



Discipleship & Equipping Ministries

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"Explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

1 Corinthians 2:13

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Disciples

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”¹

The Lord’s Great Commission was to “make disciples”. The subject of Discipleship is of utmost importance. What is Discipleship all about?

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He *said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”²

From this passage, we see that Discipleship has to do with how we perceive and relate to Jesus. Discipleship is walking in the revelation and

¹ Matthew 28:18-20

² Matthew 16:13-19

relationship of Christ's Lordship. Biblical Christianity is discipleship. The Church that Jesus is building consists only of disciples – all others are merely "visitors".

Discipleship is being taught by the Lord Himself through a disciplined devotional life. Isaiah prophesied: "All your children will be disciples of the Lord..."³ Discipleship is "obedience to the faith"⁴ – that is, observing the teachings of Christ in every area of life.⁵

My purpose in this message is to show the dynamics of Discipleship in the context of the Church through ministry relationships with the Five-Fold Equipping Ministries found in Ephesians 4. This is not an attempt to cover all aspects of Discipleship or Equipping, nor is it intended to be an overview of these subjects.

³ Isaiah 54:13. cf. Acts 2:42; Romans 8:14

⁴Romans 1:1-5; Acts 6:7

⁵Matthew 28:20, Matthew 6:10; Romans 14:17

The Church & Discipleship

During the apostolic period, Discipleship took place in the context of the local church life, wherein each member of the Body related directly to Christ, the Head of the Body, as a disciple of Christ, but also related to the whole Body, including the “five-fold” “equipping ministries”⁶ which included the team of local elders⁷.

One snapshot of the early church:

“So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer..... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.... And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.”⁸

⁶ Ephesians 4:11-13

⁷ Acts 20:17 & 28

⁸ Acts 2:41-42, 46; 4:32-35

From these passages, we see that Discipleship in the apostolic church required not only certain commitments in relationship with Jesus, but also certain commitments in relationship with the Church⁹:

- Teaching
- Fellowship
- Accountability
- Responsibility
- Oneness of heart and soul
- Submission to leadership and one another¹⁰

⁹ While the focus of this message is Discipleship as it relates specifically to the Equipping Ministries, this is not to say that relationships with these equipping ministries are all that is required in discipleship. Discipleship requires the authority of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20); and this authority necessitates the ministry of the entire Body of Christ, most importantly including relationship with the Head of the Body. There is a proverb which is attributed to several different African nations which in one way or another communicates: "It takes a village to raise a child."

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/It_Takes_a_Village#Proverb_question) It takes the whole Body of Christ – most importantly including relationship with the Head of the Body - to make a disciple. In this regard, I would suggest my message: "The Church – A Community for Transformation".

¹⁰ Acts 2:40-46 & 4:32-35

Spiritual Authority & Discipleship

Let us look again at the Lord's Great Commission:

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, **“All authority has been given to Me** in heaven and on earth. **Go therefore and make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”¹¹

“All authority has been given to Me... therefore make disciples.” **Only the authority of Christ can make disciples of Christ.** Jesus said He would be with us until the end of the Church Age, with His **authority**, and if we would co-labor with Him, He would make **disciples of Christ.** **It takes the authority of Christ to make a disciple of Christ.** Let's think about what that could mean:

Jesus is the Head of the Body, “the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all”.¹² “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.”¹³ The apostle Paul reminds us: “... not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think ... God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of

¹¹ Matthew 28:18-20

¹² Ephesians 1:22-23

¹³ Ephesians 4:7

another.”¹⁴ No one person or one type of ministry relationship carries all the authority of Christ. It takes the Five-Fold Equipping Ministries to make a disciple of Christ.

“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds¹⁵ and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ....”¹⁶

¹⁴ Romans 12:3-5

¹⁵ For the Greek word *poimen*, I am choosing to use the translation “shepherds” rather than “pastors”. One of the reasons for this is that is how the word is translated in every other instance in the New Testament. Also, the word “pastor” unfortunately carries with it assumed connotations which I feel go contrary to the biblical concept of this ministry.

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:7, 11-12. (“as” in the NASB, and “to be” in the NKJV are not in the Greek text.)

Equipping Ministry Relationships & Discipleship

We will discuss these different types of ministry relationships; but first, I'd like to identify that which they have in common. Firstly, these are **ministry relationships** – they may also be friendships, but they are **ministry relationships** by nature. Something in addition to human friendship is taking place in these relationships. **The life of Christ is being ministered through the Spirit and the word of Christ.**¹⁷ Jesus said: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”¹⁸ Human friendships are good, but an intentional **ministry relationship** is vital for discipleship. Since it takes the authority of Christ to make a disciple of Christ, authentic **ministry relationships share the life of Christ**, i.e., they are **Christ-centered relationships through which Christ is revealed and relationship with Christ is nurtured.**

Let's look at these Equipping Ministries:

“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ....”¹⁹

¹⁷ Colossians 3:16

¹⁸ John 6:63. Also: 2 Corinthians 3:6

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:7, 11-12. (“as” in the NASB, and “to be” in the NKJV are not in the Greek text.)

This passage tells us that Jesus gave certain gifts to men and gave certain men as gifts to the Church. Something that is important for us to understand is this: In building His Church,²⁰ **Jesus blesses men – not methods**. There may be some value in considering methodologies for how to make disciples; but in the end, Jesus blesses disciples **through men** rather than through methods. Acts 2:42 tells us that the disciples “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship....” In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also fellowshiping with the apostles. The syntax in the Greek text has both the teaching and the fellowship referring back to the apostles. In fact, *The Amplified Bible* translates it as: “the instruction and fellowship of the apostles”. Jesus gave certain gifts to men and gave certain men as gifts to the Church. The apostle Paul could say to the Thessalonians, “You know what kind of men we proved ourselves to be....”²¹ What qualifies these men to equip the Church is not their fulfilling the presupposed “job descriptions” of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, but rather who they are as ambassadors of Christ²². These are men who “have been with Jesus”²³, and bring the presence of Jesus.

²⁰ Matthew 16:18

²¹ 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *The Amplified Bible*

²² 2 Corinthians 5:20

²³ Acts 4:13

The Essence of the Equipping Ministries

The definitions of these five ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers vary – particularly with regards to the ministries of apostles and prophets. I have given much thought, study, and more thought to these ministries. I have my own personal perspectives on what the scriptures mean by these ministries. They each function differently, and they are usually defined by their functions. But here, I would rather try to capture the essence of the ministry instead of presupposed “job descriptions” – for three reasons:

- 1) In the atheistic and agnostic philosophies, “existence precedes essence”.²⁴ But in the Biblical worldview, “essence precedes existence”. For example, we have been created in the image of God, and this essence is meant to influence our existence, rather than we creating our own essence from the existence we choose to live independently of God. So, according to that principle, the essence of these ministries will define their functions. I think it is very possible – and prevalent – to have people purporting to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers when they lack the essence – the grace and gifting – God has in mind.
- 2) Secondly, I believe God incorporates uniqueness even within categories. No two apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, or

²⁴ The phrase was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre, who was a major proponent of Existentialism.

teachers will function exactly alike. They will have the same essence, but they will not fit presupposed “job descriptions”.

- 3) Thirdly, in relationships with these different ministries, it is the essence of each that we want to receive, rather than merely experiencing their functioning in our lives. The gift is more about who they are rather than what they do.

The Function of the Equipping Ministries

The Greek word translated “equipping” is *katartismos*, which means *maturing and perfecting*, also *furnishing and completing*; but the meaning also includes *repairing and restoring*, and particularly means *fitting, framing, and joining together*. These ministries are gifted with the discernment and ability required to help disciples take their place in the Body of Christ, and in this way “set in order” the church.²⁵ . The “equipping” ministry is essentially “leadership training”²⁶ – “for the training of the saints for the work of ministry”.²⁷ Biblical examples of this ministry relationship can be seen with Paul and Timothy²⁸, and Paul and Titus.²⁹

Ideally, along his spiritual path, a disciple finds ministry relationships with those who serve in each of the equipping ministries - apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers - in order to receive comprehensive influence and training. These ministers may be or may not be serving in the disciple’s local church. By nature of the case, shepherds are always local. But apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers may serve in the local church, but also extra-locally to the wider Body of Christ. Paul, while not a local shepherd, did spend several years in particular local churches.³⁰

²⁵ Titus 1:5

²⁶ 1 Timothy 1:3; 3:14-15; 4:1-6, 13; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:1-2, 14; 4:1-5; Titus 1:5; 2:1-15

²⁷ Ephesians 4:12 *Holman Christian Standard Bible*

²⁸ Acts 16:1-3a; 2 Timothy 2:1-2

²⁹ Titus 1:4-5

³⁰ 1 ½ years in Corinth (Acts 18:11); 2 years in Rome (Romans 28:31; Acts 28:30; and about 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:31).

Timothy and Titus, also not local shepherds³¹, spent seasons of time in particular churches.³²

In discussing his ministry, Paul gave the Church some analogies which I believe correspond to the Equipping Ministries:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So, then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants, and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God, which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”³³

I understand these analogies to correspond to the Equipping Ministries in this way:

- **“Planting” by apostles and evangelists**
- **“Watering” by teachers and prophets**
- **“Foundation Laying” by apostles and prophets**
- **“Building” by shepherds and teachers**

³¹ 2 Timothy 4:5

³² Cf. 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 4:21; Titus 1:5; 3:12

³³ 1 Corinthians 3:6-13

Apostles

Corresponding with Paul’s analogies in 1 Corinthians 3, the fruit of ministry relationships with authentic Christ-centered apostles is **a planting of the gospel and a laying of the Foundation of Christ** in the life of the individual disciple and the life of a local church.

Paul wrote to the church: “**I planted**; Apollos watered” It is important to note that Paul did not plant the church, but **the gospel**. I believe he was ever aware of the Lord’s promise: “I will build My Church”³⁴ coupled with the Lord’s commission: “Go and make disciples”.³⁵ Paul preached “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”³⁶. Paul ministered Christ. He did not go out to plant churches nor employ church-building methodologies. He ministered Christ, and churches happened – Jesus built them. Never once did Paul refer to himself as a “church planter”. But twice he said that he was “appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher”.³⁷ Paul **planted the gospel** into the hearts and lives of individual disciples and into the hearts and lives of churches.

Paul also wrote to the Church: “According to the grace of God, which was given to me, like a wise master builder I **laid a foundation**, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no

³⁴ Matthew 16:18

³⁵ Matthew 28:19

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2

³⁷ 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11

man can lay a **foundation** other than the one which is laid, **which is Jesus Christ.**³⁸ There is so much contained in this passage³⁹; but here I want to simply comment on the fact that Paul's ministry was one of **"foundation laying"**.⁴⁰ Paul clearly identified **the Foundation as Christ**. Individual disciples and whole churches need to be **"rooted and grounded"**⁴¹ in **relationship with Christ**. This **relationship**⁴² starts with **revelation**⁴³ – we cannot relate to that which we do not know. And this **relationship** continues in **revelation** – as our **revelation of Christ** grows, our **relationship with Christ** grows. Everything in our Christian life, everything in the life of the Church utterly depends on our **relationship with Christ**. And our relationship is determined – limited to or proportionate to our **revelation of Christ**. **Foundation-laying ministries co-labor with Christ as He builds His Church through revelation of Himself.**⁴⁴

When God gives equipping ministries, He also gives the necessary grace to fulfill those ministries – the special gifting to impart the **revelation of the mystery of Christ** in such a way as to bring a people into fullness of **relationship with Christ**.⁴⁵ Paul states clearly in Ephesians that God gives this **"revelation of the mystery of Christ"**⁴⁶ to apostles and prophets. He

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

³⁹ For more depth and detail on this subject, see my publication, *The Foundation of the Church*.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

⁴¹ Cf. Paul's prayer: Ephesians 3:16-21

⁴² Cf. Matthew 16:13-18

⁴³ Cf. Luke 6:46-48

⁴⁴ Matthew 16:13-18

⁴⁵ Galatians 1:15-16, 4:19; Ephesians 3:1-10; Colossians 1:27-29.

⁴⁶ Ephesians 3:1-7

also speaks of “the foundation of the apostles and prophets”⁴⁷ – they are not the foundation, Christ is – but he is referring to the foundation laid by the ministries of apostles and prophets.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ephesians 2:20

⁴⁸ Ephesians 2:20; 3:1-7. Regarding Ephesians 2:20, M.R. Vincent explains: “The foundation laid by them.” See my article, “The Foundation of the Apostles & Prophets”.

Prophets

Corresponding with Paul's analogies in 1 Corinthians 3, the fruit of ministry relationships with authentic Christ-centered prophets is **a laying of the Foundation of Christ** and a **"watering"** in the life of the individual disciple and the life of a local church.

The Greek word, *propheteuo*, means to prophesy or be a prophet. Greek scholars⁴⁹ describe this to mean: "speaking under inspiration", "revealing the will and the mind of God", "revealing the counsels and the ways of God". John the Baptist, as with all the prophets who preceded him⁵⁰, **testified of Christ**, because as we are told in the Book of Revelation, **"the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"**.⁵¹ This is because Jesus is **the Foundation**. Paul states clearly in Ephesians that God gives the **"revelation of the mystery of Christ"**⁵² to apostles and prophets. In tandem with apostles⁵³, prophets "lay the Foundation of Christ". As I explained earlier with apostles, the Foundation laying ministry involves the **revelation of Christ and relationship with Christ**. We could understand that God has given apostles the special gifting to establish **revelation of Christ**, and to prophets, the special gifting to establish **relationship with Christ**.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ James Strong, W.E. Vine, Robert Young

⁵⁰ Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁵¹ Revelation 19:10

⁵² Ephesians 3:1-7

⁵³ Acts 13 shows us that it was prophets and teachers who became apostles. This may suggest that the motivational gifts (Romans 12:5-8) of an apostle may be both teaching and prophecy. It also helps us to understand how apostles and prophets work together in laying the Foundation of Christ.

⁵⁴ Galatians 1:15-16, 4:19; Ephesians 3:1-10; Colossians 1:27-29.

The apostle Paul said he “planted”, and others “watered” after him⁵⁵. That which apostles plant is the “seed”⁵⁶ – “the seed which is imperishable through the living and enduring word of God”⁵⁷. It is important that we understand that prophets “**water**” that seed which is the word of God. There is only one seed – the word of God. Prophets who have come after the 1st century don’t plant new seeds – they water God’s seed implanted.⁵⁸ The words of the prophets are not adding new words to the word of God. The words prophets speak forth are “**something that God brings to mind**” – something about which He has already recorded in His written word. **“Something God brings to mind”**: This is a phrase I have adopted from Wayne Grudem.⁵⁹ It refers to **insights from God’s perspective** - the **inspiration and revelation** God gives to prophets, as well as the **inspiration and revelation** He desires to give **through** prophets. God’s word is “forever firmly fixed in heaven”⁶⁰; but He uses the words of prophets to “**bring it to mind**”. Prophets “water” the seed.

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:6

⁵⁶ Luke 8:11

⁵⁷ 1 Peter 1:23. cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19

⁵⁸ James 1:21; 2 Peter 1:19. *The Scriptures – The Canon of the Old and New Testaments*

⁵⁹ *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, Crossway (1988/2000)

⁶⁰ Psalm 119:89

Until the “Perfect” Comes

Because I am speaking about apostles and prophets, I feel I must also invest a minimal amount of time in an effort to offset the conventional dispensational / cessationist doctrine which asserts that the ministries of apostles and prophets – as well as certain other spiritual gifts⁶¹ – have “passed away”. This view is most often based on a poor exegesis of one verse of scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:10, which states: “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” The “perfect” is arbitrarily interpreted as the Canon of Scripture. At the time of the writing of this epistle, the Church had no concept of a “canon” or that the establishing of a Canon would become necessary 1500-1600 years into the future. It seems to me a much more rational interpretation of “the perfect” would be what Paul refers to a few chapters later in 1 Corinthians – the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the Church – “Then *comes the end*, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.”⁶²

To understand how confused the modern Church is on this subject, consider this: Most in the Church know that the Greek word, *apostolos*, can be translated as “a sent one”. Their understanding is that this refers to “a missionary”. They accept the ministry of missionaries but may have a problem recognizing the need of the local church to have input from extra-

⁶¹ Usually the gifts of tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles are singled out from the other spiritual gifts.

⁶² 1 Corinthians 15:24 (Context: vv. 20-28)

local or itinerant ministries. Their perspective is: “Missionaries are for all those poor people overseas – not for us here in the local church.” These same people see Peter, James, John, and Jude as apostles, yet these men were not “missionaries” as we understand the term. If we “amplify” the translation of *apostolos* to include “one commissioned with a purpose” – “an accredited messenger”, “a representative”, “an ambassador”⁶³ – we get somewhat beyond the presupposed “job description” to quality of the man.

Actually, in the New Testament scriptures there are two categories of apostles:

- 1) “The 12” who walked with Jesus⁶⁴ and established the norm for the doctrine and practice of the early Church⁶⁵
- 2) At least 7 more apostles are mentioned in the New Testament⁶⁶ after the first 12. And there are also all the other apostles throughout Church history to the present who have emerged from the Body of Christ and followed the apostolic tradition⁶⁷

Nowhere in the whole of the Bible is there any indication that any spiritual gifts would pass away during this age. Throughout all Church history to the present time the evidence of spiritual gifts is documented. Of a certainty, there have and are atrocious abuses; but the answer to abuse is

⁶³ *New Bible Dictionary; Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20; Galatians 4:14.

⁶⁴ Matthew 10:2-4

⁶⁵ Jude 3

⁶⁶ Paul (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8); Barnabus (Acts 14:14); Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:9); Timothy and Silas (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6); Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7)

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6; Romans 16:7; Acts 14:14; Galatians 1:18-19; 2:9

not disuse. Neither the scriptures, nor the Holy Spirit, give the Church permission to ignore any of the spiritual gifts.

This is what the scripture says: “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **until** we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” It should be perfectly obvious that the Church has not yet attained these things, so **until** it does, we need **all** the equipping ministries. If we want to say that apostles and prophets have passed away, then we must also say that evangelists, shepherds, and teachers have also passed away. But, in fact, none of the equipping ministries have passed away.

Christ gave the Great Commission to His apostles. When those 12 passed away, did the Great Commission pass away? Of course, not. I see some significance in the fact that Jesus gave the Great Commission to apostles, as opposed to “pastors” (as we know them today). I believe that to preach the gospel and make disciples – to plant the gospel and lay the Foundation of Christ - in an authentic way requires an **apostolicity** of the quality which we have been discussing. **There needs to be this Christ-centered apostolicity in order for the life of Christ to be shared⁶⁸ in**

⁶⁸ Colossians 3:16

ministry relationships between disciples and equipping ministers - be they an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, or teacher.

Correspondence, Literature & Media Ministries

As I've said, with the exception of shepherds, the other four equipping ministries are both local and extra-local. Just a cursory look through the Book of Acts and the Epistles shows us that input from extra-local equipping ministries was an essential part of the apostolic church. With the relative ease of travel today, this should be the case even more so; but, generally speaking, this biblical norm has been lost. At least in the modern Western church, the support of these itinerant ministries has for the most part fallen by the wayside. I personally think this is symptomatic of the culturalization of the church⁶⁹ in a consumer-driven society. The result is a low-level and a self-centered spirituality wherein people are inclined to support only those ministries which are locally "always there for them" serving their "felt needs". But to be fair, this situation is also a result of low-level and self-serving instruction on the part of local pastors wherein the biblical pattern the Holy Spirit has graciously recorded for us in the scriptures is ignored. Ironically, because of this consumer spirituality, people who either want their "ears tickled" by their preference⁷⁰, or alternatively, people who may be a little more serious about their discipleship seek out extra-local ministries for input and are many times willing to support the ministries they are receiving via the media. This has created a para-church situation which has supplanted the biblical pattern which has all ministries emerging from and accountable

⁶⁹ I have written in some detail on this subject in my publication, *Some Thoughts on Church & Culture*.

⁷⁰ 2 Timothy 4:3

to the local church. I have given an overview of these things in my publication, “Supporting the Work of Ministry”. I hold a theology of Restoration that looks to see the doctrine and practice of the apostolic church restored. I do see pockets in non-denominational circles where there is some understanding, appreciation, and practice of these things regarding extra-local equipping ministries. But I don’t know if I will live to see an overall restoration of these things take place in the Western church.⁷¹

Now, having “beat that drum” for a while, I’d like to add to the objectivity by pointing out that, while Paul’s extra-local ministry brought him into many local churches, he also wrote epistles which were sent to churches he had not visited.⁷² This too is part of the apostolic pattern. Like John’s Revelation sent to the seven churches in Asia⁷³, Paul’s letters to the *Galatians* and the *Ephesians* were “circular letters”, which were intended to be read and passed on to other churches.⁷⁴ The apostle Peter did little traveling⁷⁵; the apostle John, even less⁷⁶; and the apostles James and Jude, the Lord’s brothers⁷⁷, apparently none at all. But their epistles are still traveling all over the world.

⁷¹ I have been referring to the general situation in non-denominational churches in the West. Ironically the denominations have established in their structures support for “extra-local ministries”, albeit in the form of denominational “overseers”, whose job descriptions are to essentially maintain denomination policies, as opposed to the apostolic pattern to which I have been referring.

⁷² Rome, Colossae

⁷³ Revelation 1:4

⁷⁴ Revelation: the churches of Asia. Galatians: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch. Ephesians: the churches in Asia Minor.

⁷⁵ Samaria (Acts 8:14-25); Joppa (Acts 10-11); Antioch of Syria (Galatians 2:11); Rome (1 Peter 5:13)

⁷⁶ Samaria (Acts 8:14-25); Patmos (Revelation 1:9)

⁷⁷ James 1:1; Jude 1

Today, as throughout all of Church history, this mentoring relationship between the equipping minister and the disciple continues to take place through the writing of correspondence and literature. The first apostles wrote letters of instruction.⁷⁸ Prophetic literature was recorded. It is impossible to estimate all the correspondence that has taken place between mentors and disciples throughout human history. There are and have been countless Christian authors – well known and not known. I love this quote from Samuel Marinus Zwemer⁷⁹: “The printed [and digital] page is a missionary that can go anywhere and do so at minimum cost. It enters closed lands and reaches all strata of society. It does not grow weary. It needs no furlough. It lives longer than any missionary. It never gets ill. It penetrates through the mind to the heart and conscience. It has and is producing results everywhere. It has often lain dormant yet retained its life and bloomed years later.”

Looking back on those who have been equipping influences in my own spiritual life and ministry, I would identify probably three local elders⁸⁰, and also three older brothers in the Lord who had extra-local ministries⁸¹. In the past 40 years, I haven’t interacted with the three local elders, two of which has passed away. Of the older brothers in the Lord, all three have passed away. But I can give a long list of spiritual mentors who equipped me in a

⁷⁸ i.e., Epistles

⁷⁹ Zwemer was an American missionary and scholar (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Marinus_Zwemer) who coined the phrase: “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity.”

⁸⁰ Dennis D’Amico, a shepherd; Jim Borchet, an apostolic teacher; Robert Mawire, an evangelist

⁸¹ Dale Rumble, an apostolic teacher; Art Katz, a prophet; John Beaumont, a prophet.

very personal way through their writings. Through their writings, their thoughts and words have never left me, and are always on hand whenever I want to turn to them.⁸² While I prefer “paper and ink”, I appreciate and make use of the availability of digital formats. The apostle Paul used the phrase “... combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*.”⁸³ Interacting with the thoughts and words of an author allows the Holy Spirit much freedom for internalizing truth in our hearts in a uniquely personal way. I am convinced that is why God gave us His Book.

Maybe second to that quality of interaction between a disciple and an author would be those favorite preachers and teachers that some people meet with regularly on the radio⁸⁴ daily or weekly. Listening to audio, minus image, is still somewhat interactive, and still gives ground for the Holy Spirit to communicate internally on the heart level.

And while it is also beneficial, probably the least effective equipping with regards to internalization is the digital image via TV and DVD. I say this because this mode of communication is “prescriptive” on the part of the speaker and “passive” on the part of the hearer. The visual image is dominant, dictating to our eyes and mind what we are to receive. And so, by and large, we receive only what the human speaker has to give. There is some, but little, room for the unimposing Holy Spirit to speak deeply inside

⁸² Just to name a few: J. Sidlow Baxter, Bill Britton, Oswald Chambers, Robert Coleman, Devern Fromke, Graeme Goldsworthy, Alexander Rattray Hay, C.S. Lewis, Andrew Murray, Watchman Nee, David Pawson, Francis Schaeffer, Howard Snyder, T. Austin Sparks, and three Biblical Language scholars, A.T. Robertson, James Strong, and W.E. Vine.

⁸³ Or “... explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words...”, 1 Corinthians 2:13

⁸⁴ Or “podcasts”.

our hearts. There is no doubt that image-oriented communication has “dumbed down” our culture, as well as the discipleship and spiritual formation of the culturalized church.

Now, in expressing these perspectives, I don’t want to give the impression that I put little value on actual “flesh and blood” ministry relationships. That is not the case. In fact, this is what characterizes the disciple’s ministry relationships with shepherds, which are, by nature of the case, localized and personalized relationships. While serving as local elders, these people often have grace and gifting to function also as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers.

Evangelists

The Greek word⁸⁵ translated “evangelist” is *euangelistes*. It literally means “a messenger of good” – one who announces, proclaims, or declares a good message. It is essential that we understand what that “good message” is. Paul said that if the Church strays from “single, simple devotion to Christ”, we can end up preaching a “different gospel”, receiving a “different spirit” and a “different Jesus” – and, he said, this is readily accepted.⁸⁶ We must realize that this is not only possible, but it is also prevalent in the contemporary Western Church – it is an explanation for its low-level of discipleship.

The word is the seed. Evangelists plant the seed. The wrong message produces the wrong kind of “believer” and the wrong kind of church. This is because the wrong message sends out the wrong idea of what Christianity is all about in the first place. People will not develop into devoted disciples of Christ if they are given a “different” message to begin with. Christ-centered evangelists plant good seed. The “good message” is specifically about Christ.

Corresponding with Paul’s analogies in 1 Corinthians 3, the fruit of ministry relationships with authentic Christ-centered evangelists is a **planting of the gospel** in the life of the individual disciple and the life of a

⁸⁵ In this publication, references to meanings of Greek words are sourced mainly in W.E. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*.

⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 11:2-4

local church. By that which is planted we are “born again not of seed⁸⁷ which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God⁸⁸ - “the implanted word, which is able to save our souls.”⁸⁹ Evangelists who minister the life of Christ are those who, like Paul⁹⁰, preach “the gospel of God... concerning His Son....”⁹¹ - “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”⁹². The Book of Acts shows that the message preached by the early church was a Christ-centered message. In its 20 chapters, there are at least 30 references to Christ as the subject matter of the apostles’ messages.⁹³ Paul said that “God’s gospel” “concerned His Son”⁹⁴ – that “He is Lord of all”.⁹⁵

Paul summarizes the message at the end of his first letter to the Corinthians⁹⁶: The message is: “Jesus died for our sins, was buried and was raised.” He said that this message was “according to the scriptures”. He said that this is the message which “he preached and by which people are saved”. He exhorted people to receive it, believe it, hold fast to it, and stand in it. In summarizing his ministry to the elders at Ephesus, he said that he “... solemnly testified to both Jews and Greeks of **repentance toward God**

⁸⁷ Luke 8:11

⁸⁸ 1 Peter 1:23. cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19

⁸⁹ James 1:21

⁹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11; 4:5

⁹¹ Romans 1:1 & 3

⁹² 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; 2:1-2

⁹³ Acts 2:22, 32, 36, 38; 3:13; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30, 42; 8:5, 35; 9:20, 22; 10:36, 38; 11:20; 13:23, 33; 15:11; 16:31; 17:3, 18; 18:5, 25, 28; 19:13; 20:21; 24:24; 25:19.

⁹⁴ Romans 1:1-7

⁹⁵ Acts 10:36

⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁹⁷ The message calls for both repentance toward God and faith in Christ.

Christ-centered evangelists plant good seed. Their message contains the DNA for authentic Christianity – authentic conversion, and authentic spiritual life and growth.⁹⁸ The very first message preached by the Church (through Peter) on the Day of Pentecost clearly set forth the DNA for authentic Christianity. In his message, Peter included the necessary response to the message – that is, how one authentically turns to God and has faith in Christ: “Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”⁹⁹ This pattern continues throughout the Book of Acts.¹⁰⁰ People received the right message, the right Jesus, and the right Spirit. The early church was not without problems, but it was authentic and “turned the world up-side-down”¹⁰¹ – it is difficult to say the same about the contemporary Western church.

How was this “good message” delivered? Today, when we think of evangelism, we most often think of telling people our “testimony” – that is, how we came to faith in Christ, how it changed our life, and how it can meet people’s needs and solve their problems. Our “testimonies” may fit the description of giving “an explanation to everyone who asks you to give an

⁹⁷ Acts 20:21

⁹⁸ I have written on these things in the following publications: *Foundation Stones, Receiving the Gift of The Holy Spirit, Repentance, Some Thoughts on Spiritual Life & Growth, You Must Be Born Again.*

⁹⁹ Acts 2:38

¹⁰⁰ Acts 2:37-38; 8:12-24; 10:44-48; 19:1-6.

¹⁰¹ Acts 17:6

account for the hope that is in you“.¹⁰² But the only testimonies recorded in the New Testament are either those in the gospels given by people who had received miraculous healings from Jesus, or the apostles’ eye-witness accounts of the risen Christ in the Book of Acts and the epistles. On the other hand, there is a method of evangelism which I see in the New Testament which seems to be little realized, yet it has been employed throughout church history and is sorely needed today. I’ll call it “Evangelistic Teaching”.¹⁰³

The Ethiopian eunuch who was reading Isaiah wanted Philip to “guide”¹⁰⁴ him in the scriptures. The Greek word is *hodegos*, meaning “to lead the way”, that is, through the scriptures. As we know, the man received “understanding”¹⁰⁵, came to faith in Christ, and was baptized.¹⁰⁶ Essentially, Philip led the man in an “evangelistic Bible study”.

This method of evangelism typified Paul’s ministry: In Damascus, he was “proving” that Jesus was the Christ. The Greek word is *sumbibazo*, literally meaning “to join together”¹⁰⁷ - that is, joining events in the life of Christ together with references in the Hebrew Scriptures to “prove” He was the Christ.¹⁰⁸ In Thessalonica, Luke says that Paul was “reasoning” – the same Greek word translated “proving”; but adds that he was also

¹⁰² 1 Peter 3:15

¹⁰³ Cf. “Turning to God” by William Barclay; “Ancient-Future Evangelism” & *The Journey to Jesus* series by Robert Webber.

¹⁰⁴ Acts 8:31 (Strong’s # 3594)

¹⁰⁵ Acts 8:30

¹⁰⁶ Acts 8:26-39

¹⁰⁷ Strong’s # 4822

¹⁰⁸ Acts 9:22

“explaining” and “giving evidence” that Jesus was the Christ. The Greek words are *dianoigo*, meaning “to open up completely”,¹⁰⁹ and *paratithemi*, meaning “to put forth facts through teaching”.¹¹⁰ The passage¹¹¹ tells us that not only Jews, but also “God-fearing Greeks” and “leading women” “were persuaded”.¹¹² Of the word “persuaded”, Vine says: “bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations”. In Corinth, Paul “reasoned” with Jews and Greeks;¹¹³ and they too were “persuaded”.¹¹⁴ He also did the same in Ephesus.¹¹⁵ A while later, again in Ephesus,¹¹⁶ Paul “reasoned” and “persuaded” for 3 ½ months in the synagogue and for another 2 years in the School of Tyrannus.¹¹⁷ I believe a major part of Paul’s ministry can be accurately described as “Evangelistic Teaching”.

¹⁰⁹ Strong’s # 1272

¹¹⁰ Strong’s # 2532

¹¹¹ Acts 17:1-4 (1 Thessalonians 2:1-16)

¹¹² Greek: *peitho* (Strong’s # 3982)

¹¹³ Greek: *dialegomai* (Strong’s # 1256)

¹¹⁴ Acts 18:4

¹¹⁵ Acts 18:19 During his 2nd missionary journey

¹¹⁶ During his 3rd missionary journey

¹¹⁷ Acts 19:8-10

Teachers

Next, we'll consider the equipping ministry of teachers. Ephesians 4:11 reads: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, **and some as shepherds and teachers....**"

Some scholars see four, rather than five categories here, thus combining shepherd-teachers into one ministry title. This is because of the absence of the phrase "some as"¹¹⁸ in between the two words. It is also noted that Paul told Timothy that shepherds "should be able to teach".¹¹⁹ I do agree with these observations. In fact, most teaching ministries can be more accurately defined with preceding adjectives like "pastoral teaching", but also "apostolic teaching", "prophetic teaching", and even "evangelistic teaching"¹²⁰. I see all these categories in Paul's ministry, for example.¹²¹ I believe there are various types of teaching ministries which are not connected to the ministry of shepherding. There is also the fact that, in the Jewish counterparts, there were rabbis/teachers who were totally dedicated to teaching, and in that sense, not involved with a "hands-on" ministry of shepherding the flock. The same is true today. So, I will deal here briefly with the "teachers" and, taking "shepherds" out of their listed order, deal with them later.

¹¹⁸ Or "to be" in the NKJV

¹¹⁹ 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24

¹²⁰ e.g., Acts 8:26-35; 17:2-3; 18:4 & 19; 19:8-10

¹²¹ Acts 17:17, 18:4, 19:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:11

Corresponding with Paul's analogies in 1 Corinthians 3, the fruit of ministry relationships with authentic Christ-centered teachers is a **watering of the gospel and a building upon the Foundation of Christ** in the life of the individual disciple and the life of a local church.

The Hebrew word for "teacher" is *morah*. *Morah* is also the Hebrew word for "archer".¹²² The Christ-centered teacher has placed Jesus as the "bull's eye" of his target, so to speak. This Hebrew word, *morah*, comes from the same root word as *torah*, which means "the way". For the Hebrews, the Old Covenant Law was "the way" – "the way of life". In announcing the New Covenant, Jesus declared Himself to be "the way, the truth and the life".¹²³ This is why first century Christians referred to themselves as "the Way".¹²⁴ The Christ-centered teacher "points the way" to Christ.

According to Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest, the kind of teachers the apostle Paul is referring to in Acts 13:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11, are "God-called and God-equipped teachers recognized by the Church as those having authority in the Church in matters of doctrine and interpretation". Both the apostle Paul and the apostle James insist on "sound doctrine" in the Church¹²⁵ - which is to say, Christ-centered doctrine. Christ-centered teachers who minister the life of Christ, like the writer of Hebrews, are those who focus on the doctrine of Christ.¹²⁶ There are the

¹²² Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament

¹²³ John 14:6

¹²⁴ Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

¹²⁵ 1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 1:13, 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 7-8; James 3:1

¹²⁶ Hebrews 6:1-2. cf. 2 John 9

doctrines ABOUT the Christ from the Old Testament types and in the apostolic epistles; and there are the doctrines OF Christ from the Gospels.

The goal of Christ-centered teachers who minister the life of Christ is to bring **revelation of Christ** with a view to enhancing **relationship with Christ**. The goal of Christ-centered teachers is teaching with a view to spiritual formation - the formation of Christ in you – to transform you into the image of Christ. Paul told the disciples at Galatia that his ministry was like being in labor in the birthing process, “until Christ was formed in them”.¹²⁷ Paul taught that, as one receives revelation of Christ, the Holy Spirit transforms you into His image.¹²⁸ He told us in an epistle what his ministry was all about “... Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, that we may present everyone perfect (complete and mature in their relationship with) Christ Jesus.”¹²⁹ Christ-centered teaching is done for the purpose of spiritual formation – the formation of Christ in you – to transform you into the image of Christ.

Following are a couple of quotes from a couple of Christ-centered teachers:

“A teacher imparts a love for the truth – a deep passion for scripture and for the Lord of scripture.” (Clay Sterret)

¹²⁷ Galatians 4:19

¹²⁸ II Corinthians 3:18 & 4:6

¹²⁹ Colossians 1:27-28

“The test of an instructor in the Christian Church is that he is able to build me up in my intimacy with Jesus Christ, not that he gives me new ideas, but I come away feeling I know a bit more about Jesus Christ.... If you are a teacher sent from God, your worth in God’s sight is estimated by the way you enable people to see Jesus.” (Oswald Chambers)

Shepherds

Lastly, we come to the term “shepherds”¹³⁰. We will see that those on this leadership team of a local church – that is, “those who rule”¹³¹ - are interchangeably referred to as “Elders” or “Overseers” or “Shepherds”. In the New Testament scriptures,¹³² the three terms appear together obviously referring to the same entity. “Elder” is the title, “Overseer”, the position, and “Shepherd”, the function. Elders are overseers who shepherd the flock.

Acts 20:17-35 is a record of Paul’s farewell address to the leaders of the Church at Ephesus, where he had ministered daily for 3 years.¹³³ In this passage are many wonderful insights into the nature and quality of Paul’s ministry; but we will focus on just two verses having to do, specifically, with the leaders of the Church at Ephesus, that is, those to whom Paul was speaking.

Let’s read Acts 20:17. “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders of the church.**” This verse tells us that the church leaders from Ephesus whom Paul is addressing are called “elders”. The Greek word is “*presbuteros*”. It is the Greek word from which we get the English word, “presbytery”. In the New Testament, this word appears first in Acts

¹³⁰ As I said earlier, for the Greek word *poimen* in *Ephesians 4:11*, I am choosing to use the translation “shepherds” rather than “pastors”. One of the reasons for this is that is how the word is translated in every other instance in the New Testament. Also, the word “pastor” unfortunately carries with it assumed connotations which I feel go contrary to the biblical concept of this ministry.

¹³¹ Hebrews 13:17

¹³² Acts 20:17 & 28; 1 Peter 5:1-2

¹³³ Acts 20:31

11:30, and then in Acts 15: 4,6 & 22 - all in reference to the “elders” of the church in Jerusalem. According to the Greek scholar, W.E. Vine, the Greek word, *presbuteros*, is an adjective, not a noun, meaning *elderly* and/or *mature*.¹³⁴ The concept of eldership found in the gentile churches like this one in Ephesus was a carry-over from Israel. The elders sat at the gates of the city¹³⁵ to give “righteous judgment” to the people¹³⁶, bear witness to the will of God and make decisions accordingly.¹³⁷ Those who ruled¹³⁸ as elders¹³⁹ in Israel were chosen because they had wisdom¹⁴⁰ and discernment¹⁴¹ and were inclined to fear and serve God rather than people.¹⁴² So we see that the term “elder” describes the spiritual stature of the church leaders Paul was addressing – they were physically and spiritually mature.

Another thing to note is that this word is always used in a context of plurality in the Bible.¹⁴³ In other words, a church did not have an elder, it had elders. The apostle Peter used the term, *sumpresbuteros*, meaning “fellow-elders” or “co-elders”.¹⁴⁴ The prefix of the Greek word literally means “together in association”, “the same or equal to in resemblance and

¹³⁴ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Strong’s #4245)

¹³⁵ Proverbs 31:23

¹³⁶ Deuteronomy 16:18

¹³⁷ Cf. Ruth 4:1-12

¹³⁸ Deuteronomy 1:13 (Hebrew) *roshe* (Strong’s # 7218)

¹³⁹ Exodus 3:16 (Hebrew) *zaqen* (Strong’s # 2205)

¹⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 1:13 (Hebrew) *chakam* (Strong’s # 2450)

¹⁴¹ Deuteronomy 1:13 (Hebrew) *bene* (Strong’s # 995)

¹⁴² Deuteronomy 1:17; 2 Chronicles 19:9

¹⁴³ Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1

¹⁴⁴ I Peter 5:1; *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Strong’s #4850)

instrumentality”. The eldership is a plurality with co-equality. The word “archpresbuteros” does not appear in the Bible – there was no such thing as a “head elder” or “lead elder”. The practice of a “lead pastor” over other “supporting pastors” is a modern concept that is not found anywhere in the New Testament scriptures. The only record in scripture of a shepherd who is above other shepherds refers to Jesus, the “Chief Shepherd”.¹⁴⁵

The other verse we want to focus on is Acts 20:28. “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” This verse tells us a number of things: Firstly, these **“elders” were also “overseers”**. The Greek word is *episkopos*. It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “episcopal”. It is a combination word: *epi*, meaning “over”, and *skopeo*, meaning to “look” or “watch” – i.e., to “look over” or to “watch over” – “the flock”. So, this tells us **the ministry position** of these Ephesian church leaders.

But notice that **the “elders” and the “overseers” are one and the same**. A tradition developed back in church history which set “overseers”, called “bishops”, over the “elders” of churches in a region – i.e., a “bishop” would rule over the local church “elders” in a region. Robertson’s *Word Pictures of the New Testament* says: “Ignatius shows that in the early second century the office of (overseer or) bishop over the elders had developed, but Lightfoot has shown that **it was not so in the first century.**” In the New Testament scriptures, there is no evidence of any office higher

¹⁴⁵ (Greek) *archpoimen*, I Peter 5:4.

than or over the local eldership (except, of course, for Christ, the Head of the Body). The idea of “bishops” overseeing pastors in a given region, etc. as in denominational structures, is not to be found in the New Testament scriptures.

Let’s read Acts 20:28 again. “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” So here we see that the ministry function of an “elder”, called an “overseer”, is “**to shepherd** the church of God”. There is a noun form appearing in Ephesians 4:11, which is traditionally translated “pastor”, but is essentially “**a shepherd**” – one who “**shepherds the flock**”. The concept of shepherding found in the gentile churches like this one in Ephesus was also a carry-over from Israel. The prophet Ezekiel was clear regarding the Lord’s expectations of those who would shepherd His people. They were to feed the flock, strengthen the sickly, heal the diseased, bind up the broken, bring back the scattered.¹⁴⁶ The Greek word for “shepherd” is *poimaino*. This is a verb which means to “feed”, to “tend”, or to “guide” the flock.¹⁴⁷ Surveying the New Testament scriptures, we get an overview of activities of this plurality of elders:

- tending and shepherding¹⁴⁸
- teaching¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ezekiel 34:1-10 & 11-16

¹⁴⁷ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Strong’s number 4165)

¹⁴⁸ 1 Peter 5:2 *poimaino* (Strong’s # 4165)

¹⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; Titus 1:9

- guarding and protecting¹⁵⁰
- praying - regarding the oversight of the work of ministry,¹⁵¹ and for those in sin and sickness¹⁵²
- leading¹⁵³ and guiding¹⁵⁴
- steering and governing¹⁵⁵
- and ruling

A few comments on the last activity listed – “ruling”: Paul writes to Timothy and refers to elders who “rule well”¹⁵⁶. How would the apostle Paul describe “ruling well”? In the same sentence he said that it involved “labor in the word and doctrine”.¹⁵⁷ The apostle Peter also offers the following: “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, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”¹⁵⁸

So according to the apostle Paul, an “elder” is an “overseer” who **“shepherds the flock”** – all one person, but as I said, always appearing in

¹⁵⁰ Acts 20:28-31 (Greek) *prosecho* (Strong’s # 4337)

¹⁵¹ Acts 6:1-7

¹⁵² James 5:14

¹⁵³ Romans 12:8

¹⁵⁴ Romans 12:8 (Greek) *proestimi* (Strong’s # 4291); Hebrews 13:7, 24 (Greek) *hegeomai* (Strong’s # 2233)

¹⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:28 (Greek) *kubernesis* (Strong’s # 2941)

¹⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 5:17

¹⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 5:17 *New King James Version*

¹⁵⁸ 1 Peter 5:1-3 *New International Version*

a plurality.¹⁵⁹ The qualifications for an “elder” in Titus 1:5-9 and the qualifications for an “overseer” in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 are essentially the same. This adds credibility to the fact that these are one and the same person.

We see that the apostle Peter paints the same picture in his epistle when he exhorts the **elders** to “**shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight....**”¹⁶⁰ In his *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, W.E. Vine concurs that an “**elder**” is an “**overseer**” who “**shepherds the flock**”.¹⁶¹ “Overseer” is his ministry title, “shepherd” is his ministry description, and “elder” speaks of his spiritual stature.

There is no scriptural evidence of “elderesses” – i.e., no women overseers that shepherd. But there are *wives of elders* who, ideally, are “helpers” “comparable” or “suitable” to”¹⁶² their husbands in spiritual stature and are “one” with their husbands in the work of the ministry.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ The idea of a “lead pastor” is a relatively recent development. The idea of a pastor or shepherd over other pastors or shepherds occurs only once in the New Testament, and that is in reference to Jesus being the “Chief Shepherd” (archpoimen) in I Peter 5:4.

¹⁶⁰ I Peter 5:2

¹⁶¹ See: “Pastor”, *poimen*, 4166 in *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

¹⁶² Genesis 2:18

¹⁶³ Deacons, who essentially have the same qualifications as elders (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12) and the wives of deacons (v. 11. There are somewhat convincing arguments for the position of “deaconess” cf. Romans 16:1, early church writings.) were given charge over various ministries but did not “rule” in the same sense as elders/overseers/shepherds. Recommended reading regarding women in ministry: *Leadership is Male* by David Pawson; *The Role of Women in Ministry Today* by H. Wayne House; and the various publications of *The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*.

“Appointment”¹⁶⁴

Contrary to modern denominational polity, appointments of elders to oversee and shepherd a local church were and are done in and by the local church, rather than by some “ordination committee” or a “board of ministerial relations”. Since there are to be no regional bishops ruling over local elders and churches, there is no authority over the local church and its eldership. The local church is self-governing (more accurately, under the government of the Spirit of Christ). This makes appointment an affair of the local church. If extra-local ministries are involved, their authority is spiritual, not organizational. The nature of their input is of a consulting nature rather than ruling. Appointing elders is an affair of the local church’s leadership and people.

Let’s consider the word and concept of “appointment” in the New Testament. There are actually quite a few Greek words translated “appoint”,¹⁶⁵ but there are two that are probably most appropriate to our subject matter:

One word is: *Kathhistemi* - This word is found, for example, in Titus 1:5. Of this word, Vine writes: “The appointment, for the **recognition** of the churches, of those who had **already** been raised up and qualified by the

¹⁶⁴ I am choosing to focus on the words “appoint” and “appointment” rather than “ordain” and “ordination”, because the word “ordination” unfortunately carries with it assumed connotations which I feel go contrary to the biblical concept of the ministry of elders/overseers/shepherds.

¹⁶⁵ Or “ordain”

Holy Spirit and had given evidence of this in their life and service.”¹⁶⁶ This is what church leaders do when they “appoint” someone.

Another word is: *Cheirotono*. This word is found for example in Acts 14:23. Of this word, Vine writes: “The recognition of those who had been manifesting themselves as gifted of God to discharge the functions of elders.” This word is used the same way as the word *kathhistemi*.¹⁶⁷ (*Cheirotono* is also a combination word): *Cheir*, meaning the hand and *teino*, meaning to stretch i.e., “to stretch forth the hand”. The secular use of this Greek word is used in reference to voting in the Athenian legislative assembly; but what takes place in the Church is not literally a “vote” – the kingdom of God is not a democracy – it is a theocracy. Rather, it is a show of agreement between equipping ministers¹⁶⁸ and local church that this is God’s will and God’s work – the raising up and qualifying of an elder, who is an overseer “feeding”, “tending”, “shepherding” the local flock.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

¹⁶⁷ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

¹⁶⁸ Viz. Those equipping ministers who are serving in the local church and/or those extra-local men who have an established ministry relationship with that local church.

¹⁶⁹ While the words “appoint” or “ordain” are not actually found in the scriptures in reference to deacons and deaconesses (1 Timothy 3:1-13), the concept is pictured in Acts 6:1-6: The apostles told the church to “select”: v. 3: (Greek) *episkeptomai*, “look out for”; “appoint” or “put in charge of”: v. 3: (Greek) *kathistemi*, “stand over” – men to serve. The church “chose”: v. 5: (Greek) *eklegomahee*, “called out” or “put forth” “seven men full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”; and the apostles “prayed and laid hands on them”. (v. 6)

Under-Shepherds

Corresponding with Paul’s analogies in 1 Corinthians 3, the fruit of ministry relationships with authentic Christ-centered shepherds is a **watering of the gospel and a building upon the Foundation of Christ** in the life of the individual disciple and the life of a local church.

In his epistle, Peter referred to Jesus as “the Chief Shepherd” and “the Overseer of our souls”.¹⁷⁰ It is essential that we see the Chief Shepherd and the under-shepherds as Peter did – that is, in light of the New Covenant. The New Covenant sheds specific light on **how** shepherds are to “lead¹⁷¹, guide¹⁷², steer, govern”¹⁷³ – **how** they are to “rule well”.¹⁷⁴ **Jesus** is “the Chief Shepherd” and “the Overseer of our souls”.¹⁷⁵ Jesus told Peter to “tend **His** sheep”.¹⁷⁶ Jesus referred to us as “**His** sheep”. “**His** sheep hear **His** voice and follow **Him** because they know **His** voice”.¹⁷⁷ In the New Covenant, the authority of Christ has been given to shepherds, not to make disciples of themselves, but rather to make disciples of Christ.

What is the New Covenant? While the New Covenant was inaugurated by Jesus on the Feast of Passover just before His death on the cross, God

¹⁷⁰ 1 Peter 5:4, 2:25

¹⁷¹ Romans 12:8

¹⁷² Romans 12:8 (Greek) *proestimi* (Strong’s # 4291); Hebrews 13:7, 24 (Greek) *hegeomai* (Strong’s # 2233)

¹⁷³ 1 Corinthians 12:28 (Greek) *kubernesis* (Strong’s # 2941)

¹⁷⁴ 1 Timothy 5:17

¹⁷⁵ 1 Peter 5:4, 2:25

¹⁷⁶ John 21:15-17

¹⁷⁷ John 10:3-4

began defining the New Covenant through Old Testament prophets.¹⁷⁸ First Isaiah prophesied:¹⁷⁹ “All your sons will be disciples of the Lord.”¹⁸⁰ This was quoted by Jesus.¹⁸¹ Then Jeremiah prophesied¹⁸²: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for **they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,** says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”¹⁸³ Just prior to this, in the same prophecy regarding the New Covenant¹⁸⁴, the Lord spoke in terms of **shepherding His own sheep**: “For thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so **I will care for My sheep** and will deliver them from all the places to which they were

¹⁷⁸ The “beginning of the teaching about the Christ” (Hebrews 6:1) began in the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures.

¹⁷⁹ 701-681 B.C.

¹⁸⁰ Isaiah 54:13

¹⁸¹ John 6:45

¹⁸² 626-586 B.C.

¹⁸³ Jeremiah 31:31-34

¹⁸⁴ While most commentators refer to the passage in Ezekiel 36 as prophecy regarding the New Covenant, the passage in Ezekiel 34:11-31, may not often be mentioned. But these two passages are part of the same prophecy. Verse 25 refers to the “everlasting covenant of peace” found in Ezekiel 37:24-28, as well as Numbers 25:12 and Isaiah 54:10. The prophecies regarding the Davidic covenant is a foreshadowing of the New Covenant: Jeremiah 23:1-6.

scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.... **I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest'**, declares the Lord God."¹⁸⁵

Through the prophet, Jeremiah, the Lord promised: "I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."¹⁸⁶ In Proverbs it is written: "The knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the maxim of Christ-centered shepherds is: "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord."¹⁸⁸ Christ-centered shepherds will impart, not just good words, but "The Word"¹⁸⁹, not just good teachings, but "The Teacher"¹⁹⁰, not just good counsel, but "The Wonderful Counselor"¹⁹¹, not just good spiritual things, but Jesus - "The Sum of All Spiritual Things".¹⁹² Christ-centered shepherds will lead the flock to follow the Chief Shepherd and Overseer of Our Souls.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁵ Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15

¹⁸⁶ Jeremiah 3:15. Also: Jeremiah 23:4

¹⁸⁷ Proverbs 9:10

¹⁸⁸ Hosea 6:3

¹⁸⁹ John 1:1, 14

¹⁹⁰ John 13:13

¹⁹¹ Isaiah 9:6

¹⁹² The title of a wonderful message by Watchman Nee.

¹⁹³ 1 Peter 5:4, 2:25

Bill & Frances Furioso
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, discipled many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet... www.AtChristsTable.org

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