier to the true potential of the human race. They do not believe in absolute truths, but everything is relative to people and their opinions. Humanism is Babel revisited.

The West is already aggressively pushing certain principles, those which will be the basis for the rule of the Antichrist, on the rest of the world. Those principles are based on the politics of entitlements, human rights, and libertinism.⁴ Europe and the US are spearheading the campaign to make this system global. You can see it in how the US govern-

⁴ They call it freedom, but it's not God's kind of freedom. Real freedom is freedom from sin and fleshly desires. The world's

ment promotes a women right to abort her children, blasphemy (not liberty) in the press, and gay marriage. The US government is making a strong diplomatic push for these supposed “freedoms” around the world.

The faithful person has perished from the land, and there is none who is upright among humankind. All of them lie in wait; each hunts his brother with a net. Their hands are upon evil, to do it well; the official and the judge ask for the bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul; and they weave it together (Micah 7:2-3; LEB).

So in these difficult times, times of prevailing darkness, where are the prophets? Who will speak the Word of God with boldness? Who will confront the Church’s Apostasy? Where are the servants of God? Have you noticed that even the best pastors⁵ have become stumbling blocks? They have.

...even the best pastors have become stumbling blocks.

Most church leaders are avoiding the responsibility of true pastoring altogether. They don’t feed God’s sheep with God’s Word or equip the saints for the ministry. Instead, they have become thorn bushes, snagging all who walk close to them. They don’t really free people at all, but wrap them up deeper in sin and confusion.

The best of them is like a brier; the most upright worse than a thorn hedge (Micah 7:4; LEB).

I have had to take a stand and oppose pastors to their faces numerous times since 1997. God has not allowed me to tolerate their sin. God won’t let me be permissive with their permissiveness. Because of this, many pastors have stopped supporting me, ceased to be my friends, and some have even chosen to vehemently opposed me.

brand of freedom is what they call freedom of expression, of speech, and of self-determination (meaning the right of each person to do what they want).

⁵ I’m referring to men like John MacArthur and Adrian Rogers who preach the Bible verse-by-verse, but who still deny the fundamental doctrines (such as One God and Father, baptism for salvation, and the resurrection from the dead).

And I got rid of three shepherds in one month, for I grew impatient with them, and they also became tired of me (Zachariah 11:8; LEB).

So times are tough, but the difficulty is not just pastors. The Scriptures warn us that we can't trust the members of our own families. We can't even trust our friends. Our enemies are closer than ever.

The day of your watchman, your punishment, has come; now their confusion will come. Do not put faith in a friend; put no trust in a close friend. Guard the doorways of your mouth from the one who lies in your lap. For a son treats a father with contempt; a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; the enemies of a man are the men of his own house (Micah 7:4-6; LEB).

5. Forewarned

The prophets warned us of the troubled times we live in...

Is this all a surprise to us? It shouldn't be. The prophets warned us of the troubled times we live in, and Jesus did too. Jesus knew the passage you just read from Micah, and he used it to warn us. We'll share the passage here with you, but read it carefully since our comments are in brackets. Our intention is to help you to understand what Jesus was saying. Lots of people miss the meaning of Jesus' words here. Don't you miss it.

I have come to bring fire on the Earth, and how I wish that it had been kindled already! [These words clearly indicates that the fire *hadn't* yet been kindled.]

But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am distressed until it is accomplished! [He meant by this that his crucifixion—a baptism in blood—had to occur *before* he would kindle the fire of spiritual testing we find ourselves in today].

Do you think that I have come to grant peace on the Earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! [Notice that Jesus was talking about the effect he would have on the world *after* his death. He was *not* talking about what his times were like then. He was talking about what they *would be* like.]

For from now on there will be five in one household, divided three against two and two against three. They will be [that's the future tense] divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law⁶ (Luke 12:49-53; LEB).

Now do you understand that Jesus warned us about the times we are in? Indeed he did. He told us 2,000 years beforehand what the very times we currently live in would look like. Two millennia is a fair warning, wouldn't you say? But the original warning was given even longer ago. Micah's prophecy, the one that inspired Jesus to speak, was preached even further back—2,700 years ago! Why is it a surprise to you today to hear that we are in the Apostasy? It shouldn't be a surprise at all.

Let's say that you have accepted the fact that we are in the Apostasy. Fine, you have accepted the truth; but the truth is not going to make you a better person unless you can deal with it. You need the right attitude if you're going to be able to face this particular truth. The reality of the Apostasy is not supposed to make a believer feel resigned and depressed. God intend for the news of Apostasy to cause us to quit. He doesn't want us to say, "What's the use of serving in the Church then?" He wants us to say just the opposite.

If you have come to understand that pastors, friends, and family are not worthy of your trust, you'll be tempted to

...the truth is not going to make you a better person unless you can deal with it.

⁶ Jesus went on to rebuke religious leaders for their hypocritical denial of the signs of the times. They could tell the weather, but they couldn't discern the times they lived in.

And he also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud coming up in the west, you say at once, 'A rainstorm is coming,' and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be burning heat,' and it happens. Hypocrites! You know how to evaluate the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how is it you do not know how to evaluate this present time?" (Luke 12:54-56; LEB)

If they had analyzed the times correctly, they would have known that the Kingdom of God had drawn near to them.

say “Why invest any effort in serving in the Church?”—but don’t fall into temptation. There’s an answer to this question of why we should serve in the Church, and it will inspire you.

6. Why serve in the Church

First, let’s see what the answer is not. The answer is not that you should serve in the Church because Evangelicals are appreciative folks—if you’ve been around churches for long, you’ve already discovered that they’re not.

Have you experienced the frustration of serving and not being appreciated?

Have you experienced the frustration of serving and not being appreciated? The prophet Zachariah did. Consider the struggles he had working as a pastor of God’s people:

... I said, “I will not shepherd you! The one dying will die, and the one to be destroyed will be destroyed. And the ones remaining, let them devour the flesh of each other.” [Zachariah wanted to give up on pastoring because the people were both ungrateful and mean to each other.]

And I took my staff Kindness and broke it, to break my covenant that I had made with all the peoples. [He showed the congregations that his commitment to do missions was over.] And it was broken on that day. Then the afflicted of the flock, the ones who were watching me, knew that it was the Word of Yahweh.

And I said to them, ‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages, but if not, keep them.’ And they weighed out my wages, thirty silver shekels. And Yahweh said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter,’ this noble price at which I was valued by them! [That’s sarcasm. Zachariah was remunerated very little, so he demonstrated to his flock—by throwing away the money they paid him—that money was never what motivated him to serve them as a shepherd. He was no hired hand.] So I took the thirty silver shekels and I threw them to the potter in the house of Yahweh (Zachariah 11:9-13; LEB).

So why should any man pastor a church today? There’s no real money in it. There’s no real appreciation. Why serve a

group as unappreciative as today's Church? Here's the bottom line—here's the fundamental reason: You should serve the Church out of the fear of God. If you're a pastor, care for his people because God will punish you if you don't. Yeah, he'll punish you severely.

Woe, my worthless shepherd who deserts the flock!
 May a sword fall on his arm and on his right eye!
 May his arm wither completely and his right eye be
 utterly blinded! (Zachariah 11:15-17; LEB)

7. A good reason to pastor

You may not have the patience to stick with pastoring, but God still cares about his flock whether the flock is grateful or not. In fact, the Church needs good pastors more now than ever. If you can't think of any other reason, teach them the truth because of the times we live in—practically nobody else will. That's the characteristic of times of Apostasy—truth is not taught.

**...teach
 them
 the truth
 because
 of the
 times we
 live in...**

Since God knows that we are in the Apostasy, he has extra compassion on his sheep. They are destined for the slaughter, so he feels compassionate. God knows the tribulation his people will have to face, and he longs to have them as prepared as possible. That's why he commands pastors to shepherd his sheep even when those same sheep are prepared for slaughter.

Thus says Yahweh my God: "Shepherd the flock doomed to slaughter. The ones buying them kill them and go unpunished, and the ones selling them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I have become rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them. [Here God condemns today's pastors for their greed; clearly foreseeing the rise of the Prosperity Gospel.]

For I will no longer have compassion on the inhabitants of the land," declares Yahweh. "Look, I am going to cause humankind to fall, each into the hand of his neighbor, and into the hand of his king [this is a prophecy of the times of the Antichrist, the Tribulation period]; and they will devastate the land, and I will not deliver any one from their hand."

And I shepherded the flock doomed to slaughter, even the afflicted of the flock. I took two staves, one I called Kindness, and the other I called Unity, and I shepherded the flock (Zachariah 11:4-7; LEB).

So even though it's going to be hard, recommit yourself to serving God's flock. Just like Zachariah, assume the responsibility. Pastor Zach did it, and so can you. The Antichrist is on his way. Yes, an evil Global Pastor is on the rise, so God's people need to be warned. They need to be able to discern truth from lies. Who then will teach them to discern the truth? If they commit themselves to the Antichrist, they will be utterly destroyed! More than ever, these are times when good pastors are needed.

More than ever, these are times when good pastors are needed.

And Yahweh said to me, "Take again the implements of a foolish shepherd [He calls shepherds *foolish* because that's the way people see them, and because it appears foolish to the people of the world]. For look [Here, using the word *for*, God gives his primary reason why a pastor should shepherd the flock], I am raising up a shepherd in the land [that's the Antichrist] who will not attend to the ones that are perishing; he will not seek the young man, he will not heal the ones that are crushed and he will not sustain the healthy ones; he will devour the flesh of the fattened ones [he will exploit the rich] and tear apart even their hoofs (Zachariah 11:15-16; LEB).

You're either part of the problem or you're part of the solution. Are you part of the Apostasy or are you fighting against it? Do you want to just give up on the Church? Do you think it's pointless to serve God anymore? You're wrong. Do you know why you're wrong? It's because there are still souls to save—there are still souls in need, people for whom Jesus died. The kinds of people you can assist are the ones that are perishing, the young, and those who are crushed. As if that weren't enough to do, you could also labor to sustain the healthy sheep, and warn the fattened ones of the danger they're in. God's work is far from over. There's plenty to do.

8. The job is not done

Sometimes we despair because it seems like nobody wants to listen, but if there were absolutely nobody to minister to, the end would already have come. God will only allow the end to come when all nations have heard the proclamation of the Gospel.

This good news of the Kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations [i.e., ethnic groups, *ethnesin* (ἔθνεσιν) in Greek]. And then the end will come (Matthew 24:14; HCSB).

You've got to leave it up to God when to put an end to the task of evangelism—and he certainly will put an end to it. He will end it at a time he calls *the end*. In the meantime, preach to anyone you can. Preach the Gospel to any ethnic group that has not yet heard it. Preach it to every single person.

He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15; NKJV).

The Evangelical Church cannot bear to hear sound doctrine anymore—we know that, but we still have work to do. If we can't work with the Church, we'll do the work of an evangelist! Timothy was a pastor. He was very well-versed as a Bible teacher. Timothy was trained by the apostle Paul and anointed by the Spirit—but Timothy knew that when the Apostasy finally arrived, no one was going to listen to sound teachings any longer. Even so, Timothy would still have work to do. He would have the Gospel to preach to unbelievers!

... do the work of an evangelist!

... the time will come [the time of the Apostasy] when they [the people in the churches] will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:3-5; NKJV).

So join us as we preach the Gospel to the lost. The final task of pastors will not be teaching so much as evangelism. What a blessing if you are called to pastor in the Church, but even when the Apostate Church doesn't afford you the opportunity to fulfill your ministry as a teacher, you will still have plenty of opportunity to serve God as an evangelist. Don't be discouraged, there's always ministry opportunity for someone who knows the Gospel.

9. Got church?

You can still find people who are waiting for the Kingdom of God. Have you found any of them? Are you in fellowship with them? If you haven't found them yet, how might you locate them? Will you find them on the Internet? It's unlikely. Rather, you'll find them by seeking the Kingdom! Follow this principle:

Don't seek a church,
seek the Kingdom
and a church will be added to you.

If you are currently seeking the Kingdom, look around you. Is anyone seeking the Kingdom with you? If people are seeking it with you, then you have met your church! That's how you find the Church. Finding a church that way is actually a promise of Christ:

**... how
you
find the
Church.**

... seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [including a church to congregate in] shall be added to you (Matthew 6:33; NKJV).

10. Know what the Church is

Love the people in your church. Care for them. Do your best to protect them from sin and temptation. Pray for them. Serve them this way—it's your duty to do so. You fulfill Christ's command when you do so. You should be willing to lay your life down for them.

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; NASB).

God calls you to dedicate all of yourself to the Church. As you can see from the above verse, he says that you should be willing to die for it. If it's that important, then we need to know exactly what the Church looks like. We have to be able to distinguish it from groups that are just trying to pass for churches. Once you can identify the true Church, then you'll know to whom you should dedicate your life. If you don't know what it looks like, you might make the grave error of devoting yourself to an unworthy group. Jesus doesn't want that for you.

... we need to know exactly what the Church looks like.

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces...

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves... they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit (Matthew 7:6, 15; 15:14; NASB).

If we give our hearts and souls to people who are spiritual dogs, it would certainly spell destruction for us! If we follow false prophets, we fall with them. So let's learn about what the Church looks like. We absolutely *must* be able to discern the body of Christ. If we don't, we could end up casting our pearls before swine. No believers want false brothers or sisters to tear them to pieces, right?

B. Not a human organization

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 - iii. Unity is our goal
 - iv. Superstar winners
 - v. Poor losers
 - vi. Do not be deceived
 - vii. Human traditions

The Church is made up of people but it's no human organization. Lots of people are quick to say that the Church is a human organization. What they mean by that is that the Church is sinful, but what they believe is not true—God's Church is holy! Believers are God's *saints*, his holy ones. People who peg the Church as a human organization are trying to say that it is led by sinners—but they only say that to justify themselves. They are looking for a reason to ignore the message of the Church. If they can disparage the messengers, they discredit the message. They nullify the Gospel so that they might ignore the Gospel, and feel free to live in sin, as they please.

1. Holy men

Now, what these detractors say may be true about counterfeit Christians—the ones that currently pass for churches. Critics of the Church are quick to expose false prophets and pseudo-pastors. Most of the false prophets in the Church get involved with scandals sooner or later, and the press pounces on the shameful testimonies that come out of those scandals.

Detractors will do all they can to discredit the real Church too: slandering, lying, giving false witness, and inventing stories. The world has tried over and over again to prove that the Church is a hoax. They do all they can to make it look bad, but the true Church has been led by Spirit-filled men from the beginning. Look at the way they chose their first deacons:

...the true Church has been led by Spirit-filled men from the beginning.

... the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘... Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility [feeding widows] over to them’ (Acts 6:2-3).

Notice the qualifications of the first deacons: They had to be full of the Holy Spirit just to assist the apostles. The deacons only had to serve food to some widows, they were not Church leaders. However, since the deacons would be closely associated to the apostles—and the apostles’ reputation would be closely bound to the reputation (good or bad) of the deacons—the deacons had to be holy and wise.

The Scriptures were written by men like those first deacons—men with a testimony, filled with wisdom and the Spirit of the Living God. They were holy men. They didn’t speak according to their personal opinions or their own interpretations. They were not led by their own desires. They were men who both lived and spoke the Word of God.

... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21; NKJV).

a. Confirmed by God

The men who led the Church in its initial stages were part of a divine institution, not some petty human organization. Just like their Lord Jesus, they did God’s will and they spoke God’s Word. God honored that. He put his seal on their lives by giving them the power to do great miracles.

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord [Jesus], was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:3-4).

God does not keep it a secret when he chooses someone for leadership in his Church. Even today, you can count on him to put signs on the life of a person he has chosen to lead—

and don't doubt that God gives supernatural signs still! God's leaders are the ones he says they should be. Seek his signs if you want confirmation.

2. A living organism

We just studied a principle of Church leadership: God determines who leaders will be. Along those same lines, here's another principle for the Church—and it's the most important principle for identifying the Church: The Church is what God says it is. Just as God says who should lead in the Church, he also says what the Church is.

The Church is what God says it is.

That's why we must insist that the Church is not a human organization; but rather, the Church is an organism. What's the difference? An organization is an invention of man, an organism is a creation of God. A organization is not alive, a body is. We call bodies *organisms*, not *organizations*, and God repeatedly calls the Church a *body* in the Scriptures—he never calls it an *organization*.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one Body... Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27).

This is what God says the Church is: a Body. If you study the true history of the Church, you'll be tracing the story of a body, not an organization. To discern Church history better, you might want to ask yourself: What human organization was in place when the Church was born? There was no organization in place on Pentecost. Be sure of this: The first group of Christians had no organizational structure at all. It was enough for them to have the Holy Spirit, just as it's enough for a human being's body to have a spirit when a human being is born. A baby doesn't need clothes, a house, or even a name. What it needs is a spirit. With a spirit, it is alive.

God infused spiritual life into the Body of Christ, the Church, from its inception. God poured his Spirit upon that handful of men and women who were praying the day the Church was born—and the Spirit was all they had! They

had no bank account, buildings, or books. They had no name as of yet. Nobody had even called them Christians as of yet. What they had was life—the essential substance of a body. Christ had given them life, spiritual life, which is what made them his Body.

a. Head-down order

Now, when we say that it was not a human organization, we're not saying that the Church didn't have order. They did have order, just like any human body has order. Disorder in a body is either sickness, disease, or defect.

God designed the Church just as he designs other bodies—from the head down.

To start with, the first Church had a head. God designed the Church just as he designs other bodies—from the head down. The Church had leadership, but its leadership was not chosen by men. As its head, Jesus was a man chosen by God; and the other leaders of the Church were also chosen by God.

God put the Church under the leadership of the Twelve Apostles. Those twelve men were not a product of human organization, nor did they produce a human organization. What do we mean by saying they were not a product of human organization? Well, nobody elected them. Neither did they graduate from some religious institution.

What do we mean by the apostles didn't produce a human organization? Well, by the time they had a fold consisting of 5,000 adult men (Acts 4:4)—meaning a congregation that easily consisted of some 25,000 people, since the men had families—the apostles still had no building, no financial structure, no salaries, no means of transportation, no schedule of events, and no training programs in place. They had no written works of their own, either. Of course they had the OT, but they had no gospel accounts like we do now.

b. Strategy from the head

The apostles had no human-engineered organization. All they had were a vision and orders from Christ. Their vision, which they were working towards, was reigning in the Kingdom. The orders they got from their Lord Jesus

outlined their fundamental strategy: to make disciples. How would they do that? By baptizing those who repented of their sins, and teaching baptized believers to obey everything the Lord Jesus commanded.

... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus laid out a simple strategy for the Church: start near and go far. The apostles were to start in Jerusalem, then to preach around Judea, and then Samaria, until they reached the furthest limits of the known world. Jesus' commands were enough to guide their actions. Since he was their head, they didn't need any creative ideas or human theologies to guide them.

**...start
near and
go far.**

... he [Jesus] gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:4-5, 8).

Indeed, the Twelve apostles were so serious about following Jesus' orders that they stayed in Jerusalem even while persecution was very strong! They stayed there even while all other believers fled. As remarkable as it may sound, even when their very lives were at stake, they still waited. Jerusalem was filled with enemies and murderous plots against them, but they stayed put until Jesus told them to do otherwise!

... a great persecution broke out against the Church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1).

c. Power in weakness

This is a remarkable truth: The apostles' power was not political, educational, financial, or even religious. They were nobodies in the religious hierarchy of their times. They had no money, no education, and no political influence. They had already renounced all of their wealth,

including their family businesses, by the time Jesus named them apostles.

The apostles were not men of great learning. Besides Paul and Apollos, none of the apostles were particularly intellectual. Most of them had a basic synagogue education, which means that they were literate and schooled in the Scriptures; however, none of the Twelve had any special academic training. They were country folk, from the rural region of Galilee. City folk like the Jerusalem Jews looked down on Galileans because they were unsophisticated in their eyes.

... when they [the Jewish leaders] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled (Acts 4:13).

Jesus chose the apostles because of their weakness!

The power of the apostles cannot be attributed to any human wisdom or social advantage. In fact, Jesus intentionally chose Galilean fishermen, men from the lower social class, in order to demonstrate God's power in them. Jesus chose the apostles because of their weakness! Was there truly wisdom in that? Indeed there was because Jesus left no room for anyone to question what his Church is about. It's not about human genius. It's not empowered by human wisdom. It does not rest on social standing, or require social advantage. The Church does not get its dignity from human credentials. Its power is from God—and it's the Spirit of God that makes the Church a force to be reckoned with.

3. A pastor's empire

There's a big difference between a man who labors for the Kingdom of God, and a man who is building his own empire. Jesus and the apostles labored for the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God was their vision, their goal. Paul, for example, considered himself and his team to be workers for the Kingdom:

[Aristarchus, Mark, Justus are]... among my fellow workers for⁷ the Kingdom of God (Colossians 4:11).

⁷ The best translations (NIV, NASB, NKJV, and LEB) use the word *for* in this verse. Be aware that there is no reason to translate the

Do not confuse the Church with the Kingdom, they are markedly different! In the handful of NT verses that might mistakenly be interpreted as speaking of a current Kingdom, a close examination will always reveal that the context points to a Kingdom to come. Indeed, the coming Kingdom is the context of the entire NT! God's Kingdom is future, which is what makes it our hope—you can't hope in something that is already here. The Church is already here, so it's not our hope.

... the coming Kingdom is the context of the entire NT!

Any Bible verses that hints at the idea that we're in the Kingdom now, is really dealing with our Kingdom citizenship. Read those verses closely, and you'll see that they are not dealing with location, but status. We are in the world, we're not in the Kingdom. Our location is the world. However, God has transferred our citizenship to Heaven. We have heavenly status. In other words, legally we belong to Heaven—even though we're not there now.

... the Father... has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light [we inherit the Kingdom]. For he rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:12-13; NASB).

The passage you just read uses the word *transfer* [μεθίστημι (methístēmi)] which Thayer defines as “a change of situation or place.” In this case, it's a change of situation, not of place. Remember: our status has changed, not our location. Our transfer to the Kingdom of Christ means that we are not under the domain, realm, power, and lordship of the Devil. We are under the domain and lordship of Christ now, which means that we are under Kingdom rule. Just as a man living abroad is still legally a citizen of his country of origin, and still must abide by its laws; so are we in a foreign land. We are strangers in this world, maintaining our loyalty to the law of Jesus' Kingdom, which is love.

verse as “fellow workers *in* the Kingdom.” Neither Jesus nor any apostle ever said that we are *in* the Kingdom yet. Indeed, we are not in the Kingdom yet. Just as a diplomat who works in a US embassy works *for* the US, but not *in* the US, so did Jesus and his apostles labor *for* the Kingdom—not *in* it.

a. Pastors who boast

There have been prosperous Christian congregations since the Church began. The fact that there are wealthy or *mega*-churches today is not new. What is new is that today the pastors of those megachurches boast about their wealth. Their boasting is not a good sign. It demonstrates that their churches have become a business.

...they expressed that hope by renouncing wealth, not by acquiring it.

Jesus and the apostles steered clear of any businesslike approach to ministry. They served God in the hope of a Kingdom, and they expressed that hope by renouncing wealth, not by acquiring it. In fact, they gave up their material wealth. They gave up their businesses, homes, money, and material possessions to gain the Kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus and the apostles called other people to do the same! Is that what you hear preachers do in churches today? It's not. On the contrary, you'll be bombarded by a message of wealth and prosperity in churches today. You'll hear pastors say things like "Praise God, I have become rich."

The ones buying them [the people who make a business of God's sheep] kill them and go unpunished, and the ones selling them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I have become rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them (Zachariah 11:5; LEB).

Who is this verse talking about? It says that there are people selling God's sheep. Who are those people but today's Christian pastors. We know that because the passage says that they are the sheeps' *own shepherds*. You know these men—they are the pastors who are quick to promote their church programs, but slow to speak of the Kingdom of God. They run a business, buying and selling souls—and go unpunished. Nobody challenges their behavior because we live in such a greedy world that even when the men supposed to be representing Jesus are ambitious, others will treat their ambition like a virtue. You'll hear those pastors talk about their:

- evangelistic outreach
- nursery or daycare

- Sunday School program
- youth ministry
- worship team
- women's Bible studies
- international missions
- orphanages
- radio programs
- websites
- television programs
- building programs
- men's retreats
- Sunday gatherings

... but you won't hear them preach the coming Kingdom. Can we consider them to be servants of Christ? Can we really call them legitimate Christian pastors if their message is so contrary to the message of Christ? Of course not.

**...you
won't
hear
them
preach
the
coming
King-
dom.**

b. Jesus' example

In contrast to the message of today's preachers, Jesus' focus from beginning to end was the Kingdom! What other message did he promote? What other program did he push? There was no other. Look at how Jesus started his ministry:

Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the Gospel [good news] of the Kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:14-15; NKJV).

What does *at hand* mean? It means *near* or *close by*. The Kingdom had drawn near to the people who heard Jesus. They could feel its power. The evidence of its closeness was the power of the Spirit that was working through Jesus. For example, when Jesus cast out demons, he said that those exorcisms evidenced the presence of the Kingdom of God.

... if I cast out demons by the finger of God,
then the Kingdom of God has come upon you (Luke
11:20; NASB).

We just saw what Jesus said at the beginning of his ministry; now notice Jesus' focus during his ministry, all during the middle of it. His focus was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. His focus didn't change.

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the Good News of the Kingdom of God is being preached (Luke 16:16).

Now, how did Jesus finish his ministry? You guessed it: He wrapped it up with a strong emphasis on the Kingdom! The expectation he gave the apostles on the last night he spoke with them was that they would drink with him in the Kingdom.

I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

We have just proven from these passages that the Kingdom is the fundamental message of our Lord Jesus—he preached it from the beginning to the end of his ministry. How does that affect us? Well, the Kingdom of God has to be the Church's message too. Paul calls it the *one hope*. We cannot have any other goal that compares to the Kingdom—nothing should even come close, not even the goal of a big congregation—although it would be nice!

We are not to preach “the Church will grow,” but “the Kingdom will come.”

The good news of a coming Kingdom is our message. We are not to preach “the Church will grow,” but “the Kingdom will come.” Jesus did not command anyone to enter a church, but to enter the Kingdom. Do you speak with the unconverted that way? Do you call unbelievers to the Kingdom? If you don't, you're not truly building Christ's Church. You're building something other than the Church, because the Church of Jesus is that particular group of people in this world, who are called to the next world. They're called to the Kingdom.

c. What Church is about

Since the duty of the Church is to preach the coming of the Kingdom, any preacher who overshadows the Gospel with a different message, sins. To establish other priorities in a church like church growth or some church program is to commit a grave error. False shepherds abound, misleading believers by making them think that the Church is about the Church. It's not. The Church is about the Kingdom.

False shepherds abound, misleading believers by making them think that the Church is about the Church.

Jesus takes churches out of their places precisely when they are not useful for getting people into the Kingdom. Churches are not indispensable—if they don't function correctly, Jesus gets rid of them. He removes them.

[Jesus warned a church] If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Revelation 2:5).

Churches come and go—the Kingdom will remain forever! That's why the hope of the Kingdom is the anchor of our souls. The Kingdom gives us stability. Our hope in the Kingdom is the ground upon which the Church is built.

This hope [of the Kingdom] we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast (Hebrews 6:19; NASB).

d. The Church's vision

Afad in Evangelical churches today is having a mission and a vision statement. Pastors promote this because mission-vision statements are a very popular business model—and that's their basic reason, not because it's the will of God. Motivated by a business model, pastors have by-and-large forgotten to ask themselves what the first Church's vision was.

The first Church actually did have a vision—in fact, they had the only vision any Christian church should ever have. They didn't need to write it out in statement form either,

**Their
vision
was the
King-
dom of
God!**

because God's vision for the Church was written so powerfully on their hearts, that it governed their every word and action. Their vision was the Kingdom of God!

The hope the first Christians had in the Kingdom inspired them to do radical things, but the most radical was selling their houses! How do we know that they sold their houses for the Kingdom? Well, those first Christians didn't put the funds of the sales of their homes in a church building fund. Nor did they invest the money in any programs, hospitals, or orphanages—no. They used the proceeds of the sales to care for the poor among them. They sold their homes to make sure that no believer among them had any needs unmet.

... all who believed [in the Gospel] were in the same place, and had everything in common. And they began selling their possessions and property, and distributing these things to all, to the degree that anyone had need (Acts 2:44-45; LEB).

Now the group of those who believed [in the Gospel] were one heart and soul, and no one said anything of what belonged to him was his own, but all things were theirs in common... For there was not even anyone needy among them, because all those who were owners of plots of land or houses were selling them and bringing the proceeds of the things that were sold and placing them at the feet of the apostles. And it was being distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:32, 34-35; LEB).

That first Church was free from selfishness. They shared all, investing in each other because that's what Jesus commanded them to do. As they loved one another, they showed their obedience to Christ. What do you think? Did they invest wisely? For a worldly-minded person, what they did was foolishness; but for someone who is spiritual-minded, their feeding, clothing, and caring for poor brothers was the best possible investment of their resources.

... the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you... when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you

a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ... The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:34, 37-40).

Obedying Jesus means rewards in the Kingdom. Believers who give to poor brothers and sisters will inherit the Kingdom. It pays to love!

e. Not for man's glory

When someone other than God or Jesus is getting the glory for what is happening in a church, then you can be sure that things are not working the way they should. You can be sure that things have gone awry. The glory in the Church is not for a pastor, teacher, or missionary. It's for God.

... to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine [the One God], according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church (and in Christ Jesus) throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

The ministry of the apostles was not about glorifying the Church, but about glorifying God in the Church. The glory was always for God. The glory wasn't for the apostles themselves. They didn't proclaim themselves as lords—rather, they proclaimed Jesus as Lord. The apostles made sure that people understood who they were—humble human servants, calling people to turn to the Living God.

[When Barnabas and Paul heard that the people wanted to treat them like gods, they shouted] 'Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the Living God...' (Acts 14:12-15).

... we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake (2 Corinthians 4:5; NASB).

The ministry of the apostles was... about glorifying God in the Church.

In spite of this example of apostolic humility, many pastors today are busy seeking their own glory. They don't seem to realize that God has only given them a temporary authority. They have a stewardship in the Church, not a lordship over it. They need to go back to preaching Christ Jesus as Lord, act like servants to other believers, and give God the glory. They have to stop preaching themselves.

f. Guilt on their heads

Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders about the sin of religious pride. He taught them not to use spiritual authority for their own glory. At the time Jesus taught the following lesson, he was speaking to the Pharisees. They wanted to have full control of the Kingdom—but instead of lawfully earning authority in it, God took Kingdom authority from them. They were stripped of their Kingdom authority.

...instead of lawfully earning authority in it, God took Kingdom authority from them.

There was a landowner [God] who planted a vineyard [Israel]. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers [the Jewish leaders] and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants [the prophets] to the tenants to collect his fruit.

The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants [more prophets] to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son [Jesus] to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him [that's a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus].

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they [the Pharisees] replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'

... Therefore I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the Jews] and given to a people [the Gentiles] who will produce its fruit (Matthew 21:33-41, 43).

Jesus' warning was direct, but we can't simply interpret it as a message for the Pharisees who lived 2,000 years ago. We must apply this warning to today's corrupt pastors too. Why? Because Jesus' story ends: "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" Jesus is telling us that his parable will only be fulfilled when he returns. Who will have spiritual authority over his people when he returns? Christian pastors. The Lord Jesus will strip them of any Kingdom authority they may have had, just as he has already stripped many Jewish leaders of theirs.

Men will always try to lord over others through religion. The leaders of the Jews did it at the time of Jesus, and the majority of today's Church leaders do it now. If corrupt men can control religion, they control people. They enjoy feeling that control. He who wields the power of religion has the greatest authority—Satan knows that. Through the Antichrist, Satan will lead a global religion. That's why the goal of the Antichrist is to sit in the Temple of Jerusalem, being worshipped as God.

**He who
wields
the
power of
religion
has the
greatest
authori-
ty...**

Look at how Jesus spoke to the corrupt religious leaders of his day:

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of Hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on Earth... (Matthew 23:33-35)

Jesus confronted the wicked spiritual leaders of his day, and he confronts them today too—through us. He said that he would send prophets, wise men, and scribes to today's shepherds of God's flock, and Jesus is talking about us. We're his messengers. Jesus said that we have to be reject-

ed in the same way prophets were rejected in OT apostate Israel, and we have been—the only difference is that we’ve been rejected by religious leaders who call themselves Christians. The ones who rejected Jesus and the apostles called themselves Jews.

Jesus hasn’t sent us to be successful, but to make a point.

It’s okay that we’re rejected. Jesus hasn’t sent us to be successful, but to make a point. Jesus wants a legal matter to be established through us: All of the guilt of all of the righteous blood which corrupt religious leaders have shed, must be placed on the heads of those same leaders. They have rejected God’s messengers, so God must reject them. They are reprobate; disqualifying themselves from eternal life and Kingdom rule.

g. Getting people in

Our job is to get people in—not into a church building, but into the Kingdom. Lots of Evangelical churches these days are calling themselves “sending” churches. By that, they mean that their purpose is not to just fill auditoriums, but to send out missionaries. They have set an ambitious goal, but it’s not ambitious enough. The high purpose and goal of any pastor should be for every person he teaches to have a generous entrance into the Kingdom. The true pastor’s joy and glory is to see the people he cared for actually make it into the Kingdom, being welcome into the presence of Jesus on the day of his return.

... entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied for you (2 Peter 1:11; LEB).

... [Paul said to the Thessalonians] Who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? For you are our glory and joy... (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; NASB).

It is no easy task to prepare people for the return of Christ. It requires diligence, patience, and lots of prayer. It requires wisdom and integrity. It also requires great courage because a pastor must correct sin and handle issues of church discipline—even punishing people when necessary. Good pastors will labor to purify their congregation from sin so that believers will be ready for the return of Jesus.

... [Paul said to the Corinthians] I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2; NASB).

Just as a father labors to keep his daughter chaste for marriage, so will a good pastor labor to keep a congregation free from the contamination of sin. Pastors who don't do that, are not serving Jesus—they're serving themselves. They're not working for the Kingdom of God. They're working for their own glory, not God's glory.

4. Just one denomination

You've heard of the Baptists, Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians. We call those *denominations*. Evangelicals and Protestants wouldn't consider the Jehovah's Witnesses to be a denomination, but a cult. They're right that the JW's are not a denomination, but it's not because they're a cult. It's because the JW's gave themselves their name. The term *denomination* means "the name a church is called [passive voice] by." That's the definition of *denomination*—it's not what we call ourselves, but what others call us.

...denomination means "the name a church is called [passive voice] by..." not what we call ourselves, but what others call us.

Christians have been called by many names throughout history. Some of those names have stuck, and others have been forgotten. Call us what they may,⁸ there is only one name we strive to be called by—*Christians*. If people call us *Christians*, it's an honor because it means that we resemble

⁸ Many names given to Christians have been derogatory. For example, Jerusalem Jews called the first Christians Galileans even though only some of the Christians were from Galilee. Those Jews used the term Galileans scornfully, implying that the Christians were uneducated hillbillies. They were trying to peg believers as unsophisticated, since the apostles were not from the city of Jerusalem.

Another example of a derogatory name given to Christians is one the Romans gave us in the first centuries after Christ: *atheists*. They called Christians *atheists* because Christians didn't believe in the Roman gods. Although Christians were far from being atheists, and nobody would use that term for us now; for Romans of the first three centuries, the Christians were atheists.

Christ. They see Christ in us if they call us Christians. The disciples at Antioch earned the respect of their neighbors, people who thought that believers were like Christ. They had the honor of being called *Christians* before any other church in history.

... the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26; NASB).

God's will was never for the Church to be divided into different denominations; but sadly, that's the way it is today. Christians are one family, so we shouldn't have different congregations in one geographical space. The NT pattern is for every city or town to have one body of believers, one church. There should be no division among Christians within a given location. If the church in a certain city is divided, then what good can the church do in that city? We have lost our testimony with the people around us because they only know that we are disciples of Jesus by our love for one another—and division is not love. You'll notice that Paul wrote to:

...they only know that we are disciples of Jesus by our love for one another—and division is not love.

- the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1:1)
- the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- the church in your house [the house of Archippus] (Philemon 1:2)
- and the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:2).

According to this pattern, the best name for any congregation would be the one that meets in someone's house or the church in a given city (like "the church in Tom's house" or "the church at Washington DC"). The ideal name for any church should be according to its geographical location—not its doctrine. There is, after all, only one true Christian doctrine—the one handed down to us from the apostles.

... the unity of the spirit [is]... one faith (Ephesians 4:4-5; LEB).

... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3; NASB).

Christians meet together. Those meetings are going to earn us a name, whether it be “the loud church down the block” or the “Bible-toting Evangelicals” or “the congregation that does so much good for the community.”

... when you meet together... (1 Corinthians 11:20; NASB).

We would hope to be called *Christians*, but we have to deserve it. We have to earn the name of our Lord, the Christ. We hope that our reputation would be one of strong love for one another, and that the inhabitants of our city would see that love, the same love that Jesus had.

a. Our pilgrimage

To what place do Christians direct their religious affections? Other religions have places that the faithful must visit: The Muslims go to mosques on Fridays and on pilgrimage to their holy city of Mecca; Catholics go to cathedrals⁹ or to other buildings they call *churches*, and Catholics feel particularly drawn to the Vatican; Hindus visit temples, particularly to the many temples in India; Buddhists visit temples too, with a special focus on Tibet; and Jews go to their synagogues—longing for the Temple of Jerusalem to again be their central place of worship.

On the other hand, Christians seek no earthly place. We hold no city in the world as dear. We are not required anywhere in our Bible to make a pilgrimage or trip. Although we recognize that Jerusalem is the city that God has chosen for himself, we resist the error of pining over the earthly Jerusalem—that was the great error of the Crusades!

... Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen for myself to put my name (1 Kings 11:36; NASB).

Christians seek no earthly place. We hold no city in the world as dear.

⁹ Two of the most famous cathedrals in the world would be St. Patrick’s in New York and Notre Dame in Paris. Special places for Catholics would be the shrines at Lourdes (France), Guadeloupe (Mexico), or some other place where people are said to have had special encounters with Mary.

In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever (2 Kings 21:7; NASB)

Like Abraham, we aim our lives towards the New Jerusalem.

By faith he [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:9-10; NASB).

**a city
that is
not yet
on Earth**

The New Jerusalem is our destiny. Our pilgrimage is to a city that is not yet on Earth. It will be, but for now it is in Heaven.

... the present city of Jerusalem... is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (Galatians 4:25-26).

Our desire is to be part of the assembly that's enrolled in Heaven. By faith, that is what we come to when we come to Christ—a group of people which are registered in the Kingdom of Heaven. God calls his assembly the “Church of the firstborn.” It consists of people who are on a list only found only in Heaven.

... you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in Heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22-23; NKJV).

b. A name to earn

Throughout history, people have called Christians by different names. One example is the name *Protestant*. That's what the Catholics called men like John Wycliffe, John Knox, John Calvin, and Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation. They called them *Protestants* because these men, who were Catholic clergy [priests and monks] at the time, *protested* the way Rome was misleading believers. They protested against the fraud and

corruption of Rome, particularly the collection of money (indulgences) to release souls from Purgatory, the absolute authority of the Pope, and the doctrine of salvation by works.

Since a Christian shouldn't want to have the reputation of being a protester, we don't want people to call us *Protestants*. Whether a Christian should accept certain names or not is a matter of each Christian's conscience, but why would a follower of Christ want to be called *Lutheran*? What does that name do but peg a person as a follower of Martin Luther. A true Christian does not follow the teachings of men! Similarly, why allow people to call us *Calvinists*? The name denotes that one is a follower of John Calvin. Shouldn't our faithfulness to Christ be our fame?

A true Christian does not follow the teachings of men!

On the other hand, if a believer is called a *Methodist* because their life is characterized by a *method* of holy devotion to God, then there's nothing wrong with him allowing others to call him by that name. They can allow it with a clear conscience.

If we're called *Anabaptists* because we have been baptized again (*ana* is a preposition that means *again*), then there is no reason to resist being pegged an Anabaptist. An Anabaptist has turned away from the false doctrine of infant baptism, and there's nothing wrong with that.

God knows how much each believer strives to earn the denomination *Christian*. The Scriptures say that it is a good name to earn. There is no shame in being called a Christian.

... if someone suffers as a Christian, he must not be ashamed, but must glorify God with this name (1 Peter 4:16; LEB).

i. Appearing with Christ in Glory

If Christians are persecuted now, we should be happy because the shame we bear now will turn into honor when Jesus returns.

These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—

may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:7).

All the world will eventually see that we belong to Christ.

The testing we must endure now, will become our glory—but how? All the world will eventually see that we belong to Christ. They will be witnesses of the fact that we have a covenant with him; that he is our husband. That’s what the Bible means by us “appearing with Christ in glory.”

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

Appearing with Jesus means being visibly seen alongside him. It’ll be visible to all that we are his. Do you want the whole world to see you with Christ in glory? Remember that at the Rapture Jesus will be seen by everybody, and when we are taken up to the clouds with him, the entire world will see not only him, but also us with him. He will gather us to him by taking us up in the clouds.

Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect... (Matthew 24:30-31)

Every eye will see him, especially the Jews, the people who pierced him.

I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son (Zechariah 12:10).

‘Look, he is coming with the clouds,’ and ‘every eye will see him, even those who pierced him’; and all peoples on earth ‘will mourn because of him.’ Shall it be! Amen (Revelation 1:7).

Our belief and expectation of the Rapture is something that we must treasure. We have to hold firm to the hope God has given us. We have been duly warned that it would happen,

so we have to get ready. The Rapture is a major event in the life of the Church, if not *the* major event. It should be as important for us as a wedding day is for a bride!

... on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-36).

Now we ask you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to him, that you not be easily shaken from your composure, nor be troubled... (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2; LEB)

ii. Mrs. Christ

Speaking of brides, every bride decides upon whether she will take the last name of her husband or not. A bride normally makes that decision according to the rules of her culture. Many brides keep their maiden name, while others hyphenate their new last name, keeping the maiden name and adding the last name of her husband. Others simply take the last name of their husband, and lose their maiden name.

We're not going to be judges of any woman. How she picks her last name is up to her own conscience. However, there is a spiritual matter that is revealed in this choice which helps us to know the Church better. Consider how a bride's selection of her new last name is a beautiful illustration of the Church's choice. As Christ's bride, we have the opportunity and privilege of bearing his name. The Church should strive to have Christ's name, and to obtain the name *Christian*—that's our point.

The Church should strive to have Christ's name.

In the 18th century, the followers of John Wesley earned the name *Wesleyans*. Those who adhere to Wesley's teachings are still called *Wesleyans* today—but should they allow themselves to be called *Wesleyans*? Does it glorify Christ for his people to be called by another name? Would a man be happy for the woman he married to have the last name of another man? It's much more appropriate for the bride of a man to have that man's name, likewise the bride of Christ is best known by the name *Christians*.

If people call us *Pentecostals*, that means that they recognize that the power of Pentecost, the anointing of Pentecost, upon us. Those people recognize the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for us. That was, after all, the gift God gave to the Church at Pentecost. Knowing that, is being called *Pentecostal* something that we should accept? Should we insist that people call us *Christians* instead?

Others might call us *Charismatics*. If we ask ourselves why people call us Charismatics, the root reason will be that they notice that we use the *charisma* (gifts) of the Holy Spirit. Is that a good name to bear? Should we allow people to call us *Charismatics* or, like a wife who wants her identity and reputation to be as closely tied to her husband as possible, should we insist that they call us Christians?

c. Different names for us

**Every-
where
Christian
churches
spring
up,
there is
a public
opinion
of them.**

There are thousands of different names Christians can go by. Everywhere Christian churches spring up, there is a public opinion of them. In the early 1700s, George Fox and William Penn founded a religious movement, forming strong roots Pennsylvania. They were called *Quakers*—do you know why? It was because they *quaked* in their worship time. Their hands and bodies trembled during prayers. That's why the Shakers were called *Shakers* too—their bodies would shake as they worshipped God.

Pentecostals in the early 1900s were called *Holy Rollers*. Why? It was because they would roll on the floor in their meetings, especially during moments when they felt a special anointing. The people around us will always need to refer to us somehow. They will end up calling us something. Since what most stands out about us is our behavior, they name us according to our behavior.

In the Middle East, Muslims often call Christians *Nazarenes*. That's because Muslims have heard from their imams that Jesus, the founder of Christianity, was from Nazareth. That Muslims custom is very similar another one which people who knew Christians in the first century AD thought that Christianity was a sect of Judaism. At that time also, people called Christians *Nazarenes*. Others called them *the Way*.

... we have found this man [Paul] to be... a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes (Acts 24:5; LEB).

I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect (Acts 24:14).

According to the Qur'an, Muslims should refer to Christians (along with Jews) as *the People of the Book*. That's a denomination we should be more than happy to bear—but do we really deserve it? Are we really people of the Bible?

It's also popular for Muslims to call Christians *the People of Jesus* (*Al Ahel Yeshua*)—which is flattering. Muslims also use the Arabic term *Messiahi* for Christians—that word, as you may have guessed, comes from the word *Messiah*. It simply means *Christian*.

d. Catholicism

Now we come to a fascinating exception to the rule of denominations: Roman Catholicism. It is not a denomination. The simple reason why it is not a denomination is that Catholic leaders picked their name for themselves. In their own words:

... the Catholic Church¹⁰ does not view itself as a denomination, but as the original pre-denominational church.¹¹

Roman Catholicism... is not a denomination.

Remember, a denomination is what you are *called*, not what you call yourself. Catholics have given themselves the name *Catholic*, but why? They chose it because it means *universal*. In other words, they chose the name because they want to be known as the one global Church. They still struggle to get that reputation, even though they don't deserve it. It's not true at all, so Catholics live a life of contradictions. They live a lie.

¹⁰ In our speech, we resist using this term because Catholicism is not a church at all. It doesn't deserve to be called a church. It is a fraud, a cheap imitation of the Church. It's Great Babylon, a whore, not the Bride of Christ.

¹¹ Taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination on August 23, 2016.

Ever since Roman Catholicism became the state church of the Roman Empire (c. 325 AD), Catholic leaders have proclaimed themselves to be the universal Christian Church. They have promoted a lie for their own worldly benefit. Be sure of this: They never earned the name *universal*, they promoted that name to strategically advance their influence in this world. By calling themselves *Catholics*, they were attempting to conform every true Christian congregation to their doctrine and leadership.

**...they
have
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vinced
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selves
that
they
are the
original
Church.**

The great underlying sin of those who conform to Catholicism is pride—a sin that people who are raised Catholics unwittingly fall into. With no basis in God’s Word, they have convinced themselves that they are the original Church. They imagine themselves to be something they’re not. Their belief has no foundations; rather, it is based on a lie. The Word of God actually says the opposite about Rome—it calls Rome a harlot.

From the dark ambitions of an empire, the Catholicism was born. Now there are millions of people who believe that they are the Church—and their personal belief is all they have. Catholicism is the evidence of how much power there is in simply believing we are God’s Church. Think about it: If they aren’t the Church, but their blind faith is enough to give them a sense of peace—then imagine how much power there is in actually being the true Church! How much peace should we have, knowing through the very testimony of God that we are the true Body of Christ!

There is so much power in being the Church that even masquerading as the Church produces boldness. In the same way that a child feels power and safe behind his superhero mask at Halloween, Catholics feel security and authority behind the mask of human history. Although the reality is that they have no authority at all, they feel like they do. Although the reality is that they do not deserve any sense of security, they feel it. They think that God approves of them much the way the Muslims imagine that God approves of Muslims.

i. An empty argument

The Catholic argument is a pitiful attempt at explaining what the true Church is. We should be familiar with their argument to avoid being deceived by it ourselves. Their argument goes this way: Since Peter was Jesus' hand-picked leader, and since Peter became the leader of the Church at Rome, therefore the Roman Church has preeminence over all churches in the world today.

Catholic priests have transmitted a vague sense of confidence to millions of Catholics based on a historically unproven notion: that Peter passed his authority on to today's popes. There is no historical evidence to prove this, nor is there any indication in the Bible that such apostolic succession was what God wanted. The only thing Catholic teachers can grab onto is their misinterpretation of Jesus' words to Peter "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matthew 16:18). Due to their misinterpretation of this one Bible verse, millions of gullible Catholics have fallen into a trap: They believe that the Pope who is seated in Rome today is part of a long tradition, a string of authority. It's all quite preposterous, but it's the essential reason why Catholics have such false confidence that they are the Church.

Catholics wouldn't consider themselves to be anything special were it not for their blind belief that they are the original Church. They are certain that Peter was their first leader, but the funny thing is that Catholics don't know anything about Peter's doctrine. Most Catholics have never even studied the sermon Peter preached on that first Pentecost (a passage which is less than one chapter long)—and even if they have read it, it's highly unlikely that they have understood it. How do we know this? It's because the teachings of Catholic priests are so far from the actual teachings of Peter, that if you read a passage of the Bible with Peter's actual words, Catholics aren't able to assimilate them.

Catholics don't know anything about Peter's doctrine.

What Catholic you know (as devoted to Peter as he is, supposedly) invests time studying the words of Peter's two letters? It would take a person of average intelligence about

25 minutes to read the two epistles of Peter. Ask any Catholic if they have taken 25 minutes out of their lives to just sit down and read Peter's writings. What you'll discover is that, in general, Catholics know nothing about Peter—even though they pride themselves on being his followers! Their faith has no foundation at all. They stand on nothing but the sand of religious lies.

ii. History repeats itself

They have prided themselves on being followers of Peter.

Catholics have committed a grave error, an error the Bible directly warns us to avoid: They have prided themselves on being followers of Peter. The Bible warns us not to do that because, as it says, it is the sin of dividing Christ. Catholics have produced quarrels through their false beliefs—and quarrelling is a serious sin.

... some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas [Peter]'; still another, 'I follow Christ.' Is Christ divided (1 Corinthians 1:11-13)?

The error of the “we follow Peter” group was harmful to the Church in the first centuries. That same error is just as harmful today—although the damage it causes is limited to those who are deceived by Catholicism. The first-century fans of Peter were genuine believers, having been baptized in water for repentance and having been baptized in the Holy Spirit. These were people who were originally sound in doctrine, having been taught by the apostles. That reality makes the first-century fans of Peter quite different from today's fans of Peter (Catholics). As we have already seen, Catholics are not genuine believers.

Today's Catholics do not come to Christ through repentance, nor are they ever baptized for the forgiveness of sins, they are never in their entire religious experience grounded in sound doctrine, being largely ignorant of the Bible, devoted Trinitarians, and Marianists. Neither do they have access to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for their priests aren't baptized in the Spirit themselves.

If the “we follow Peter” group was off base in Paul’s day, how much further off base are today’s Catholics? The truth be told, the only thing that Catholics have in common with the Corinthians who were fans of Peter is that they commit the same sin—dividing Christ and quarrelling! In other places in the NT those sins are called *dissention* and *factions*. Are they serious sins? Why yes. In fact, people who practice those sins cannot enter the Kingdom.

... the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are... enmity, strife,... dissension, factions... and things like these, things which I am telling you in advance, just as I said before, that the ones who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21; LEB).

Catholics act like everyday people, not like children of God. In the following passage, Paul tells fans of Peter that they were acting like *mere men*. What did he mean by that? He meant that they focused too much on people, not on God. Like those Corinthians, Catholics have formed a man-focused sect.

For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one (1 Corinthians 3:4-5; NASB).

Do you want to confront Catholicism head on? If you do, then say to Catholics, “What then is Peter?” just like Paul said to the Corinthians. If they actually meditate on that key Bible truth, they may realize how mistaken they are. Their entire religion is based on this one error: They think that they are special due to their imaginary faithfulness to Peter. How mistaken they are.

iii. Babylon the Great

We have already stated that Catholicism does not have a name that was given to it from anybody else—but doesn’t it? The truth is that there is somebody who gave Catholicism a name—God. Indeed, one reality Roman Catholicism cannot avoid is that God Himself has given it a name: He calls Rome *Great Babylon*. Although humans

...the only thing that Catholics have in common with the Corinthians who were fans of Peter is that they commit the same sin.

have not given it a name, God has—and his name for Rome is not very flattering.

God's name for Roman Catholicism signifies that it is a corrupt religion. It means that Rome has prostituted herself—she has turned faith into a business, a commercial endeavor. When God calls it *Babylon the Great*, it's because Rome is a focal-point of idolatry today—just as Babylon was in ancient times.

Rome is a focal-point of idolatry today—just as Babylon was in ancient times.

... I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus... The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits (Revelation 17:3-6, 9).

How do we know that the woman of the passage is Roman Catholicism? Well, we have to interpret the passage by firstly identifying the beast upon which the harlot sits. She is sitting on a scarlet beast. We have to understand what the beast is exactly if we will understand who the woman is. Study your Bible, and you'll see that the beast is a renewed Roman Empire. What might that be? It's the modern day European Union.¹² The woman is seated upon the seven

¹² How do we know that the Beast is a renewed Roman Empire? The one that comes out of the sea in Revelation 13:1-2 is the same beast. It also has seven heads and ten horns.

I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name (Revelation 13:1-2).

One of the Beast's horns is the Antichrist (the one that gets a fatal wound but is healed), and because the Antichrist is the embod-

heads of the Beast, and the passage clearly tells us that the seven heads mean seven hills—so the seven hills are the heads of the beast.

Although the European Union has no capital city, the Roman Empire always had one—it's a city that is significant in the European Union today, Rome. Now, Rome is a city built upon seven hills. This has been the fame of Rome since the time it was founded to such a degree that Rome is known as “the city of seven hills.”¹³

**Rome
is a city
built
upon
seven
hills.**

Let's return to our interpretation of the woman now, the harlot. She sits upon the Beast. That means that she has dominance over the seven-hilled city. What spiritual authority has its headquarters in Rome? No questions there: It's Roman Catholicism. That would mean that the harlot is Roman Catholicism. Now we get to the big question: Why would God call Catholicism a *harlot*? It's simply because it has gained riches by selling itself. That's what a prostitute does.

iment of the European Union, he is likewise called the Beast in Revelation 13:4-8. This double use of the term the Beast may be a little confusing for you at first, but if you read the full chapter, the context should help you to understand that the European Union is embodied in the Antichrist. In other words, you'll see that the Antichrist so personifies the European Union, and is so in synch with the European mindset (which is secular humanism), that only he could ever be called by the same name.

¹³ The Catholic Encyclopedia states: "It is within the city of Rome, called the city of seven hills, that the entire area of Vatican State proper is now confined" (Retrieved from <http://www.chick.com/information/religions/catholicism/sevenhills.asp> on November 7, 2015). For further information, please see the Wikipedia article (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_hills_of_Rome).

Although the Vatican is not one of the Seven Hills of Rome, Roman Catholicism has long dominated the city. Indeed, if it were one of the Seven Hills, then it wouldn't be said in Revelation that the woman is actually on the seven hills, right? In other words, the Scriptures say that she is on them; the Scriptures never say that she is one of them. The dominating influence of the Vatican imposes itself upon all the inhabitants of Rome. That's a fact!

**corrupt
Christi-
anity**

In contrast to a faithful wife, one who is true to her husband, the Roman Catholic religion is unfaithful to Christ, even adulterous. Catholicism is willing to embrace other religions and even idols while she gives lip service to Christ. Syncretism is mixing religions—and Catholicism has promoted a religion of syncretism since its inception in 325AD. It has encouraged false religions to adapt the idolatry, holidays, and pagan traditions of those same religions to a semi-Christian religion called *Catholicism*. That's what makes Catholicism a hybrid religion. It's not pure Christianity, but corrupt Christianity. It's a group of people who use Kingdom vocabulary, but who follow worldly principles. They speak of the Kingdom, but live for the world.

Like a prostitute, the Catholic religion makes bargains with those who hate her supposed spouse, Christ. She makes bargains with the political entities of this world. Indeed, the Vatican has its own corrupt financial system.¹⁴ Through its dealings with other governments, it gets rich. It does not preach that the Kingdom of God is a coming rule for people to wait for; on the contrary, (with the same brazen and shameless audacity of a whore) it presents itself as God's Kingdom now. Do you get it? The Catholic religion contradicts Jesus' central message: The Kingdom of God is soon to come. Catholicism does not hold forth the hope Christ gave to the world. On the contrary, it promises people political power here and now.

Catholicism has turned the Christian faith into a business. She has done political favors for a price. She claims to have glory just as any perfumed and mascara-donning prostitute claims to have glory. Prostitutes promote themselves as being beautiful, and they may look it, but the reality is that they have no inner beauty—none at all. A prostitute will exhibit her physical beauty to any man naïve enough to look at her. However, the truth is that her beauty is only an appearance. Now, realize that that's exactly all that Catholicism has, an appearance.

¹⁴ Read the following article December 6, 2013 from the Financial Times to find out more about the corruption in the Holy See's central bank: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/3029390a-5c68-11e3-931e-00144feabdc0.html>

5. Careful who you follow

Here's a good question: How many times in history has a Christian church been started by someone who was divisive? The answer is: never. How many times have new churches started under the leadership of someone who was a rebel? Never.

Consider the story of Brigham Young: the founder of Salt Lake City, the first governor of the Utah Territory, and the renowned leader of the Mormons. He is a famous American polygamist and political leader. He died in 1877. What was his legacy? Was it division or unity?

Then consider the life of Charles Taze Russell. He was the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses. He passed away in 1916, and left behind teachings such as these:

... that Christ had returned invisibly in 1874, and that he had been ruling from the heavens since that date. He predicted that a period known as the "Gentile Times" would end in 1914, and that Christ would take power of Earth's affairs at that time. He [Mr. Russell] interpreted the outbreak of World War I as the beginning of Armageddon.¹⁵

God knows what inspired these false prophets to start their sects. If their sects have produced division, then the inspiration that guided those sects (the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, respectively) must have been demonic. God inspires unity, the unity of the spirit. There have been thousands of Christian sects throughout history, but there can be only one true Church. She is characterized by unity because she is one Body.

**God
inspires
unity,
the uni-
ty of the
spirit.**

A sect called *the Worldwide Church of God* was founded by Herbert Armstrong in the US in 1968. Since then it has split into numerous branches. Was Mr. Armstrong sincerely seeking to serve God when he started the Church of God? The fruit of his ministry is the only evidence we have. Observe the results of his years of preaching, and you'll notice that his followers have suffered division after division.

¹⁵ Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Taze_Russell#Theology_and_teachings on November 22, 2015.

Do you know the sad story of Jim Jones? He started as a conservative American Evangelical, became communist, and went on to lead a group of his followers to South America, convincing them that they were the objects of a US government conspiracy. He taught them that the government was trying to oppress the true Christian faith. Together with 909 of his followers, he committed suicide by drinking cyanide in 1978 in Guyana.

What of the Branch Davidians? Their compound in Waco Texas was stormed by US federal forces in 1993, leading to the death of 80 people, including their leader, David Koresh. Was Mr. Koresh sincere, or a divisive deceiver? The fruit of his ministry was death. Were the Branch Davidians martyrs for the cause of Christ? God knows every man's heart, motivation, and destiny. God knows who are his, but unity is not the legacy of Mr. Koresh's ministry.

a. Who is really in the Church

God knows who are his, and that's a consolation. We don't know who are his—and we don't have to. We have to be content waiting until the Resurrection to know exactly who God's people are. Until then, if anyone calls himself a Christian, you'll have to take their word for it. Of course, you'll know a true believer by their fruit, and by the fact that they turn away from sin. It's your job to make them conscious of it if they're sinning unawares.

God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness' (2 Timothy 2:19).

Those fortunate people who are redeemed are blessed of God. That's an understatement, but it's what the Bible says of them. Their names are found in the Book of Life and their deeds are recorded in certain books that God has stored in Heaven.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the Creation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

So the day will come when it will be clearly manifested who the chosen really are. For now, we simply do not know who God's elect may be. They might even be people who are sinning today, but who are on their way to repentance. There are people who are not yet walking with Christ who will turn to him before their time is up. One thing we know: The ones who will make it into the Kingdom are the people who will finish well. They will persevere to the very end.

... the one who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:22).

... the one who endures to the end—this person will be saved (Matthew 24:13; LEB).

...the day will come when it will be clearly manifested who the chosen really are.

In conclusion, only God really knows who is in the Church. We don't. Time will tell who God's elect really are. In the meantime, we'll have to pass many trials, including the temptation of judging others and the temptation of forming sects.

b. God's purpose in division

This may sound strange to you, but the division that exists within churches is not necessarily bad. God says that a certain degree of division is inevitable. Although divisive people are useless, God has a good purpose with division. Do you know what God's purpose is with allowing for differences within the Church? They allow God to demonstrate exactly who he approves.

... there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval (1 Corinthians 11:17-19).

A wise Jewish leader by the name of Gamaliel understood that division could be very beneficial. Gamaliel knew that splinter groups would come and go. He recognized that the litmus test for God's backing is the test of time. Here are Gamaliel's words of wisdom:

Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men [Peter and John]. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God (Acts 5:35-39).

Christianity... has passed the test of time... the Christian faith is "from God." Christianity still exists, right up to the present day. It has passed the test of time. Two thousand years is nothing to scoff at. In the words of Gamaliel, that means that the Christian faith is "from God." Now, we cannot deny that, in the will of God, Islam has persevered for 1400 years. We also know that Hinduism, a grossly idolatrous religion, has been around since about 1750 BC (others say 800 BC),¹⁶ maybe for a total of 3767 years—but we can't concern ourselves about false religions. We're only concerned about the true faith. That one, beginning with Abraham, has been around since approximately 2000 BC, which would make it some 4017 years since the date this book was published.

When it comes to religions, we are really only interested in authentic Christianity. So we have to ask ourselves "Has the Church persevered in the same faith it had in the beginning?" Have Christians keep the faith, the original one? Have they protected the doctrines which were once-for-all delivered to God's people?

... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (Jude 3; NASB).

¹⁶ We got the dates of Hinduism from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Hinduism, retrieved on June 19, 2016.

c. When division started

When exactly did divisions start to manifest themselves in the Church? When did people start to turn against the teachings and leadership of the apostles? Believe it or not, it happened from the very start, while apostles such as Paul and John were still around. Here's a passage that shows us something we might not otherwise believe: There was an Early-Church pastor who would not welcome the apostle John in his congregation.

I [John] wrote to the church, but Diotrephes [a pastor in the Early Church], who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church (3 John 1:9-10).

...an Early-Church pastor who would not welcome the apostle John in his congregation.

If there were pastors who wouldn't allow the apostles to minister in their congregations while the apostles were still around, don't you think that the apostles would be rejected in many congregations today as well? Of course they would, and they are! To prove to you that the apostles are rejected in many of today's congregations, here's a test you can do: Simply use a style of preaching called *expositional preaching* for a month in a given church.

Read one of the epistles of John verse-by-verse, explaining the verses in simple terms—do some straight forward preaching of the Scriptures. You'll see how many people stay for the end of the epistle, and how many decide to find another place to worship God. You could also try going through Revelation—John wrote that book too, and he wrote it precisely so that it might be read in churches. Do churchgoers really want to hear John speak today? Let them hear John, and you'll find out.

John wasn't the only apostle that met with strong opposition within Christian churches; the apostle Paul also had to confront enemies in churches, even in the churches he founded! He had to warn the believers in Corinth that when he visited them he would have to confront and even punish some of them:

... in Christ Jesus I fathered you through the Gospel... But some have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I am coming to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk of the ones who have become arrogant, but the power... What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness? (1 Corinthians 2:15, 18-19, 21; LEB)

I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people... We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God... And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete (2 Corinthians 10:2, 5-6).

i. The Church's first sect

When did division start and how does it continue? The teachings of the *Judaizers*, the first sect in the history of Church was the first obstacle the Church needed to overcome—it's first challenge. These *false believers* as Paul called them, would have divided the Church from the start, were it not for the men who took action to counteract the influence of the Judaizers.

The Judaizers infiltrated the Church, teaching that believers should be circumcised. They wanted believers, people who had just been set free from the Old Covenant (through faith in Jesus), to recommit themselves to God through the Old Covenant. The Judaizers enforced the Old Testament instead of the New! Although all of the apostles had to battle with their doctrine, Paul had some particularly frequent clashes with the Judaizers. He wrote this:

... I went up again to Jerusalem... I took Titus along also... Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised... This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you (Galatians 2:1, 3-5).

The Judaizers enforced the Old Testament instead of the New!

... if I still preach circumcision [Paul is saying that he did *not* preach it], why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the Cross has been abolished. I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. For you were called to freedom, brethren... (Galatians 5:11-13)

Paul wanted Christians to be able to live in the freedom of the NT. What he meant by *freedom* is that we are freed from our flesh and our sins if we follow Christ. Our righteousness does not consist in following the rules found in God's OT Law—we can't fulfill those rules because we're too weak in the flesh. What we can do, by God's grace, and through the power of his Holy Spirit, is live by faith in Jesus. We are made righteous if we believe in Jesus.

We are made righteous if we believe in Jesus.

Did you notice how in the tone of Paul's writing that he warned Christians not to let themselves be intimidated by Jewish OT rules? The Judaizers tried to impose many laws on believers; however, in Christ there were no more rules on eating, drinking, holidays, or Sabbaths. Paul preached the Cross. He called his message "the stumbling block of the Cross" because it offended the Jews who thought that the OT was God's greatest revelation. It wasn't and it isn't. The Cross is the greatest revelation because it shows how God procures the forgiveness of our sins through his mercy, his justice, and his love in Christ.

... do not let anyone judge you with reference to eating or drinking or participation in a feast or a new moon or a Sabbath, which are a shadow of what is to come, but the reality is Christ (Colossians 2:16-17; LEB).

The Judaizers had become the main source of division in the Church by the time the first Council at Jerusalem was convened. However, they were roundly defeated by Paul and Barnabas. Those two apostles debated the Judaizers with strong and coherent arguments, and they won—saving the Church from division.

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' ... Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them (Acts 15:1-2; NASB).

 ii. Ripping us apart

...legalism is still one of the two main forces dividing the Church.

You may think the Judaizers are long gone, but their way, the way of legalism is still one of the two main forces dividing the Church. The other main force is libertinism. Many small-church pastors get into the bad habit of being hard on believers. They impose dietary laws and rules about observing different days (the Seventh-Day Adventist pastors, for example, insist that the Saturday Sabbath is still in effect). Those pastors are following in the footsteps of the Judaizers, classic legalists.

Although libertinism (the philosophy of life that says “everybody can do whatever they want”) is a more common tendency in Western churches, it’s only more popular than legalism because of the humanism that pervades our society. Instead of the conforming to the pervading humanism, people who are anti-culture will tend more towards legalism; and there are plenty of Westerners whose thinking goes against the culture—many of them for good reasons!¹⁷

Since Western culture is guided by humanism, which teaches us that people can do whatever they want to do, the Church in the West will tend to favor teachers who say “Discover the champion in you.”¹⁸ Humanism is faith in people. Humanists believe in people power. However, there is also a counter-culture [and it’s just as fleshly] which has reacted against humanism. These modern-day legalists often emphasize the sovereignty of God to such a degree that they make Christians think that human beings have no power at all.¹⁹

¹⁷ It sounds contradictory to say that humanism can produce legalism, but it’s not. Just think of it: Extreme humanism can produce an independent-mindedness in people that actually leads them to be anti-culture.

¹⁸ This has been the theme of Marcos Witt’s ministry. He pastored the Spanish-speakers in Joel Osteen’s church in Houston Texas from 2002-2012.

¹⁹ Two groups that will insist that human being don’t have a free will are the Reformed Baptists and Evangelicals who are Calvinists.

The very power of a Christian is the indwelling Holy Spirit, but legalists stifle the spiritual gifts. They will not give an opportunity to any Christian who comes to them in the power of the Holy Spirit. Legalist pastors will allow no one to exercise spiritual gifts in their congregations—except perhaps those who teach or sing. They teach the letter, but they don't have the Spirit, who gives life.

Legalism is still killing churches around the world. I've met foreign pastors who impose rigorous fasts on their congregations. Those same pastors lock God's people into a schedule of meetings, practically enslaving them. Many of those legalists do their damage through the Messianic movement, which is not a bad ministry if it's used to evangelized Jews. The Messianic outreach to Jews giving them an opportunity to retain their Jewish culture while converting to Christ. However, the work of many Messianic churches today is not the evangelization of Jews. Rather, their work is guiding Gentiles into the Old Covenant! Some of those Judaizers spend their time convincing Gentiles that they are Jews! So you have Gentiles who haven't got a drop of Jewish blood in them thinking that they're Jews, and feeling justified by that.

Legalism is still killing churches around the world.

Other churches emphasize God's grace so much that they only talk about faith (*Creciendo en Gracia*²⁰ is one of those, as are the Free-grace²¹ Evangelical churches in the USA). They don't call people to repentance. They don't insist that believers keep any covenant, New or Old. They don't call people to practice righteousness; rather, they glory in the fact that they are sinners. Their mantra is that we are saved by faith alone, not by anything we do.

²⁰ This church became very popular in Latin America until its founder, a Puerto Rican named José Luis de Jesús Miranda, died in 2013. They had the strange custom of tattooing 666 on their bodies and they believed that Mr. Miranda was Jesus Christ.

²¹ Here we're referring not to a denomination but to the churches that hold to the doctrine promoted by the Dallas Theological Seminary. This would include the churches that admire and listen to preachers such as Chuck Swindoll.

the
Gospel
balance:
liberty
in love

These are the two great tendencies that rip God's church apart: legalism and libertinism. You must beware of them! Either one of the two will draw you away from the Gospel. Either direction will separate us from the Gospel balance: liberty in love.

This is the true message: Through the Spirit we fulfill the Law of God! That is, in Christ we have the true liberty—freedom from sin. Overcoming temptations by faith in Jesus, we are free to walk in the Spirit. Jesus equips us to obey God. He is the model of a free human will—a will in sync with the sovereign will of God. God worked in Christ to reconcile us to himself.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ... (2 Corinthians 5:19)

The true Christian faith, healthy and sound, is that God works through us. It's not all God, and it's not all us. It's God's power in us. That's the balance you must aim for. Anything less than that is not the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

... work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13; NASB).

Through faith in Christ, we can synthesize our lives to the will of God. We can be holy as God is holy. Indeed, we must be holy—God has commanded it!

... you shall be holy; for I am holy (Leviticus 11:44; NKJV).

d. Deal with division

In most churches, there will be divisions. It's the reality of the Christian life. Yes, even though division is wrong, it's the reality we live in. It is harmful in that it causes weak Christians to stumble. It is evil because it gives non-believers another reason to criticize the Church; but even so, divisions give God the opportunity to do something important: Through them, he manifests his approval on the people he wishes to approve.

... your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval (1 Corinthians 11:17-19).

When God demonstrates his approval of one Christian group over another, there's no more debating to be had. There's no more argument because God shows us what he thinks. Do you remember how God turned Aaron's rod into a snake? Do you recall how it devoured the rods of Pharaoh's magicians? That same rod blossomed later on—what did that mean?

Do you remember how God approved of Elijah's sacrifice by sending fire from Heaven? The priests of Baal were humiliated on that day, and slain. God sent his fire from Heaven to show his people that Elijah was his chosen prophet—likewise, God places his approval on the Christian leaders he chooses today.

Differences are necessary. "There *have* to be differences among you..." says Paul, but only so that God can distinguish one group from another. We should avoid differences altogether, but the inevitable reality is that situations arise, and they call for decisive differences. In certain situations, you must separate yourself from divisive people.

Differences are necessary.

Recall the story of Korah and his followers. It proves that there comes a time when we have to move away from the company of rebels. God gives rebels time to repent, but if they don't, then he will place firm judgments on them. Korah thought that he should be allowed to carry out the priestly duty, the duty that only corresponded to Aaron, even though God never gave Korah permission to do so. Moses heard this, and then Moses prayed that God would make his choice known:

And Moses said to Korah, "You and your entire company will be before Yahweh tomorrow, you and they and Aaron. Each one take his censer, and put incense on it and you will present it before Yahweh, and each of you bring his censer, two

hundred and fifty censers, you and Aaron, each his censer...”

Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the community, saying, ‘Move away from the dwelling of Korah...’” And it happened... the ground that was under them split open. The land opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their houses and every person that belonged to Korah and all the property. They went down alive to Sheol, they and all that belonged to them, and the land covered over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly... And fire went out from Yahweh, and it consumed the two hundred and fifty men presenting the incense (Numbers 16:16-17, 23-24, 31-33, 35; LEB).

The clear warning of the passage is “Get away from the tents of the rebels.” That’s what we all should do—just get away from factitious groups. Avoid them altogether. Never join a sect.

i. Testing fruit

You cannot allow yourself to be deceived. Jesus said that you should test the fruit of a teacher. Does your Bible teacher bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Do they have love, peace, and joy? If not, then they are deceivers—false prophets. You cannot allow yourself to be deceived. It is your responsibility to thoroughly examine the lives of the teachers you follow, but mark this: It will be impossible for you to do this if you only know your teachers through media (television, internet, or radio).

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:15-16).

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control (Galatians 5:22; LEB).

According to Jesus’ rule here, his rule for fruit testing, it doesn’t matter how right a teachers sounds, it is always dangerous to follow a religious leader who is angry. Why is it so dangerous? Quite simply, if you follow him, you

will learn his ways. Learning his ways is falling into a trap because you would quickly get stuck in his same sin.

Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul (Proverbs 22:25; NKJV).

Instead of following angry people, deal with them. Confront them. If you are brave enough, deal with divisive people according to God's instructions in the passage below. In it, Paul told a pastor named Titus to warn a divisive person, but just twice. If Titus didn't see any repentance in the divisive person, Titus was to avoid that person altogether.

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned (Titus 3:10-11).

ii. Factions are sin

The frank truth about divisive people is that they are sinners. They will not enter the Kingdom of God. As it says in Titus, they are *self-condemned*. This term may be difficult for you to understand, but it just means that divisive people condemn themselves by what they do. They will be judged by God according to their actions, but their actions already condemn themselves. Obvious sins are different from the ones that are hidden. How so? In this way: the obvious ones make it evident beforehand who is going to be condemned. Hidden ones hide the reality of who will be condemned—until the Great Day comes, the day when God will make all things manifest and public.

Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later [meaning that other people realize that these people were sinners later on]. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden (1 Timothy 5:24-25; NKJV).

Obvious sins are different from the ones that are hidden.

The Bible testifies that factions are sinful. They generate condemnation. Factions are an act of the flesh. They are in the same category as discord and dissensions. Do you know

anyone who has formed a faction or who is forming one now? Warn them to stop. Tell them to repent. Warn them that they won't get into the Kingdom of God unless they turn from their sin!

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, fractions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

iii. Unity is our goal

...either we destroy division in the Church or division will destroy the Church.

So either we destroy division in the Church or division will destroy the Church. Will you join us in fighting against it? With us, will you make unity your goal? It is one of the most challenging battles we will ever wage, the battle for unity; but we have powerful tools at our disposal: humility, gentleness, patience, love and peace. With them, we'll be able to maintain the unity of the spirit.

... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, putting up with one another in love, being eager to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; one Body and one Spirit (just as also you were called with one hope of your calling), one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all (Ephesians 4:2-6; LEB).

Now, this is where the matter of unity gets very sensitive, very delicate, because we have to ask ourselves: With whom do we even have unity in the first place? If we don't have any unity to maintain, then the command of Ephesians 4 doesn't apply. Rather, in those situations where there's no unity in the first place, we'll have to work on establishing unity.

Undoubtedly, very few congregations would agree with us about:

- what the one *Body* is, since we believe that it consists of all those who exercise supernatural gifts
- what the one *hope* is, since we believe that it's the government of Jesus coming to Earth
- what the one *faith* is, since we believe that it's the doctrine of the apostles, the fundamentals
- what the one *baptism* is, since we believe that it's the baptism of the Holy Spirit
- who the one *God* is, since we believe that it's the Father of our Lord Jesus

Here's one example from the list above: Let's say that we are dealing with another congregation, and it's Trinitarian (as about 95% of Evangelical congregations are). That means that they define the One God as three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). For them, the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine—that means that it determines whom they can fellowship with. They cannot fellowship with us since we believe that the One God is the Father, and that makes us heretics in their eyes. We obviously have no unity with a congregation that considers us to be heretics; and if there's no unity to begin with, what unity is there to maintain? The only thing we can hope to accomplish with them is to attain to some degree of unity by persuading them through the Scriptures.

For them, the Trinity is a fundamental doctrine...

Should we spend our time trying to convince Evangelicals that there's One God, the Father? Should we invest our energy in making sure that they have the Kingdom hope? We could, but the job of resetting the foundations of a building is very time consuming and it's not cost effective. Why would we ever build upon another man's foundation, especially if it's poorly set? That's why our ministry is establishing the grounds of unity with the people we evangelize, new believers.

I aspired to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20; NASB).

We call our seven books *the Unity Series* precisely because each one is based on one of the seven great truths that have

the seven great truths that have the power to unify all believers

the power to unify all believers. There are no other truths that can do that. These seven realities define true Christianity. There's no modern preacher (like James Dobson or Billy Graham), no Puritan pastor (like John Owen or John Bunyan), Reformation leader (like Martin Luther or John Calvin), or ancient theologian (like Augustine or Thomas Aquinas) that has the authority to define Christianity.

If we will learn these seven truths, share them, and persuade others to believe in them, we will be doing the greatest possible labor in the war against division! We must certainly share these truths with Evangelicals, but they are the people who will most fervently oppose them. The people of the world have little interest in them. That's why wisdom says that our most productive work is sharing these truths with new converts.

Once new believers are grounded in the truth, our work is not done. At that point, if we have to make sure that there's no fighting among ourselves. A church that has in-fighting will self-destruct. The end of in-fighting is death, and who destroys who? The Church destroys itself. That's truly one of the saddest situations that anyone could ever know, because we're not talking about some insignificant group of people here. We are talking about the people of God.

If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other... (Galatians 5:15).

Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15)

... this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:11).

Fighting in a congregation means destroying people for whom Christ died. It is a serious sin. Instead of falling into that sin, use wisdom and make a concerted effort to promote unity. How can you do that? Convince people about the seven realities God Himself calls *the unity of the spirit*. That's the best way to establish spiritual unity. Do it with the right people, and do it "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, putting up with one another in love... in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2).

iv. Superstar winners

Where does division come from? You'll discover that divisions begin when Christians start to follow man-inspired (as opposed to Spirit-inspired) teaching. If we get ideas from people, and take them to be inspired by God, we become deceived. Often the source of this deception, the deceiver, is a flamboyant and eloquent leader who craftily builds his influence in the Church. They act similarly to the *super-apostles* of Paul's day. Those *super apostles* attracted many followers, making the humble apostles of our Lord Jesus look inferior.

... [Paul said] if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super-apostles.' I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge (2 Corinthians 11:4-6).

I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles,' even though I am nothing. I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:11-12).

Of course, Paul was speaking sarcastically when he called the popular church leaders of his day *super-apostles*. He was using this term with Christians, and he supposed that they must have remembered that the greatest must become the least. Paul was speaking to people who were well aware of Jesus' principle of service. Anyone who has a basic knowledge of the Gospel knows that a person who makes himself out to be a superstar is no superstar at all. The Corinthians knew that, but Paul wanted to remind them.

... on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all' (Mark 9:34-35).

...a person who makes himself out to be a superstar is no superstar at all.

v. Poor losers

The superstars of today's Church (who are most often singers, televangelists, faith healers, comedians, politicians, and radio preachers) are leading Christians away from the simplicity of the Gospel. They make people imagine that they should become famous and popular too. Their message is often that all believers should become rich—but does that sound like the teachings of Jesus? Does it sound like the lifestyle of Jesus or the apostles?

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God (Luke 6:20).

Because these superstars discourage people from following in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, they are responsible for dividing the Church. How so? For one thing, by glorifying wealth and success, they have marginalized the poor. How contrary is their example to that of Jesus' example, who actually made himself poor for our sake.

... you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, for your sake he became poor, in order that you, by his poverty, may become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9; LEB).

Most people who follow a today's superstar preachers, are pursuing the same worldly glory that these super apostles have, but being rich and famous are temptations of the world. As goals, they fly in the face of the hope of the Kingdom. Hope in the Kingdom is actually born through the difficulties of poverty.

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5).

There is nothing wrong with becoming poor.

Poverty often produces good fruit. It is often the inspiration for Christian generosity and giving. There is nothing wrong with becoming poor.

... we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and

their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

vi. Do not be deceived

Today's superstar Church leaders are guiding Christians in the wrong direction—using the name of Christ, their deception is ever so subtle. Since Jesus' keynote warning for the end times is: "Watch out that you are not deceived" (Luke 21:8), we have been fairly warned of the spiritual deception that characterizes our times. Jesus sternly warned us that many false teachers will rise up and will mislead many. Have you taken that warning to heart?

Indeed, false teachers are already leading many astray—but it's not so obvious how they do it. Their hypocrisy is quite tricky. Their sin is so subtle. The female pastor who was leading believers in Thyatira to commit fornication was committing an obvious sin, but the sins of today's super-pastors aren't always so obvious.

I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:20).

Although some of the false teachers in today's Church commit sins as blatant as pedophilia, adultery, and homosexuality,²² the real need believers have is the need to discern

...the real need believers have is the need to discern the subtleties of false doctrine.

²² The numerous cases of pedophile Catholic priests are well-documented (read up on the Boston Globe's 2002 investigation at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/31/scores-priests-involved-sex-abuse-cases/kmRm7JtqBdE-Z8UF0ucR16L/story.html>). By the time the pedophile priest scandal broke out in the USA, similar accusations had already gone public in Canada and Ireland. It was then that a report was put together called the John Jay Report (2004) which contained

the subtleties of false doctrine. If, for example, these false teachers water-down the message of repentance, teach that salvation is by faith alone, or don't establish people in the Covenant (by not insisting on baptism or participation in

10,667 allegations against 4,392 priests accused of engaging in the sexual abuse of minors during the years 1950 to 2002 (retrieved on November 26, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_sexual_abuse_cases#United_States).

Evangelical churches have not been free from scandals either. The escapades of Evangelical pastors went public with Jimmy Swaggert's adulterous scandals with prostitutes (1988 and 1991) and Jim Bakker's infamous fall into sexual sin with Jessica Hahn (1987). Then there was the strong evidence that the man who led the National Association of Evangelicals from 2003 to 2006, Ted Haggard, practiced homosexuality (Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Haggard on November 26, 2015). It's shameful to mention all of this, but since these scandals have already made headlines, giving them a small place in our study is simply due recognition of the reality of the condition of today's Church in the USA. We can't deny the truth.

There's more that needs to be said. What of the lies journalists have exposed in modern day Evangelical preachers? The faith healer Benny Hinn was investigated by the CBS television program *The Fifth Estate*. The report concluded that there was no actual evidence that any true healing had ever taken place at a Benny Hinn meeting.

With the aid of hidden cameras and crusade witnesses, the producers of the show demonstrated Hinn's apparent misappropriation of funds, his fabrication of the truth, and the way in which his staff chose crusade audience members to come on stage to proclaim their miracle healings. In particular, the investigation highlighted the fact that the most desperate miracle seekers who attend a Hinn crusade—the quadriplegics, the brain-damaged, virtually anyone with a visibly obvious physical condition—are never allowed up on stage; those who attempt to get in the line of possible healings are intercepted and directed to return to their seats (Retrieved on December 12, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benny_Hinn).

the Lord's Supper with a clear conscience)—then you know that they are false.

These same teachers are experts in making people feel like Christians—they tell their followers that they are God's Church, but don't ever even take the time to make sure that anyone has been baptized in the Spirit. They are incapable of transmitting the Anointing to anyone, and they deny the resurrection from the dead this way: They don't even recognize what it means to be dead.

These same teachers are experts in making people feel like Christians...

These same false teachers never warn Christians that God will judge us by our actions—although it's a fundamental truth of our faith. By leaving the fundamentals out of their teachings, these teachers are actively destroying any hope for Christian unity. Their false doctrines can only generate division. They don't even believe in One God. Most of them are Trinitarians. What unity could ever be had unless God's people recognize him as the One God?

vii. Human traditions

To divide Christians, a long-time favorite tool of the Devil is human tradition. Tradition was the instrument of division the Pharisees used in their day. Don't you remember how Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their sinful commitment to human traditions?

[Jesus addressed the Pharisees] ...you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' (Matthew 15:6-9; NKJC).

Be careful of people who make human rules appear as doctrines of God. Division comes from Church leaders who make Christians think that certain traditions are inspired by God when they're not.

No tradition could possibly be inspired by God if it's not based on the doctrines that produce unity.

Think about it: No tradition could possibly be inspired by God if it's not based on the doctrines that produce unity. To take these men to task, ask them what their traditions are based upon. Do they believe in Ephesians 4:4-6 or not? Go over the truths with them there one-by-one. Ask them if they are pursuing the unity of the spirit. If they're not, then what is their goal for the Church? Are they seeking the Kingdom of God or building their own empire?

Ask them what the traditions of the Church are. Do they mention baptism for the repentant, sharing the Lord's Supper, male leadership, the laying on of hands, or providing for the poor through offerings? If they don't then they are leaving out the traditions Jesus taught us. Have they added child baptism, Easter, Christmas, or certain musical events? Have they turned the Church into an artistic performance? Is their concern erecting buildings or building up people in the truth?

C. Not a business

1. Leaders free from greed
 - a. The apostle of avarice
2. Jesus' good anger
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 - a. Ezekiel's warnings
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 - b. Demas: So close

The way of the world is the way of greed. Worldly people want to get as rich as they can. The world follows a business model—and to our shame, many churches have adopted that same model.²³ The Prosperity Gospel is the craze in churches around the world. It was popularized in the USA by Kenneth and Gloria Copeland in the 1980s. Along with the influential Rhema ministry of Kenneth Hagin, a new message was being preached to American Evangelicals: God wants to make you rich here and now. In whatever congregation where they constantly preach about blessings, prosperity, and healing—you're hearing the Prosperity Gospel.

Joel Osteen sums up his version of the Prosperity Gospel with the title of his bestselling book *Your best life now*.²⁴ Evangelicals by the droves have exchanged the Kingdom hope, the message Jesus preached, for cheap faith in worldly gain. Their preachers are experts at twisting the Scriptures to make them say what they want. In particular, they take certain Kingdom promises from the Bible, promises that are for the future Kingdom, and make people believe

...they take certain Kingdom promises from the Bible, promises that are for the future Kingdom, and make people believe that those promises are for us now.

²³ Rick Warren describes his business-based model in his influential work *The Purpose-Driven Church* (1995). This book was listed in *100 Christian Books That Changed the Century* and was the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) *Christian Book Award Winner* in the US for 1996 and 1997. In 2002, the ECPA awarded it the Gold Medallion Award.

In 2005, *Time* magazine said that Rick Warren was "America's pastor" (retrieved on November 26, 2015 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Purpose_Driven_Church). His book established a trend. Very soon after it became popular, thousands of other US pastors would implement a similar business model for church growth. The model involves doing a demographic study of a geographical area, targeting a specific population group, and tailoring church doctrine, architecture, and worship style to the surrounding culture.

²⁴ This Joel Osteen book has made the NY Times Bestseller list for more than 200 weeks. At one point it was #1 on the NY Times list. It has sold more than 4 million copies as of January 2016.

that those promises are for us now. Those who embrace this message of worldly success are denying Jesus, his Cross, and his Kingdom!

1. Leaders free from greed

The love of money has long been a strong temptation for spiritual leaders. Most of the kings of Israel, after they gained power, fell into the trap of greed. Once they became rich, they changed. Saul became proud and selfish. Solomon became depressed and existential. (Read about his internal struggles in the Book of Ecclesiastes). Lot got sidetracked by worldly ambition, separating himself from his spiritual guide, Abraham. Lot separated himself from Abraham for one reason: He thought he would be happier if he were richer.

He thought he would be happier if he were richer.

Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the Garden of the Lord... so Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan [the Promised Land], while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom (Genesis 13:10-12).

Lot thought that he could make a better living near Sodom where the grass was greener. What a mistake! How painful it was for Lot to see his riches literally go up in smoke—and his problems all began when he started to make his decisions based on money. Guided by greed, he wandered away from the faith, bringing tremendous loss to himself and his family.

... the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).

What is the best way for the Church to avoid turning into a business? It all starts with our leaders. God's requirements for pastors set the standard for all of us. One main guideline God sets in the Scriptures is that church leaders must be free from greed. No man who loves money should be allowed to be a pastor.

An overseer, then, must be... free from the love of money (1 Timothy 3:2, 3; NASB).

This passage means that neither King Saul, King Solomon, or Lot would have qualified to be pastors in the Christian Church. They may have had great authority in their tribes and kingdoms, but they fail to fulfill God's requirement for spiritual leadership under the New Covenant. Let's not be concerned about them, however—many of the today's church leaders fail just as miserably. In fact, there was an apostle who couldn't fulfill the "free from greed" requirement. He had a great fall, all due to his greed...

a. The apostle of avarice

Judas was one of the Twelve. He was among Jesus' chosen few, but that was not enough to free Judas from temptation. He was weak in the face of avarice, having the custom of stealing from the Apostles' purse, robbing his own trusted friends. He practiced this sin until it finally took its most ugly turn for the worse: Judas sold Jesus himself for the price of a slave.

**Judas
sold
Jesus
himself
for the
price of
a slave.**

... [Judas] was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it (John 12:6).

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver him [Jesus] over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over (Matthew 26:14-16).

Everyone thought that Judas was a model apostle, but the moment came when they realized that he was serving sin. Judas was a slave to sin. Judas the apostle, was nothing more than a common crook! He was an actor, a hypocrite. Judas disguised his greed, but it was not hidden from the discerning eyes of Jesus.

Judas, like most hypocrites tend to do, revealed his wicked heart through his words. He tried hard to maintain an appearance of generosity, but in his attempt to make people think that he was generous, he exposed his own sin. Notice

how Judas' words in the following passage revealed his horrible inner thoughts: He didn't value Jesus. If you read the passage, you'll see that Judas did not value Jesus more than Judas valued money!

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor... (John 12:3-6)

...the hypocrisy of every greedy pastor will also someday be made public.

Just as Judas' façade would eventually become visible to everyone—the hypocrisy of every greedy pastor will also someday be made public. The result of Judas' greed was death. He died, and today Judas is located in the hottest part of Hell. Now he understands what is truly valuable. Every day he remembers the value Jesus, the Savior of sinners. The very thing that Judas had available to him for three years, the blessing and friendship of Jesus Christ, is lost forever. Love and eternal rewards were at Judas' fingertips, but he preferred to clutch money in those same fingers.

It is too late for Judas now, and it was too late even on the day Jesus was condemned to death. Why? Because Judas couldn't repent. His heart had become too hardened by greed. He could only feel remorse—and remorse for our sins is not enough to get us saved. We need repentance.

... when Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that he had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to that yourself!' And he threw the pieces of silver into the Temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5; NASB).

Although Judas knew that he had betrayed innocent blood, he couldn't undo the sale. Selling his Lord, Judas goes

down in history as the man who committed the most grievous sin of all time. That doesn't mean that there aren't others like him, though. It doesn't mean other apostles, missionaries, prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers won't do the same thing. They have, and they will.

No man who loves money is the kind of man that God wants leading in his Church. Saul, Solomon, and Lot all had the Holy Spirit, but they were not fit for the task. Judas resurrected people and cast out demons, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to many, but he stumbled over the love of money. Now you know why a man who will lead in God's Church is required by God to be completely free from the love of money.

2. Jesus' good anger

Never did Jesus express more anger²⁵ than when he cleansed the Temple. Now, just to put the issue of anger in context, we need to understand that expressing anger is not a sin, *being* an angry person is sin. You are allowed to be angry, just don't let your anger linger for more than one day. The Scriptures actually command us to get angry—but if you let your anger seethe overnight, it will become tomorrow's bitterness. We can't let anger ever become bitterness. Bitter people are mean people. Could a mean person enter into the Kingdom? No.

...expressing anger is not a sin, being an angry person is sin.

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26; NASB).

An authentic child of God will be angry under the right circumstances. God wants us to be passionate people. He wants us to strive for justice. He wants us to demonstrate indignation when it's appropriate. That's why we shouldn't be afraid to express anger.

Jesus got angry; but take note that Jesus' anger was the good kind of anger. It wasn't some sudden fit of rage. He thought out his feeling of anger. It was intentional, not emotional. Jesus made a conscious decision to be angry,

²⁵ You might want to refer to it instead as righteous indignation, a just anger, but what Jesus showed that day was anger nonetheless.

When we do things twice, it's because we have "thought twice."

and here's the evidence: He kicked the merchants out of the Temple on two separate occasions. He kicked them out once in the beginning of his ministry, and once at the end. The first time was right after the miracle at Cana, and the second was on Palm Sunday, about three years later. When we do things twice, it's because we have "thought twice." Here's a description of the first cleansing of the Temple:

... [Jesus] found in the Temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When he had made a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables (John 2:14-15; NKJV).

Actions speak louder than words—and Jesus's actions were saying that the Jews had treated God's House wrongly. During Jesus' second cleansing of the Temple, his words were recorded for us, giving us a clear idea about what he was angry about.

Right after our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem...

... he went into the Temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, "It is written, 'My House is a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves'" (Luke 19:45-46; NKJV).

After reading this passage, you should be able to answer the question: Why did Jesus get so angry? It was because a place God had designated for prayer had been turned into a place for thievery, a place where crooks did their crooked business. In other words, his main issue was that people were ripping other people off in a holy place. He expressed that same disapproval when he said in another Gospel, "Don't make my Father's House a house of merchandise!"

... he said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make my Father's House a house of merchandise!" (John 2:16; NKJV).

Jesus was upset about what was happening in God's place of worship. If you're not sure about what stirred Jesus most deeply, you don't have to do much thinking. The words

Jesus spoke that day have already been interpreted for us. The apostle John understood that Jesus felt a deep passion for God's house—a passion he called *zeal*. That zeal wasn't just some fleshly emotion, it was a fulfillment of prophecy! David wrote 1000 years prior (in Psalm 69:9) that the Messiah would be consumed with zeal for God's house.

...Jesus felt a deep passion for God's house...

His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me' (John 2:17).

Do you feel a deep passion for God's House? If you are like Jesus, you will. If you are like Jesus, you'll feel righteous indignation with the pastors who today are turning the Church into a business—and you might even get angry with them every once in a while!

a. Making enemies

Jesus' Temple cleansing wasn't the only time he pointed out the greed of the Jewish leaders. He did it on another occasion when his topic was God's commandments. Jesus announced that their reason for changing God's commandments was for their own financial benefit. Jesus made the Jewish leaders' sin public, even though they wanted to keep it a secret. These men had been stealing property from widows, so Jesus condemned their cunning—but Jesus not only pointed out their hypocrisy, he assured them that they deserved judgment, one which would be much greater than the judgment others would get.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation (Matthew 23:14; NASB).

Jesus was bold enough to point out a well-known fact: the religious establishment is a business. Are you brave enough to point it out? Jesus declared in public something that a lot of Jews already suspected: the Jewish leaders were getting as much money out of their ministry as they could. Don't Evangelical pastors do the same thing today? Are they milking their ministries? Are they shearing their sheep?

Speaking directly to the men who led the People of God, Jesus accused Bible teachers of taking for themselves the financial support they should have given to their parents. He knew their tricks, and he could easily identify what motivated them in ministry: money. Jesus confronted the religious leaders in their sin because he was not afraid to make enemies—are you?

...why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! (Matthew 15:3-7)

b. A husband’s fury

...we’re God’s house now... Jesus is still zealous for God’s House—that means that He’s zealous for *us* because we’re God’s house now. The earthly Temple has been destroyed, but the Church stands. The Jewish priests have no more Temple in which to minister, but Christian pastors do have a place—among Christians.

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the House of God, which is the Church of the Living God (1 Timothy 3:15; NKJV).

Today’s question is the following: Would Evangelical pastors dare to turn the Church into business again, repeating the sin of the Jewish leaders, now that Evangelical pastors know exactly how Jesus feels about greedy leaders? Would they dare to make Jesus angry again? If they do, they are very foolish. God will destroy anyone who destroys his Temple.

Do you not know that you are God’s Temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s Temple, God will destroy this one. For God’s Temple is holy, which you are (1 Corinthians 3:16-18; LEB).

In conclusion, here's a question for you: Is Jesus any less angry with the greedy Church leaders of today than he was with the Jewish leaders of his own day? Let's put the situation in context: The Church is the bride of Christ, and Jesus is very protective of her! Will a husband not avenge himself on the man guilty of committing adultery with the husband's wife? He will take vengeance, which is precisely why we say *woe* to the person who exploits the Church. Woe to the preachers who take advantage of her. That's exactly why Solomon spoke to us through the OT like this:

Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul... for jealousy is a husband's fury; therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will accept no recompense, nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts (Proverbs 6:32-35; NKJV).

Is Jesus any less angry with the greedy Church leaders of today than he was with the Jewish leaders of his own day?

Don't get Jesus angry. Don't push him to fury. He will take vengeance on anyone who exploits his Church. He knows who is ministering out of greed in his Church. He will not spare those who take advantage of his Bride.

3. Greedy pastors

Jesus warned us about pastors that will only work if they get a salary. Jesus warned us of men who are after the money in ministry. He called those men *hirelings*, or *hired hands*. Jesus said that they are not real shepherds because they're not willing to fend off the wolves. They're not brave, and they refuse to protect the sheep.

The hired hand is not the shepherd, and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away (John 10:12).

In giving this teaching, Jesus pointed out the fundamental sin of false pastors: They really don't love the Church. Pseudo-pastors don't have enough love to serve God's people. They are not willing to risk their lives to save souls. They are interested in what they can get out of ministry, not what they can invest in it. Too bad for them, because ministry is a great investment—with dividends in eternity.

...a pastor who felt happier feasting with sinners than fellowshiping with saints.

Along these same lines, Jesus also told a story about a pastor who felt happier feasting with sinners than fellowshiping with saints. The pastor in Jesus' story didn't want to do his work. On the contrary, he used his position of authority to be above suspicion. Living in hypocrisy, his job as pastor was his disguise. At heart, he was as worldly and sinful as any wicked worldly man.

Who then is the faithful and wise servant [a pastor], whom the master [Jesus] has put in charge of the servants in his household [the Church] to give them their food²⁶ at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time [those are pastors who are not waiting for Christ's return],' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 24:41-45).

Jesus told this story right after he gave a detailed description of the signs of the Last Times. What's the connection between the Last Times and negligent pastors? Pastors who are not serving with the hope of Jesus' return are failing the Church. They are the cause of the Apostasy, as they allow believers to fall into sin.

²⁶ This *food* is the Word of God. A pastor's duty is to teach it at the proper time, meaning that there are moments we should seize because they are the moments when it is best to give a teaching. Just as food is best served in three square meals, in balanced portions without snacking, so should pastors give a balanced teaching from the Scriptures. What we mean by *balanced teachings* is that they do well to give expositional (verse-by-verse) teachings on Sundays, and home-based lessons on basic doctrine during the week.

Men such as these try to get all they can out of pastoring, but in this life—not the next. The unworthy pastors easily fall into the temptation of using Church authority for their own benefit. They do not follow the simple instruction of Jesus: feed believers the Word of God. Is Jesus' command so difficult? Is Jesus overly demanding?

These times we live in are characterized by greedy Christian pastors. The message of prosperity so prevalent in today's church was long foreseen as being an indication of the end. Have you heard pastor's boast of their wealth? Have you heard them say, "I praise God that I have become wealthy"? Even if you haven't, just look at their lifestyle. The opulence of today's pastors demonstrates we are in the Apostasy now.

Thus says Yahweh my God: "Shepherd the flock doomed to slaughter. The ones buying them kill them and go unpunished, and the ones selling them say, 'Blessed be Yahweh, for I have become rich.' Their own shepherds have no compassion for them (Zachariah 11:4-5; LEB).

We are the sheep doomed to the slaughter, and this is the great sign: Pastors are so greedy that there are none who actually care for souls anymore. The times of true pastors have past, now we have hypocrites in charge, but their judgment is pending.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1; NKJV).

a. Ezekiel's warnings

Jesus warned us of the kinds of pastors we have now, but God has had issues with pastors for thousands of years. The pastors of Ezekiel's day got a warning from God that's worth looking at. Let's look at God's warnings for them because pastors then committed the same sins Evangelical pastors are committing now.

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against the pastors of his day. It wasn't easy for Ezekiel, but he dutifully performed the task of a true prophet. He warned religious

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy against the pastors of his day

leaders of their sins just like Jesus warned the Pharisees in his day. Who is willing to warn pastors today of their sins? Who is willing to continue the tradition of the true prophets of God?

Ezekiel's prophecy begins with a lament over pastors. How does he express that lament? By saying "Woe to them!"

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel... (Ezekiel 34:1-2)

i. Taking care of themselves

Woe means "how sad for you." Why did the shepherds have to feel so sad? Why should they have wept? It was because God had good reason to condemn them. These teachers, responsible for the spiritual care of the people, had only taken care of themselves. Therefore, they were guilty of the sin of selfishness. They only thought of their own food and their own clothes. They had no love. On the contrary, they were only interested in exploiting God's people, greedily slaughtering God's sheep to get rich.

They only thought of their own food and their own clothes.

Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock (Ezekiel 34:2-3).

What did God want these shepherds to do? From the previous verse, it's quite clear what he wanted them to do: "take care of the flock." In fact, God said it twice in the previous verse—but what does "take care of the flock" mean exactly? It means at least five things, each of them enumerated in the following verse:

You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost (Ezekiel 34:4).

Those five things God expects a pastor to do are:

- strengthen the weak
- heal the sick
- bind up the injured
- bring back the strays
- search for the lost

Do pastors do that today? If you're a pastor, is that what you're busy with? Is that your business?

ii. Mean shepherds

Not only were the shepherds guilty of neglecting the five duties of pastoring, but they were mean too! They were hard-hearted towards God's sheep. They turned the tender and affectionate job of pastoring into an autocratic dictatorship. They lorded over the people, and would not guide them by example.

You have ruled them harshly and brutally (Ezekiel 34:4).

What was the effect of such unkind pastoring? It was the same effect mean pastoring will have on any family or congregation: People ran away from fellowship. God's flock was scattered. Being dispersed, his sheep became easy prey for spiritual wolves, bears, coyotes, and lions. Because of the unkindness of the shepherds, God's people wandered without a clear path.

**People
ran away
from fel-
lowship.**

Due to the fact that the shepherds were so negligent, many thousands of Jews were lost. Indeed, the shepherds were so negligent that they wouldn't even go out and look for God's sheep. They were two times negligent.

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them (Ezekiel 34:5-6).

iii. God vs. pastors

God was against the leaders of the religion that he himself established!

God was firmly against the shepherds of his people—doesn't that sound contradictory? God was against the leaders of the religion that he himself established! However, that didn't mean the end of his people. God wasn't without a solution to the problem of poor leadership. He would call the shepherds to give an account and would remove them from their positions. He would fire them.

God's reasons for dismissing the evil pastors was clear: They didn't actually do any shepherding at all. They had allowed God's flock to be attacked by wild animals. They did not search for the lost sheep, but cared for themselves instead.

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the Word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock, but cared for themselves rather than for my flock; therefore, you shepherds, hear the Word of the LORD:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves (Ezekiel 34:7-10).

It all boiled down to this: God wouldn't let the shepherds of his people *feed themselves* any longer. Spiritual leaders should feed *others*, not themselves! In the United States, gluttony is known among men in the ministry as "the pastors' sin." It is so widespread that many pastors justify their overeating with jokes. They like to think that all pastors do it and to laugh it off—but God won't justify their gluttony unless pastors repent of it. It needs to be washed away in the blood of Jesus.

iv. A shepherd's basic duty

Does the problem of selfish pastors sound familiar to you? It should. Jesus exhorted Peter on the same issues

we read about in Ezekiel. As he commanded Peter to focus on feeding the sheep, Jesus sounded a lot like Ezekiel 34. Peter was just about to start a job as the leading pastor of a large Christian church, so Jesus spoke to Peter in order to push Peter in the right direction.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’

Again Jesus said, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He answered, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Take care of my sheep.’

The third time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ He said, ‘Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my sheep’ (John 21:15-17).

You may have already noticed that the same things that happened in Ezekiel’s time are happening in our times. Pastors are feeding themselves, but not God’s sheep. What’s one solid solution? Pastors should take Jesus’ exhortation to heart: “Take care of my sheep.” They need to prove their love for Jesus Christ. A pastor who loves Jesus will feed Jesus’ lambs and take care of Jesus’ sheep.

v. A solution to come

How do we get over the problem of selfish pastors? The solution to the pastor problem is not just encouraging them the way Jesus encouraged Peter. The solution to the pastoring problem is not simply looking back to the ministry of Peter, but forward to the ministry of God—yes, God!

God Himself will rescue the sheep from the bad shepherds because God will come to shepherd his sheep. He will care for them. The process of saving his sheep starts by rescuing them from the evil shepherds:

I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

**...he
com-
manded
Peter to
focus on
feed-
ing the
sheep...**

For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep (Ezekiel 34:10-12).

...God will bring his sheep together. After rescuing his sheep from evil shepherds, God will bring his sheep together. They will not be scattered any more. He will bring them to one place, to the land of Israel.

I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land (Ezekiel 34:12-13).

Here we see the powerful solution to the problem of bad pastors—it's for God to be the Pastor of his people. God will give us the rich and fertile pastures of the mountains of Israel in which to feed. What does God mean by Israel? It's the central geographical location of our new dwelling place, the Kingdom. When his Kingdom is established in Israel again, we will be able to freely reflect on his Word, and live a healthy spiritual life. We will be free from temptations and sins. It will be a long-time promise fulfilled

I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 34:14).

So, God himself is going to pastor his sheep. He isn't going to let the men who have been selfishly leading his people continue in their positions of leadership. Rather, he will strip them of their authority, and he is going to assume the leadership he deserves.

I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice (Ezekiel 34:15-16).

vi. The flock's fault

Now, bad pastors are a problem, but they're not the whole problem. God doesn't only warn pastors here. The problem in churches is not only the fault of church leaders, but it's the fault of the people. God holds his own people responsible too. God speaks to his sheep as well, and promises to hold them accountable too.

As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (Ezekiel 34:17-19)

The good pasture and clear water that this passage speaks of is the blessing and prosperity God gave to the wealthy in the society of Israel. Those who were financially blessed left nothing good for the poor, but rather destroyed the blessings God had left for the poor. That was a social issue, and God was about to do something to solve the social problems that existed among his people. Since the wealthy were despising the poor, God had to solve the problem—and he would solve it by judging between the rich and poor. He calls them the *fat* sheep and the *skinny* sheep.

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another (Ezekiel 34:20-22).

vii. One-shepherd solution

Now comes the best part: We find out exactly how God is going to solve the problem. He has a concrete solution to the problem of bad pastors: He will place one

The problem in churches is not only the fault of church leaders, but it's the fault of the people.

Shepherd over them. He has a true Shepherd to send to his people—and God calls that man *David*. Who is this David?

I will place over them one Shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their Shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be Prince among them. I the LORD have spoken (Ezekiel 34:23-24).

We know that God was talking about Jesus here. Only Jesus fully fulfilled the prophecies about the long-awaited descendant of David, the heir to the throne of David. Jesus is that Good Shepherd selected by God to care for God's flock.

This passage ends with the powerful words “I have spoken.” That means that Yahweh has resolved to fix the problem of bad pastoring, and that *without a doubt* he will establish Jesus as the Great Shepherd. The NT agrees with Yahweh's solution for bad pastoring. That's why we see Peter warning men to carry out their pastoral duty in the light of Christ's return.

Be shepherds of God's flock... not pursuing dishonest gain... being examples to the flock... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4).

viii. Inspiration for pastors

Bad pastoring begins with a little thought in a pastor's heart: “Jesus will delay.” That little thought leads to another thought: “I can get away with my sin. Nobody notices.” Beware of thinking that way if you're a pastor.

Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household [a pastor]? ... if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time...’ (Matthew 24:45, 48; NASB)

...good pastoring is inspired by faith in the return of Christ.

On the flip side, good pastoring is inspired by faith in the return of Christ. A man who is inspired to be a good pastor will take his cue from the fact that someday Jesus will pastor all of us, and there will be one flock. Good pastoring is

founded on our hope that Jesus will come back as rule over the Earth as the Good Pastor.

[Jesus said] I am the Good Shepherd... and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd (John 10:14-16).

Times may have changed, but the solution to the problem of pastoring has not changed. Let's get ready for the return of the One Shepherd!

b. Demas: So close

Have you heard of Demas? His name has become famous due to the fact that John Bunyan made him a character in his classic story *Pilgrim's Progress*—but we're not concerned about whether you've read *Pilgrim's Progress* or not. Do you know the Demas of the Bible? Have you read about him there?

Demas was a fellow worker of the apostle Paul. He was on the same ministry team as Luke and Mark. Those last two became gospel writers, and Paul wrote more NT books than any other man. That means that Demas was in good company—the best of company.

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas (Colossians 4:14; NASB).

Epaphras... greets you, as do Mark, Aris-tarchus, Demas, Luke, my [Paul's] fellow workers (Philemon 23-24; NASB).

Demas was in good company—the best of company.

Demas was right up there in spiritual status with the greatest names in the history of the Church. He lived, like Judas Iscariot, in close fellowship with God's most anointed servants. Nevertheless, Demas turned his back on his friends, and went the way of the world.

Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me [Paul] and gone to Thessalonica (2 Timothy 4:10; NASB).

Demas loved the world—and that’s a serious sin. Many believers don’t take being a friend to the world so seriously, but this sin is so serious, it makes you an enemy of God.

... don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Beware not to follow in Demas’ footsteps. When Paul indicates that Demas went to Thessalonica, Paul is saying that Demas went to the church community there. Demas went to Thessalonica as a missionary, but not as a man sent by God. You may be a missionary too. You may minister in churches, but at the same time be an enemy of God—if you love the world as Demas did.

II. What the Church is

- A. Organizationally
- B. Metaphorically
- C. Spiritually

how God
defines
it

What is the Church? How we define it doesn’t really matter. What matters is how God defines it, and God has spoken extensively about the Church throughout the Bible. The NT in particular gives very clear teachings on what the Church is organizationally, metaphorically, and spiritually—and those are the things we’re going to look at in this section.

First, we are going to see how God set up his Church. He established the Church through leaders. Why did he use leaders? Because he wants the Church to function well. God organizes everything he does because he is a God of order.

God is not a God of disorder but of peace as in all the churches of the saints... let all things be done decently and according to proper procedure (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40; LEB)

A. Organizationally**1. Leadership principles**

- a. Men should lead
 - i. The weaker vessel
 - ii. Power in weakness
- b. Kingdom leadership
 - i. Refuse titles
- c. Choosing leaders
 - i. God's choice
 - 1) God chose Judas
 - 2) God chose Matthias
 - 3) High priests choose
 - 4) Churches choose

2. Leadership roles

- a. The team of elders
 - i. From OT to NT
 - ii. Appointed by apostles
 - iii. Keeping each other in check
 - iv. Brotherly love
- b. Fourfold leadership
 - i. Apostles
 - 1) The most important leaders
 - 2) No confusion
 - 3) Lesser-known apostles
 - 4) Jesus' seventy apostles
 - 5) Is this your calling?
 - ii. Prophets
 - 1) From the Church's start

- 2) To the Church's end
- 3) Getting prophecy back
- 4) It's coming back

iii. Evangelists

- 1) The Gospel to all the world
- 2) Preach and baptize
- 3) Jesus left his mark
- 4) Power evangelism

iv. Pastor-teachers

- 1) Overseers
- 2) Requirements
- 3) Free from blame
- 4) Disqualification
- 5) A labor of love

c. Deacons

- i. Deaconesses

3. People money

a. Poor money

- i. The sell-all challenge
- ii. Becoming poor
- iii. Investment strategy
- iv. Tithes and offerings
- v. Distribution of wealth
- vi. Missions for the poor
- vii. The gift of giving
- viii. More important than giving

b. Pastor money

- i. Offerings
- ii. Invest in education
- iii. Common sense

- iv. God commands it
- v. The right to be paid
- vi. Hired men
- vii. The worthy-worker principle

The NT makes it abundantly clear how the Church should be led. We can see how it was led from its inception—the Early Church is described for us all over the NT—but if we speak of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and elders today, Evangelicals are perplexed. Such titles sounds strange to professing Christians today, whereas when the Church started, it was the norm for every congregation to be led by such men. What has happened throughout the centuries so that we’ve come to the point where we don’t understand biblical church leadership?

...when the Church started, it was the norm for every congregation to be led by such men.

After Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official state religion in 325 AD, the Romans developed a system of monks, priests, bishops, and a Pope. They created their own institution, one that would control the masses through religion and politics. It became the Holy Roman Catholic Empire with its main branch located in the Vatican. The Catholic Magisterium assumed for itself leadership of God’s Church, but anyone who knows anything about the NT knows that the Church is not led by priests at all.

We also know that we cannot call our teachers *father*. Jesus prohibited the use of the title *father*; however, Catholics call their supreme leader *the Pope*, a word which comes from Latin meaning *the Father*. So they’ve actually sinned beyond the sin Jesus warned us to avoid, using the article *the* before the Latin word for father, making the Pope out to be the One Father. It’s a blasphemous title, and one that God surely hates.

... do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in Heaven (Matthew 23:9).

1. Leadership principles

**God
com-
mands
us to
submit
to our
lead-
ers...**

Leadership is a vital part of Church life—not just a neat idea or a suggestion. God commands us to submit to our leaders, so we have to know who they are. They have authority over us, so we should understand them. How will we feel confidence in them unless we are certain that they are rooted in God’s will?

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you... Greet all your lead-ers and all the Lord’s people... (Hebrews 13:17, 24).

Do you know who your spiritual leaders are? Can you name them one-by-one? Try it. More importantly, have you considered how a man actually earns a place of authority in the Church? If you’ve thought about those two things, then ask yourself: “Have my spiritual leaders obtained their leadership legitimately?”

According to the following passage, leaders are established as authorities by teaching the Scriptures. That’s the basis for obtaining authority in the true Church. A man who has authority is a man who speaks the Word of God to the people. Furthermore, that man’s lifestyle must produce good fruit.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith... (Hebrews 13:7).

If a man does not teach the Bible, he has no legitimate authority in the Church. All authority emanates from God, and a leader among his people speaks his Word. Any true leaders in the Church must also have a lifestyle worthy of imitating. They have to live model lives. As it says in the passage above, God’s Church has to both *remember* and *consider* these men’s lives.

a. Men should lead

God has chosen mature men, not women to lead in the Church. We live in an egalitarian world—that means that women have leadership in business, politics, and society in general; however, women should not have positions of leadership in the Church. Does that sound severe or misogynistic? Let the truth be told, women shouldn't even *speak* in the churches. Many people opposed this rule in the times of the apostles, and many more oppose it in our current age—this age of feminism. However, if anyone ignores this rule, God will ignore them, and you can ignore them.

...women should not have positions of leadership in the Church.

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the Church.

... what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored (1 Corinthians 14:34-38).

There is no biblical argument in favor of women teaching in the Church. Such an argument doesn't exist. The Law—handed down to us about 3,500 years ago from God through Moses—establishes male leadership among God's people. Patriarchy is the patent will of God, as the history of the patriarchs testifies.

Where in the OT are women ever designated by God to be spiritual leaders? In the few passages when women do wield authority, they are either cast into their roles while under submission to a man (as Esther was to Mordecai and to her king), or those same women express their great desire to see men lead, encouraging men to assume leadership (the way Deborah encouraged Barak in Judges chapter 4).

Male leadership is not just a rule from the times of Moses; it goes further back. It is a principle established in Creation! When God made Adam and Eve, he established male leadership. Male headship is not based on Jewish culture or Middle Eastern traditions, as some people would have us believe. It's no human invention. Neither is male leadership

It is a divine design—a law established by our Designer.

a conspiracy which men have craftily designed so that they might oppress women. It is a divine design—a law established by our Designer. God made Adam to lead, then he made Eve to help Adam, following her husband’s ways.

To really understand how God established this vital leadership principle in the Beginning, pay close attention to how the word *for* is used in the following passage:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13; NKJV).

Paul was writing about church leadership here. What was the basis for his rule, the rule that woman should be silent, should be submissive, and not teach men or have authority over them? His basis was Creation. In other words, all men and women (particularly in the Church, where the knowledge of God should be shining brightly through the teachings we receive from our pastors) should relate to each other according to the model God established in Creation, through that first couple, Adam and Eve.

i. The weaker vessel

Therefore, God has established an order in which men and women should relate to each other. God made man first—and he did that intentionally, demonstrating that men should lead. If that truth is difficult for you, consider the following passage. It says that women can be deceived more easily than men, which is another reason why women should not have authority over men.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression (1 Timothy 2:14; NKJV).

The truth that women can be deceived more easily is reinforced through Peter who tells us in a famous passage that women are *the weaker vessel*. What Peter means by using the word *weaker* is that men are weak, but women are more weak. Grammatically, Peter is using a comparative adjective, that is, he’s comparing two degrees of weakness.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7; NKJV).

Before you take offense at the biblical principle that women are weaker than men, you do well to recall this Bible truth: All human beings are weak. The only power any of us has is from God. That's what "When I am weak then I am strong" means (2 Corinthians 12:10). That's also the reason why Paul says "I will boast... about my weaknesses" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Men and women are all weak, and it's our glory to delight in that weakness, so that the strength we manifest might clearly be shown to be from God.

All human beings are weak.

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness (2 Corinthians 11:30).

I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:5).

ii. Power in weakness

Is it hard for you, as a woman, to admit that you are the weaker vessel? It might help if you look at it this way: No Christian, be they man or woman, should boast about anything *but* their weaknesses. So if women have more weaknesses, it actually means that that they have more to boast about! By no means does the principle that women are weaker mean that they are destined to fail. On the contrary, it actually means that more of the power of God can work through them—right? Weakness is not a defect in God's Kingdom. It is an asset. It's something to delight in.

I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

So women, due to their being weaker than men, must rely on God more than men. Of course, both men and women need to rely on God, so what's the difference really? The key difference is that men must rely on God through Jesus, and women must rely on God through a man. Every woman has to find good men to subject herself to. The men in those women's lives may be a husband, a father, brothers, or church elders. Whoever they may be, women should

choose to follow men who show faith, trust, and reliance on Jesus!

I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3; NKJV).

Men lead in the Church because it's God's design for them to do so. That doesn't mean that men are better, it means that their design is different from that of a woman. Their role is leadership, and when they lead, they are being submissive to God, the King of all.

...under the curse, wives will feel that male leadership is unfair.

We understand that under the curse, wives will feel that male leadership is unfair. They are going to feel like their husbands have an unfair advantage. That feeling is *feminism*—and it's part of this world system. It's a desire that's been around since Eden, so it's an ancient feeling.

To the woman he [Jesus] said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you' (Genesis 3:16).

Feminism is not new, even if certain people would like you to think so. Neither will it work, even if political agendas try to convince you otherwise. Why not? Because the Lord Jesus has said "... your husband... will rule over you." Is that the best way for things to be? For now, yes; it is—but when the Kingdom is established on the Earth, the resurrected saints will not be married. Then there will be no more competition between men and women.

b. Kingdom leadership

Leadership in the Church is not the kind of leadership we see in the world. In fact, it's dramatically different. It's a leadership from another world: the Kingdom. You have to follow new principles to obtain Church leadership. Those principles are the ones Jesus taught us through word and example.

In the world, people get positions of leadership by fighting their way to the top. They compete viciously for power in politics, work, business, finances, and religion. Sometimes

they use slander, lies, or even murder to become leaders. On the other hand, in the Church, you gain a position of leadership by serving others. You don't get leadership because you beat others out because Church leadership is not earned through competition.

...you gain a position of leadership by serving others.

Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:25-28).

The guiding principle for becoming great in the Church is service. Jesus established the serve-others principle, and there has never been another leader in the history of the world who has used such a radical approach to leadership. Jesus commanded that none of us should try to lord over others. He established that none of us will be a boss by being bossy.

On the contrary, although it's good to want to be first, we get there by being the least. That's what Jesus taught us. We are to humble ourselves just like he did, and then God will grant authority to us. Isn't that exactly what happened with Jesus? Yes, God granted authority to Jesus after, and only after, Jesus humbled himself.

... it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest (Luke 9:48).

Christians must follow the principles of the Kingdom, not the ways of the world. The Church can only function well if it follows Kingdom rules. Jesus taught us to strive for greatness—so we should do that; even striving to obtain eternal glory in the Kingdom. Didn't he? We don't believe in service for the sake of service. We're striving to be rulers in the Millennium. To get that glory, we must humble ourselves now, in this life.

The greatest among you will be your servant (Matthew 23:11).

i. Refuse titles

**...refuse
a title if
people
begin to
call you
by one.**

You cannot identify Church leadership through titles. The greatest among us is not the Reverend or Pastor So-and-so.²⁷ Seeking to be called by a prestigious title is a great mistake; it exposes us to the temptation of pride. It's important that you refuse a title if people begin to call you by one. For example, if they say "Pastor Richard, please come over our house," you may want to reply, "Please just call me Richard. Your Pastor and mine is the Lord Jesus."

But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.²⁸ And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called

²⁷ We previously spoke about the erroneous titles used in the Catholic religion, but what of the titles used in Evangelical churches? *Pastor* and *Deacon* are all too often used as titles among Evangelicals, and it has become a harmful tradition. Will we fall into the same trap as the Catholics by esteeming a man according to his title?

What the Church needs is not to have someone called a *pastor*, but for men to pastor. We need the verb form of *pastor* to be used among us. We don't need men called *apostles*, but for men to go when God sends them. We don't need people called *prophets*, but people who will prophesy the truth to us. We don't need someone called an *evangelist*, but for someone to have such an anointing that the unconverted repent when they hear him preach. The Church is about us working together to fulfill God's plan, not about titles.

²⁸ Jesus taught that we are all brothers. That doesn't mean that nobody leads in the Church. It means that brotherly love guides our decisions. For example, the decision of whether or not to use a title with someone is a decision we must make in love. If everybody in a congregation calls an elder *Pastor Scott*, and you would offend him if you did not call him *Pastor Scott*, then use the title.

Still, as much as you are able, try to avoid the use of titles. Avoid this practice out of love for the person with the title, knowing that flattery is a powerful temptation—it's hard even for the most

instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah (Matthew 23:8-10).

God will exalt those who humble themselves, and he will humble those who exalt themselves. Seeking a title for yourself is seeking your own honor—so beware.

When he [Jesus] noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:7-11).

c. Choosing leaders

We have established that no one should become a Church leader the worldly way, by asserting themselves or imposing their authority. We shouldn’t choose Church leaders the worldly way, but how then should we choose Church leaders? Should we vote? Should we follow the will of the people—a majority choice? That’s the natural style of selecting leaders for most of us, since it conforms to the democratic principles that underlie Western society.

...how then should we choose Church leaders?

humble Bible teacher to resist a feeling of pride when he is called *pastor*.

Calling people *sir* or *ma’am*, is politeness. Giving honor to whom it is due (Romans 13:7) is good. That’s why we treat government officials respectfully; using the titles they may have such as *Mr. President*. We use their titles as we address them. However, among fellow Christians, we shouldn’t allow the use of titles, because we are all brothers.

Well, there are two Bible examples of God’s people choosing leaders democratically—both attempts gave devastating results. Here’s the NT example:

... the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).

Notice the expression “they will gather around them” in this verse. It means that the people in churches will establish certain kinds of teachers among them. There’s democracy at work. The people chose their teachers, but they are not men chosen by God. The people give these teachers their support, but they don’t have God’s support—and for good reason: These men preach what people want to hear, not what God wants to say.

These men preach what people want to hear, not what God wants to say.

Another passage that shows democracy at work in the Church is the one where Aaron and Myriam asserted themselves as being just as important as their brother, Moses. Affirming that God spoke through them just as clearly as he spoke through Moses—they fought for equality.

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses... ‘Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’ And the LORD heard this... At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, ‘Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.’ So the three of them went out.

Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, he said, ‘... Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?’ The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them (Numbers 12:1-2, 4-6, 8-9).

Democracy-minded people believe that there should be a balance of power in leadership. Aaron and Myriam, inspired by the principle of equality, asserted themselves as equal to Moses, but God rebuked them. The lesson they

learned was that leadership is based on who God chooses, not about balancing power or dividing authority.

i. God's choice

We have just seen that the foundation of true Church leadership is not human choice, but God's choice. It's not about democratic vote, but divine election. Are you willing to let God choose who leads in the Church? Jesus was, the apostles were, and today we also must be willing to let God choose our leaders. We can learn very important lessons on this topic from two Biblical examples: how God chose first Judas, and how he later chose Matthias.

It's not about democratic vote, but divine election.

1) God chose Judas

Jesus picked the Twelve Apostles, but notice this: He did not choose them according to his own will. His choice was not based on what he wanted—how else can you explain why he chose Judas? Jesus never actually wanted to choose Judas. Who would ever want to choose a hypocrite as a friend and confidant—but Jesus did just that! Did he lack discernment? Not at all. In fact, Jesus discerned the will of God so well, he chose Judas against his own will. Did Jesus choose Judas because Judas was able to trick Jesus into thinking that Judas was good? No, Jesus knew very well that Judas was evil.

Jesus replied, 'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!' (John 6:70)

Jesus chose Judas for one simple reason: He wanted God's will to be fulfilled, as difficult as it was. Jesus knew that he had to be delivered into the hands of his enemies, and that it had to happen by means of a betrayal. He knew that a traitor had to be among the Twelve.

Jesus knew that his great ministry as Savior had to be fulfilled through his death—he knew that he was the Lamb of God. God's will for Jesus was for Jesus to be a sacrifice. Through his study of the Bible, our Lord realized that betrayal by a friend was the only way for him fulfill his role as the Passover Lamb. He knew that he had to be handed over to the Jewish leaders to die.

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the House of God, as we walked about among the worshippers (Psalm 55:12-14).

**Jesus
put
choos-
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Church
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ship in
God's
hands.**

Choosing Judas was no easy feat for Jesus. He chose Judas along with the other eleven apostles after consulting with God for an entire night. He held a vigil to make this decision. So let's learn from our Lord: Jesus put choosing Church leadership in God's hands—shouldn't we? Jesus didn't choose Church leadership according to his own desires, but according to God's strategic plan for the salvation of the world. Shouldn't we do the same?

Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles (Luke 6:12).

2) God chose Matthias

The Twelve apostles followed Jesus' example of leadership selection. They made sure that pastors and elders were chosen by God. When the time came for them to choose Judas' replacement, they did what Jesus did—they consulted with God. They had the maturity and sensitivity to prayerfully nominate two men, and then they cast lots between the two.

[Peter said] "... it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'May his [Judas'] place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, 'May another take his place of leadership.' Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles (Acts 1:20-26).

With the casting of the lots, the apostles could feel absolutely certain that the man who would assume his part in the ministry of the Twelve was God's man for the job. The apostles were wise in requiring that that man be someone who was with them during the entire 3-year ministry of Jesus. He had to have been someone who experienced the baptism of John, and witnessed the ascension of Christ—but the apostles didn't depend on their wisdom. They left the final decision in God's hands.

3) High priests choose

When the apostles cast lots, they weren't following the custom of gamblers. Rather, they were following a longtime tradition of priestly decision-making—what was it? Well, God ordered that two stones called the *urim* and *thummim* should be set in the High Priest's breastplate. The High Priest was supposed to use these stones during times when God's people had to make important decisions much the way people use dice today.

And you will put the urim and the thummim on the breast piece of judgment, and they will be on the heart of Aaron when he comes before Yahweh, and Aaron will bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before Yahweh continually (Exodus 28:30; LEB).

Some decisions are weightier than others. In the following passage, Moses made sure that Joshua would get the High Priest's guidance. Joshua needed it so that he might know when to advance. This was the situation: When the Israelites broke camp to move on to a new place, Joshua had to be sure that it was God's timing. As much wisdom as Joshua had, he still had to present himself before the High Priest and let the final decision be God's. Shouldn't we do the same when we have situations that require inspired decision-making?

... Yahweh said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and place your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest

The High Priest was supposed to use these stones at times when God's people had to make important decisions...

and before the entire community, and commission him in their sight. You will give to him from your authority so that the entire community of Israel will obey him.

He will stand before Eleazar the priest, who will ask for him by the decision of the urim before Yahweh. On his [Joshua's] command they will go out, and at his command they will come in, both he and all of the Israelites with him, the entire community' (Numbers 27:18-22; LEB).

4) Churches choose

The Christians of the NT also consulted with God on big decisions. Deacons are not church leaders *per se*, but they are very significant helpers to church leaders. The Jerusalem church chose the first deacons, and in a remarkable instant in history, their collective will matched God's will. This is one of the only times such a thing ever occurred in the Bible! That first church was in sync with God. It was a very spiritual group.

... the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.'

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:2-6).

Due to their spiritual sensitivity, the Jerusalem Christians were wise enough to choose the deacons God wanted. Is today's Church spiritual enough to choose the leaders God would have for us?²⁹ That's a very important question. In

²⁹ The objective answer to this question is *no*. Today's Church is not spiritual enough. It's a fact that the Church is in Apostasy. Not

Is today's Church spiritual enough to choose the leaders God would have for us?

fact, it's one of the most important questions Christians could ask themselves today.

Another church, the one at Antioch, chose Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries. They made their choice through fasting and prayer, and God spoke to them through the Holy Spirit. It was an amazing moment in history because nobody shared their opinion. The Holy Spirit revealed his choice to the believers in prayer. It was only the prayer that resolved their concern, but the voice of the Holy Spirit which led the church leaders to send Paul and Barnabas out.

... in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia... (Acts 13:1-4).

Here's the conclusion: We don't elect Church leaders by popular vote. We do that with candidates for public office since democracy is what our Western culture values—fine; but it's a mistake to mix political ideologies like democracy with church-life. Never was voting used in the history of Israel or the Church for the selection of spiritual leaders. Never. Don't think that God gave democracy to the Church.³⁰

We don't elect Church leaders by popular vote.

only does it reject the men who are sent to it by God, it rejects the foundational doctrine they preach.

³⁰ There is wisdom in democratic elections because they put the responsibility of choosing leadership on the people. That allows the people share the burden of electing leaders. The people won't likely revolt against a government they have freely elected, so democratic societies have less likelihood of revolution than those ruled by an elite group or a monarchy. Nonetheless, after more than 140 years (they've been around since the late 1770s), democratic elections still haven't solved the age-old problem of how to get the best leader for a nation.

We're not drifting off the subject here, but building an illustra-

You can tell who they are because God has anointed them.

The divinely-inspired election principle is this: Certain men are equipped by God to lead. Certain men have been given authority from God. You can tell who they are if you have wisdom. You can tell who they are because God has anointed them. You have to find out who those men are—they were the ones “who spoke the Word of God to you,” as it says in Hebrews. We should consider the outcome, the fruit

tion. If you contemplate the history of democracy in the world, you will see that democracy has little place in Church life.

Consider this: If democratic elections are not the way to establish Church leadership, how will those same elections ever solve the problem of political leadership? Is the Church not God’s model community for the world? Yes, it is. We set the example for nations through our leadership-selection process. Our process is based on wisdom and divine choice—and societies throughout the world would do well to make use of those same two tools.

What a failure for Christians to put their confidence in democracy! We are never taught in the Bible to trust in the majority. We are taught to put our trust in God. “In God we trust” is the mantra of the Church, not of the country. We shouldn’t be afraid to preach and teach divine election, as radical as it may sound to our Western counterparts. Divine election is a principle meaning God should make the choice of who leads, not us. Are we ashamed to believe that? Do we believe in a God who reveals his will, or in a God who hides his will from humanity?

Let’s have compassion on the multitudes of people that have become frustrated with democracy, oligarchy, dictatorships, socialism, and communism and tell them about divine election. It will be a relief for them to know that there is another option.

The best men will never be popular, and they will never get to positions of leadership if elections are in the hands of the people. We learned that on the day the Jerusalem multitudes—crowds of people who knew the Word of God—cried out “Crucify him, crucify him” and chose Barabbas over the Son of God. They got what they deserved, a criminal and not God’s King-elect. The people’s choice prevailed. They could have chosen the man God wanted. It’s not like God hadn’t made his choice clear enough through the miracles of Jesus—but they were blind. Sadly, many Evangelicals still are just as blind today, which is why the pastors are the men they are.

of their lives, and submit to them. Here again is the passage we quoted in the beginning of this section:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life... Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority... (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

2. Leadership roles

There are four leadership roles in the Church. In other words, there are four positions of authority. The men who have such positions should be respected and honored among us. We are going to look at each role in depth here. These four positions of authority are clearly enumerated for us in the following passage:

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12; NASB, MacArthur).³¹

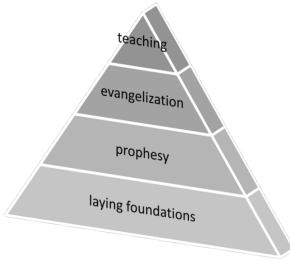
³¹ We have decided to modify part of the NASB translation with John MacArthur's because with his amendments, the translation is most true to the original Greek. He explains his *shepherd-teacher* translation this way:

... the fourth gifted category of men is teaching shepherds... this is a hyphenated word, the Greek construction here indicates that they're not two words, pastors and teachers, but that it should be pastor-teacher. You'll notice the word *some* which is before the first four is not before teachers and that's because it is not set apart as a separate category. The Greek construction leads us to say this...

... the word *pastor* only appears once in the whole Bible, and it's here... It simply means *pastoral*... The word in the Greek is *poimen*, and every single time that word is ever used in the Bible it is always translated with the idea of shepherding... it means shepherd, teaching shepherd (Retrieved from <http://www.gty.org/Resources/sermons/1926> on February 2, 2016).

Other translations that bring out the meaning of the original Greek very nicely are the following:

He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some proclaimers of good news, and some shepherds and teachers (Young's Literal Translation).



Don't be deceived: These leadership roles are not about who is more important than who in the Church. The list you read is not a hierarchy. On the contrary, this list defines the activities a group of people need if they will be a church. It's about what we do as God's Church. The list describes

four essential activities for God's New Covenant people:

- laying foundations (the function of an apostle)
- prophesy (the function of a prophet)
- evangelization (the function of an evangelist)
- teaching (the job of a pastor-teacher)

When the Church carries out these functions harmoniously, it's because we are working the way God wants us to. Although one-way-or-another all Christians are involved with the activities of laying foundations, giving prophecy, doing evangelization, and teaching—there are some among us whom God has chosen to lead in these activities. The men who lead in these activities have positions of authority in the Church by the simple fact that God has chosen them. Scriptures call them apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. You can call them whatever your culture and language deems appropriate.

His "gifts to men" were varied. Some he made his messengers, some prophets, some preachers of the Gospel; to some he gave the power to guide and teach his people (Phillips).

And he himself gave some, on the one hand, as apostles, and, on the other hand, as prophets, and still again some as bringers of good news, and finally, some as pastors who are also teachers (Wuest).

And it was he who gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers (Mounce).

Remember that it's the function that matters, not the title. Call an apostle a *missionary*, a *church planter*, or a *founder*—if you want. As long as that man is sent by God and he is establishing churches in the truth, he's doing his job. God will be happy with him. The missionary's duty is what's valuable in God's sight, not the name people give him.

...it's the function that matters, not the title.

Likewise, you can call an evangelist a *preacher*, a *herald* (1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:1), a *soul winner* (a 19th century term), or the more modern version: *outreach coordinator*. These names are all fine—as long as he baptizes people while he preaches repentance, forgiveness of sins, and the Kingdom of God. If he does those four things, he's fulfilling his role as an evangelist. God will be pleased with that man even if not one person repents or gets baptized. It's the activity that counts in God's eyes.

Pastors are called by at least three other names in the NT: *bishop-overseers*, *elders*, and *teachers*—those titles change from Bible passage to Bible passage, and context to context. Today, there are even some denominations that call pastors *superintendents*, which is a perfectly legitimate name. That last one even jives with the original NT Greek word, often translated *overseer*. As long as the pastor cares for God's flock, and feeds God's sheep with the Word, call him by the name that's most accepted in your culture.

The idea is not to bicker over words and definitions, but to assure that God's will is being fulfilled in the Church. What we need is for men to fulfill these four roles in the Church.

There's an order among the four functions, an order of importance. Although no one person is more important than the whole, apostles have the first place among us. Every Christian should know this: Church founders are the principal leaders. Every local church is duty-bound to conserve the doctrine upon which it was founded. To conserve sound doctrine, members need to give honor to the founders of the church, like children who appreciate their fathers.

Church founders are the principal leaders.

When the Corinthians grew cold in their love for the apostle Paul, it was tragic. Disregarding Paul was tantamount to disregarding sound doctrine. Why? Because Paul laid

the solid doctrinal foundations of that church. He fathered them.

I am not writing these things to shame you, but admonishing you as my dear children. For if you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I fathered you through the Gospel (1 Corinthians 4:14-15; LEB).

This same Paul, the apostle to the Corinthians, did not preach in places where Jesus had already been preached. Why not? He didn't want to build upon another foundation. He wanted to invest his time establishing solid and true foundations, not wasting his time building upon weak foundations. Building upon weak foundations is useless work. Everything will eventually fall apart.

I aspired to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20; NASB).

a. The team of elders

Elders do not have one specific function in the Church. Rather, they serve in various ways such as preaching, teaching, and overseeing—that is, supervision. We know that they have various functions because passages of Scripture give these same men different names. Notice, for example, how *elders* is used interchangeably with *overseer* in the following passage. That means that the two terms are for the same people.

... [Paul said to Titus that he should] set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach... for the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward... (Titus 1:5-7).

Also, in the following passage it says that there are some elders whose work is preaching and teaching. The fact that only some elders served in these two areas clearly indicates that not all of them had the job of preaching and teaching. If there were elders “whose work is preaching and teaching,” then it stands to reason that there were *other* elders whose work was *not* preaching and teaching.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

This passage gives us an important insight: The term *elders* does not only refer to pastor-teachers. Other elders could very well be prophets, evangelists, overseers, or ministers to the sick and needy. None of those functions focus on the work of preaching and teaching.

In conclusion, we should use the term *elders*³² as a general term for the mature men who lead in a church. It doesn't matter what particular ministry they have, but to qualify as an elder, a man has to be experienced. His experience has to be in doctrine and Church ministry. The word *elder* comes from the word *older*, of course, and age implies experience. The Jewish traditions stated that a man should be over 40 years old to be considered an elder.

...we should use the term *elders* as a general term for the mature men who lead in a church.

Here's a NT fact that sheds some light on our study: The word *elder* appears in the plural (*elders*) 64 times, but it only appears 5 times in the singular (*elder*). That means that, to be more Biblical and to speak the way God speaks, we should use the term when we are describing a group, a plurality of men. Indeed, no congregation should ever be led by just one man.

There should always be a group of leading men in a Christian church—and they should be a group of elders. Nowadays you'll be hard pressed to find a congregation where a group of mature men are leading. In some churches men lead—but mature men are men of good testimony capable of teaching sound doctrine. That's what a group of elders looks like. That's what the Church had when it started.

i. From OT to NT

In the OT, the term *elder* is used in no less than 138 verses.³³ That's a lot, and it proves that leadership through

³² In some translations like the NASB (only in 1 Timothy 4:14), they are called *the presbytery*.

³³ This statistic was found by doing a search of the word *elder* through Bible Gateway for the NIV, NKJV, LEB, and NASB

mature men was a well-established Jewish tradition. The Jews maintained that tradition throughout their history. The NT writers used the expression *the elders* most often to refer to the leaders of the Jews. For example, the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes is referred to as *the elders*. Those same elders were the ones who crucified Jesus. Since he challenged the system they controlled, and they didn't want to lose their power, they had to destroy him.

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the High Priest, who was named Caiaphas, and plotted in order that they could arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him (Matthew 26:3; LEB).

... while he was still speaking, Judas—one of the twelve—arrived, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders (Mark 14:43; LEB).

We see that a group of leading men can be a blessing or a curse. It all depends on their character: good or evil. Consider the history of Israel: the tradition of male leadership had become tainted by corruption by the time Jesus came along. The positive part of the tradition—the leadership of older men became part of the Christian Church. The key difference between Jewish and Christian elders was that the Christian elders understood that leadership is a service. They put themselves under the authority of Christ.

Paul says that men's leadership in the Church was based on the Law. That means that it was a tradition passed down from the OT to the New.

versions of the Bible (Search made on the website <https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?quicksearch=elders&qsversion=NIV%3BNKJV%3BLEB%3BNASB> on November 7, 2015). One example of an OT verse which demonstrates how important the elders were in OT Israel is the following:

Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God (Exodus 18:12).

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

However, Paul also taught that male leadership is based upon something greater than tradition. It's based upon God's Creation design! So male leadership is not just a Jewish tradition. It is a tradition, indeed; but it's greater than a tradition. It's a tradition founded upon the natural order. It's a Creation tradition. Pay close attention to how Paul uses the word *for* here:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission... For Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Timothy 2:11-13; NKJV).

From Acts 11:30 onward you'll notice that the term *elders* is no longer used to refer to Jewish leaders, but to refer to the leading men of the Church. It is used eight more times in Acts (after Acts 11:30), and 9 more times in other NT books, specifically referring to Church leadership. What happens in Acts 11 is a major historical shift: it is the transition from the Jewish to the Christian leadership of God's people.

The entire connotation of the word *elders* changes after Acts 11, going from a negative to a positive connotation. Here's one of the NT passages that has that positive connotation. It's referring to Christian elders:

... by it [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony (Hebrews 11:2; NKJV).

In our Western society, people generally have a disdain for the elderly. We tend to value youth over age. By the time the Jews crucified Jesus, the Jewish elders were corrupt and had little credibility. However, a Christian elder is a man of honor. If you have any doubts as to the honor associated with being an elder, consider that they are mentioned no less than 12 times as the men—the only men besides Jesus himself—who are in Heaven right now! In fact, God has given them the honor of sitting in a circle around his Throne! Is there a greater honor in the universe? Jesus is also there, “standing at the center of the Throne.”

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders (Revelation 4:4).

...male leadership is based upon something greater than tradition. It's based upon God's Creation design!

I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the Throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders (Revelation 5:6).

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God (Revelation 11:16).

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the Throne. And they cried: ‘Amen, Hallelujah!’ (Revelation 19:4)

ii. Appointed by apostles

Titus was sent out from his local church so that he might accompany Paul on mission trips, which makes Titus an apostle also. He stayed behind in Crete, an island where Paul had started churches—guess why? Titus stayed behind in Crete in order to establish elders in the churches there. This is a significant fact because it proves that elders are appointed by apostles.

...elders
are appointed
by apostles...

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you (Titus 1:5).

God has determined that authority be transferred from leaders downward in the Church. Apostles should establish elders; and elders, in turn, should establish other men in the ministry. How do elders establish other men in the ministry? Through the simple but profound act of the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is not mere ceremony—it is the real transferring of the anointing of the Holy Spirit from one man to another. Church elders administer the anointing of the Holy Spirit, thereby establishing other men in leadership.

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you (1 Timothy 4:14).

Elders also establish accountability among church leadership through this same laying on of hands. For example, if the elders put a man who is not yet ready in the ministry, and that man sins, then the elders share in that sin. God will hold them responsible because they took the decision to place that

immature man into the ministry when he was yet unprepared.

Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin (1 Timothy 5:22; NASB).

Due to their experience and wisdom, elders have special authority in the Church. They work together in brotherly love, sharing the burden of leadership. Not just one man is responsible for the teaching, training, or care of the flock. They work as a team.

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care... (1 Peter 5:1-2).

iii. Keeping each other in check

Even Peter, the man Jesus personally set as the first leader of God's Church, served the people along with a group of elders. Far from being independent, Peter was kept in check by the Jerusalem church board of elders consisting of the apostles John, Paul, Barnabas, and others. Those elders shared authority with Peter. They were on the same board with him. Peter didn't have any fixed position of leadership within the dynamic of the board. In fact, by the time the First Council of Jerusalem convened, the Bible clearly shows that the group of elders wasn't being led by Peter anymore—it was being led by James!

The apostles and elders met to consider this question [the issue of whether to circumcise Gentile converts]. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago [referring to Cornelius' conversion] God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the Gospel and believe ...'

Far from being independent, Peter was kept in check by the Jerusalem church board of elders...

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up. ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me. Simon [Peter] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles... It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God (Acts 15:6-7, 12-14, 19).

...Peter was part of a board of elders, and... Peter didn't have the final word on how to steer the ministry of the Church.

You can see in this passage that Peter was part of a board of elders, and that Peter didn't have the final word on how to steer the ministry of the Church. His decisions were subject to the Jerusalem church board of elders. On one occasion, Paul rebuked Peter in front of the whole group of leaders, pointing out that Peter was wrong. Paul wasn't trying to disgrace or humiliate Peter; nor was Paul vying for preeminence. There was no fighting amongst each other for leadership, as there is in churches today. Rather, Paul rebuked Peter as a brother, in love. Paul was making sure that the Church wouldn't get misled by Peter.

When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For... he [Peter] used to eat with the Gentiles... But... he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group... I said to Cephas in front of them all, ‘You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?’ (Galatians 2:11-12, 14)

iv. Brotherly love

Because Paul spoke on God's behalf for the good of the Church, and because he was right, Peter accepted Paul's correction. We know that Peter accepted it because Peter went on to call Paul a *dear brother*. Notice how highly Peter spoke of Paul in his second epistle:

... as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters (2 Peter 3:15-16).

This kind of open environment, one in which any church leader who is in error or sin can be confronted before all, is still the mark of the true Church. Remember that Peter and Paul didn't belong to the same local congregation, but that didn't stop them from dealing with each other man-to-man. They were and are part of something greater than a local congregation. They were acting like men who were part of the Body of Christ.

The team of elders sets the tone for the Church. Through them, all believers are assured that their pastors and leaders are kept in check. The duty of elders confronting one other is their labor of love. Their diligence in this work gives believers the confidence that they're not going to be misled, but even more importantly: It infuses fear in believers.

The team of elders sets the tone for the Church.

Any time an elder is rebuked, it is a warning for all. What does that warning say? It says: "We show no partiality. Everyone is subject to discipline." When an elder is rebuked, it shows that we are God's saints, his holy people. That's the tenor of Paul's words in this next passage, as he sets down the rule for the correction of an elder:

... those elders who are sinning you [Timothy, a pastor] are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning (1 Timothy 5:20).

So men in the Church leadership are supposed to be frank with each other. They are accountable to each other and their accountability is an example for all of us. A team of elders is God's tool for keeping the Church in line. Elders interact for the good of all the Church, whether there is friction between them or peace. Whether they agree or disagree.

b. Four-fold leadership

At this point, we're going to take a look at each of the four particular leadership roles one-by-one. As you study each role, you'll comprehend the wisdom of God much better. He knows how to build his Church, and he will do it through people. That's his wise plan. We're honored to be a part of it. As you look closely at the roles of Church leaders, you'll see and study God's strategy for the success of the saints and the salvation of souls.

i. Apostles

Since the Bible tells us “first apostles,” we’ll study the role of apostles first. What is an apostle? How many are there? Are there only twelve? What does an apostle do exactly? Are there any apostles around today? These are all important questions. Let’s see how God answers them through the Bible. We’ll start by affirming two things: 1. apostles are certainly around today, and 2. there are many more than twelve!

1) The most important leaders

...they are the most important leaders in the Church.

To understand what apostles are, it helps to recognize firstly that they are the most important leaders in the Church. They are named first on the following lists of church leaders, and they’re first for a reason. Ask yourself what that reason might be.

... God has appointed in the Church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then... (1 Corinthians 12:28; NASB).

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12; NASB, MacArthur).

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they (1 Corinthians 12:29; NASB)?

... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone (Ephesians 2:20; NASB).

The word *apostle* literally means “one who is sent out.” It is from the Greek word *apostolos* [ἀπόστολος]. Break the word down and you get *apo* (the Greek word *από* means *away from* or *out*) and *stello* (which is the Greek word *στέλλω* meaning *sent*), hence the literal meaning of *apostle* is “someone who is sent out.”

It’s helpful to use the modern term *missionary* in place of the word *apostle* when we’re talking about apostles because

missionary denotes the idea of “one who is sent out” much better than the word *apostle*; at least to the modern mind it does. The word *apostle* has a lot of baggage from previous centuries. As a word, *apostle* has become quite stigmatized. Today, it is charged with connotations that it didn’t originally have.

Our Lord Jesus chose a handful of missionaries to be especially close to him; we call them *the Twelve Apostles*. They were the following men:

- Simon Peter
- Andrew
- James
- John
- Phillip
- Bartholomew-Nathaniel
- Matthew-Levi
- Thomas
- Thaddeus-Judas (not Iscariot)
- Simon the Canaanite (or Zealot)
- James the Less
- Judas Iscariot

Although most Christians would only be able to name about half of them, these men as a group have become so famous, the word *apostle* is normally understood as a reference to one of them. However, nobody would dare say that the last one, Judas Iscariot, has fulfilled the duties of an apostle—right? Everybody knows that he was disqualified as an apostle. Therefore, we see the principle that an apostle is known by his actions—not by the title *apostle*.

**...an
apostle
is known
by his
ac-
tions—
not by
the title
apostle.**

Paul is an example of a man who everybody considers an apostle, but he wasn’t one of the Twelve. Paul qualified as an apostle through his actions. He fulfilled his mission to the Gentiles, a ministry of evangelization and church planting. Many men called themselves *apostles* in Paul’s day, and many of those men put Paul down, criticizing him as a

failure. However, Paul's labors, suffering, and pain spoke for themselves. They qualified him as an apostle, so he defended that, as you can see in the following passages:

I am the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13).

Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:2).

... what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are [as apostles] in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles...

Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also... in whatever respect anyone else is bold—I speak in foolishness—I am just as bold myself. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death (2 Corinthians 11:12, 18, 21-23).

The apostolic ministry lives on today...

The apostolic ministry lives on today through the men whose actions speak for themselves. Men are still being called to the apostolic ministry today. It began with the Twelve, but it didn't end with them. Today, missionaries continue to plant churches, and to establish people in the faith. Can you name any you know?

2) No confusion

Today there is much confusion about what an apostle is. Men who don't deserve to be called *apostles* are called *apostles*; while other men deserve to be called *apostles*, but are ignored. Legitimate men who are sent by God are disregarded and rejected in churches everywhere—they are not even allowed to preach in a Sunday morning service. Sound familiar? Jesus was rejected in many Jewish synagogues. They even tried to kill him when he preached in his home congregation in Nazareth.

Paul was unwelcome in many Christian congregations. That didn't stop him from being absolutely certain and

confident that he was an apostle. He wouldn't let anyone convince him otherwise. He affirmed that he was an apostle in spite of his detractors. He defended himself because people who were under his ministry were getting confused about what an apostle was.

People are confused about what an apostle is these days too, so we have outlined five aspects of what an apostle is. These points are taken from Paul's defense of his apostleship. Reflect on them, and that should take away any confusion about what an apostle is.

People are confused about what an apostle is these days...

1. A true apostle is marked by a powerful anointing. I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12).

2. One becomes an apostle through the will and command of God.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (this exact phrase is found in 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1).

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior (1 Timothy 1:1).

3. To be an apostle, one must be appointed by God, not by men.

I was appointed a herald and an apostle (1 Timothy 2:7).

I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher³⁴... (2 Timothy 1:1).

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father (Galatians 1:1).

4. An apostle is confirmed an apostle through the fact that people are under his ministry.

Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our

³⁴ This passage clearly demonstrates that whether a man is a teacher (the lowest level of Church leadership), or an apostle (the highest), he still needs to be appointed. It shows that a man can feel just as proud to be appointed a teacher, as he can of being

Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1-2).

5. Apostles have the authority to correct and discipline Christians.

... as apostles of Christ, we could have asserted our authority (1 Thessalonians 2:6).

... some have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I am coming to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will know not the talk of the ones who have become arrogant, but the power. For the Kingdom of God is not with talk, but with power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness? (1 Corinthians 4:18-21; LEB)

3) Lesser-known apostles

three apostles who are not well known To remind ourselves of what an apostle is—a church leader who is sent out to establish churches—consider three apostles who are not well known: Barnabas, Andronicus, and Junias. First of all, Barnabas was a great apostle, but do you ever hear people mention “the apostle Barnabas”? Probably not. The Bible does speak of him as Paul’s first missionary partner, and names him an *apostle*:

...when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd (Acts 14:14).

The Bible also speaks of Andronicus and Junias³⁵ among the apostles in the church at Rome. Not only are these two called *apostles*, but Paul highlights that they had seniority over him. These two men were in prison with Paul. They were Jews, and had become Christians before Paul. As great as they were, why do we never hear anyone preach about or even name “the great apostles Andronicus and Junias”? Never. The reason is because these two never

appointed an apostle.

³⁵ There is debate among Bible scholars about whether Andronicus and Junias were actually apostles or whether they were just

well-known *among* the apostles. Most Bible interpreters lean towards interpreting the passage as saying that they were just well-known among the apostles, and not actually apostles (See <https://bible.org/article/junia-among-apostles-double-identification-problem-romans-167>; retrieved on Dec. 20, 2015), but we differ with that interpretation. Why do we differ? Primarily because Paul wouldn't use that phrase. It's not his way of speaking because he was against people putting any importance on being popular among the apostles.

In another passage, Paul says that it didn't matter to him whether he had a good or bad reputation among the leading apostles. He even said it made no difference to him who the apostles were! If that were so, why would he put importance on Andronicus and Junias' reputation among the apostles? Did it all of the sudden become important to Paul? Did he have a double standard? Was it was important for other people to have the apostles' esteem, while it wasn't important for him? We think not.

As for those who were held in high esteem [James, Peter, and John]—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message... God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas [Peter], and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship... (Galatians 1:6-9)

Someone might rightly ask: "How could Andronicus and Junias be well-known apostles if they didn't go down in history?" That's a good question. A proper response would be: "What happened to the apostles Bartholomew, James the Less, Simon the Zealot, and Thaddaeus-Judas? Why didn't *they* go down in history? They were, after all, among Jesus' Twelve apostles, but who ever teaches about them? Who knows anything about them?"

Great apostles don't necessarily become famous. History has by-and-large been passed down to us by worldly-minded historians (often funded by government officials whose political agendas are strongly opposed to the Gospel). These historians very rarely record the stories of apostles. It's not convenient for them. Not only do they not see history through the eyes of God; they actually oppose the work of God. They make sure that apostles such as Andronicus and Junias are forgotten.

became famous among men. What they are in the eyes of God remains to be seen.

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me (Romans 16:17; NASB).

...these
two
never
became
famous
among
men.

Now, although the name *Junias* was mostly a female name when the Letter to the Romans was penned, it was a gender-neutral name. In other words, it could have been used for a man or a woman. However, since Junias is named in the Book of Romans as an *apostle*, we know that Junias must have been a man.

Some have proposed that Junias was a female, teaching that Junias and Andronicus were a missionary couple. Unfortunately, that couldn't be true. Just two verses earlier, in Romans 16:3-5, Paul addresses Priscilla and Aquilla, a famous missionary couple, members of Paul's team. Those two beloved companions of Paul ministered from their home through a house church in Rome—but Paul doesn't call *them* missionaries!

Paul doesn't call Priscilla and Aquilla missionaries because they weren't. Not that they weren't capable teachers anointed by God. Indeed, Priscilla was a woman so anointed with knowledge that she was capable of teaching the Gospel to the knowledgeable Apollos—but she is never called an *apostle* simply because women don't qualify as apostles.

The truth people don't want to accept is that it's abundantly clear in the Bible that women should not have authority over men in the Church. Since an apostle has the highest degree of authority in the Church, it's inconceivable that a woman should be an apostle. That's the main reason we know that Junias must have been a man. He is called an *apostle*, and apostles cannot be women.

Lastly, if we simply consider the context, we will see that Junias had to be a man. The passage says that Junias was in prison with Paul—does it not? The Roman government didn't put women in Roman jails. In fact, there's no country in the world which would do that today! Women are not prisoners with men in jails.

4) Jesus' seventy apostles

On one occasion, Jesus sent out seventy³⁶ men—and those men were just as much apostles as the Twelve, for they were *sent out* by our Lord. Jesus had enough confidence in these seventy men to charge them with the preaching of the Gospel. He asked them to open the way for him as he went from city to city, and they did so. These were legitimate apostles if there ever were legitimate apostles, authorized by Jesus himself!

... the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of him “... heal those in it [the city] who are sick, and say to them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you...’ The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name...’ ‘I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you... the spirits are subject to you...’ (Luke 10:1, 9, 17, 19-20; NASB).

Since the passage literally says “the Lord also appointed another³⁷ seventy,” the emphasis is that there was another group of apostles. God is telling us that Jesus didn’t have only twelve apostles, he had seventy more. The passage expresses that that these seventy men were seventy *other* apostles. Analyze the Greek³⁸ and you’ll see that there’s no doubt about it: The seventy were just as much apostles as the original Twelve.

You may think that we don’t know anything about these seventy apostles, but that’s not true. We know about at least two of them: Justus and Matthias. These two were among the seventy because we know that they had been with Je-

**The
seventy
were
just as
much
apostles
as the
original
Twelve.**

³⁶ Some translations say that the number was seventy-two, not seventy.

³⁷ This word does not mean another kind of person. It means that there was another *number*—not twelve but seventy! Indeed, they were the same kind of person as the Twelve. These men were apostles.

³⁸ The Greek literally reads like this: “Appointed the Lord also

sus, that he had chosen them from the ministry of John the Baptist, and that they persevered in the faith all the way to our Lord's resurrection.

There was a pool of men who had been with the Twelve during the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry—from that group, the eleven chose Matthias as Judas Iscariot's replacement.

'... it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.' So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias (Acts 1:21-23).

**Cleopas,
a companion
of the
Twelve
Apostles.**

So there are at least 68 names of select apostles, men commissioned by Jesus himself, which we don't know—or do we? We know one more name, actually—Cleopas, a companion of the Twelve Apostles. He and a friend of his got a lengthy teaching from Jesus himself on the Road to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection. Their conversation reveals how close Cleopas and his friend were to the Twelve Apostles.

... that same day two of them [the *them* here means two *apostles* since v. 10 shows that *apostles* are the subject of the sentence] were going to a village called Emmaus... As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them...

One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he [Jesus] asked.

'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied... we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel... In addition, some of our women

others seventy" (retrieved from <http://biblehub.com/interlinear/luke/10.htm> on February 5, 2016).

amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body... Then some of our companions [John and Peter] went to the tomb... (Luke 24:13-15, 18-19, 21-24).

The privilege of the Twelve was not that they were the only apostles—no. They were not the only men sent out by Jesus. The privilege of the Twelve was that Jesus chose them to be close to him and to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom. The Twelve became intimate friends of Jesus. Indeed, even Judas Iscariot became one of Jesus' intimate friends.

Jesus chose them to be close to him and to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom.

... [the psalmist prophesied the betrayal of Judas saying:] my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the House of God, as we walked about among the worshippers (Psalm 55:13-14).

Jesus chose the Twelve to be with him, and to send them out as preachers. He wanted them to do the work of apostles, and they did. However, that doesn't mean that the Twelve were the only apostles!

He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach (Matthew 3:14).

5) Is this your calling?

Do you think that you are called to be an apostle? You have to have a deep desire to see congregations grow in sound doctrine, love, and service to God to be an apostle. Apostles are sent out because they deepen people in the faith. They live to see believers advance in the faith.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect (Titus 1:1).

Do you want to be sent out? That's a good desire, but the key to going out is to settle *in* first. In other words, you have to fulfill your ministry in your local congregation before you can be sent out from it. Are you serving God faithfully already in a church? If you are, then see what it takes to be sent *out* from your church. Investigate by asking the pastors or church leaders. Ask them if they think you are ready to be sent out—and if they would send you.

If you do everything you can do in your local church, the leaders will eventually be left with no other option but to send you out. Just as it's the nature of parents to send out a 20-year old son to college or the military due to his reaching the age of maturity, it's the nature of a Christian church to send out mature believers. That's what happened with Paul and Barnabas. They were serving diligently in the church at Antioch, and the day came for them to be sent out. Observe in the passage below that they were teachers and prophets before they were apostles.

... in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas... [others] and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:1-3).

ii. Prophets

How important should prophecy be for the Church?

Now we come to the role of the Christian prophet—but before we look at the prophets themselves, let's ask ourselves: How important should prophecy be for the Church? God says it's essential. In fact, throughout all of history, God's people have been led by prophets. Should it be any different now? We respond with a resounding *no*. The very Gospel was revealed to us by the prophets.

... which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it [the Gospel] has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit (Ephesians 3:5; NASB).

Is it just a coincidence that the Bible says that prophets are the second most important leaders in the Church? Does it mean nothing that they come right after apostles on God's lists of Church leaders? With all the talk about the Church's apostles, where is the talk about our prophets? Who are these men?

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

All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they (1 Corinthians 12:29; NASB)?

... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone (Ephesians 2:20; NASB).

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12; NASB, MacArthur).

Where do prophets come from? Is there a seminary somewhere where they can be trained? Is there a training program that can produce them? Probably not, but they certainly do develop and mature in the midst of the Church at large. There may be some churches where the gift is used more frequently, but Christian prophets will have to mature by using their gift in different contexts. They should minister from church to church.

Now at this time some prophets came down from [the church in] Jerusalem to [the church in] Antioch (Acts 11:27; NASB).

Now, God has always been the one who inspires the prophets. That's why no Christian should ever think lightly of prophets or look down upon prophecies. Christian prophets speak on God's behalf. They are from God.

... the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets... (Revelation 22:6; NASB).

... do not despise prophetic utterances (1 Thessalonians 5:20; NASB).

Prophets should be more than welcome in any church—but it's evident that they are not. Although God inspires the spirits of the prophets, people in churches reject prophecies, turn prophets away, and close their hearts to the prophetic ministry. The situation in Evangelical churches is grave. It seems that we have forgotten that even Jesus was a prophet.

Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own

...Christian prophets will have to mature by using their gift in different contexts.

people; you must listen to everything he tells you, and it will be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet will be destroyed utterly from the people' (Acts 3:22-23).

We've observed that when a Muslim says to a Christian that the Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, the natural first response of the Christian is "No, he wasn't"—but he was! The Early Christian Church wasn't afraid to affirm that Jesus was a prophet, why are we? Jesus' role as prophet was a central belief of the Early Church in Jesus. For them, to be a prophet was a great honor. They knew that Jesus had that honor, and more.

'... Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people' (Luke 24:19).

How will we understand what God wants us to do if we don't listen to prophecies? We can't. What does God do without first revealing it to prophets? Nothing.

Surely, the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

1) From the Church's start

Prophecy is just as much a ministry for Christians under the New Covenant as it was for Jews under the Old.

So where are the prophets today? There is a general notion that prophecy is a ministry God relegated to the OT. Indeed, it was an important job in the OT—but it still is an important job. Prophecy is just as much a ministry for Christians under the New Covenant as it was for Jews under the Old. Please read the following two NT passages carefully. In them we learn that Christian prophets had a vital ministry when the Church started. Notice that six prophets are named: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Paul, and Agabus.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul [that's the apostle Paul] (Acts 13:1; NASB).

As we were staying there [in Caesarea at the house of Philip the evangelist] for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea (Acts 21:10; NASB).

Prophecy is not what you might think it is. It's not a ministry reserved for eccentric hermits or misfits. It's not the ministry of social deviants bent on upsetting communities with threats of the day of doom. On the contrary, it's a very coherent ministry. It is a ministry for intelligent and knowledgeable Christians like Paul (who is listed among the prophets above).

...a ministry for intelligent and knowledgeable Christians...

Prophecy is a ministry to be carried out with wisdom, knowledge, and self-control. Prophets know exactly what they are saying. They control their words, and they boldly direct their words towards their hearers.

... and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (1 Corinthians 14:32; NASB).

One important way in which prophecy should be used is when elders lay their hands on people in a time of prayer. Elders in the Church do well to prophesy while they are actively transmitting spiritual gifts.

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery [group of elders] (1 Timothy 4:14; NASB).

Prophecy should also be used to encourage and strengthen a congregation during preaching. What better way to get a long message across to a listening congregation than by spicing it up with prophecy?

Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message (Acts 15:32; NASB).

Prophecy is also an effective way for women to develop a home-based ministry. Women can prophesy to anyone who will come to visit their home. The deacon Phillip encouraged his daughters to carry out a significant ministry of prophecy.

Now this man [Phillip] had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9; NASB).

2) To the Church's end

The prophetic gift was in the Church at its inception, and it will be in the Church straight into the Last Times. The Holy Spirit established the prophetic role in the Church from the time it started, and it's not going away! The Book of Revelation mentions Christian prophets numerous times. Through Revelation, we know that prophets will play an important role in the believing community as God's final judgments fall upon the Earth. Prophets are listed right alongside apostles and the rest of God's saints as the key figures of the Last Times.

**...the
key fig-
ures of
the Last
Times...**

... the time came... to reward your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, the small and the great (Revelation 11:18; NASB).

... they poured out the blood of saints and prophets (Revelation 16:6; NASB).

Rejoice over her, O Heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her (Revelation 18:20; NASB).

And in her [Great Babylon] was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth (Revelation 18:24; NASB).

The prophets are our brothers! That's what the Bible calls them. Do you feel that way about the prophets? Do you even know any prophets? If you don't yet, when will you start?

[An angel said to John] '... I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book' (Revelation 22:9; NASB).

3) Getting prophecy back

Indeed, prophecy was considered by the Early Church to be the greatest spiritual gift. It was so highly valued that a

great number of believers pursued it, and got it. Paul taught that it was the greatest gift, greater than tongues. What was his reason? He said that it was because prophecy is especially useful for evangelizing unbelievers—while tongues tends to scare unbelievers away.

... desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy... one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation... one who prophesies edifies the church... prophecy is for a sign... to those who believe...

Therefore, if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you (1 Corinthians 14:1, 3-4, 22-25; NASB).

From this passage, you see that prophecy is given to believers as a sign—a sign that God is really among us. Paul encouraged all Christians to prophesy in church meetings. He trusted that if we do, then prophecy would act powerfully upon the hearts of the unbelievers who are visiting with us, and bring them to repentance!

Prophecy was a common ministry and a popular gift during the ministry of the Early Church. There were so many people in the church of Corinth anointed with the gift of prophecy that prophets had to take turns (two or three at a time) to speak! That's how common prophesy was for the first Christians in their meetings. Is that how it is in your congregation?

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment (1 Corinthians 14:29; NASB).

You might be thinking: “I’m glad we don’t have prophecy in our church—since so many people falsify prophecies.” Ah, but that’s the point of the last verse above, the verse where we read “... let the other pass judgment.” That Holy Spirit-inspired command means that prophecies must not

...prophecy is given to believers as a sign—a sign that God is really among us.

only be spoken, they must be scrutinized. Christians should listen with a critical ear to prophecies.

...they weighed the prophecies they heard against the perfect prophecy...

How did the believers in Paul's churches weigh prophecies? They subjected prophecies to the truth of Scriptures by comparing prophecy to Scripture. They examined prophecies through comparison. Christians didn't just blindly believe prophecies, they weighed the prophecies they heard against the perfect prophecy—the one that was made more sure, the Bible.

So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place (2 Peter 1:19; NASB).

Going back to the idea of *passing judgment*—that phrase means that Christians would take the character and holiness of the person who was prophesying into consideration. They knew that some people considered themselves prophets when they really weren't prophets at all. They knew, like Paul did, that some people liked to think they were spiritual, but they really weren't.

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment (1 Corinthians 14:37; NASB).

4) It's coming back

The gift of prophecy belongs to us as God's Church. It is ours, but we have to use it. "Use it or lose it" is a true maxim, so we have to revive the tradition of prophecy in the Church. If we don't, how will we possibly receive the words of the Two Witnesses when they appear? These are the two great prophets God will send to the Church to assist us in navigating a straight path through the Tribulation. What person will be capable of heeding their words? Only the person who knows prophecy and how to discern truth from lies.

I will appoint my Two Witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth... They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to

strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want (Revelation 11:3, 5-6).

These two prophets—the greatest leaders of the Church since Paul—will proclaim the truth of the Gospel while the Antichrist gains his global following. By the time he rules over the Earth, who will be discerning enough to heed their words? Who will be able to bear their exhortations? These two End Time prophets will stop the rain, turn rivers into blood, and invoke plagues on the Earth. Only people with a mind sensitive to prophecy will understand why they command such disasters.

...two prophets—the greatest leaders of the Church since Paul...

Today more than ever we need a heart to believe in God's prophets. One of the best ways for us to be ready for the ministry of the Two Witnesses is to listen to prophecies now, and to study them well. Their ministry will last for three-and-a-half years, the period of the first Tribulation. It won't be easy to heed their words, or to stand with them. Blessed are the people who have become accustomed to hearing prophecies now, the people who are currently sensitive to prophecies. They are the only ones who will have the ears to hear when the time comes.

iii. Evangelists

After apostles and prophets, *evangelists* are Jesus' gift to his Church. Just as God gave us his greatest gift in the person of his Son, so does our Lord Jesus give us his greatest gifts through people. We should thank God for the evangelists he has given the Church; but who are those evangelists?

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service (Ephesians 4:11-12; NASB, MacArthur).

The modern Church knows little of evangelists. It's not familiar with God's definition of an evangelist because Evangelicals have redefined the term to suit its apostasy. Most American Evangelicals think that an evangelist is someone who preaches at large meetings organized by local churches. Like the Billy Graham campaigns, there would

be special music and invitation for the repentant to come forward to receive Christ in prayer. Unfortunately, that's not what NT evangelists did.

The man who best embodies the Bible definition of an evangelist is Phillip—not the fisherman who was one of the Twelve Apostles, but the man who was one of the first seven deacons. Now, why do we know that Phillip is the model evangelist? It's simple: He's the only person ever called an *evangelist* the entire Bible.

...the only person ever called an evangelist the entire Bible.

On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven [first deacons], we stayed with him (Acts 21:8; NASB).

How does the Bible describe the ministry of this man, the only man God calls an *evangelist* in the Scriptures? First of all, it says that he preached the Gospel in every city he visited. That means that an evangelist is someone who is busy preaching the Gospel wherever he goes.

... Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the Gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40; NASB).

The problem here is that very few Evangelicals even know what the Gospel is. Phillip certainly knew what it was, as did Jesus and the apostles—but the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God, a message which ushers people into the New Covenant through baptism, is hardly ever heard nowadays.

Timothy is the only other evangelist we know about. Paul told Timothy to fulfill his ministry by doing the work of an evangelist. The phrase “the work of an evangelist” implies that evangelists have a certain line of work, a duty. Christ gave us some evangelists, and they are the men who fulfill the work of evangelism in the Church.

And he [Christ] gave some... evangelists (Ephesians 4:11).

But you [Timothy], be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:5; NASB).

Now, let's try to define exactly what the function of an evangelist is.

1) The Gospel to all the world

What is being an evangelist about? Quite simply, it's about preaching the Gospel. In Greek, the word *euangelion* [εὐαγγέλιον] means *Gospel*. It's a compound word with two parts: *eu* = good, and *angelion* = news. The Gospel is the *good news* of the Kingdom. An evangelist is a man who specializes in preaching the good news of the Kingdom in such a way that people come to Christ.

...it's about preaching the Gospel.

Surely the Twelve Apostles fit the bill for being evangelists. Didn't they preach the Gospel of the Kingdom? The next verse proves that they did:

... they [the apostles] began going throughout the villages, preaching the Gospel and healing everywhere (Luke 9:6; NASB).

Certainly, Jesus charged the apostles with the responsibility of preaching the Gospel. He gave them this charge even while he was still with them, and he commanded that they preach to all the nations even before he was resurrected.

The Gospel must first be preached to all the nations... (Mark 13:10; NASB).

While he was with them, Jesus reminded the apostles of their worldwide commission. He exhorted them that shouldn't only preach in Israel, but that they should preach the Gospel to all people, even to the uttermost parts of the world. That command is not just an expression of Jesus' love for the world; it is the expression of Jesus' desire for the apostles to be evangelists.

... this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

2) Preach and baptize

Jesus commanded the Twelve to evangelize, but he gave them instructions. He wanted them to evangelize in a particular way. In other words, it wasn't just the message—

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the method mattered too. The apostles had to tell people to repent of their sins, to believe in the message, and to be baptized. That was their 3-part strategy for evangelism. The commission Jesus gave the apostles shows us that any true evangelization is grounded on the three responses: repentance, belief, and baptism.

... repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his [the Christ's] name to all nations...
(Luke 24:47)

... he said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved' (Mark 16:15-16; LEB).

What Evangelicals have all but forgotten today is that baptism is part of evangelization. There are many Evangelical pastors today who outright deny the role of baptism in evangelization; but the Bible says that baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. Does forgiveness seem like part of evangelization to you? Well, it is, and God requires baptism for forgiveness.

To see how important baptism is, remember Phillip—the only person in the Bible called an *evangelist*—and take note of his technique. In the following passage, you see exactly how he evangelized. When the Samaritans believed in the message, Phillip made sure that they were baptized—but Phillip considered water baptism a small matter. His goal for his converts was for them to receive the baptism of the Spirit. That's what he commanded his hearers to really seek out. Baptism in water is just one step on the way to getting the Holy Spirit.

... when they believed Philip preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike... when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For he had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:12, 14-16; NASB).

When Phillip evangelized the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip's message again went directly to baptism. Phillip baptized the eunuch immediately after the eunuch professed faith in Christ Jesus as Lord.

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, water. What hinders me from being baptized?'

Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'

And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'

So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him (Acts 8:35-38).

As you read the next passage, you'll notice that Peter had the same method as Philip. When he evangelized 3,000 people on Pentecost, he told them exactly how to respond to the message. How so? Peter commanded them to be baptized!

When the people heard this [Peter's preaching], they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:37-39, 41).

3) Jesus left his mark

Most believers are quick to point out that Jesus is our model evangelist, the preacher *par excellence*; but do they know that a study of his ministry is the best study of evangelism available? Our Lord Jesus was supremely wise in how he dealt with each person, being gentle with the humble, and firm with the proud. He ministered with healings and resurrections to children, adults, and the elderly. In addition, Jesus used vivid, well-illustrated parables to make his message easy to understand.

**the best
study
of evangelism
available**

His passion for evangelism was so strong...

There are so many passages that show us how Jesus preached the Gospel, that there's simply not enough space in one book to contain them. That's why instead of writing here about Jesus' evangelism, we'll simply include some passages that demonstrate his disciples' commitment to evangelism. If we do that, it will prove how powerful Jesus' passion for evangelism was. His passion for evangelism was so strong that he left an indelible mark on others to do the same!

... and there they continued to preach the Gospel (Acts 14:7; NASB).

... [the apostles said] We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the Gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a Living God, who made the heaven³⁹ and the earth and the sea and all that is in them (Acts 14:15; NASB).

After they had preached the Gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch (Acts 14:21; NASB).

When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the Gospel to them (Acts 16:10; NASB).

... God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the Gospel of his Son, is my witness... (Romans 1:9; NASB)

... for my part, I am eager to preach the Gospel to you also who are in Rome (Romans 1:15; NASB).

... I aspired to preach the Gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20; NASB).

³⁹ The word here is *ouranon* (οὐρανὸν), a singular noun in the Greek. It's normally used to describe the place where God abides, but here it refers to *the sky*. We know this from the context. How so? Well, Paul describes here to the Earth, the sea, and the *sky*—so Paul is talking about Creation. Since God's Heaven existed before Creation, it's beyond Creation, and it couldn't be what Paul is talking about here.

4) Power evangelism

Here's something else you need to know: A true biblical evangelist is a person anointed with power. Just like Jesus, the apostles, Phillip, and Paul; an modern-day evangelist needs to perform miracles and signs. God gives gifts to evangelists like tongues, healings, deliverance (that's authority to cast out demons), and miracles. God, in his wisdom, gives these gifts so that an evangelist might be able to convince people of the truth of the Gospel more readily.

A true biblical evangelist is a person anointed with power.

... in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ (Romans 15:19; NASB).

And they went out and proclaimed everywhere, while the Lord was working together with them and confirming the message through the accompanying signs (Mark 16:20; LEB).

Jesus never sent out anyone to preach without first equipping that person with the corresponding gifts. Are you equipped with power to preach? You'll need it if you're an evangelist. You'll have it if you're genuinely sent by the Lord.

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him, and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness... These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons' (Matthew 10:1, 5, 8).

... the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of him to every city and place where he himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "... heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:1, 9; NASB).

Even after Christ's ascension, when apostles were on their own, the most salient characteristic of a true evangelistic ministry was signs and wonders. Consider Phillip's ministry, described here:

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed... (Acts 8:5-7; NASB).

God gives miraculous power in order to confirm the veracity of the message being preached.

Power in evangelism is just as necessary for an evangelist today as it was in times past. Again, the reason is this: God gives miraculous power in order to confirm the veracity of the message being preached.

iv. Pastor-Teachers

In addition to the three leadership roles we have just described, there is a fourth: pastor-teachers. Now, these are the most necessary men in the Church. Who doesn't need to taught? Who doesn't need to be cared for? Pastor-teachers are the men who are directly responsible for the care of God's people. They serve in a local congregation, working together to perfect every believer.

God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers... (1 Corinthians 12:28).

You will observe that these pastor-teachers are the third men named on Paul's 1 Corinthians list above. Why is that? Didn't Paul put them fourth on his Ephesians 4 list? Indeed, he did:

... he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers (Ephesians 4:11; NASB, MacArthur).

Here's the explanation for the two different positions of pastor-teachers on Paul's lists: The Ephesian 4 leadership list has a broader context. The Ephesians 4 list is not about the context of a local church. Paul lists pastor-teachers in the third place on the 1 Corinthians list precisely because the context is the local church.

Paul is showing in Corinthians the roles of leaders "in the church." Do you notice that key phrase? In other words, the

1 Corinthians list describes those who labor *within* a local congregation. Consider this: Evangelists labor *outside* of their local congregation. They are outreach because they work with unbelievers. Evangelists are the leaders of a ministry which goes beyond the church doors.

So within a local congregation, only apostles and prophets have more authority than pastor-teachers. That makes pastor-teachers influential men in their congregations. Indeed they are, since according to the next passage they have at least seven other ministries under their oversight:

- miracle-workers
- healers
- helpers
- guides
- language-speakers
- interpreters
- deacons

God has placed in the Church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:28-30).

Do you have anointed people ministering in your local congregation? The only kinds of people who should be laboring in the ministry of the Church are people who have authentic spiritual gifts. If you don't have anointed people ministering in your congregation, it's a dead church. Furthermore, if the leaders in your church are not equipping the people to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit, then they are not fulfilling their duty. Each person must use whatever gift God has given them in service to the Church.

And he [Christ] gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-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; NASB, MacArthur).

If you don't have anointed people ministering in your congregation, it's a dead church.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10).

1) Overseers

An overseer is simply a kind of pastor-teacher. There is a lot of confusion about what an overseer⁴⁰ is, but there's no need for confusion. An overseer is simply a kind of pastor-teacher. If the people in your congregation want to emphasize the oversight responsibility of a pastor, you might call the overseers *senior pastors*. Many Evangelicals use that term today, but since nowhere in the NT is anyone called a *senior* anything, you would do better to call a leading pastor an *overseer*. If the term *overseer* is good enough for Jesus, it should be good enough for them.

... you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls [Jesus] (1 Peter 2:25; NKJV).

We should want to speak the way God speaks, and to use words the way he uses them, right? If we do, then we must pay close attention to how the term *overseer* is used in the Bible. If you pay close attention, you'll see that *overseer* is a synonym for *shepherd*. That means that you can call a pastor an overseer, and vice-versa.

In the next passage, you can see that the job of the elders is both to shepherd and to exercise oversight. Those actions (shepherding and overseeing) are precisely why elders can also be called *shepherds* and *overseers*). Observe how their names are derived from action verbs!

⁴⁰ This could also legitimately be translated as *bishops*, but since the Catholic priests hijacked the term, it has a strongly Catholic connotation today. Because of that connotation, it would be best to use the term *overseer* when you come across the word *bishop* in the Bible. That's because the Greek word for *overseer* is *epi-scopos* [ἐπισκόπος], meaning *over* (*epi*) *seer* (*scopos*).

Another faithful translation of *bishop* would be *supervisor* [a word which has the exact meaning of *epi-scopos*, which is a Greek word for *looking* (vis) *over* (super)]. However, since *supervisor* has a business-world connotation, it's not as suitable for describing this particular church leadership role, that of an *overseer*.

Therefore I, your fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a sharer of the glory that is going to be revealed, exhort the elders among you: Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [lit. *episkopeō*, overseeing] not by compulsion but willingly (1 Peter 5:1-2; LEB).

This passage really is a jewel because it proves that the overseers, and pastors are just three different names for the same people, elders. Their job has four important dimensions, so the NT writers used four different terms for these men. Those four dimensions are:

- maturity to lead (we use the term *elders* when you want to emphasize that)
- ability to shepherd (we use the term *pastor* to emphasize that)
- wisdom to teach (we use *teacher* for this dimension)
- authority to exercise oversight (we use *overseer* to highlight this dimension).

Reinforcing the truth that we are dealing with one Church leader who wears many hats, notice how the term *overseer* is used as a synonym for *elder* in the following passage:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city... the overseer must be above reproach (Titus 1:5, 7; NASB).

...the term *overseer* is used as a synonym for *elder*...

So it's a fact that the term *overseer* is used as a synonym for *elder*. In addition to that, the next passage proves that the job of an overseer is to shepherd God's people. Read thoughtfully, and notice here the divine confirmation that *overseer* and *shepherd* are also synonyms:

... [Paul] summoned the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them, 'Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God' (Acts 20:17-18, 28; NASB).

Notice that the overseer's job is oversight—in other words, he is to supervise God's people. At the same time, one of

the requirements for being an overseer is skillful teaching. That means that an overseer must also be a teacher.

The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to supervision [lit. *episkopē*, oversight], he desires a good work. Therefore the overseer must be irreproachable... skillful in teaching (1 Timothy 3:1-2; LEB).

Since we have already proven that an overseer must be a shepherd, now we can say with all confidence that overseers are pastor-teachers! Read the next passage carefully and you should be able to confirm once again that the term *overseer* is synonymous with *elder* and *pastor-teacher*.

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons... (Philippians 1:1)

How do we know that the overseers mentioned in this passage are pastors and elders? Well, the elders and pastors are the ones who labor in local churches with the assistance of the deacons. Although here they are called *overseers*, they are the same men!

2) Requirements

...there cannot be any grievous sin of which a pastor could be accused.

The men we choose to pastor in our churches must fulfill certain requirements, and there are many requirements, but the most noteworthy is being irreproachable. What does *irreproachable* mean? Quite simply, it means that a person is above reproach. That is, there cannot be any grievous sin of which a pastor could be accused. They have to be innocent of any scandalous public sins. Notice how this requirement is first on both of the NT lists that establish requirements for elders.

Now the overseer is to be above reproach... (1 Timothy 3:2).

... set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach... for the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward... (Titus 1:5-7).

Now, let's reflect upon the rest of the requirements a man must fulfill to be a pastor-elder. Surely, the Church would not be in Apostasy today if it had been firm throughout history to demand that its pastors fulfill the Bible's qualifications. God doesn't lay out qualifications for nothing. Paul defined the qualities of a pastor like this:

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's Church?)

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the Devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the Devil's trap (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

That's a demanding list, but before we analyze it more fully, let's read through the second NT passage that lays out the requirements for a pastor. While you read it, don't forget what these lists are saying: If a man does not have these qualities, then he should not lead in a congregation. He shouldn't be a pastor-teacher, an overseer, an elder, an evangelist, a prophet, or an apostle-missionary. If he doesn't have these virtues, he is disqualified for a Church leadership role.

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not vi-

If a man does not have these qualities, then he should not lead in a congregation.

olent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:5-9).

**...the
kind of
person
God
wants
to lead
in his
Church.**

We've read the passages; now let's sum them up. If we fuse the two lists together, we'll get a clear picture of the kind of person God wants to lead in his Church. You can organize the requirements for a pastor-elder in ten categories.⁴¹ He must be:

1. above reproach, blameless
2. faithful to one wife
3. good at managing his family
 - his children obey him with full respect
 - his children are believers
 - his children are not accused of being wild or disobedient
4. temperate
 - self-controlled
 - disciplined
 - not given to drunkenness
5. a lover of what is good
 - upright
 - holy

⁴¹ You do well to note that requirements #7–10 are requirements exclusive to pastors. They are not required of deacons. That means that fulfilling requirements #7–10 is what specifically qualifies a man for leadership in the Church. So if you want to serve God in a leadership ministry, you need to:

- have a good reputation with outsiders
- be gentle
- be experienced
- be able to teach

6. free from the love of money
 - not pursuing dishonest gain
7. having a good reputation with non-Christians
 - respectable
 - hospitable
8. gentle, not violent
 - not overbearing
 - not quarrelsome
 - not quick-tempered
9. experienced: not a recent convert
10. able to teach
 - holding firmly to the original Gospel and the doctrine of the apostles
 - encouraging others with sound doctrine
 - can refute the people who oppose sound doctrine

Why are the two top qualifications for a pastor-overseer to be *blamelessness* and *faithfulness to one's wife*? It means that a pastor must be—more than anything else—a man of integrity. That is the most basic requirement for anyone seeking a position of leadership in the Church. Are your pastors blameless and faithful to their wives?

**a man of
integrity**

3) Free from blame

Being blameless doesn't mean that a pastor is never accused of anything. It means that if a pastor is indeed accused of wrongdoing, he will have to either:

- be cleared of that blame, or
- be rebuked by another elder in the church

It's a very serious matter for a pastor to be accused of sin, so it has to be dealt with fairly, firmly, and yes, even publicly! Why must a pastor be corrected in front of the whole congregation? For fear's sake. The reason is essentially so that the fear of God might be instilled in the hearts of church members.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality (1 Timothy 5:19-21; NKJV).

What kind of partiality was Paul warning Timothy about at the end of the verse? He didn't want Timothy to have any special preference for elders. Timothy couldn't do any favors for the men who were in leadership with him. Isn't that what happens so often in churches? Don't men often conceal the sins of their friends, turning leadership into a club? Don't the men in leadership often do each other favors, thereby becoming impartial, biased, and even prejudiced against those who are not in leadership? Their double standard and inequality can never take root among us. When leadership becomes corrupt, the entire church is put at risk. God save us from such sin.

4) Disqualification

If a man does not fulfill the requirements for being a Church leader, but for some reason has already gotten a Church leadership position, what should we do? Should we let them remain in their position? Should we let them lead anyways? If we allow them to continue in a position of influence, how many people will stumble into sin with them? Surely, many will fall into sin by following the example of an unqualified pastor just as sheep will fall into danger under the leadership of an unqualified shepherd. When people follow a blind man, won't they stumble and fall?

...many will fall into sin by following the example of an unqualified pastor...

... if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit (Matthew 7:6, 15; 15:14; NASB).

We have to either confront sinning pastors, or walk away from them. Allowing them to continue with leadership over us is a great danger for many.

If a man does not fulfill the requirements laid out in the Scriptures, then he is disqualified from leading in the Church. That's precisely why there are pastoral require-

ments laid out for us in the Scriptures. The Bible insists that a preacher can be disqualified from the prize God has for him.

... I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Think about it: If a pastor be disqualified from his Heavenly prize, can't he be disqualified from his earthly privilege? Of course he can. Pastoring is not a right—it's a privilege. Salvation is a free gift, and it is based on grace, but leadership (just like the rewards in the Kingdom) is based on merit. It must be earned. God has to consider you faithful if he's going to put you into the ministry.

Pastoring is not a right—it's a privilege.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:1-2; NKJV).

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service (1 Timothy 1:12; NASB).

To be a pastor, you must be tested first. If deacons have to be tested first, how much more so must a man be tested before he become a pastor?

[Speaking of deacons, Paul says:] They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons (1 Timothy 3:10).

Remember: You can't get a prize for which you don't compete. Anyone who gets a prize for being a pastor has earned his prize, and he has earned it for this reason: He has carried out the job of pastoring well. If that man gets disqualified for the prize, he surely can also be disqualified from the very ministry that would qualify him for the prize. We hope that things don't get to that, but sometimes they must get to that—for the salvation of souls, and for the sake of the fear of God in the Church.

5) A labor of love

A genuine Christian elder gets his inspiration to pastor from a deep love for Jesus. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd; as such, he will inspire pastors to lay down their lives for the sheep. Jesus is the role model for pastors.

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Jesus has commanded pastors what to do: to feed his sheep and to care for them. That's clearly the charge Jesus has given to pastors, but why? Have you ever thought of *why* Jesus has charged us with feeding and caring for the sheep? If you read the next passage closely, you'll see why: We are to care for God's sheep out of love for Jesus. So, the question for pastors is: Do you love Jesus?

**We are
to care
for God's
sheep
out of
love for
Jesus.**

... Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me... ? Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, '... do you love me? ... Take care of my sheep.' ... Jesus asked him the third time, 'Do you love me? ... Feed my sheep' (John 21:15-17).

Jesus, as the Chief Shepherd, will generously reward all of his under-shepherds someday—but not all of them. He'll only reward those who have served him well. Pastors who serve Jesus well are the ones who do their job by faith. The effective pastors are hoping to be rewarded by Jesus someday; and what is their reward? An everlasting crown of glory!

[Speaking to pastors, Peter says:] ... when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:4).

c. Deacons

Now, what of deacons? We have not included them in our teaching about the four Church leadership roles quite simply because they are not Church leaders. Rather, they are the support team for leadership. Although many of the men among the Church's deacons are in training for leadership, they haven't yet gained authority in the Church.

Although deacons don't have authority, they do have the potential for "an excellent standing" among believers. Through their service to the elders and leading figures, deacons earn the respect of everyone in the Church. They serve with the hope of gaining that respect.

Those [deacons] who have served well gain an excellent standing... (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

The deacons are the right-hand of church leaders. They are the elders' helpers and trusted companions. This close-knit relationship makes it necessary for deacons to have the same character as elders. Although a deacon's role is different, they must have the same qualities of elders.

The differences between deacons and elders are laid out for us right on the 1 Timothy 3 list that establishes the requirements to be a deacon. Surprisingly, the main thing that makes them different from elders is that deacons do not need to be teachers. They *do* need to "keep hold of the deep truths of the faith" (meaning that deacons must demonstrate their belief in solid doctrine), but they do *not* need to be able to teach the Word.

...deacons do not need to be teachers.

In the following passage, Paul describes the kinds of people deacons must be:

... deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then, if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, the women [this is not the feminine form of the word *deacons*, it is the Greek word *women*, meaning *the wives of the deacons*] are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Here's a summary of the qualities required of deacons, taken directly from the passage above:

1. he has already been tested, and has been found blameless
2. he is faithful to his wife
3. he is worthy of respect
4. he manages his children and household (including his wife) well
 - his wife is not a malicious talker
 - his wife is temperate
 - his wife is trustworthy in everything
 - his wife is worthy of respect
5. he is sincere
6. he does not drink much wine
7. he does not pursue dishonest gain
8. he holds firmly to the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience

You will notice how similar the list of requirements for deacons is to the list of requirements for elders. As you compare the two lists, you'll see that the main differences are these three:

- a deacon doesn't need to be experienced
- a deacon doesn't need to be able to teach
- less is required of deacon's children than the children of elders

Two other less significant differences are:

- the Bible says nothing about a deacon needing a good reputation with unbelievers
- nothing is said about deacons being gentle or not quarrelsome

Of course, it's desirable for a deacon to have a good reputation in the community. In fact, it's something we would hope for every Christian; however, it's not a requirement. That's understandable, since deacons are not public figures. Of course, pastor-teachers are. Deacons will not need to face the same level of attacks that pastors will. Pastors have to deal with the limelight, and are often the objects of slander. Pastors most certainly will be maligned, so they need to have a particularly good reputation.

i. Deaconesses

We have already explained this important truth: Leadership in the Church should be male. We have also seen in the last passage (the one about the qualifications for deacons from 1 Timothy 3) that the Bible does not say that women can be deacons. However, the Bible nowhere prohibits women from being deacons. Indeed, there is no reason why women cannot be deaconesses. Why couldn't they? As we have seen, a deacon is not an authoritative role in the Church. It's not a teaching role.

Women can be deacons. We say that with all confidence, not because the Biblical qualifications for being a deacon specify that women can be candidates; but because the Bible describes a female deacon for us. You'll meet her in another passage, Romans 16:1. You must follow this principle: If the Bible mentions a truth just once, it's fodder for faith. Once is enough for us to believe. Here's the passage:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you...
(Romans 16:1-2a).

Reading this passage, you see that there was a lady deacon by the name of Phoebe. She worked closely with the apostle Paul. The passage states three things very clearly: Phoebe was a deaconess, she was taking a trip to Rome, and she was in need of assistance. The most important matter for us to understand here is that Phoebe was indeed a deaconess.

Indeed, there is no reason why women cannot be deaconesses.

A deacon's ministry of assisting the elders makes them well-suited to being the messengers of apostles.

In addition to her being a deaconess, the tone of the passage indicates that Phoebe was carrying Paul's Epistle to the Romans *to* the church in Rome. Now, we're not sure of this fact; however, it would be completely in agreement with the profile of a deacon's ministry for that deacon to carry a message. A deacon's ministry of assisting the elders makes them well-suited to being the messengers of apostles.

Also, take note that the only thing Paul was requesting was for the brothers and sisters in Rome to help Phoebe. He was not sending her as a missionary. He was not saying that the people in the church had to obey anything she said. He never said that Phoebe was their authority.

Paul doesn't tell Phoebe, like he told Titus (in Titus 1:5), that Phoebe was going to set things in order in the church. Paul did not say that Phoebe was going to teach the Romans. Why not? Because she was a deacon. Deacons are helpers, which is why Paul said that she was "a great help to many people."

... she has been a great help to many people, including me (Romans 16:2b).

So Paul said that Phoebe was his great helper. He also said that due to her being such a great help, she deserved to be helped by the Christians in Rome. He wanted them to honor her as a deaconess that way. Our study of Phoebe has helped us to understand not only to understand what a deacon does, but why a woman can be a deaconess. It's because of three big reasons:

- Deacons do not have a teaching role in the Church.
- Deacons don't have authority.
- Deacons are the helpers of Church leaders.

Does this definition of a deacon sound like a fair description of a woman's spiritual role? To us it does. In fact, it totally corresponds to God's design for women. Just consider the first woman, Eve. She was the helpmate and follower of the first leader, Adam.⁴² Consider also the *many* women who followed Jesus during his ministry; women such as

⁴² Now, if Adam *wasn't* the leader in the Garden of Eden, then

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. Were these not women ready to help Jesus in his ministry? These women were the forerunners of Phoebe and the lady deacons who serve in the Church today because a deacon's job is to serve alongside apostles, prophets, and pastor-teachers by helping them in anything they may need.

...a deacon's job is to serve alongside apostles, prophets, and pastor-teachers...

Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3).

Let's remember this: Phoebe served alongside the apostle Paul—and who was Paul? He was a man with very clear teachings on God's design for women. He was an apostle who never gave a woman a role of authority in a Church. As Paul's helper, Phoebe served a man who didn't allow women to speak in church meetings. He taught the following:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak (1 Corinthians 14:34).

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet (1 Timothy 2:11).

why did he bear the responsibility of Eve's sin? Why did God chastise Adam for listening to his wife? It's because Adam *wasn't* supposed to listen to his wife. Eve wasn't created to be Adam's equal; she was created to be his helper.

Men are responsible for making the final decisions in their families. The choice to do good or evil in the first home belonged to Adam. The reality that man has the God-given role of decision-maker is what makes men the leaders in their homes. God the Father has modeled that role for all fathers. He is the Head of the family of God.

It's important to point out that the Christian principle of gender roles is unlike the Muslim principle of separation of men and women. Christians believe that men and women should work together, Muslims believe that they should work separately. The Scriptures teach that God designed men to lead, but that doesn't mean that women are not integrally involved in ministry. They are. In fact, the apostle Peter tells us that women are co-heirs of the same grace that men have. As such, wives deserve to be honored by their husbands.

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together⁴³ of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7; NKJV).

In God's economy, nobody inherits what they do not deserve. If men and women minister together now, we will deserve an inheritance from God later. Without women, men are incomplete. With women, men can fulfill their ministry. Do you see how women are integrally involved in ministry? They are not separate, but different. They're not just different, but complementary.

...women are integrally involved in ministry...

3. People money

Money, money, money. What we do with it can produce huge conflict; especially if it is misused, unequally distributed, or stolen. What should our pastors do with the offerings they collect? The Bible has a clear answer—and it's probably not what you expect.

Since pastors benefit from offerings and tithes, and a requirement for a pastor is that they not be “a lover of money” (1 Timothy 3:3), the Church should take special measures to prevent pastors from falling into the temptation of greed. We don't want pastors to end up turning the Church into a business. Let's not forget that this was the great

⁴³ The word here should certainly be translated either as *joint heirs* or *fellow heirs* (since the Greek word is *synklēronomoi*, from *sýn* meaning “closely identified with” and *klēronómos* meaning “an heir”). This information is from Strong's Concordance.

downfall of one of the Twelve Apostles. It was the downfall of Judas, the treasurer of Jesus' earthly ministry.

They [the Jewish leaders] were delighted to hear this [that Judas would betray Jesus] and promised to give him [Judas] money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him [Jesus] over (Mark 4:11).

... Judas used to keep the money box (John 13:29; Mounce).

With that as our solemn starting point, and aware that “the love of money is a root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10; LEB), let's take a look at how pastors should treat the finances of the Church. It's all quite simple really, if you focus on the Scriptures.

We will begin with this: There is no Bible passage that says that the Church should use its finances to pay for a building—not even one verse! Neither is there a passage that speaks of the Church using its funds for buying any form of equipment. The Early Church leaves us no record of any purchases they made for transportation,⁴⁴ musical instruments, seats, or decorations—not one. That doesn't mean that we are prohibited from paying for a building or investing in equipment; however, churches that make those kinds of investments without first investing the money where it belongs are committing a grave error. The only investment the NT teaches is people—human resources. Is today's Church investing in people? Let's look more closely the two⁴⁵ kinds of people we should invest in and why.

There is no Bible passage that says that the Church should use its finances to pay for a building...

⁴⁴ Yes, they had transportation in their times, such as chariots, wagons, donkeys, camels, and horses.

⁴⁵ Although we're not going to include a section in the book on the third person to whom the Church gives its money, there is such a person: Caesar.

'Show me the coin used for the poll-tax.' And they brought him a denarius. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22:19-21; NASB).

a. Poor money

The Church is filled with the poor...

The Church is filled with the poor;⁴⁶ and so we provide for people's basic needs with Church funds. Of course,

We are to pay taxes to the government, even as a ministry. Why do we do so? Because Christians submit to the governing authorities.

... it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (Romans 13:5-7).

Although we are children of God, and as such, our rights make us exempt from Kingdom-related taxes, we still pay taxes to religious leaders when they ask. We pay so that we might not offend anybody. Jesus taught on this in the following passage:

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma Temple tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the Temple tax?' 'Yes, he does,' he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. 'What do you think, Simon?' he asked. 'From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?' 'From others,' Peter answered. 'Then the children are exempt,' Jesus said to him.

'But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours' (Matthew 17:24-27).

⁴⁶ Anyone who decides to follow Jesus becomes poor. Jesus himself called his disciples *you poor*.

... [Jesus] lifted up his eyes toward his disciples, and said: 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God...' (Luke 6:20; NKJV)

Now by calling us *poor*, Jesus doesn't mean to say that all of his followers are *financially* poor. A Christian has just as much possibility of being financially blessed as anyone else. We are hardworking, after all. There are plenty of wealthy believers in the

we feel compassion for the poor because the love of God is in our hearts, but there's an even greater reason for our giving to the poor: We get something out of it. We get a reward. Yes, Jesus has promised to reward those who give to the poor. Jesus never called anyone to a life of philanthropy, which would mean doing good as an end in itself. On the contrary, we do good in order to get something better.

Jesus has promised to reward those who give to the poor.

Christians tend to be shy and we often act like our giving

Bible. Even Paul, a man who lived under constant persecution—a man who spent many years in jail, was prosperous at times.

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:12-13; NASB).

The main difference between the rich and us is not income. Everyone's financial status changes often—finances are uncertain. Being poor is not our condition, it's our attitude. We are poor in the sense that we are outsiders. We are the ultimate outsiders because we're not a part of this world system. Jesus has chosen us *out* of this world—and that makes us *outsiders*.

... you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world (John 15:19).

We don't belong to the world. We are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. We don't allow ourselves to be conformed to its love of riches, its ambition, or its greed. Not belonging to the world means that we are not shrewd and crafty like rich people tend to be. For example, we don't scam others. We don't weasel our way out of deals. Our conscience won't let us cheat in business the way others do. It's not in our character to steal.

... the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light (Luke 16:8; NASB).

Do you understand now why Jesus calls us *poor*? It's because Christians lose our earthly lives. We have lost our worldly ambition. If you're a Christian, you have already lost your life to the degree that you even hate your life in this world.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:25).

**...get a
good
reason
to give.**

to the poor is altruism. It's not. Rather, we give to get a reward. There's nothing wrong with saying "What's in this for us?" Peter asked it. If you haven't asked God that question yet, then maybe it's time that you do. Maybe it's time for you to get a good reason to give.

Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?' (Matthew 19:27)

At the time Peter asked Jesus this question, he knew that he was investing in the Kingdom. However, Peter wanted a guarantee on his investment. Peter had listened to Jesus promise Kingdom glory over and over again, but he still wanted Jesus to affirm his reward. Jesus wasn't upset that Peter should ask to get something back. Kindly, he acknowledged Peter's sacrifice, and replied:

Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28-29).

You've read his words, now understand this: Jesus taught that we sacrifice our worldly treasures to get more, much more, both now and forever. The apostles took Jesus seriously—do you? Jesus couldn't have made this message more clear. Now, listen to another teaching of Jesus on this same subject. It addresses the issue of why we give to the poor. Do you know why? We give so that we might be repaid in the resurrection!

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:12-14).

i. The sell-all challenge

We tend to think that it just happened once or twice, but Jesus constantly commanded his followers to sell their possessions and to give the proceeds to the poor. It wasn't just a challenge he gave to the rich young ruler. The invitation Jesus gave to the rich young ruler is a well-known Bible passage, but it's one of many sell-all challenges our Lord gave. Refresh your memory of the passage as you read it here. The most striking thing in it is the fact that Jesus told the rich young ruler he had to sell all he had.

Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come, follow me' (Matthew 19:21).

Does Jesus use the sell-all challenge for all of his followers? Yes. He says to us even today: Give up on worldly goals and invest in the Kingdom. To have a Kingdom focus, you must stop worrying about material things.

Give up on worldly goals and invest in the Kingdom.

Giving our possessions to the poor is a way of saying "We're not worried about this world," but it's scary to let go of what we have. Giving can be scary, and Jesus knows that we get scared by his give-all challenge—which is why he reminds us of the reason why we should do it: to obtain the treasure God has for us in Heaven. It's to get the Kingdom God is pleased to give us!

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail... (Luke 12:32-33)

Zacchaeus was one man who heard Jesus' challenge loud and clear. Along with everyone else who listened to Jesus, Zacchaeus understood that he had to renounce the love of money if he would be saved. He knew what he had to do if he was going to follow Jesus. He had to demonstrate repentance through acts of compassion to the poor. After eating with Jesus one afternoon, Zacchaeus proclaimed his newfound commitment to the poor:

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house...' (Luke 19:8-9)

ii. Becoming poor

There are lots of financial consultants, brokers, and stock market gurus around. They have a lot to say, but you just read Jesus' investment advice for you and me. What was it? Invest in Heaven. Do you understand how to go about storing up treasures in Heaven? You do it by giving to the poor. Now, this has nothing to do with communism. It's not any Department of Social Services, a government agency designed to curb poverty. Let's be absolutely clear that Jesus is commanding us to do: He's not commanding us to change society. Jesus himself said that we will always have the poor among us. The Church is no social movement.

The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want (Mark 14:7).

The Church is not a monastery or convent. Our storing up treasures in Heaven is not a commitment to the ascetic life. Jesus never called anyone to be a monk or a nun. Never did he invite a follower to make a vow of poverty. On the contrary, Jesus told us that we should never make an oath.

**...we
should
never
make an
oath.**

I tell you, do not swear an oath at all... (Matthew 5:34).

Jesus had his disciples out and about, constantly interacting with rich and poor alike. The disciples could help out the poor at any time because they were with them constantly. That approach transcends man-made religion and man-made government. It is the true solution to caring for the poor. Welfare programs and socialism will never beat Jesus' approach.

Our Lord called his first followers to leave their family businesses. Likewise, today he calls each of us to renounce all of our worldly concerns (money, investments, business ventures, and professional development) so that we might dedicate ourselves to a higher calling: reaching others for him. Following Jesus, fishermen become fishers of men, investors in stocks become investors in souls, and groundskeepers become keepers of holy ground.

... as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther from there, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him (Mark 1:16-20; NKJV).

Now, giving away your money is one thing, but giving up your profession is quite another. It’s much more challenging to give up your profession, right? You can give away your money, and then earn more if you keep your job; but how will you prosper if you give up your profession? God has the answer to that question; but you have to test him to see what it is.

**giving
up your
profession**

The apostles left their fishing boats, nets, and clients to start a new profession—itinerant preaching. What are the financial prospects for preachers? The apostles didn’t know how much they would make. Jesus didn’t give them any written guarantees. They signed no contracts. These men were committing themselves to the unknown. Their financial future was up in the air, literally; because until the Kingdom of God was established, they had no employment guarantees.

The apostles knew poverty firsthand. They knew what it meant to be without. They lived like pilgrims. Being a follower of Jesus for them meant hunger and homelessness.

It meant shabby clothes and an uncertain income. Although they had plenty of work, and were very busy, they didn't have a salary, health insurance, life insurance, or any retirement plan.

... I [Paul] think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last... we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands... We have been made as the filth of the world (1 Corinthians 4:9, 11-13).

iii. Investment strategy

Jesus insisted that we must care for the poor among us. Giving to the poor is by far Jesus' most common command about what to do with our money—and by *common* we mean that it's not something just for mature believers to do. It's not something for the super-spiritual. From the moment he called people to follow him, Jesus laid out this short- and long-term investment strategy for us: Give to the poor. Jesus never gave a command to invest in anything else.⁴⁷

Jesus never gave a command to invest in anything else.

⁴⁷ Church offerings are another investment Jesus taught us to make—but he didn't teach it through any particular command. He gave tacit approval to giving offerings when he affirmed that the poor widow gave the most. Through his words, we know that Jesus believed in the importance of offerings.

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the Temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on' (Mark 12:41-44).

Our Lord approved of tithes and offerings, but that is very different from approving of the way religious leaders handled those same tithes and offerings. Jesus did not approve of how the Pharisees handled offerings. He wasn't shy about pointing out how

Does your church invest in the poor? How should your church put this kind of giving into practice? Even more importantly, do the people in your church understand the wisdom in Jesus' philosophy of giving? If they understand the wisdom of it, they will be able to embrace it willingly. Here are four principles to guide us in our giving to the poor:

1. Give in secret.

... when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men... But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matthew 6:2-3; NASB).

2. Care for a poor person you know, a neighbor.

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table...

... the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades... Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise

...a
certain
beggar...
laid at
his gate,
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they handled the offerings out of selfish ambition. Wisely not inspiring any sort of public protest against the financial abuse of the Pharisees (people easily go up in arms about the rich exploiting the poor), Jesus exposed their greed another way. He pointed out that they used their own parents' offerings to funnel money to the Temple treasury, the very one that paid their salaries. He exposed their scheme!

... [Jesus asked the Pharisees] why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother'... But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' [an offering]... Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! (Matthew 15:3-7)

Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented' (Luke 16:19-25).

3. Be hospitable to the poor.

... the head of the household [who wanted to give a banquet]... said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame...' (Luke 14:21; NASB)

4. Develop a heart attitude of generosity.

... you Pharisees... inside you are full of greed and wickedness... now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor... (Luke 11:39-41)

iv. Tithes and offerings

...the basic principle that guided the way the apostle's handled the Church finances

Jesus' teaching that we should help the poor quickly became the foundation of Church financial management. It became the basic principle that guided the way the apostle's handled the Church finances, and it must be the guiding principle in your congregation today, if it isn't already.

James believed in Jesus' philosophy of giving. James was sympathetic to the poor and confrontational with the rich. He wouldn't let the wealthy in his congregation get away with dishonoring the poor. Here's what he said:

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business (James 1:9-11).

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor... (James 2:5-6)

James was no insignificant person in the Early Church. He was the leading figure in the first congregation, the one in Jerusalem. He was outstanding among the elders by the time they had their first council. He was also Jesus' brother—which gave James a big advantage in terms of personal growth and holiness. James eventually became the author of a Bible book. In it, he asserts that the essence of true religion is caring for the needy:

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

James laid out the rule: there is no substitute for caring for a Christian in need. No amount of religious talk or kindly words can replace concrete actions. Either we care for needy brothers and sisters, or we don't. James taught that we have to be proactive with the poor among us; otherwise, our faith is dead—and a dead faith cannot save us. It's useless.

...there is no substitute for caring for a Christian in need.

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:15-17).

v. Distribution of wealth

The apostles made sure that the Church met the needs of the poor among them. This matter was so important to them that the apostles took personal responsibility for the distribution to the poor. That's right: The first believers didn't put their offerings in an offering box at all; they actually laid their offerings at the feet of the apostles. What happened at that point? Well, the apostles made sure that the funds were distributed to anyone who was in need. They administered these offerings publically, without any intermediary banking—fiscal transparency at its finest!

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:44-45).

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sale and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means *son of encouragement*), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:32-37).

Among the poor, some of the most vulnerable are widows. Because of the delicate financial situations widows often have, the apostles made sure to distribute food daily to the widows of the Church.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic [Greek-speaking] Jews among them complained against the Hebraic [Hebrew-speaking] Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:1).

...it's the only thing that the leading apostles asked Paul and his missionary team do.

Caring for the poor was so important to the apostles that it's the *only* thing that the leading apostles asked Paul and his missionary team do. Yes, when Paul launched his mission to the Gentiles, it was the only thing they requested! Paul's team was more than happy to comply because the apostle Paul had the same commitment the rest of the apostles had—a commitment to provide for the needs of the poor.

... James, Cephas [Peter], and John, those esteemed as pillars... agreed that we [Paul and Barnabas] should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along (Galatians 2:8-10).

With such heartfelt concern for the poor, Paul made sure that ministry to the poor would be a tradition in every congregation he founded. After he left Timothy in charge of one church, Paul exhorted him to make sure that the wid-

ows were provided for. He gave Timothy specific advice about what widows could be included on the church's list—and yes, there was a list of the widows who would receive assistance. Paul called them the ones who were *truly widows*. He used that term twice in the following passage:

Honor widows who are truly widows... Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old, the wife of one husband, being well-attested by good works, if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality, if she has washed the feet of the saints, if she has helped those who are oppressed, if she has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse younger widows...

If any believing woman has widows [living with her in her house], she must help them, and the church must not be burdened, in order that it may help those who are truly widows (1 Timothy 5:3, 9-11, 16).

vi. Missions for the poor

Paul's service to the poor went a step further than most other apostles. His ministry was intra-congregational. He made sure that financial gifts made their way from one church to another. Now, can you imagine to whom the gifts were destined? You guessed it—to poor believers! Paul called them *the poor among the Lord's people*.

[Paul testified to Felix, saying] After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings... (Acts 24:17)

I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings (Romans 15:25-27).

...financial gifts made their way from one church to another...

Paul made collected financial gifts without putting any pressure on the givers. Bringing offerings from one church to another was a job he took seriously. His goal was not to solve a social ill, but to promote a spirit of generosity among believers. You can sense how intensely he felt about the need for generosity in the next passage. In it, he uses the word *generous* three times and *generosity* twice!

... I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given... Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion... As it is written: 'They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever'... You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else (2 Corinthians 9:5, 7, 9, 11-13).

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Paul said that his goal was *equality*. What he meant was that if all believers share, everyone will have their needs fulfilled. He meant that there is enough to go around. He meant that God's provisions are sufficient. This is a very important principle in the Church: We believe that there is enough among us so that none of us will have to go naked, hungry, thirsty, or homeless. Paul's redistribution-of-wealth ministry outdoes anything the legend of Robin Hood ever proposed because Paul's actions were based on love. Paul's ministry of giving was based on faith—faith in the God who sent manna from Heaven down to his people in the desert.

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: ‘The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little’ (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

vii. The gift of giving

We tend to ignore giving as a gift since other gifts like miracles and healing are so spectacular; nonetheless giving is a powerful anointing of the Spirit, a spiritual gift. As such, giving must be done properly. For example, if a believer has the gift of giving, they have to give generously.

...giving is a powerful anointing of the Spirit, a spiritual gift.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy... if it is serving, then serve... if it is giving, then give generously... if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8).

Certain people we read about in the Bible definitely had the gift of giving. Tabitha and Barnabas had reputations for giving to the poor. Each in their own way gave immense encouragement to other Christians through their generous acts of giving, and that indicates that they were anointed with the gift of giving.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means *son of encouragement*), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:36-37).

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha... she was always doing good and helping the poor (Acts 9:36).

Then we have Cornelius, a man while he was yet unconverted, already had earned a reputation as being generous to the poor. We wonder: How much *more* generous must he have become after having received the Holy Spirit? Much more, undoubtedly.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.

One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said... ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God...’ (Acts 10:1-4).

viii. More important than giving

As a final note, we should point out that although one of the greatest things a Christian can do is to give their possessions to feed the poor, even giving can still be done the wrong way. If it is not done in love, it is the wrong kind of giving.

... if I give all my possessions to feed the poor... but do not have love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

...it doesn't matter how much you give, if you lie about the giving, the giving counts as a sin. Likewise, it doesn't matter how much you give, if you lie about the giving, the giving counts as a sin. Whatever you gave is worthless in the eyes of God. To understand that principle, consider how a believer in the church at Jerusalem, a man named Ananias, presented a large offering. His offering came from the sale of his own property. Ananias told his wife that he was going to keep part of the money from the sale—and there was nothing wrong with keeping part of the money. The problem was that he didn't let the church know about the part he was keeping. Ananias' sin was that he presented the offering *as if* he were giving the total value of the land sold.

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also [like Barnabas] sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge, he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 5:1-2).

Ananias was actually lying to the Holy Spirit by lying to the Church. How so? Well, wasn't the Holy Spirit present there when he lied—abiding within the members of the

Church? Lying to the Church is lying to the Holy Spirit; and lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God, because the Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God. So the sin of Ananias was much worse than what it seemed. Peter didn't say to Ananias, "Why did you lie to the Church?" Rather, in an attempt to show Ananias how serious it is to lie to the Church, Peter rebuked Ananias for lying to God.

Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God' (Acts 5:3-4).

God made an example of Ananias by killing him right there on the spot. For God, a very serious sin was being committed. Does lying seem serious to us today—so serious that it warrants death? Do we imagine that financial giving could (in any way) justify a lie? There are lots of wealthy donors and philanthropists who think that it can, but it can't.

Let's understand the way God wants us to give. He wants us to give in purity. He wants our giving to be done in a way that's not contaminated by any sin. He wants us to give with genuine love.

Ananias died, and so did his companion, Sapphira. Their deaths caused the people in the Church to have a strong sense of the fear of the Lord. They realized that God was not going to be permissive with sin in the Church.

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. [His wife suffered the same fate soon afterwards.] And great fear seized all who heard what had happened (Acts 5:5).

We have to think this through clearly to understand what happened on that day: Ananias lied, and that's a sin—but since lying is not normally punishable by death, what was Ananias' lie exactly? His lie was that he gave more than what he really gave.

His lie was that he gave more than what he really gave.

Now, that may not sound so serious to us today, but everybody (yes *everybody*, according to Acts 4:34) who had property in the Church was selling their property and houses and giving the proceeds to the poor.

... all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold (Acts 4:34; LEB).

Ananias knew exactly the way people were interpreting what was happening in the Church; so when he presented the offering without informing others (except his wife in secret, demonstrating that he knew how important the matter was), he was leading the Church to think that he had given the full amount the land had been sold for. It actually wasn't the full amount, and as Peter pointed out, Ananias could have told the Church that he was keeping a part for himself. That wouldn't have been a sin at all.

Ananias was being an actor. He was delighting in appearances, not in the truth. That was his sin. He faked a gift. Although attempting to use gifts by experimenting with them is perfectly acceptable, nobody has God's permission to fake miracles, prophecies, tongues, or any other gift—not even the gift of giving! God will oppose anyone who fakes gifts in his Church.

Holy Spirit-inspired giving is the only kind God allows in Church. If anyone corrupts giving—that is, if they falsify it, they've got a big problem with God. That's what the members of the first Christian Church learned when God slew Ananias and Sapphira. That unfortunate couple tampered with something that God considers supremely important: not just the gift they were giving God, but the gift God had given to the Church.

b. Pastor money

...the
Church
is to
invest in
human
resources...

Now, we've just studied an indisputable NT truth: the Church is to invest in human resources, particularly in fulfilling the needs of poor Christians; but there is another kind of Christian the Church should invest in. The second group of people we honor are the men who teach the Word. They are a significant financial investment for the Church,

and just as important as the poor. So we ask ourselves: How should the pastor money be handled?

i. Offerings

We will begin by stating that the financial gifts churches give to pastors should correspond to the needs of those same pastors. Notice the need that Paul mentions in this passage as he thanks the Philippians for giving to him:

... [Paul wrote to the Philippian believers] it was good of you to share in my troubles... in the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel... not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only... you sent me aid more than once when I was in need... I have received... the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (Philippians 4:14-19).

...the financial gifts churches give to pastors should correspond to the needs of those same pastors.

In these times, when greedy men are constantly vying for a larger piece of the Church's tithes and offerings, and many of them are becoming rich through a business-style approach to ministry, it's important to affirm that Christians are free to give financial gifts to whom they please. They are not subject to any obligation, but are free to give the amount they see fit to the preacher they choose to support. Under the New Covenant, giving is an activity subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

ii. Invest in education

Although there are no hard-fast rules for giving, that doesn't mean that there aren't any general guidelines. For example, the Bible tells us who should receive financial support from Church offerings: Elders who direct church affairs well should be paid twice the amount that other elders get. In other words, we should honor elders by making an elders' pay is proportional to his performance. That raises the question of what quality pastoral performance is. Well, the Bible tells us what it is: it's solid preaching and teaching.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17).

The Church must invest in education—in learning the Word of God. To get the teaching we so desperately need, we shouldn't invest in fancy facilities or smartboards. We don't need videos, computers, or great libraries. We need teachers, and we need the best teachers—men with wisdom and maturity.

**Teaching
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There are lots of things pastor do. They pray for the sick, they exhort, they preside over meetings, they send and receive missionaries. They do many things as they represent the Church in the public eye, but their most important job is to feed God's sheep. That's why the pastors who preach and teach deserve a generous stipend. Teaching is the single most demanding work of the ministry, and the Church should recognize it as such by remunerating its teachers.

Christians who are taught the Scriptures should share what we have (food, drink, clothes, shelter, money) with our teachers. We need to give to those who have given to us. Paul uses the term *sowing* to describe the action of giving to a Bible teacher. What he means by *sowing* is that Christians should not just give, but make spiritual investments. We give with the confidence that we'll get dividends from our investments. The principle behind our giving is that we reap according to what we sow.

... the one who receives instruction in the Word should share all good things with their instructor... A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest (Galatians 6:6-9).

We will reap the harvest of eternal life if we sow in spiritual things. So what's a spiritual thing in which we can invest? Try this: sound doctrine and anointed teaching. We are to do good to all people, but how much *more* good should we do to the men who instruct us in the Word?

We should give the highest regard to those who work *hard* in the Church—and we’re not talking about the worship leader or the youth coordinator, we’re talking about teachers. They are the ones who care for us and exhort us by watching out for our souls. They speak the truth to us in the midst of a world of lies. That’s the kind of work we need to appreciate. When we pay our elders, it means we value the work of pastoring.

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

iii. Common sense

We should also recognize, as the Bible does, that it’s common sense that pastors should be paid. They do work, after all. Paul encourages us to reflect on how obvious it is that a pastor should be paid. If other laborers such as soldiers, farmers, and shepherds are paid for their work, why shouldn’t a pastor get paid?

...it’s common sense that pastors should be paid.

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? (1 Corinthians 9:7)

The right perspective is to view the issue of paying a pastor as a small matter. In other words, we should think that they deserve much more. It is a small thing for someone to give a material blessing to someone who has given unto them spiritual blessings, right? What is more important after all—spiritual blessings or material blessings? If Christians understand what is truly valuable in life, then why would we ever refuse to give material blessings to those who have brought us spiritual treasures?

If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (1 Corinthians 9:11)

iv. God commands it

**...paying
pastors
is not op-
tional.**

Another Bible truth is that paying pastors is not optional. God has said that we must pay them, so we must. The issue we should be debating is not *whether* we pay pastors, but *how much* we pay pastors. In OT times, God looked into the future and gave us the illustration of oxen treading grain to teach us about rewarding the NT pastoral ministry. God, through the example of an unmuzzled oxen, commanded that we should pay the men who preach the Gospel to us.

... it is written in the Law of Moses: ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us [Christian pastors], doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest (1 Corinthians 9:9-10).

... Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’ (1 Timothy 5:18).

God has decreed that a man who preaches the Gospel should make his living from preaching. That means that the people who receive a pastor’s teaching should make sure that their pastors get a decent income. A congregation should make sure that pastors are able to earn a living—enough for themselves and their families. All of a pastor’s needs should be met by the people who benefit from their teaching.

Don’t you know that those who serve in the Temple get their food from the Temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should receive their living from the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14).

God commanded that the men who served in the Temple should get their food from the Temple offerings. That applies to us today. The men who serve in the Church today should have their needs met through the offerings too. Old

Testament believers would share their offerings with the priests; and Christians should share their offerings with their pastors. It's an OT-NT parallel we literally *can't afford* to miss.

v. The right to be paid

Pastors have a God-given right to be paid. Since the Bible calls it a *right*, so should we—but what does it mean to have a right? It means that a pastor may claim payment from his congregation if he is not being remunerated fairly. It means that he is legally protected under that right, and his legal protection comes from God, not from any human authority or government.

...a pastor may claim payment from his congregation...

A pastor's right to be paid is established by God for a reason: It is to protect the pastor from poverty—his pay is financial security for him. It should be at least enough so that he'll have his basic needs met. For example, consider the need a pastor has to eat and drink. He and his family have a right to eat and drink, don't they?

Am I not an apostle?... Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?... Don't we have the right to food and drink? (1 Corinthians 9:1, 4)

Clearly, the idea is not to just give our elders enough so that they might scratch by. Pastors have a right be paid a sufficient amount so that they will not have to get secondary employment to make a living. If a pastor has to get a secular job to make ends meet, it will consume great amounts of time and energy. God knows how taxing it is to have a second job, therefore God has given pastors the right to be paid enough money through the ministry. God has done this so that a pastor will not have to commit himself to a secular job. The apostles, including Peter and Jesus' brothers all used this right. Can a pastor use it today? Of course, he can.

... is it only I and Barnabas [comparing himself to the other apostles, Jesus' brothers, and Peter] who lack the right to not work for a living? (1 Corinthians 9:6)

Paul did not use this specific right—and that was a wonderful gesture on his behalf. Paul was a man of faith and sac-

rifice, God bless his soul. Paul worked at his craft of tent-making and paid for his own needs. Being single helped, but that didn't mean that he didn't need to work much. In fact, Paul worked so diligently that he actually lost sleep. He did that to give his flock an example of hard work. Paul made every effort to give an example to those who were tempted by laziness.

... you yourselves know how it is necessary to imitate us, that we did not behave irresponsibly among you, nor did we eat bread from anyone without paying, but with toil and labor, we were working night and day in order not to be a burden to any of you, not that we do not have the right, but so that we may give ourselves as an example to you (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9; LEB).

**the right
of support**

A pastor's right to get paid a decent salary is appropriately called *the right of support*. Bible students remember Paul as the apostle who made great sacrifices, including the sacrifice of not using this right. He was a great man, but Paul's sacrifice doesn't mean that the right of other pastors ceases to exist. Any pastor can claim the right to get paid because God has given him that right. God gave it and Paul does not take it away, as wonderful an apostle as he was.

If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the Gospel of Christ... But I have not used any of these rights (1 Corinthians 9:11-12, 15).

In sum, if a pastor wants to ask his congregation to increase his pay due to certain needs he may have, he should do so. God does not want any pastor to be burdened during that man's service to God.

vi. Hired men

There are men who people call *pastors*, but whom God would not call pastors. These are the men who do not have the heart of a shepherd, although they serve in the Church. These are the men who are not serving Jesus—they are serving themselves. They are serving their own bellies.

... note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17-18; NKJV).

... many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things (Philippians 3:18-19; NKJV).

The false shepherds are in Christian congregations for the money. Jesus calls them *hired hands*.⁴⁸ Read the following passage and you'll see that these men care nothing for God's sheep. They have no investment in the sheep. The sheep are really not theirs.

**Jesus
calls
them
hired
hands.**

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep (John 10:11-13).

Do you see the contrast Jesus is making? He is contrasting himself, who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep, with the hired hand. The hired hand doesn't feel responsible for the sheep because they are not his. Jesus says that the hired hand does not care *at all* for the sheep. Therefore, even though a hired hand looks like a shepherd, he's really not a shepherd.

How many men are willing to ward off the wolves from God's Church? How many pastors are currently fighting against the false doctrine that assaults God's people? We have to be brave to be real shepherds and we have to care for God's sheep. The flock will be scattered unless there are true shepherds among us. We need men who will bravely

⁴⁸ This expression is from the Greek word *misthotos*, meaning *hired servant*.

stand by the sheep when the wolves approach—not running away, cowering back, or abandoning the sheep. This kind of commitment is only possible if a pastor is serving God, not money.

The fundamental problem of the hired hand who does not love the sheep is greed. His heart is inclined towards money, not people. The Good Shepherd parable describes the different men you will find in Christian ministry. It demonstrates what men go into the ministry for—many for money, and some for God. Most Pharisees served money. They were the hired hands of Jesus’ day, and our Lord wasn’t afraid to confront them about it:

‘No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.’

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts...’ (Luke 16:13-15).

Jesus knew that the hearts of the Pharisees were far from God. He identified their greed, and told them straightforward that they were unfit for the ministry. What would our Lord say about today’s pastors? Are they any better than the Pharisees? Maybe Jesus would confront them through us the way he confronted the Pharisees in his day and age!

vii. The worthy-worker principle

...a worker is worthy of his wages.

As he sent off seventy apostles, Jesus affirmed an OT principle: a worker is worthy of his wages. This principle was also taught by Paul. It’s a financial guideline for us today. Let’s call it the worthy-worker principle.

Go your way... I send you out... Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals... whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house...’ remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages... eat such things as are set before you (Luke 10:3-8).

The elders who lead well must be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor by speaking and teaching. For the scripture says... 'The worker is worthy of his wages' (1 Timothy 5:17-18; LEB).

What is this divinely-inspired principle about? It's all about building confidence. God wants the men who serve him in the ministry to feel confident. He wants us to be confident that we'll be rewarded for what we do. What man doesn't want to know that he'll be paid fairly before he starts a job? In the same way, a preacher should be able to tackle any assignment with the assurance that God will provide for him.

Jesus, a man who is the spitting image of God, encouraged men in the ministry. By doing so, Jesus revealed the very heart of God to us. Jesus tried to make sure that his apostles wouldn't feel any financial concerns. He didn't want his apostles to have any doubts that they would have all of their needs supplied, so he told them:

Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep (Matthew 10:9-10).

How sure can a preacher be that God will provide for him? One-hundred percent sure. He can be so sure that he need not carry money at all! This confidence-building is why Jesus didn't allow his apostles to carry money with them. Jesus gave them an opportunity to demonstrate that they were absolutely sure that God would provide for them. This is what Jesus believed: Missionaries don't need money for missions. Do you believe the same? God will provide for missionaries through the people to whom missionaries are sent.

Men who serve God should not have to worry about finances. Of course, we should not worry about anything at all. We have concerns, but money cannot be one of them. If we seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, surely financial blessings will be added to us. God will provide for

...a preacher should be able to tackle any assignment with the assurance that God will provide for him.

us through the Church, through the people we are sent to, through our own resourcefulness, and even through miracles. Isn't that what he did for Elijah?

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there...'

Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food...' Elijah said to her... "this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD sends rain on the land...'” So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family (1 Kings 17:2-4, 8-9, 13-14, 15).

...preaching is work...

As a final note, you'll also notice that the worthy worker principle proves that preaching is work—doesn't the Bible call preachers *laborers*? Preachers are legitimate workers. Some people might doubt it, but teaching the Scriptures is a real job that requires real knowledge, hard-won skills, and vast amounts of time.

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Notes: