

Will the Real Church Please Stand Up?

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Will the Real Church Please Stand Up

Meaning of Church

We have taken the word *church* and given it a religious meaning which is greater than its original usage. In order to remove from its meaning all of the tradition which has been attached to the word, we need to establish its original meaning from the Scriptures.

The Greek word translated as church is *ekklesia* and has a definite and specific meaning—an assembly formed by calling people out of a larger group. The Greek word is used three times in Acts chapter 19 (verses 32, 39, 41) with its secular meaning and is translated “assembly”. This assembly was called in the City of Ephesus to deal with the effects of Paul's ministry there. We can learn several things from the usage of *ekklesia* in this instance.

1. They went to gather in the theater; this establishes the fact that *ekklesia* is not a place but people.
2. Not all people in Ephesus were allowed to attend, only those that met the requirements of citizenship and were freemen.

The same is true of the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ.

Requirements for Participation

If we are to participate in the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ then we, too, must meet the proper criteria. There are four requirements and we can find them in Matthew 16:15-18 in Peter's response to Jesus question about who He is.

Matthew 16:15-18 NASB

- (15) He *said to them, **"But who do you say that I am?"**
- (16) Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
- (17) 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.**
- (18) **"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.**

First, there was a confrontation with Jesus over the issue of who He is. This is the first step—the issue of Jesus. Second, the Father revealed that Jesus is the Son of the Living God (this revelation does not come through people). Third, Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God. And, fourth, Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God before others.

It was this revelation of who He is that is the rock upon which the *ekklesia* of Jesus Christ is built.

To participate in the *ekklesia* of Jesus, we must have a personal confrontation with Jesus for the revelation, acknowledgment, and confession of Him as the Son of the Living God. This makes

us a member of the Church Universal; that is, a part of all who have become a part of Christ.

To be become a part of the Local Church, we must reside in a locality. The Local Church is that part of the Church Universal which is resident in any given locality.

USAGES OF "EKKLESIA" (As translated in the KJV)

Church in a city	35 times
Church in a house	4 times
Churches in a province	36 times
Church universal	20 times
Church local, but not exactly defined	16 times
Church in the wilderness (O.T. Church)	1 time
Assembly (of the City of Ephesus)	3 times
<i>Churches in a city</i>	<i>0 times</i>
<i>Church in a province</i>	<i><u>0 times</u></i>
TOTAL	115 times

We can see from the way *ekklesia* is used that there are only two defining areas for a local church: 1) city; 2) house. It is unscriptural to speak of two or more churches overlapping one another in any given locality. The use of the word is never plural for a city and never singular for a province.

Scriptural Characteristics of Church

While the Scriptures present several different types or pictures of the Church to bring us into understanding, the Church is primarily compared to two types: a house or building and a body. (Another primary type is bride, but, that needs to be dealt with in a different setting.)

Church as a Building

Ephesians 2:20-22 NASB

- (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,
- (21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,
- (22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4-6 NASB

- (4) And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,
- (5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- (6) For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE

DISAPPOINTED."

The Church is a spiritual building with Christ as the foundation and cornerstone and the true believers are built together as living stones. In Scriptures, "church" is NEVER applied to physical buildings made of brick and mortar.

The Church has only one foundation (I Corinthians 3:11) upon which we build. As a building or house, we are being built together as God's dwelling place by the Spirit of God not by human hands.

Acts 7:48 NASB

(48) "However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says:

Acts 17:24-25 NASB

(24) "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

(25) nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all *people* life and breath and all things;

The Lord has caused Himself to dwell in His people not in a physical building. We are the building materials for His House. We are not just a pile of stones; but, instead are being built together (this implies purpose, placement and function). The Lord is building His dwelling place out of us, the living stones.

The structure in which the Church gathers is nothing special to God and neither should it be anything special to His people. In some denominations, the Church building has taken on such religious connotations that it has almost become an idol. We need to be very careful in this, lest we become guilty of idolatry.

Church as a Body

Ephesians 1:22-23 NASB

(22) And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

(23) which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

There is only one Body (Ephesians 4:4) with its headquarters in Heaven and there is only one Head.

As a Body, the Church is the Lord's personal representative and executive agent for the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 10:40 NASB

(40) "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

Each believer is an individual member of the one body.

Romans 12:4-5 NASB

(4) For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have

the same function,

- (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NASB

- (12) For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.
- (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
- (14) For the body is not one member, but many.

1 Corinthians 12:18-21 NASB

- (18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.
- (19) If they were all one member, where would the body be?
- (20) But now there are many members, but one body.
- (21) And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

God has placed the members of the Body together in the way that pleases Him, but, also in such a way that all of the members need and depend on each other. It takes all of the individual members for the Body to be whole.

The Church is held together by joints and ligaments.

Colossians 2:19 NASB

- (19) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

The "joints" are personal relationships: a) to Christ; and b) to fellow believers. We get "out of joint" when we allow a personal relationship to become stressed or broken. When body members are "out of joint" it hinders the functioning of the Body as a whole.

The "ligaments" or "bonds" are the universal attitudes necessary to hold the "joints" together; that is, to maintain unity. These are "peace" and "love".

Ephesians 4:3 NASB

- (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Colossians 3:14 NASB

- (14) Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

All of the joints and ligaments of the Body are invisible; that is, they are not seen with the natural senses. It is difficult for people to deal with invisible things. We want everything to be seen.

The major problem of the Old Testament was the repeated error of Israel to represent or replace the invisible God with some kind of visible image. Today, the one constantly repeated error of Christians is to replace the invisible relationships within the true Church with some kind of visible structure or organization.

The long term result of replacing the invisible relationships with visible structure is that the invisible relationships cease to be recognized and many times become completely broken. In the denominational church of today it seems that structure is more important than relationships and that structure must be maintained at all costs.

The Body is an *organism* not an *organization*. It is structured by living functions (joints and ligaments) rather than organizational charts.

The Purpose of the Local Church

The primary purpose of the local Church is fellowship.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NASB

- (9) God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 John 1:3 NASB

- (3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The apostles testified of the things that they saw and heard of Jesus so that we could have fellowship with them; thereby, sharing with them the fellowship of the Father and the Son.

In Acts 2:1 and Acts 13:1-4 we see how the Holy Spirit births the purposes of God through the fellowship of believers. Without fellowship there can be no spiritual birth (John 3:6).

There are three eternally inherent characteristics of the Godhead, of which fellowship is one. The Lord intends for His people to experience and live in the same type of fellowship enjoyed by Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

John 17:20-22 NASB

- (20) "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;
- (21) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.
- (22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

This was the prayer of Jesus—that our fellowship would reach such a depth that we become one with Him and with each other. This is a far cry from a cookie and a cup of coffee together in the fellowship hall!

After Pentecost, the Church concentrated on four areas.

Acts 2:42 NASB

- (42) They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:46-47 NASB

- (46) 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,

(47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They constantly devoted themselves to 1) the apostle's instructions, 2) fellowship, 3) breaking of bread, 4) prayer. Doing these things produced unity, care for one another, gladness, sincerity of hear, praises to God and favor with the people.

We find further expression of what is expected when believers assemble in First Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 14:26 NASB

(26) What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

When believers assemble the outcome should be every member involvement, each contributing what God has given to them that others may be edified or built up. Each member should be receiving something from the Holy Spirit that can be brought forth in the fellowship of believers to build up those who are present. This is a scriptural *Church meeting* not the pulpit preaching that we have today.

The Five Primary Ministries

Jesus when he ascended gave gifts to men. The gifts are 5 categories of men: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds), and teachers. They are gifts of Christ (headship gifts) not gifts of the spirit (ministry gifts).

Purpose:

1. equip the believers to do their job
2. build up the body of Christ

Three great goals:

1. come into the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God
2. unto maturity
3. unto completion, fullness

Alternative if not done God's way:

1. retardation
2. instability
3. deception

Results or Climax:

1. grows up
2. completeness

- 3.unity
- 4.strength
- 5.each part doing its job
- 6.the body builds itself

To achieve the results described requires the full functioning of all five primary ministry gifts of Jesus. Without the full five ministries, we, by default, receive the alternative and become unstable, deceived, spiritually retarded people lacking the power to overcome the trials and tribulations that come with the implanted Word. We remain ignorant of the ways of God and, therefore, fail to accomplish His purpose in the earth by falling short of fulfilling the work He prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

The Functions of the Five Primary Ministries

Apostles

Apostle means “one sent forth”. This implies that there is one who is doing the sending as well as the one sent. Jesus made this clear.

John 13:16 NASB

- (16) "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent [apostolos-apostle] greater than the one who sent him.

In the original “one who is sent” is *apostolos* which is apostle. Therefore, the apostle is not greater than the one who sent him. There is also an implication that the apostle (the “sendee”) is responsible to the “sender”, that is, the one who sends the apostle maintains responsibility for the apostle.

Categories of Apostles

There are three categories of apostles. The first two categories occurred before Pentecost and the third after Pentecost. The first two categories are unique and will never have any more additions.

The first category is the Apostle of the Father. Jesus is the only member of this class.

Hebrews 3:1 NASB

- (1) Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;

As the Apostle of the Father, Jesus was sent by Him for a specific work. (All apostles are sent to do a particular job or work). Jesus was sent forth from the Father as an apostle; but He returned to the Father as High Priest.

The second category of apostles are those sent or appointed by Jesus. This is also a unique class since these apostles have prophetic application and placement in God's purpose as shown in the Book of Revelation.

Matthew 10:1 NASB

- (1) Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Matthew 10:5 NASB

- (5) These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: . . .

Matthew 10:2 NASB

- (2) Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: . . .

Luke 9:1-2 NASB

- (1) And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases.
- (2) And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

Before Jesus commissioned the twelve, they are called disciples; after He sent them out, the twelve are called apostles.

The third class of apostles are those included in the ascension gifts of Jesus. It is important to see that these were only given after Jesus ascended to the Father. This should eliminate the arguments about whether or not the apostolic functions are for today.

Ephesians 4:8 NASB

- (8) Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

Ephesians 4:11 NASB

- (11) And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers,

These gifts were given by Jesus as the Head of the Church to carry on with His work in the earth. It is Jesus as apostle working through a man that makes him an apostle. It is Jesus as prophet working through a man that makes him a prophet and so it is with the other ascension gifts.

We need to distinguish between these gifts of Jesus and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as listed in I Corinthians 12:8-11. These gifts are manifestations of the Spirit, while the ascension gifts are manifestations of Jesus. One must be baptized in the Holy Spirit to operate in the gifts of the Spirit; however, it is not necessary (although, it would be prudent) to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to operate as one of the ascension gifts.

A person may have any or all of the gifts of the Spirit operating in his life but not be appointed by Jesus in any of the five primary ministries. For example, a person can have the gift of prophecy and prophesy on a regular basis, but still not be a prophet. We need to be clear about this in order to eliminate confusion in this area.

We see the first appointment of the third class of apostles at Antioch.

Acts 13:1-4 NASB

- (1) 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.

- (2) While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- (3) Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
- (4) So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, selected Barnabas and Saul for a work. After acknowledgment and commissioning by the others, they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. After being sent out, these two are then called apostles (Acts 14:4; 14). Prior to being sent out they were prophets and teachers, but the act of sending them out caused them to become apostles.

The sender (in conjunction with the Holy Spirit) was the local church at Antioch represented by the prophets and teachers, who were probably the elders. However, just because Barnabas and Paul had been sent out didn't mean that their relationship with the church in Antioch was no longer of any importance.

When Barnabas and Paul completed the work that they were sent to accomplish, they returned to Antioch and gave account of all that had been done.

Acts 14:26-27 NASB

- (26) From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.
- (27) When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

This shows that there is an ongoing relationship between the apostles and the local church which sent them out. The local church acknowledged and endorsed the apostles, which reveals a responsibility for them. The apostles were not autocrats; but, instead, were subject to the discipline of the local church that sent them forth. The commissioning local church could withdraw its endorsement of its apostles if their morals, ethics, or conduct became questionable and they refused correction from the elders that send them out.

Others Called Apostles

There are a number of others in the New Testament who are called apostles; but, due to inconsistency in the translations (especially the King James), the Greek word for apostle is not always translated as "apostle" but is sometimes translated as "messenger". Here are two examples of this.

2 Corinthians 8:23 NASB

- (23) As for Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, *they are* messengers [*apostolos*=apostles] of the churches, a glory to Christ.

Philippians 2:25 NASB

- (25) But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger [*apostolos*=apostle] and minister to my need;

In these scriptures Titus is called an apostle of the churches and Epaphroditus is called an apostle from the Philippian Church.

Because of the tremendous apostolic work done by Paul, we tend to think that anyone who is an apostle must also do such powerful work. But, in spite of the way we think, not all apostles are of the same ability or stature as Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:5 NASB

(5) For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

From this verse we can see that there are some eminent apostles, which also implies that there are some who are not so eminent. As with other ministries, there is a wide range of abilities and consecration resulting in varying degrees of success of the apostolic work.

Paul also mentions a couple of other apostles which he considered to be outstanding.

Romans 16:7 NASB

(7) Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Again, these two were outstanding among the apostles, which implies that there were others that were ordinary or even mediocre apostles.

The Calling of an Apostle

Many have searched the Scriptures looking for an apostolic gift and have not found one. This is because there isn't an apostolic gift. An apostle is person and it is the person of an apostle that is given by Jesus to His people. As such an apostle has to be called by the Lord and commissioned or appointed by the Holy Spirit with an acknowledgment and a sending out by the local Elders.

Romans 1:1 NASB

(1) Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

2 Timothy 1:11 NASB

(11) for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

1 Timothy 2:7 NASB

(7) For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

We saw the pattern for how this was done when we looked at Acts Chapter 13. Since this is the only detailed example in the Scriptures about people being sent out as apostles, we can assume that all that we need to know about the methodology is contained in these scriptures. There is no indication that the Lord has changed His methods since then. We should expect the same procedures to apply today.

We should notice in Acts 13 that it was the prophets and teachers that were assembled and it was from this group that Paul and Barnabas were selected by the Lord. The implication is that apostles only come forth from those who already have a proven ministry as prophets and teachers. They didn't stop being prophets and teachers but the sending forth as apostles added a

new dimension and responsibility to their ministries.

We should also notice that they were sent forth as a team. Apostles always functioned in the plural and sometimes their teams were quite large. Even when Paul and Barnabas split up as a team over the issue of John Mark, they assembled new teams. Barnabas took John Mark as part of his team and Paul took Silas (later adding Timothy). Paul refers to his apostolic team in the first verse of I Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 NASB

- (1) Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Most people don't realize it, but all three of these (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) wrote the book of Thessalonians together. While we only think of Paul as an apostle, all three of them are referred to as apostles in the second chapter of Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 NASB

- (6) nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Another example of apostolic teams is in Acts 8. This chapter about Phillip in Samaria is the pattern for the work of the Evangelist, which will be discussed later. For now, notice that Phillip worked alone. He didn't have a team, just the power of God. He preached Christ, performed miracles, healed the sick, cast out devils and baptized those who believed in water. This describes the fullness and the limits of the Evangelist's ministry. After baptizing the believers, Phillip moved on by the direction of the Holy Spirit.

When those in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received Christ under Phillip's ministry, they sent two apostles, Peter and John, to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. To complete God's work in Samaria required one evangelist and two apostles. (You can also contrast the fact the evangelist went but the apostles were sent.)

In Galatians 2 we have an example of the meeting of two apostolic teams. Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went to Jerusalem to meet with a second apostolic team of James, Peter and John. The apparent purpose of the meeting was to discuss Paul's calling to the Gentiles and to express the gospel of grace which Paul was preaching. The two teams parted in complete unity concerning God's working among the Jews and the Gentiles.

Based on a careful reading of the Word, it appears to be unscriptural for an apostle to act alone. As a matter of fact, apostles, prophets and shepherds are always referred to in the plural, never as a singular ministry. Why? Because, of the five primary ministries, these three deal with church order and government. This is so important that the Lord doesn't entrust it to only one person. Plurality is God's safety feature. If we would just obey this principle, it would save us from a lot of the problems that we have today.

Requirements for an Apostle

Because of an emphasis on the grace of God in the new birth and our walk with Him, we sometimes neglect the fact that we have to qualify for ministry and leadership.

1 Corinthians 9:27 NASB

- (27) but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

For what did Paul think he could be disqualified? Not eternal life but rather his reward.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NASB

- (12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
- (13) 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.
- (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.
- (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Our reward is based on the quality of our work. Paul did not want to be disqualified because of inferior work.

If Paul thought that disqualification could apply to him, then the rest of us had better pay attention!

All of the five primary ministries have qualifications that have to do with our character and the manner in which we live.

Ephesians 4:1-3 NASB

- (1) Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,
- (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
- (3) being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Walking worthy begins with humility to which we add gentleness and patience. These are some of the primary attributes of the character of Jesus and are absolutely required before Jesus will allow us to function in any of the primary ministries.

Paul emphasizes character when he speaks of the signs of an apostle.

2 Corinthians 12:12 NASB

- (12) The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

Perseverance, which is a character trait, is the primary sign of a true apostles. The miraculous signs are secondary. (We tend to reverse this and look at the miracles first.) More than anything else, an apostle has to persevere in the purpose and calling of God because he is resisted from every side.

The Function of an Apostle

The work of an apostle combines the functionality of all of the other five primary ministries with the working of miracles, signs and wonders. In any given situation the apostolic ministry could

be hard to distinguish from the other ministries. However, there is a specific function of apostles that is not applicable to any other ministry.

1 Corinthians 3:10 NASB

- (10) 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.

The word that is translated “wise” also means “skilled”, which is probably a better translation in this context. “Master builder” is one word in the original, *architekton*, which means “architect”. So, the apostles are the “skilled architects” of God's building program. They function as the supervisors of the building of the Temple of the Living God, as architects of the Church.

It is the architects which lay out the building plans and interpret them for the workers. The plans not only specify shape and function, but they also specify the proper building materials. That is what apostles do. They set up and maintain church order. The seal of apostolic ministry is a completed, functioning *ekklesia*—assembly of God's people.

Paul told the Corinthians that the Church of Corinth was his validation as an apostle.

1 Corinthians 9:2 NASB

- (2) If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

A fully functioning, properly established, completed local Church is proof positive of one's apostolic calling. (Getting a building and starting a “work” is not necessarily a properly established church. In most cases, this does not follow God's building plans. There are many “works”, which we call “church” that God doesn't recognize as His Church.)

Prophets

A “prophet” is “one who speaks forth” on behalf of God and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is not necessarily a prediction of the future.

God makes revelation of His plans and counsel to His prophets.

Amos 3:7 NASB

- (7) Surely the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets.

Elijah said in I Kings 17:1 ...“As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, ...”. Essentially, the prophet stands before God; that is where he receives revelation of His plans. Then in I Kings 18:1 God tells Elijah to “go show yourself to Ahab...” The message cannot be separated from the man. God uses men not methods to accomplish His purpose.

In Jeremiah 23:15-32 we have a contrast between true and false prophets. While a lot of details are given, the essentials are simple: the true prophet stands in the counsel of the Lord and delivers the word of the Lord, while the false prophet delivers a message out of the deception of his own heart.

The Prophetic Transition to the New Testament

Under the Old Covenant, the prophets were God's only representatives in the earth. However, this changes under the New Covenant.

Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB

- (1) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,
- (2) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Previously God spoke in the prophets in various manner and ways, but, God now speaks to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is The Prophet. In Revelation 19:10 we are told that "...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." This is the area of New Testament prophecy: what Jesus has done, is doing, and will do.

The operation of the prophetic has been extended under the New Covenant from just a few to the entire people of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit gave access to the gifts of the Spirit, which includes the Gift of Prophecy. All of God's people under the anointing of the Holy Spirit can prophesy (I Corinthians 14:31); but Jesus only gave "some" as prophets. Just giving prophecies does not make one a prophet.

Examples of New Testament Prophets

Acts 11:27-28 NASB

- (27) Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.
- (28) One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius.

While these scriptures name Agabus as a prophet, there are other New Testament prophets who were with him when he came to Antioch from Jerusalem. In Acts 13:1 there are five named as prophets and teachers.

Acts 15:32 NASB

- (32) Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.

Both Judas and Silas are called prophets in this passage.

If you add these up then there are ten New Testament Prophets named. In our look at apostles, we discovered that the Bible named at least 14 apostles after the day of Pentecost. However, as we will discover when we look at the evangelist's ministry, there is only one evangelist named in the New Testament. So, scripturally we have 14 apostles, 10 prophets, and 1 evangelist. However, in our modern church we have multitudes called evangelists and nobody willing to call someone apostle or prophet. Doesn't this sound like we have something backward here?

The Ministry of the Prophet

Basically, New Testament prophecy is for the believer not the unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 14:22 NASB

(22) So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe.

Prophets are normally members of groups such as the group that Agabus was with when they came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

Prophets submit their message and ministry to the other prophets for their judgment. This agrees with the New Testament picture of all believers as interdependent members of one body.

1 Corinthians 14:29 NASB

(29) Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.

Teachers

The meaning of “teacher” is essentially “interpreter of scripture”.

Teachers are third in the order of authority (which includes responsibility) in the Church.

1 Corinthians 12:28 NASB

(28) 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.

These three, apostles, prophets, teachers, all are responsible for the ministry of the the Word of God and are typically mentioned in the plural. God doesn't entrust His Word to only one ministry or one interpretation. Notice, also, that His Word takes preeminence over miracles and healing.

These three function together in this manner:

An apostle has a special task: establishing and ordering churches;

A prophet has a special message: a word individually received from God to be delivered at a specific time and place;

A teacher expounds God's Truth generally, but has no special message individually received.

Teachers are frequently linked with one of the other primary ministries: II Timothy 1:11—an apostle and a teacher; Acts 13:1—prophets and teachers (compare Acts 15:32); Luke 20:1—Jesus was teaching and evangelizing.

Two Levels of Teachers

A teacher as represented by the five primary ministries would be to the whole body in all places making the teacher a mobile or traveling ministry. An example of this type of teacher is Apollos.

Acts 18:24-28 NASB

(24) Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to

Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.

- (25) This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John;
- (26) and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.
- (27) And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,
- (28) for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:5-6 NASB

- (5) What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one.
- (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

Apollos watered what Paul had planted. The Achaia believers had come to Christ through supernatural grace. Thereafter, their faith needed to be established through understanding of the scriptures. This is achieved by systematic, public exposition of scripture.

An evangelistic ministry, many times, comes quickly after conversion; but, a teaching ministry takes time to develop.

The second type of teaching ministry is at the local level: to the members of the local flock.

1 Timothy 5:17 NASB

- (17) The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Titus 1:9 NASB

- (9) holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

One of the requirements for an elder is that he be able to teach (I Timothy 3:2). This doesn't mean he has to be what we call a "pulpit personality", but, rather that he be able to teach in a counseling manner with one on one application.

Two Categories of Teachers

Within the two types of teachers we also have two categories of teachers: originators (developers) and duplicators.

The originators develop revelatory scriptural understanding of doctrine and application. This is done in conjunction with apostles and prophets and is subject to judgment and correction by them.

The duplicators receive the teaching from others and duplicate it for those with which they associate, usually the local assembly of God's people.

2 Timothy 2:2 NASB

- (2) The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Every ministry is responsible to reproduce that which God has given them.

Evangelists

The evangelist is the only one of the five primary ministries which appears to operate alone without being part of a team. This may be because the message of the evangelist is Christ and Christ only. There is very little chance of error if one is preaching salvation in Christ only and, as people believe, baptize them in water. Some have called them God's paratroopers who drop behind enemy lines and wreck havoc with the enemy's plans.

The only detailed example we have of an evangelist's ministry is in Acts chapter 8 with the work of Phillip, the evangelist. He is the only person named in the New Testament as an evangelist. The noun is used only 3 times: Ephesians 4:11; Acts 21:8; 2 Timothy 4:5 but the verb form of evangelist, that is, to evangelize is used about 50 times: e.g. Luke 4:18; Acts 8:25; Romans 1:15; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 10:16; and others.

As we look at the Scriptures concerning Phillip as the pattern evangelist, we will find that very few of today's ministers who call themselves evangelists actually do the work of an evangelist.

Philip began as a Deacon (Acts 6:5) but developed into the pattern evangelist (Acts 21:8) of the New Testament (see also 1 Timothy 3:13 concerning Deacons). His evangelistic ministry is described in detail in Acts chapter 8.

Acts 8:5-8 NASB

- (5) Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them.
- (6) 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.
- (7) 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.
- (8) So there was much rejoicing in that city.

Phillip did several things as an evangelist:

- 1.He proclaimed Christ;
- 2.He performed miracles;
- 3.He cast out demons; and
- 4.He healed many.

This produced certain results in the people of Samaria.

Acts 8:12 NASB

- (12) But 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.

The people believed and they were baptized. In other words, they became Christians by our definition today. This is where the ministry of the evangelist ends—with water baptism.

When Philip, the evangelist, completed his ministry in Samaria, the Jerusalem church sent Peter and John.

Acts 8:14-16 NASB

- (14) Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,
- (15) who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.
- (16) For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Samaritans became Christians under the ministry of Philip, the evangelist; but they received the Holy Spirit under the ministry of Peter and John. So we see that the evangelist has a very specific job—to bring people to Christ (through preaching, signs, wonders, healing, and deliverance) and baptize them in water. If the evangelist proceeds into other areas such as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he is exceeding his job function. Part of the problem in the modern Church is that too few people actually know their job functions and the parameters within which they are to operate.

The Evangelist is not listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28 as a ministry within the local assembly because the evangelist's ministry is to the unconverted.

Shepherds

Basically, the ministries of the Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, and Evangelists are trans-local, that is, mobile or itinerant; whereas, the Shepherd's ministry is resident locally. As such, they are restricted to a given locality and function within the local body in that locality.

There is some confusion about local leadership due to translation issues and traditions. In the New Testament there are three Greek words used for the local leadership which are translated by five English words which tradition has given different meanings.

1. “*Presbuteros*” equals Elder.
2. “*Episkopos*” equals Overseer (KJV sometimes translates as “Bishop”)
3. “*Poimen*” equals Shepherd (once in KJV as “pastor”)

These different words all denote one and the same ministry or function.

Acts 20:17 NASB

- (17) From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

Acts 20:28 NASB

- (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.

The elders were made overseers to shepherd the church of God. In other words, their *qualification* for ministry was elder, their *ministry* was to shepherd; and their *work* was oversight.

Other scriptures which reflect the same truth:

Titus 1:5 NASB

- (5) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

Titus 1:7 NASB

- (7) For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,

(The KJV translates *episkopos* as “bishop” instead of “overseer” thus adding to modern confusion and helping create an artificial position and authority for bishops.)

1 Peter 2:25 NASB

- (25) For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

(Translation inconsistencies in this verse: *episkopos* is translated by NASB as “Guardian” and the KJV as “Bishop” when it is actually “overseer”.)

1 Peter 5:1-2 NASB

- (1) Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,
- (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

Again, the elders shepherd the flock and exercise oversight. Notice from these scriptures that elders are always mentioned in the plural.

Other scriptures which mention elders in the plural: Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; Philippians 1:1; I Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24.

Relationship of Apostles and Shepherds

The Shepherds or Elders are the vital link between the mobile ministries and the local church. It is the apostles that appoint the first elders of a local church not the people. Until elders are appointed, the order of the local church is incomplete.

Acts 14:23 NASB

- (23) When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Titus 1:5 NASB

- (5) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

The transition from a group of disciples into a functioning church is the appointment of the elders by the apostles. The elders then became the ones responsible for the local assembly.

When an apostle resides or is associated with a local church, within that church his position is

that of a co-elder.

1 Peter 5:1-2 NASB

- (1) Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder (*sumpresbuteros i.e co-elder*) and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,
- (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

The Shepherds or elders are required to acknowledge an apostle's ministry before it is received.

3 John 1:9-10 NASB

- (9) I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.
- (10) For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire *to do so* and puts *them* out of the church.

Revelation 2:2 NASB

- (2) **I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*;**

The local leadership is responsible for the protection and care of the flock. They were to test the apostles and other mobile ministries as part of their job.

The Ministry of the Shepherds

It is not an accident that those responsible for the local assembly are called shepherds. The natural function of a shepherd caring for the sheep is a powerful picture of the care that the Lord intends for His people.

Jesus is the *pattern shepherd*. John 10:11-16, 27 presents the main aspects of a shepherd's work:

1. To lay down his life for his sheep,
2. To know his sheep individually,
3. To be personally knowable and known,
4. To speak and lead.

Our best presentation of the shepherds' spiritual functions in the scriptures is in the negative.

Ezekiel 34:2-4 NASB

- (2) "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"
- (3) "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock.

- (4) "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.

Because the shepherds have not done these things and are receiving judgment for it, then we can assume that God expects the shepherds to perform these functions as part of their calling:

1. Feed the flock,
2. Strengthen the sickly,
3. Heal the diseased,
4. Bind up the broken,
5. Round up the scattered, and
6. Search for the lost.

From these verses we can see that the shepherds of Israel had become self centered, more concerned with their own needs than the needs of the flock. They used the flock for their own purposes.

The modern church is filled with those who call themselves shepherds but are not so called by the Lord. We are living in the days of the foolish shepherds.

Zechariah 11:15-16 NASB

- (15) The LORD said to me, "Take again for yourself the equipment of a foolish shepherd.
- (16) "For behold, I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for the perishing, seek the scattered, heal the broken, or sustain the one standing, but will devour the flesh of the fat *sheep* and tear off their hoofs.

Again, the foolish shepherd takes the position of shepherd without fulfilling the obligations of a shepherd.

The Local Church

The daily life of God's people is lived at the local level. The five primary ministries are given for the "equipping" of the believers and the "building up" of the body. The body must "grow up" into the head. So, we see that the focus of the work is on the body maturing. The mobile ministries concentrate on the *corporate* Body while the resident ministries concentrate on the *local* Body. The health of the corporate Body is dependent upon healthy local assemblies functioning in accordance with the purposes of God in the earth.

The Leadership Structure

As we have seen earlier in this study, the local leadership is never singular but is always plural. The elders govern the local assembly of the people of God as a group, never as a single "pastor" as we have today. There is not a single epistle in the Bible that is addressed to a "pastor". If the early local Church had a "pastor position" like we have, then the writers of the epistles ignored

them in their letters, which would have been a major affront to those who held such “positions”. It makes more sense to deduce that we have a leadership structure that is alien to the new testament ministers.

The local body at Philippi consisted of three groups of people.

Philippians 1:1 NASB

- (1) Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:

Paul and Timothy wrote to all of the saints, that is, believers, who were in Philippi. Within this group of “all saints” were two sub-groups: overseers and deacons. These two sub-groups were the leadership of the people of God in Philippi. (This doesn't mean that within these categories there could not have been any number of ministry gifting such as prophets or teachers.)

As we have already seen, the overseers are the elders whose job is to shepherd the people. They are the spiritual leaders and as such govern the local assembly.

Comparing leadership *then* with leadership *now* we have two mutually exclusive leadership structures:

1. Many local churches with one leader, or
2. One local church with many leaders.

The modern Church has chosen the wrong leadership model. The modern Church cannot and never will function as the Lord intends until the leadership structure comes into alignment with God's design for His Church.

Elders and Deacons

In Acts we see elders appointed in every church, every city. (Each city contained one church, one *ekklesia*). This was done by the apostles (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5) as they made their journeys. Disciples were made on the outward trip as the apostles traveled and on the return trip elders were appointed in each group of believers.

“Elder” is a relative term. In a group of ten year olds, a twelve year old would be “elder”; however, that same twelve year old would not be “elder” in a group of twenty year olds. The same is true spiritually. The apostles were dealing with disciples who were only months old in the Lord. They had to discern spiritual maturity and those who were pressing on into the things of the Lord. These were the ones chosen as elders for that local assembly.

Qualifications of an Elder

The basic qualifications of an elder reveal the fact that he has taken the Word of God seriously and has applied the teachings of the Lord to his life and that of his family. In other words, he has sought the Kingdom of God for himself and his family by applying the rulership of the Lord to himself, his family, and his work.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 NASB

- (1) It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine

work he desires *to do*.

- (2) An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,
- (3) not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.
- (4) *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity
- (5) (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?),
- (6) *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil.
- (7) And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Paul told Titus, when he left him in Crete to set in order the things that remained by appointing elders in every city, to evaluate the person by the same set of characteristics.

Titus 1:5-9 NASB

- (5) For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,
- (6) *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.
- (7) For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,
- (8) but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,
- (9) holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

One of the requirements listed above is that the elders must be “able to teach”. This doesn't necessarily mean the an elder must have what we would call a “pulpit personality”. Most local teaching in the early church was done in small groups or even one on one.

These requirements fit into three broad categories: 1) personal character, 2) family situation, and, 3) spiritual ability.

Appointment of Elders

In the scriptures, elders were always appointed not elected. As shepherds, they are selected by the Lord not the people. The assembly didn't have a choice about the ones the Lord appointed as elders.

Acts 14:23 NASB

- (23) When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

The “they” in this scripture are the apostles, Barnabas and Paul. In the establishment of a local church it is the apostles who choose, appoint, ordain elders. As the assembly of believers grows

additional elders would be chosen as needed most likely be the existing elders.

God's plan is simple. As the congregation grows, leadership expands in proportion so that all of the needs and care of the people can be handled.

The Work of Elders

Normally, an elder can only come into full effective ministry when he is officially recognized by the church. Authority is received through responsibility, but it is made effective by recognition.

There are two primary aspect to the work of the elders as seen in this scripture.

- 1.Elders are to rule.
- 2.Elders are to teach.

1 Timothy 5:17 NASB

- (17) The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Instead of “rule”, we might say “govern, administrate, manage, supervise”, however, these fall short of the full meaning of the scriptures.

There are three Greek words used to describe this aspect of the work of the elders with slightly different shades of meaning.

- 1.“to stand in front”--used in I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17
- 2.“to lead”--like an oriental shepherd—used in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24
- 3.“to shepherd”--Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2

As you can see, if we think of “rule” as a form of management, we miss the point of the meaning.

The teaching aspect of the elders' work is given in this verse:

Titus 1:9 NASB

- (9) holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

The elders receive doctrinal teaching and transmit it to others who will, in turn, teach it to others also.

2 Timothy 2:2 NASB

- (2) The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Compensation of elders

1 Timothy 5:17 NASB

- (17) The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

“Honor” in this verse is speaking of financial and material provision. This is in proportion to need and amount of time devoted to ministry.

We have created a professional class of “pastors” which receive salaries regardless of whether they are ruling well or working hard at preaching and teaching.

Selection of Deacons

In contrast to elders, deacons are selected by the people.

Acts 6:2-6 NASB

- (2) So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.
- (3) "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.
- (4) "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
- (5) The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.
- (6) And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

The Greek word, *diakonos*, from which we get deacon means “to be an attendant, server” or as we would say, “one who waits on tables”. The twelve didn't have time to deal with the food distribution complaints. They needed to devote themselves to prayer and the word, so they told the people to select men to serve in this manner. The only criteria given at this point was that the men had to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and have a good reputation.

After the men were chosen by the brethren, the apostles (who were acting as elders in this situation) confirmed the selection with the laying on of hands.

Later, Paul gave Timothy a more detailed set of requirements for deacons.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 NASB

- (8) Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,
- (9) *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.
- (10) These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.
- (11) Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.
- (12) Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households.
- (13) For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Serving well as a deacon was considered good training for further ministry.

Daily Life of the Local Church

The daily life of the early believers was quite a bit different from our daily life today. We have separated our “religious” life from our “every day” life. In the early *ekklesia* the only life was the life they had together in Christ Jesus.

Three Initial Experiences

A common life together begins with three initial experiences which I believe to be necessary in order to function together.

Acts 2:38 NASB

(38) 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.

Jesus had told Peter that He was giving him the keys to the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19) and on the day of Pentecost, Peter reveals the three keys when the people asked what they should do in response to his testimony of Jesus. Each of these keys unlocks a new dimension in our walk with the Lord.

We are to 1) repent, 2) receive water baptism, and 3) receive the Holy Spirit.

Four Ongoing Activities

After conversion, the *ekklesia* continued with four ongoing activities: 1) teaching, 2) fellowship, 3) eating together, 4) prayer.

Acts 2:42 NASB

(42) They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Teaching. Teaching is more than doctrinal understanding. It is also the practical application of the Word of God to our lives. Jesus emphasized this need to those who believed Him.

John 8:31-32 NASB

(31) So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

(32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

As a disciple we continue in His word, which includes personal study and teaching, we learn to know the truth, which, when applied to our lives, sets us free from that which is false.

Romans 6:17 NASB

(17) But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

The Greek word for “form” means “mold, impression, model, pattern”. It is doctrine, received through teaching, that is the mold that correctly shapes the lives of new converts.

Many today seem to disparage teaching, even knowledge in general, saying that they depend on

the Holy Spirit. However, the Old Testament shows us the importance of knowledge.

Hosea 4:6 NASB

- (6) My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Rejecting knowledge will disqualify us from the “priesthood ministry” and will also bring judgment upon our children. Since, under the New Covenant, we are all part of the priesthood, we should take note this.

Fellowship. In the modern church, fellowship is a poorly understood term. We have taken the glad-handing of a politician or the chit-chat of a cocktail party and applied it to the church and call it fellowship. This is far from the scriptural concept of fellowship.

Fellowship is the **end purpose** of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NASB

- (9) God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 John 1:3 NASB

- (3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Fellowship is a **place of light**, searching and testing us. To walk in the light and stay in the light we must stay in fellowship.

1 John 1:6-7 NASB

- (6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;
- (7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Fellowship is **sharing together** on every level: spiritual and material. (See Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:34-35.)

There were two main places for fellowship with the early believers.

1. Large scale. The temple, usually Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:11; 5:12). The first believers continued for a time to attend the institutional place of worship, but, (a) they did not compromise their testimony, and (b) they did not depend on the institution for their personal spiritual life. As the gentiles came into the *ekklesia*, the use of the temple became untenable as a meeting place.
2. Small scale. Their homes. Most daily activity of the church occurred in the home groups.

Eating Together. “Breaking bread” indicates normal eating together. This is the basic form of fellowship. According to oriental custom, the sharing of food together committed the partakers to a covenant of loyalty. (See Psalms 41:9).

Prayer. The primary ministry of the local church is prayer.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 NASB

- (1) First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,
- (2) for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

The first topic of prayer is “all who are in authority”.

The basic requirement for effective prayer is agreement (harmony), which comes out of fellowship. (See Matthew 18:19-20)

The Place of Gathering

As we have seen, the early church met “house to house” and, considering the numbers involved, this means many meetings occurring at both the same and different times. These home groups have been called various things but the most definitive is probably “cell groups”, depicting the home fellowship as a “cell” of the body. However, just as our natural body is more than scattered individual cells, the church is more than scattered individual home groups.

There are times when the whole church needs to be gathered together (I Corinthians 14:23). This is, of course, the whole local church.

Reasons for the whole church to be assembled:

1. I Corinthians 14:26—to edify each other through gifts and ministries
2. I Corinthians 11:23-33—to eat the Lord's supper together
3. Acts 20:7; Acts 21:20-22—to be edified by a “visiting” mobile ministry
4. Acts 14:27-28—to hear reports of returning mobile ministries to local
5. Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27—to hear letters from mobile ministries
6. Acts 15:22-29—to settle issues of doctrine and practice affecting all believers
7. I Corinthians 5:1-5—to maintain discipline and proper behavior standards
8. Matthew 18:17—to settle disputes between believers (see also I Cor. 6:1-4)

The whole local church is the final court of appeals for all issues of doctrine, discipline, morality, and disputes between believers.

The whole church would gather in any place that was suitable such as the temple (Acts 2:46; 5:42), a school (Acts 19:9), an upper room (Acts 20:8). There is no record of the early church building any special edifice in which to hold meetings. The Jews built synagogues, the heathen built temples; but, the early believers deliberately departed from these traditions. They recognized the fact that it would be blasphemous to give significance to a building of brick and mortar when the Lord is building His dwelling place from living stones.