

ESTABLISHING THE CHURCH

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH



FELLOWSHIP
GLOBAL MISSIONS

Establishing the Church

Bible Study Guide

Acknowledgments

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"Voltaire, the French infidel once said; 'It required eleven men to build the church; I will prove that it needs only one man to knock it down.' He was wrong on two counts. First, it was not eleven men who built the church, but rather one man, The Man, Christ Jesus. Second, no one can ever knock it down, for its omnipotent Founder declared; 'I will build My church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.' (Matt. 16:18) The mere existence of the church is proof positive that the living Christ is in the midst of it. Voltaire is dust; Christ lives on. Every generation has produced its Voltaire's, those who have predicted the downfall of the church. And although it has consistently faced tempest and persecution, there remains no explanation for it's continued existence apart from the fact that it's Founder and Protector is Jesus Christ."

"It ought to interest each one of us immensely that there is an object of the deepest affection of Christ here on this earth. I know of nothing more encouraging amid all the wreck and tumult, the anxieties and sufferings, and feebleness that beset us, than to think that the 'treasure hid in the field', for which Christ sold all that He had, is still here. There is one interest here that shall last forever-the interest of Christ in the church. He 'loved the church and gave Himself for it'. It is most interesting and encouraging, in the midst of prevailing confusion and uncertainty, that there is one thing to which Christ is as much attached as ever on this earth. He has not given up His affection for the church because it is in a paralyzed condition. A man does not lose his affection for his wife because she is in feeble health. Our heart can go up to Christ in the happy confidence that He is as much devoted to the church now, as on the brightest day that it saw on earth. We have changed, but, He has not changed".

J.B. Stoney

CHAPTER 1

God's Plan for the Church

Introduction

- Our subject will be “Establishing the Church” (not methods/programs/church organization or government, but rather spiritually mature/established in the faith people and churches.)

Meta Narrative – The Grand Story

- A very important factor for us to consider as we begin to look at this topic of establishing the church, is “the big picture” or “The Meta Narrative”. There is an eternal plan of God that He planned, prepared for, fulfilled, and is still carrying out on this earth. It's important to understand God's purposes for Israel and the church within the context of that plan. As you look at scripture, it's very evident that God's purpose and plans for use is not always the same for each.

Israel/The Law Contrasted With the Church/Grace

- If we were to take a close look at Scripture, we would see that over half of the Bible relates to Israel, the Jews, and they are dealt with by God in a rather unique way.
- They were separated from the mass of humanity and given specific promises not given to any other people groups. The reason why they were given promises that no others were given, was because God had plans for using them within His grand plan that He didn't have for anyone else.

- It is interesting that the other nations are mentioned only as they have involvement with the Jews.
- All the promises of God to Israel relate to the earth. If they were faithful and obedient, they were promised earthly riches and power, but if unfaithful and disobedient, they would be scattered among all peoples, **Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, 58-59, 62.**
- As we look further into Scripture, we see another distinct body, which is the Church.
- This body also has a peculiar relationship to God and like Israel has received specific promises from Him, but similarity ends there.
 1. Instead of being formed from the descendants of Abraham alone (Jews), it is a body made up of all people, both Jew and Gentile.
 2. Instead of the relationship being one of covenant (law), it is one of birth (born again—grace).
 3. Instead of being promised rewards of earthly greatness and wealth, the Church is taught to be content with food and clothing and to expect persecution and hatred, **Philippians 1:29; I Timothy 6:7-8; Hebrews 13:5.** But to hope in the promise of an eternal inheritance – **Eph.1:11; 1Pet.1:3-5**
- We could say that Israel's Promised Land is temporal and earthly, while the Church's Promised Land is eternal and spiritual. Israel's Promised Land is a place of physical abundance, whereas the Church's Promised Land is a place of spiritual abundance (fruit of the Spirit).
- Something else for us to think of is that the Church did not exist before or during the earthly life of Christ. **Matthew 16:18** – notice the future

tense, “I WILL build My Church;” not, “I HAVE built or AM building.”

- Keeping in mind that the Church is not once mentioned in the Old Testament prophecy. The birth of the Church is in **Acts 2**, and its termination is in **I Thessalonians 4**.
- In our comparisons of Israel and the church, we need to be really careful in the conclusions that we come to. Even though from the outward appearance, it appears that in origin, calling, promises, principles for conduct and future destination, all is contrast. Still God had and continues to have only ONE eternal plan. The differences then come in God’s purposes or use of each within that plan. For example, God used Abraham and Moses for very different purposes and at a very different time period than how He used Peter and Paul, but all four were used within the same eternal plan.

Here are a few things that show how God was using Israel and the Church differently, but within the same plan:

1. CALLING/PROMISES -- Israel was called to an earthly kingdom: **Genesis 12:1; Deuteronomy 8:7-9 (Condition)**. The Church is called to a heavenly kingdom: **Philippians 3:20; I Corinthians 4:11 (Position)**.
2. CONDUCT -- Israel’s principles for conduct: **Deuteronomy 7:1-2; Exodus 21:23-25**. The Church: **I Corinthians 4:12-13; John 13:34**
3. WORSHIP -- Israel was to worship in one place and at a distance from God: **Leviticus 17:8-9; Luke 1:8-10**. The Church worships wherever two or three are gathered and has boldness to enter into the holiest: **Matthew 18:20; Hebrews 10:19**.

- In the predictions concerning the future of Israel and the Church, some say that the differences are even clearer. That the Church will be taken away from the earth entirely (I Thessalonians 4:16-17), but Israel will one day have her greatest earthly splendor and power in the Millennial Kingdom (**Luke 1:30-33**). But, Israel's future doesn't end with the Millennium. Just as the Church will enjoy living in the presence of God for the rest of eternity, so will Israel.
- As **2 Timothy 2:15** states, "A workman must rightly divide the Word." There is a clear division between Israel and the Church; between law and grace, in terms of God's purposes for using each during different time periods within the same plan. And so, as we read and interpret scripture, these are some of the differences that we need to discern.
- Instead of walking in a God-given path of separation from the world, the Church has attempted to use Scripture written to the Jews for the purpose of justifying and pursuing earthly treasures such as health, wealth, power, magnificent church buildings, among other things. If we look closely at Scripture, we will see that there is a progression that God has laid out as He has faithfully carried out His eternal plan of redemption on the behalf of mankind. Within the progression of God carrying out that plan, He has plans and purposes that He has promised to only to Israel, and He has plans and purposes that He has promised to the Church. So, let's consider a brief overview of how this plan has been laid out through scripture.

Different Stages of the Meta Narrative

- In Considering God's eternal plan, we must begin with the fact that "God is love" -1Jn.4:8. This fact gives us the reason why God would create such a plan in the first place. Love is so much the essence of Who He is, that there must be an object for Him to love and pour His love out on.
 1. THE GODHEAD CREATED THE PLAN: From before the foundations of the earth, the Godhead planned for an eternal plan of redemption for a human race that He was planning to create. This eternal plan would be provided by grace and through the second member of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ the Son of God. **2Tim.1:9; 1Pet.1:18-20**
 2. THE GODHEAD PREPARES A PLACE FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PLAN: God's preparations for the carrying out of His eternal plan of redemption begins with creation in Genesis 1. In creating the universe and all that it contains, God creates the location where His plan will become fulfilled, as well as the one's for which it will be carried out for. **Genesis 1 & 2.**
 3. THE FALL OF LUCIFER AND ANGELS: Rather than choosing to remain dependent and serve God, Lucifer became proud and desired to become God and many other angels followed him in his rebellion. The result was that, through being judged by God, they became Satan and the demons. Who they are and what they do remains a very important part in the fulfillment of God's eternal plan of redemption. **Col.1:16.**

4. THE FALL OF MANKIND: In the beginning, God created mankind to be perfect and sinless, but the very fact that God created an eternal plan of redemption on the basis of grace (giving man what he doesn't deserve) is proof that He was planning for man to become sinful and not remain sinless. Also is the fact that God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden and commanded mankind to never eat from it. This fact gives us another clue that God wasn't planning for man to stay perfect and sinless. **Genesis 3**
5. THE GODHEAD BRINGS THE LINE OF CHRIST INTO THE WORLD: God had planned that His eternal plan of redemption would be fulfilled or provided by Christ. Therefore, at just the right time, God in His grace chose one of the fallen inhabitants of the world, Abram, to be the one to use to bring about a new nation and race of people through which to bring Jesus into this world to become the Savior. **Genesis 12:1-3**
6. THE GODHEAD ESTABLISHES TYPES AND TESTIMONY ALL POINTING TO CHRIST AND HIS FINISHED WORK: God gives Israel the law, the tabernacle and its furnishings, and an elaborate sacrificial system. The law became proof of Israel's sinfulness as an example of the sinfulness of all of mankind. And the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the sacrificial system all became physical pictures of spiritual truth that would be fulfilled and provided by the future Deliverer. **Rom.5:20-21; Heb.10:1-10**

7. THE GODHEAD FULFILLS THE ETERNAL PLAN OF REDEMPTION:
At just the perfect time, when God had all things prepared and in place, The Son of God was sent to be born by a virgin into the human race to go through the process and become the Savior of the world.
Jn.3:16-17; Acts 2:22-23
8. THE RESULTS OF THE FULFILLED ETERNAL PLAN OF REDEMPTION;
From Acts 1 Through to the end of Revelation 22, we have an amazing record and testimony of what was accomplished through Jesus' fulfillment of the eternal plan of redemption. There are spiritual blessings that became true of us the moment that we accepted Jesus as our Savior. These promises will remain true of us throughout eternity. These promises are both spiritual and physical in nature.
Eph.1:3; 1Cor.2:6-12; 1Pet.1:3-5; 2Pet.1:2-4

CHAPTER 2

God's Purpose For the Church

The Church's Purpose

- So, within the context of God's "grand story", we find ourselves to be part of the church, members of the body of Christ.
- The word "church" as we know it actually means "**called out ones.**"
- The present divine purpose of the Church at this time is not the conversion of the world, but rather the calling out from the world those who will believe in Christ to form the Body of Christ which is the Church. And the way that God brings this about, is by causing the church to be the "pillar and support of truth" on this earth – **1Tim.3:15**
- Here is what being the "pillar and support of truth" on earth will look like on a daily basis.
 1. • **Eph.4:11-12** – Equipped to do the work of the ministry.
 2. • **Acts 1:8** – Will be His witnesses
 3. • **2Cor.5:18-20** – Given the ministry of reconciliation – Ambassadors for Christ
 4. • **Eph.2:19-21** – We are God's dwelling place on the earth – To be the manifestation of God upon the earth.
 5. • **2Cor.2:14-15** – The odor of the knowledge of Him in every place
 6. • **Eph.2:10** – Created for good works that God has prepared before hand.



7. • **Eph.5:22-24** – Living in subjection to Christ our Head
8. • **Rom.8:29** – Conformed to the image of Christ
9. • **Rom.12:9-21; 13:8-14** – The fruit of maturity
10. • **Titus 3:1-8** – Be ready for every good deed.

Churches that are truly functioning as “the pillar and ground of truth” – Their maturity or establishment will become manifested through their life and function. Or how they are living and what they do. It’s an issue of becoming established in the faith.

The Church and Her Relationship to Christ 7 Figures/Pictures of Christ and the Church

- It might be good to take a few minutes and focus on Christ’s relationship to the Church, keeping in mind our definition of the Church (called out ones). Each of these pictures will give “clues” or characteristics that are intended to depict what our relationship to Christ looks like and how He intends to use the church in His plan.
1. The Shepherd and the sheep – **John 10:1-30; Psalm 23** – (Shepherd leads, guides, feeds, protects).
 2. The Vine and the branches – **John 15:1-8** – (vine is the source of life).
 3. The Cornerstone and the stones of the building – **Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:4-8; I Corinthians 3:11** – (Foundation Rock on which we stand).
 4. The High Priest and believer-priests – **I Peter 2:5-9** – (Priest is a middle-man between God and man) – **Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; 9:24; 10:19-22; Romans 8:34.**
 5. The Head and the body – **I Corinthians 12:12-31** – (Head is the brains/seat of wisdom).

6. The Last Adam and the new creation – **Romans 5:12-19; I Corinthians 15:45-49** – (Exchanged life).
7. The Bridegroom and the bride – **Ephesians 5:22-32** – (Protector, Provider, Lover, Savior) – **2 Corinthians 11:2**.

The Formation of the Church

There are five main components that we have identified for the establishment of the church.

1. The Godhead's plan – **2Tim.1:9**
2. The Godhead's heart and love for the church – **1Jn.4:8; Acts 20:28**
3. God the Son's promise and provision – **Mt.16:13-18**; - Jesus promised that He will build His church and He did this through the giving of Himself. Through the finished work of Christ, we were placed into Him and it's the fact that we are in Him that we have received all things pertaining to life and godliness....every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies....."all that belongs to the Father is Mine" and we are joint heirs with Him!!!
4. God the Holy Spirit's facilitation – **Jn.16:5-14; Eph.4:11-14; Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5**
5. The role of Elders/Church leaders/Pastors – **Acts 20:28; 1Pet.5:2; Eph.4:11-12**

Establishing the Church

- It seems appropriate from verses recorded in Acts and Paul's epistles, to use the word "establishing" or "maturing" to represent a

concept that was central to Paul's ministry regarding the churches.

- As mentioned before, our subject will be “Establishing the Church.” (Not methods/programs/church organization or government, but rather spiritually mature/established in the faith) – **I Thessalonians 3:1-2.**
- What is God's design for the Church? When is a church mature? God gives His design for a mature church in **Ephesians 4:11-16.**
- Because **Ephesians 4:11-16** is God's design for the Church, then our role in establishing churches is to first cast a Biblical vision of a mature church.
- What does the phrase, “Establishing the Church/maturing the church” really mean?
- Basically, we could say that “Establishing the Church” is discipleship, and discipleship is “Establishing the Church.”
- However, the most common way of discipleship is to preach against gossip, drunkenness, lust, pride, and lying, and to encourage new Christians to pray, to be devoted, to give, and to serve.
- However, as mentioned before, true discipleship is seen in **Ephesians 4:11-16.**

DISCIPLESHIP:

- a. **Equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry.**
 - b. **Building up/edifying the body of Christ.**
 - c. **Unified in the faith, true knowledge of Christ.**
 - d. **End goal – Christlikeness/fullness of Christ.**
- The more disciplined and equipped the saints become, the more established the church as a whole becomes; the more established a church

becomes, the more disciplined and equipped the saints will become. There is a growing “cycle” that takes place in this process.

- It’s not a matter of throwing out truth and expecting people to walk in it.
- Discipleship is a serious ministry (**2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 5:12**)
- “There is not a New Testament requirement that does not immediately bring the believer face to face with an overwhelming dilemma. Either he must cease to move in the realm of the purely natural, die to the flesh-life, and find in the resurrected Christ a new life, or he must fail as a Christian.” F.J. Huegel
- The Christian’s purpose – Born to grow into Christlikeness. (**Philippians 2:5-8**)
- It should grieve us to realize how many abandoned babes in Christ there are, spiritual orphans. There is an ever-increasing need for the ministry of nurturing believers that they may be rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith. (**Colossians 2:7**)
- “*The greatest proof of our love for Christ is that we care for those who belong to Him; if you love me, feed my sheep.*” (**John 21:15-17**) J. B. Stoney
- “The Christian life is not merely a converted life, or even a consecrated life, but it is the Christ-life. It is the consuming desire of the Lord Jesus to incarnate Himself in the believer.” Ruth Paxson

TWO METHODS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Focus on Man’s Responsibility	Resting on Christ’s Finished Work
*Works based	*Relationship based
*Sanctified by obedience	*Sanctified through faith – Colossians 2:6-12
*Self-focused	Occupied with Christ

*Strive to be adequate	*God make us adequate – 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 5:18-19
*Acceptance based on performance	*Accepted in Christ – Romans 15:7
*Leads to self-condemnation	*Now no condemnation – Romans 8:1
*Leads to self-righteousness	*Clothed w/His righteousness – 2 Corinthians 5:21
*Leads to burnout and lack of joy	*Manifests the life of Christ – 2 Corinthians 4:10-11
*Complacent/dissatisfied w/growth	*Content w/God's timing – Philippians 3:12-16

- What is true discipleship?
 - *Growth in a true relationship with Jesus Christ.
 - *As the relationship with Christ grows, there is also a progression of freedom that is experienced in the believer's life.
- As the relationship with Jesus grows, and more freedom is experienced, practical holiness will become a natural by-product.

CHAPTER 3

Mature Church Model – *“Transformed By God’s Word”*

Introduction

- When the Apostle Paul was meeting with the Ephesian Elders for the last time at Miletus, in Acts 20:26-27, he made this statement; *“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God”*.
- If you ask people today, “what is the whole counsel of God”? I think most would say that it’s the bible.
- Well, it’s true that the bible does contain the whole counsel of God, but it’s very possible to teach through the whole bible without laying out the “whole counsel of God”.

Other references to God’s Whole Counsel

- So, in Acts, Paul referred to the Whole Counsel of God. In 2Timothy, he calls it God’s “own purpose” – ***READ 2Tim.1:9***
- Then in 1Cor. 2, Paul refers to it as “The Hidden Wisdom which God ordained before the ages” – ***READ 1Cor.2:6-7***
- In Hebrews 13, the writer calls it “The Everlasting Covenant” – ***READ Heb.13:20***

Characteristics of God’s Whole Counsel

- So, these passages that refer to the “whole counsel of God” or “God’s own purpose” or “The hidden wisdom which God ordained” or “The Everlasting

Covenant”, also give us some characteristics that are true about this plan.

1. First, we can see that it’s eternal, for Hebrews called it “The EVERLASTING Covenant”. The covenant that will go on for eternity.
 2. Second, it was planned before the foundations of the earth. This means that this plan was predetermined in the heart of God according to His own sovereign will and purposes and not as a reaction or a response to anything done by man or any other being.
 3. Third, it would be made accessible or available on the basis of grace.
 4. Lastly, it is centered or fulfilled in Christ. ***Look at Jn.12:23,27; 1Pet.1:18-20***
- In Ephesians 3, Paul gives us more detail regarding what he meant by the “whole counsel of God” – ***READ Eph.3:8-11- To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.***
 - Paul, as an Apostle and church planter, describes the purpose of his calling to be in proclaiming among the gentiles “the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all see what “is the fellowship of the mystery”, OR, what is their participation and how these things affect them....

- Then he says, this is the mystery that God had hid from the beginning to be carried out by Christ. And then again in vs.11 he mentions that this is the eternal purpose of God that He accomplished in Christ!!!!
- It's exactly what he said in 2 Tim.1:9 and all the other passages that we read earlier.
- Having our eyes opened to seeing this eternal grace perspective is truly one of our greatest needs as Christians, pastors, and missionaries. Look at what Peter wrote just before he was martyred, as his last and most important charge to the church in **2Pet.3:18**
- Grace is a free gift from God, unmerited favor, God working for man...we do nothing for it.
- Grace is being given what you don't deserve. In order to qualify for grace, you HAVE TO NOT DESERVE IT!!!!
- Seeking to depend upon our own faithfulness and godly living to make ourselves worthy of God's blessing is to "merit" or "earn" God's blessing. But, grace is UNMERITED favor.

Every Part of Salvation is by Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. -Eph.2:8-9

- Here Paul tells us that our salvation is by grace. SALVATION...Every part of our salvation. In a minute we will see that Paul is not just talking about justification. but, also our sanctification, and our future glorification.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the

washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

-Titus 3:5-7

- Obviously, our justification is by grace. Most fundamental Christians don't have a problem with this part of our salvation being by grace. But, its in the next part of our salvation where most Christians go astray. Our sanctification or being saved from the power of sin. We become like the Galatians.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. - Rom.5:1-2

- Other versions say..."Therefore, having been declared righteous". This sets the premise for all that follows, ie....all that follows is the result of us being justified or declared righteous.
- Notice it says..."having been declared"...This Greek verb is in the aorist form which means that it was accomplished once on our behalf and the results are ongoing. It never needs to be accomplished again.
- Notice too, that Paul says that we have now received 3 blessings or 3 things as the result of having been declared righteous:
 1. First, he says that we now have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that God has fully judged all of our sin by placing it on Jesus as our substitute.
 - a. It means that God is so fully satisfied with Christ's substitute

sacrifice that He will remain eternally so and never ever take up the judgement of our sin again.

- b. That God is therefore, at rest about us forever!!!! No matter how poor our understanding is of truth, however weak our walk, God is looking at the blood of Christ and not at our sin.
2. This verse actually tells us the second blessing or thing that we have received as the result of being declared righteous....that is.....access into this grace in which we stand.
- a. Along with the peace that we have received with God we have also received access into a wonderful standing of divine favor!!!
 - b. Being in Christ, means that we have received the very favor in which Christ Himself stands.
 - c. Every believer receives this place or standing of divine favor the moment that they believe.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

-2Cor.5:17

- Here, Paul is talking about our positional sanctification or our spiritual identity. That we received it by grace and through Christ, exactly what Paul said that God predetermined in 2Tim.1:9.

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

-Rom.5:17

- Now here in this verse, Paul is clearly talking about our daily or conditional sanctification and that it's through Christ.

And then for our future glorification, we go back again to Rom.5:1-2 - *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in of the glory of God.* -Rom.5:1-2

- Back to Rom.5:1-2 - In vs.2, we also have the 3rd blessing or benefit: that is that we exult in the hope of the glory of God. This is the future of every believer in Christ.....to enter upon a glorified state in Christ.
- We are not talking about merely beholding God's glory, but actually entering into it ourselves. It becoming our glory....*Look at Col.3:4; Jn.17:22*

The Big Picture of Salvation

Lastly, let's look at one passage that actually puts together all three aspects of salvation.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

-Eph.2:4-7

- This passage actually gives us the big picture of salvation.
- When we were dead, He made us alive.....this is justification.
- He raised us up and made us sit together in heavenly places.....this is sanctification.
- That in the ages to come, the big picture of our salvation will be an eternal manifestation of how gloriously abundant His grace is...This is our future glorification.

The Whole Counsel Defined

So, when you put all of this together, I think we can clearly see that what Paul was referring to as the “whole counsel of God”, is actually the big picture of salvation.

1. That is was predetermined in eternity past
2. Will continue into eternity future
3. Is on the basis of grace
4. Obtained through Christ

Includes Justification, Sanctification, and our future Glorification and all the details that go along with each aspect.

CHAPTER 4

Mature Church Model – *“Discipleship of the Church”*

Defining the End Goal – Mature Believers

- **Read Colossians 1:24-29**
 1. Verse 24 – His Body, which is the church – Notice that this section begins with the sufferings that are associated with the “Body of Christ”.
 2. Verse 25 – God made Paul a minister or a discipler of the church and this was according to God’s stewardship or plan or timing. God made Paul a discipler of the church so that he would be the spiritual influencer or manager of the church so that he would be preaching and teaching the Word of God and they would benefit from it.
 3. This is the same thing that God does today with church leadership. God puts men in positions of being disciplers, the spiritual leaders, managers and teachers of the word of God.
- Verses 26-27 – Paul is specifically talking about the preaching of the mystery that was previously not known but is now being made known which is “Christ in you the Hope of Glory”.
 4. **God willed to make this known – this originated with God.**
 5. The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles – pointing back to the riches of the glory of God
 6. Mystery of the Gentiles is now being preached through Paul. (Eph 3:1-3)

7. Christ in you the hope of glory – this is the mystery and answer for all things.
 - i. Being “in Christ” and “Christ in us” is a repeated theme of scriptures and there is nowhere and no one else that we can have true hope in. True hope is in the person of Christ.
8. Verse 28 – The proclaiming is HIM – Christ – Christ in us the hope of glory.
 1. Admonishing and teaching every man
 2. SO THAT – every man can be presented complete in Christ.
 - i. This brings us to our goal of every believer being established in their faith.
 - ii. The goal isn’t that all men would have good behavior but that they would be established in their faith, complete in Him.
9. Verse 29 – Notice that their striving and laboring to see every man complete in Christ was according to God’s power that was mightily working in them. It was not according to their own strength, abilities, or wisdom.
10. Summary so far – The end goal is that believers will become complete in Christ and established in their faith. It is clear through these verses that this is God’s desire for His body, which is the church, stated in verse 24. God made Paul a minister and discipler so that this purpose would be fulfilled, and he was preaching the message of Christ in you, the hope of glory.
11. It is important we understand that this verse is talking about the believer’s condition or daily walk and not their

position in Christ. Because as we know Colossians 2:10 says, “in Him you have been made complete”.

1. In our position we have been made complete through the work that Christ did for us by identifying us with Him in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. This position of being in Christ is past tense, can never be taken away and is eternal.
2. Paul’s teaching to “present every man complete in Christ” is talking about the believer’s conditional or daily walk. It is referring to the conditional completeness in the sanctification process or the spiritual growth and maturity process which takes places through discipleship. Take for example the discipleship of a person. We may begin with that person, and they might not know anything of the greatness of God, their position in Christ, walking by faith or resting in grace. So, the result is that they spend more time walking in the flesh than in the Spirit. We begin discipling them teaching them about the greatness of God, the finished work of Christ, walking by faith and resting in grace and God does His work in that person’s life and they begin to be occupied with Christ more than they are with themselves and they are walking more in the Spirit than in the flesh. This person will be growing to conditionally living complete in Christ and this is what Paul is describing here.
3. This is the goal, to see believers walking in their daily lives that they

are complete in Christ, walking in the Spirit and established in their faith.

4. Examples:

- i. When parents disciple their children. In the flesh children are going to be tempted to say and do certain things, think, and behave a certain way. But through discipleship in the greatness of God, the finished work of Christ, walking by faith and living in grace this will lead to right thinking, right decisions, and right behavior. This is a description of parents laboring to present their children complete in Christ.
- ii. When there are needs in the church. After much discipleship of the people in the church, of teaching them of the greatness of God, the finished work of Christ, walking by faith and living in grace and the people see the need they serve to help meet that need. That is an example of laboring to see the church complete in Christ because their conditional completeness is showing itself through serving the body.
- iii. A struggling married couple. As they are discipled they will grow to walk more in the Spirit and less in the flesh and they will walk in the greatness of God, the finished work of Christ, walking by faith and living in grace and they can put

their own selfish desires aside for the desires of their spouse. This is laboring to see them complete in Christ in their daily lives.

- iv. A possible division in the church. As they are discipled they will grow to walk more in the Spirit and less in the flesh and they will walk in the greatness of God, the finished work of Christ, walking by faith and living in grace and they can put their own selfish desires aside for the desires of others in the church. This is laboring to see them complete in Christ in their daily lives.

Every provision is found “in Christ”

- “In Him” & “In Christ” is mentioned 55 times in the epistles.
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:30 – “By His doing you are In Christ” – God placed us in Christ because He knew what we need and what was best for us. He did not do this because we asked for it or did something to earn it, He did it in His grace and love towards us.
- What are some of the things that are true of believers because they are “In Christ”?
 - Ephesians 1:7 - Redemption and forgiveness of sins
 - Romans 6:11 – Dead to sin and alive to God
 - John 3:16 - Eternal life
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 – We are one body in Christ
 - Ephesians 3:19 – Given the Love of God
 - 1 Corinthians 1:30 – Wisdom and righteousness
 - Colossians 1:27 – Hope
 - John 10:10 – Life
 - 1 Corinthians 15:57 – Triumph and victory
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17 – New creations and old things removed
 - 2 Corinthians 3:17 – Liberty
 - Ephesians 1:3 – Received every spiritual blessing
 - Ephesians 2:6 – Raised up and seated together at God’s right hand
 - Galatians 5:22 – Kindness
 - Ephesians 2:10 – Created for good works
 - Ephesians 2:13 – Been brought near
 - Romans 5:2 – Grace

- Acts 17:28 – We live and move and have our being
- Ephesians 1:4 – Chosen
- Ephesians 1:11 – Obtained an inheritance
- It is very important that believers understand that everything that is needed for victorious living is found in their position in Christ and not in themselves or in some way of improving themselves or improving the flesh.
- Just as the completeness for an individual's sinful life is because of identification in the first Adam so the completeness for the Christian life is found in Christ.

Focus of the Disciple – “Gold, Silver, Precious Stones” or “Wood, Hay and Straw”?

- Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-15 – The context is with those who are teaching and training.
 1. The emphasis is not on Paul or Apollos but on the Lord and God was causing the growth. (Verses 5-9)
 2. The emphasis is also on the teaching and what people are building with and they must be building with Jesus Christ. (Verses 10-11)
 3. Are teachers building with gold, silver, precious stones or wood, hay, and straw. What is the difference? The correct teaching and foundation being laid is Jesus Christ, the finished work of Christ, His life in us and who we are in Him.
 4. Gold, silver, and precious stones is God and Christ centered teaching. Teaching that is centered on the finished work of Christ, centered in the greatness of God,

our identification with Christ and walking by faith and resting in grace.

5. Wood, hay and straw is man centered teaching. Focused on the believers' self-efforts to make themselves acceptable to God, man's abilities and man's works to earn peace with God and spiritual blessings.
6. Examples of each:
 - a. Colossians 2:8-10 – Gold, silver, and precious stones
 - b. Acts 15:1-11 – These verses show both; verses 1-5 wood, hay and straw and verses 6-11, gold, silver, and precious stones.
 - c. Galatians 5:1-12 – These verses show both. Verse one says keep standing firm in the teaching of gold, silver, and precious stones. The ones coming in and teaching circumcision and putting believers under the law are building with wood, hay, and straw.
 - d. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 – Timothy is encouraged by Paul to keep teaching with gold, silver and precious stones and to watch out for those who are going to come and teach with wood, hay or straw.
 - e. Matthew 23 – The scribes and Pharisees were building with wood, hay, and straw.

CHAPTER 5

Mature Church Model

“Identity of the Church”

I. Introduction

This next lesson, we want to talk about the identity of the church. As we have emphasized many times over in our other lessons, “condition always flows out of our position”, or, “function always flows out of our identity”. Therefore, in order for the church to truly live and function according to God’s call and design, they have to know who they are as a corporate body.

II. Identity Pictures

The Word of God uses a number of different metaphors that help depict some of the aspects that are true of our new corporate identity.

- ***The Shepherd and the sheep*** – ***John 10:1-30; Psalm 23*** - This not only helps to reveal the level of our dependence, but also what our relationship with Him is like in terms of His heart for us.
- ***The Vine and the branches*** – ***John 15:1-8*** - Another aspect of our dependence as our source of life and the bearing of fruit.
- ***The High Priest and believer-priests*** – ***1 Peter 2:5-9*** - Ministry of mediation, leading others to God. This is done by being the pillar and support of truth (***1Tim.3:15***). We have also been given the ministry of reconciliation - ***2Cor.5:18***.
- ***The Head and the body*** – ***1 Corinthians 12:12-31*** - This depicts our oneness and unity with one another and with Jesus the Head. Also speaks of our dependence upon Him.
- ***The Bridegroom and the bride*** – ***Ephesians 5:22-32*** - This picture reveals how significant and

cherished we are by Jesus. There is nothing that can separate us from His love for us - **Rom.8:31-39**.

- ***The Cornerstone and the stones of the building – Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:4-8; I Corinthians 3:11*** - This speaks of the church being the manifestation of God on this earth.

1. The essence of who He is love, therefore, there are more passages of scripture that call the church to show love, walk in love, bestow love than probably any other fruit of the Spirit. ***Jn.13:34-35; 14:23-24; 15:9-13,17; Rom.5:5; 12:9-10; 13:8-10; 14:15; 1Cor.8:1-2; 13:1-14:1; 16:14; 2Cor.6:3-6; 8:7-9; Gal.5:6, 13-14, 22; Eph.1:15-16; 3:17-19; 4:1-2,15-16; 5:1,25,28,33; Phil.1:9; 2:1-4; Col.1:4,8; 2:1-2; 3:12-14; 1Thess.1:2-3; 3:6,11-12; 4:9-10; 5:8,12-13; 2Thess.1:3; 3:5; 1Tim.1:5; 4:12; 6:11; 2Tim.1:7,13; 2:22; Titus 2:1-4; Philemon 1:5-7; Heb.10:24; 1Pet.1:22; 2:17; 3:8-9; 4:8-10; 2Pet.1:5-7; 1Jn.2:3-6; 3:11-23; 4:7-21; 5:1-3; 2Jn.1:5-6; Jude 1:20-21***

III. The Individual

Being that the church is made up of a corporate body of individual believers, in order for us to be brought to a correct view of the church's identity, we must first come to a correct view of the identity of each individual person that makes up that body.

- At birth, every single human being is born "into Adam". This term, "into Adam" is a description of the spiritual identity that we are born with. Because every single human was born a descendant of Adam AFTER the fall, therefore, we were all born into the same spiritual identity and condition that they were in. Here is just a few of the main characteristics:

1. Separated from God - Col.1:21
2. Enemies of God - Rom.5:10
3. Condemned - Eph.2:3; Rom.5:18

4. Unrighteousness - Rom.3:10-12
5. Unholy - Eph. 5:8
6. Headed for an eternity in hell - Jn.3:18

- Once we accept Christ as our Savior, that very moment, our old identity is done away with (crucified - Rom.6:6), we become “disassociated” with Adam and the spiritual identity that came with being in Adam, and we become “joined together to Christ” (Rom.6:3-5). And because our old identity is destroyed and we are now joined together to Christ, In Christ, we receive a new spiritual identity (2Cor.5:17; Col.3:9-10). And just as we had spiritual characteristics that were true of us individually in Adam, so now we have new spiritual characteristics that are now true of us individually in Christ:

1. Reconciled to God - 2Cor.5:18
2. Children of God - Rom.8:15-16
3. Eternal salvation - Jn.3:15-17
4. Declared Righteous - Rom.5:1,18
5. Holiness - Heb.10:10,14
6. Will spend eternity with Him in heaven, 1Thess.4:16-18
7. We are joined/unified together as one body in Christ - Rom.12:4-5

- Just as there are physical aspects and corporate aspects to the makeup of our physical identity, so the same is true in our spiritual identity.
- Each of us were born into a family. Initially, our families benefit us a lot more than we benefit the family. But, as we grow and mature and become responsible, we can come to the point where we benefit our families as much as they benefit us.

- This is also how it is in the body of Christ. At our spiritual rebirth, each of us were given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit, that upon spiritual growth and maturity, we become enabled to carry out and function in for the good of the body. But, it is a process.

IV. Individual Roles and Giftedness

In looking at individual roles and giftedness there are three aspects that are important for us to consider. First, how are various roles and giftedness obtained? Second, for what purpose? And third, how are they carried out?

- So, the main passage that we often quote when talking about establishing the church is ***Eph.4:11-16***. Well, in this context that we are focusing on in this lesson, it's important that we back up to vs. 7. In looking at vs.7, we begin to see how these roles and gifting are obtained.
- So really, when you put vs.7 and 11 together, we can see that there are two types of "gifts" that are being given by Christ. Certain "measures of faith" are given to each individual, and then each "gifted individual" is given as gifts to the corporate body of believers. This does NOT mean that only certain ones are gifted. Rom.12:3-6 proves to us that "measures of faith" are specific roles/gifts that are given to each individual believer by the Holy Spirit and not just certain ones.
- ***READ 1Cor.12:1-11***, noticing specifically vs.7 and vs.11. - it's clear that the Spirit of God gifts every believer with spiritual gifts according to His sovereign will, or according to how He wants to use each individual. (Also vs.18).
 - A. 1Cor.12:7 also tells us why He gives each one of these roles, "for the profit of all".
 - B. Now, if we go back to Eph.4 and continue, we will get more detail and see what the "profit of all is" - vs.11-16 - I think we can see that the "profit" that is detailed here in Eph. 4 really has two components to it; first, is benefit for the body itself, and secondly, benefit for others outside of the church.
- The same is true of our physical bodies, the more we grow and mature and become trained,

equipped, and responsible, the better we can take care of and benefit ourselves and the more we can be of benefit to others.

C. Lastly, is how are these roles to be carried out? Where does the enablement or ability to function in our God given roles and spiritual gifts come from? I believe there are two main components for this.

1. We must be convinced of our identity and
2. Love.

- Let's go back to Eph.4, but back up to vs.1-6 and we can see both of these aspects, our identity and the call to love.
- In these verses, the issue of identity is in terms of the unity of the Spirit that has been bestowed upon each and every believer...."one body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, through all, and in you all."
- This is exactly what Paul was saying in **1Cor.12:12-19** - He is comparing the physical oneness and unity that our human bodies have with the spiritual oneness and unity of the Spirit that we all have with one another as the body of Christ.
- And he makes the point that, if any of the members of our physical bodies ever began to doubt its own identity as a member of the body, then our function as a body would become incomplete and ineffective.
- So, in order for our churches to live and function as one body according to God's call and design, it's imperative that each member become discipled unto being confident in their identity in Christ, both individually and corporately as a member of the body of Christ.

- Then, the second needed component to being able to function in our roles for the good of the whole, again is love. Eph.4:16.
- **1Cor.12:20-31** - which is a continuation of being unified and functioning as a body, ends with “and yet I show you a more excellent way” and then he goes into Chapter 13, the famous love chapter.
- **In Eph.5:28-30**, Paul puts these two components, identity, and love, together. That if a man identifies he and his wife as truly being one flesh, then he will be enabled to love her as Christ loves the church, for no man hates his own body, but cherishes it. And then he also ties this same concept into the fact that we are one flesh in Christ.
- If we aren’t convinced of our identity as a member of the body of Christ, then we won’t be able to live and function according to how the Holy Spirit has engifted and placed us. It’s one thing to ask, “if you were to lose an arm, how effective could your body be”? But, it’s another thing to ask, “if you cut off an arm from the rest of the body, how effective will that arm be”? That’s what we are like when we don’t value the body, or we are not functioning in the body “for the profit of the whole”.
- One last verse to also consider; let’s go back and **re-read 1Cor.12:4-7** - In the context of speaking about there being a diversity of gifts and ministries that are bestowed upon us, notice in vs.7 that Paul calls these roles and their being carried out as a “manifestation of the Spirit”.
- That not only are they a manifestation of the Spirit in the sense that we receive them from Him, but, the functioning in these roles is also a manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s leading and enablement in our lives.

- This brings it back again to the issue of love. Gal.5:22 tells us that love is the first characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit. If we are walking according to the reign and control of the Spirit, love will characterize our lives and will characterize the way we are carrying out and functioning in our God given gifts and roles within the body of Christ.

V. Conclusion

These facts then bring us back again to Eph.4:11-12 - Pastors, teachers, and church leaders being given to the church for the purpose of equipping (discipleship) the saints.

- Not only the importance of the role of these church leaders, but also what the focus of the content of their discipleship must be.
- This is exactly what Paul was talking about in 1Cor.3: 9-13, when he exhorts that each teacher and discipler must consider what “materials” (content) he is using to build up the church with. Is it, “gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw”?
- Passages like Eph.4 really help to define what that content must be.

CHAPTER 6

Mature Church Model

Leadership of the Church – Who Should Lead the Church? Elders?

Who Should Lead the Church?

Man's Methods

- Before we consider what the Scriptures have to say regarding who should lead the church, it might be good to look at the various methods men have employed in the church through the centuries. We will consider this question by looking at the patterns of power of authority in the church as well as the types of people who have been placed in authority.

Patterns of Power

- Throughout its history the Church has leaned toward one of two extreme courses in leadership. In the first of these courses the Church has tended to be led by one strong leader. This has caused sharp distinction between the “clergy” and the “laity,” or we could use the terms “paid staff” and “lay leaders.” However, any clear reading of the New Testament would make clear that all who believe in Jesus Christ are gifted by God to do the work of the ministry. It was never our Lord's will for the local church to be controlled by one individual. The concept of the pastor as the lonely, trained professional – the sacred person over the church who can never really become a part of the congregation is utterly unscriptural.¹
- The second course the Church has taken has been the polar opposite. In this course, “leadership has

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth, 1995) p. 43

been placed in the hands of “all,” everybody is supposed to lead (congregational rule). In this system everybody in the church has an equal vote in how the church is conducted. While this may at first seem attractive, it inevitably runs afoul of two clear Scriptural principles: maturity and unity. The Bible from beginning to end makes it clear that the wise and mature are to be followed. The essence of majority rule, on the other hand, is that the interests of all, both the wise and the unwise, will produce the best decisions. Too much congregationalism fails to profit from the gifts of leadership. It also allows immature and carnal believers to have equal say with others.²

People of Power

- Who often become the leaders in these systems of power? Frequently the wrong people. Those often found leading the church are the:
 - *Most ambitious
 - *Most prestigious
 - *Most wealthy
 - *Most vocal
 - *Most eloquent
 - *Most controlling
 - *Most willing/available
 - *Most compliant
- But are any of these God’s standards for the leaders of His Church? To answer this question, let’s explore now God’s method for leadership as opposed to the standards of men.

God’s Method

Plurality of Leaders

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Publishers 1999) p. 476

- No one person has all the gifts, abilities, and wisdom needed to function as Christ would. In **Romans 12:3**, Paul admonishes/warns that we are not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and then in **verse 4** he explains why, because we are all members of one body with differing functions/roles. It might be good to think of it in this way: there is unity in the body of Christ, but there is also diversity in our functions or God-given roles. This then, is Paul's lead-in to sharing the seven motivational gifts in **Romans 12:6-8**.
- He begins in **verse 6** by saying, *“having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us;”* and then he shares the seven motivational gifts of prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, administration, and mercy, emphasizing the fact that it is all by God's choice and grace that we are placed into the body of Christ (**I Corinthians 12:18**) with one of these motivational gifts for the purpose of profiting the entire body (**I Corinthians 12:4-7**). (We are taking the liberty here to use the word “motivational” to explain the idea that one of these seven gifts in **Romans 12** will be our primary interest/driving force within/motivation.)
- It might be good to stop a moment and meditate on the fact that God has made us incomplete and in need of one another. Some scriptures to consider are **Romans 12:1-8; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16**, keeping in mind that the motivational gifts in **Romans 12** are different from the ministerial gifts mentioned in other scriptures. Also, it might be good at this point to mention that in the “Chain of Grace” Bible lessons Book #4, we have an explanation of each of the seven motivational gifts and a test that can be a help in determining your gift, as well as a study

entitled “Charismatic Questions” which answers the confusion surrounding the gifts listed in **I Corinthians 12**.

- We know that God is complete, and that Jesus Christ is the exact representation of His nature. The full character of Jesus is represented in the varying gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to believers. So that the church more accurately reflects the full character of Jesus. The same is true of the leadership of the church. There should be more than one so that more and more the fullness of Jesus would be represented in this leadership.
- When local churches were established in the first century, it is very clear from the historical record in Scripture that spiritual leaders (plural) were appointed to lead these churches. For example, on the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps and went back to the cities in which they had previously made many disciples and appointed elders in every church, **Acts 14:21-23**.
- In addition, Paul left Titus in Crete to organize the churches that had just been founded. Part of that work involved appointing elders in every city, **Titus 1:5**.
- Many churches have ignored the Biblically taught oversight of the church by a plurality of elders and replaced it with a one-man pastor which is difficult to defend from the Scriptures.
- The New Testament record clearly reveals that the oversight of many of the churches was committed to a council of elders. Some examples are:
 1. Barnabas and Saul gave their offering for Judea’s poor to the elders, **Acts 11:29-30**.
 2. The elders at Jerusalem came together with the apostles to discuss doctrinal controversy, **Acts 15:1-2, 6**.

3. The Bible record reveals oversight by the plurality of elders in the churches of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch (**Acts 14:21-23**), Ephesus (**Acts 20:17**), Philippi (**Philippians 1:1**), Crete (**Titus 1:5**). And according to Peter, the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (**I Peter 1:1; 5:1**).
4. Both Paul and Peter charged the elders to pastor/shepherd/oversee the churches, **Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-2**.
5. According to **Titus 1:5**, it appears that Paul did not consider a church established/fully developed until it had functioning, qualified elders.

QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE OUR CHURCH

- Who is leading our church?
- Do we have a plurality of leadership?

CHAPTER 7

Mature Church Model

“Leadership of the Church – Qualifications for Elders”

Can anyone be an elder?

We have determined that the scriptures call for a plurality of leaders to lead the local church. But who can serve in this role as elder? Is it an office that is open to any believer? Is it an office that is open to any mature believer? The apostle Paul wrote letters to both Timothy and to Titus on the topic of establishing the churches in Ephesus and Crete. Part of his instructions were on the qualifications for elders to lead these and any New Testament church. We will now look at these qualifications to understand the heart of the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, as to who should lead His church as under-shepherds.

Qualifications to be an elder

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

-1 Timothy 3:1

- Before Paul begins listing the qualifications for elders, he makes this statement. If a man desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work. Two words immediately stick out, desire and work. An initial requirement is that the man should desire the work of being an elder. Therefore, it is essential that he understands what work it is that he is looking to do. He needs to understand that it is work.
- If a man is seeking the position because of what he perceives as the benefits of being in leadership, he is likely pursuing the position from selfish

motives. This is not good, and he should not be an elder. An elder must realize that the position is one of service not of glory. He should have the attitude that Jesus had who “*came not to be served but to serve and to give His life for many.*”- Mark 10:45

- Notice also, what the word good describes. It is not necessarily a good desire. The desire to be an elder could be from good or bad motives. The man is not necessarily good. It is the work of eldering that is described as good. The Christ given work of the elder is what is good. This work is to be held in awesome respect by those who serve in this office and also by the entire church. The work of eldering is good.
- So, as we prayerfully entertain who should be elders in the local church, we should evaluate the motive of the person seeking the office. Does he recognize that it will be work, likely a lot of work? Does he understand adequately what that work will entail? We will look specifically at the ministry of the elder in the next lesson. Does he have an awesome respect for that work that comes from an awesome respect for the good God who gave this good work for the elder to do?

An elder, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach – 1 Timothy 3:2

- An elder must be above reproach. God inspired Paul to pen this list and the one in his letter to Titus so that it would be public. Everyone in the church should know the standard by which God approves of a man to hold the office of elder.

The public, objective, God-given qualifications for church leadership protect the congregation from

... unfit people.³ It is these standards that should be used to evaluate any potential elder. It is also these standards that should be used in evaluating any present serving elder when and if any accusation would be brought against him. An elder must be blameless. That is, of such character that no accusation can be brought against him.⁴ If a man meets these qualifications, then he is above reproach. We also trust and have faith that God knows the heart of every person. He is actively involved in the appointment of leaders.

- The husband of one wife. Sexual Purity is high on the list of qualifications for those who lead the church. Indeed, sexual purity is the standard for all believers. When the elders convened in Jerusalem to decide whether or not the new Gentile churches should follow the Jewish Mosaic Law, they concluded that the God given answer was no. But they did make this directive: *“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled **and from fornication**; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”* -Acts 15:28-29. (emphasis mine) So, for elders this standard is required, that he be the husband of one wife.

At first observation this seems to be a simple requirement to evaluate. Does this man have only one wife? If yes, then he meets this requirement. However, there is much discussion and debate on

³ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth, 1995) p. 71

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Publishers 1999) p. 481

the parameters to meet this requirement. Does this mean that an elder must be married? Can a single man be an elder? Can a man who has never been married be an elder? Can a widower be an elder? If an elder's wife dies, must he then cease to be an elder? Can a man who has been divorced and remarried be an elder? What if he was divorced and remarried as an unbeliever, and then they came to the saving grace of the gospel, can he then become an elder? What if the man struggles with impure sexual thoughts? Can he be an elder? Those who are charged with the decision on choosing elders must consider these questions, wrestling with the scriptures to come to their conclusion.

- Temperate. Originally in Greek, the word meant wineless.⁵ But since Paul specifically mentions in verse three that the elder should not be addicted to wine, he is likely using this word in the broader sense of being sober minded.⁶ Is the man stable in his thinking? Is he clear thinking?
- Prudent. This is similar to temperate in that is describing clear thinking, sensible thinking. This person is not flustered by problems and disagreements but able to keep a clear perspective.⁷
- Respectable. This word is also related to prudent in that it denotes self-controlled behavior that others observe and respect.

⁵ Ibid. p. 42

⁶ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth, 1995) p. 193

⁷ Ibid. p. 193

- Hospitable. Hospitality is opening your home to minister to others even strangers. This demonstrates the love of Christ for people and is sourced in Him.
- Able to teach. This requirement of being able to teach is one that separates the office of elder and the office of deacon. Deacons are not required to be able to teach, elders are. As we will study in the next lesson, one of the ministries of the elder is to guard the church from false teachers and doctrine. This inherently requires an elder to be able to teach, instruct in the truths of the scriptures. He must also be willing to teach, particularly as the need arises.

...not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money.

– 1 Timothy 3:3

- Not addicted to wine. Paul writes in Romans 6:14 “*for sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*” Also, in Ephesians 5:18 “*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,*” A drunkard cannot be an elder. But more broadly, if a man is mastered by anything other than Jesus, he cannot be an elder. What is controlling a man’s life? Is it the Holy Spirit or does something else control his passions and cravings? The legalistic response would be to forbid drinking alcohol altogether, but this too misses the point and runs contrary to scripture.⁸ Addiction is control and for anything or anyone other than Jesus to control us then we are mastered by it. Because alcohol can so easily ensnare many people, elders should set the example of not being mastered by it.

⁸ Paul instructs Timothy to drink wine rather than only water for his stomach issues (1 Timothy 5:23) and Jesus drank wine and said he would again in His coming kingdom (Matthew 26:29)

- Pugnacious, but gentle. A pugnacious man is a striker, physically violent, likely to have a bad temper. Often this characteristic is displayed in the home even if controlled in public. This is one of the reasons it is critical to interview a man's wife when considering him for the office of elder. The wife should be interviewed separately from the husband and perhaps even interviewed by the wives of current elders so that the home life of the prospective elder can be determined.

In contrast he must be a gentle man. A character of forbearance, bearing with people especially those caught in sin.⁹

- Peaceable. An elder must not be contentious or quarrelsome. He should show consideration to others. There are some people who are always looking to argue, no matter what anyone says a contentious man will argue, always in opposition. This man should not be an elder. Paul teaches us in Ephesians 4:3 that we should endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. A man who endeavors to keep the unity of the Spirit in peace is not contentious.
- Free from the love of money. Similar to the character of not being addicted to wine, one who is free from the love of money is not mastered by money or wealth. He is not controlled by the need to make more wealth or to worry about not having enough wealth. If a man has his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to meet his needs then he is free from the love of money and is free to use the wealth he does have to serve Christ, to minister to the needs of others.

He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if

⁹ Paul describes this gentleness in dealing with sinners in Galatians 6:1-5 "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness:"

a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?) – 1 Timothy 3:4,5

- A man who is married with children is in a position of leading. How he leads his family is a good demonstration of how well he may do at leading the church as an elder. Does he love his wife like Christ loves the church who is His bride? Do his children honor and obey both him and their mother? Does he lead his family by grace with dignity or harshly, demanding obedience through instilling fear? Ephesians 6:4 teaches us “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”
- The attitude a man has toward his family will influence greatly his attitude toward people in the church. Will he graciously and caringly lead the church in their walk with Jesus? Will he lead the church by his example as well as his words? Will he deal with sin in the church as God lovingly disciplines His children?

And not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. – 1 Timothy 3:6

- A new convert is inexperienced in the ways of the Lord. He is not practiced in walking by the Spirit in most walks of life. An elder must be leading the church from this Spirit led walk, an understanding gained by years of experience.
- A new convert is especially susceptible to the sin of pride. A man experienced in a life of walking by the Spirit has been taught many times to place no hope in his flesh, that is in his own self. Pride was the sin that destroyed Lucifer, precipitating his

fall. Placing a new convert into this leadership role of elder in the church will tempt him toward pride. This is not something we want to do to this man nor to the church.

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. – 1 Timothy 3:7

- Having a good reputation with those in the world is key to the testimony not only of the elder but also of the entire church. If a man has a bad reputation with his co-workers, or his extended family, or others who know him and observe him in other settings than the church, they will not think highly of the church. How often do we see this happen in today's societies? Discredited church leaders destroy the testimony of the church so that the gospel is hindered. When we look to choose someone as an elder, we should talk with those who know him in other settings and ask them what they think of his reputation. If they think highly of him then that is an advantage to the church, increasing their testimony to the world.
- If a man does not have a good reputation with those outside the church and he is placed into a position of leadership under public scrutiny he is more likely to be tempted by the devil to further destroy him. He may become bitter if his reputation is tarnished by exposed sin in his life. He may feel the need to justify himself. He may seek retribution on those who discredited him.

Realize that all these character attributes required in an elder are spiritually produced. All Christians are to walk by the Spirit, but elders in particular are to lead by example and therefore are to set the example of walking in the Spirit.

CHAPTER 8

Mature Church Model

The Ministries of Elders

Christ is the Great Shepherd Elders are Under Shepherds

- Jesus Christ is described as the Great Shepherd of the sheep in Hebrews 13:20. His love and care for His Church has never diminished and never will. He is ever present in the life of any and every local church and actively involved in the maturing of the Body of Christ.
- The elders of a local church are the under-shepherds to Jesus Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 20:28). This Holy Spirit given work of elders can be categorized into four groups: to protect, feed, and lead the flock and to help meet the flock's many practical needs.¹⁰

Protecting The Flock

Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to 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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. – Acts 20: 28-30

- Primarily the work of the elders to protect the flock is in regard to false teachers. Jesus, Paul,

¹⁰ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring The Eldership To Its Rightful Place In The Church* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth, 1997) p. 7

Peter, and John all strongly warn the church against false prophets and false teachers. ***Matt 7:15; 2 Cor 11:13; 1 John 4:1***. Peter warns in 2 Peter 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

- According to Paul's required qualifications for eldership, a prospective elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers.¹¹ See Titus 1:5,6,9 *...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, **by sound doctrine**, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.* An example of this is recorded in Acts Chapter 15 when the apostles and elders came together to pronounce that the Gentiles did not need to be circumcised according to the custom of Moses in order to be saved.
- An elder should know how to handle the word of God accurately. He must do this so he can recognize those who are handling the word of God deceitfully or carelessly. How many people and churches have been carried away by false teachers who use the scriptures to support what they say but deny the truth by what they teach? This is why we promote teaching foundationally, truth upon truth; chronologically as God has progressively unfolded the whole counsel of God; to the end that we come to an accurate knowledge of God and His ways. When we learn Christ this way, we can easily refute false teachers and thereby protect the flock.

¹¹ Ibid p.8

Feeding the Flock

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach. – 1 Timothy 3:2

- Not only must an elder refute false teachers but he must be able to teach the flock. An elder should be feeding the congregation the truths of God's word. This teaching takes time and should be done consistently for however long it takes until the whole council of God has been communicated. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he, for three years, did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:31).
- Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Christ had given pastor-teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the maturing of the body, until they all would come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man,...(Eph 4:11-13). The goal is maturity both of the individual saint and of the Body of Christ, the local church included. This is accomplished by the teaching of the word, feeding the flock. Notice that this teaching also includes the practical equipping of the saints in works of ministry.
- Some elders are more gifted in teaching than others. Some elders work harder at studying and preparing lessons to teach than others. Those that do both well should be paid for it by the people of the church who are being fed the truth. Paul writes: *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."* -1 Timothy 5:17-18. Some pastors are reluctant to teach this truth because it may sound

like all they do is ask for money. Herein lies another benefit of multiple elders. If an unpaid elder teaches the flock the scriptural mandate for paying the preaching pastor, teaches the blessings promised by the scriptures for paying the preaching pastor, and leads by example in giving to the church for this purpose, then the church will be much better established.

Leading the Flock

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. – 1 Peter 5:1-4

- Rule, govern, lead, oversee, set the example, these are all descriptors of the responsibility of elders to lead the church. As overseers, elders are to supervise and manage the church.¹² A steward is a manager of someone else's estate. As overseers, elders are stewards of the church which belongs to Jesus Christ. They are accountable for all the affairs of the church. Are the people being taught the truth? Are the people treating one another correctly, biblically? Is there unity in the body? Does the church have a good name in the community? For all these things and more, the elders will give an account to the Lord as His stewards.

¹² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: Restoring The Eldership To Its Rightful Place In The Church* (Littleton: Lewis & Roth, 1997) p. 9

- As an overseer the elder is to be above reproach. He must be setting a godly example to the flock. What would be the testimony of the church if its leaders were corrupt, immoral, ungodly? The elder must be walking by the Spirit so as to not carry out the deeds of the flesh. He must be setting a Spirit led example for the church to follow. Paul said: *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” -1 Cor 11:1*

The Practical Needs of the Flock

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus, also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – James 2:14-17

- Clearly there are many practical needs among the individuals of our churches. It is the responsibility of the church elders to see that such needs are met. This often means that elders oversee another group of church officers called deacons who look after the physical needs of church members. Other times it means the elders encourage family members to see to the needs of their relatives rather than putting the burden on the church.¹³
- There are other needs of the church members that call for the direct involvement of the elders. Praying for the sick, anointing them with oil. (James 5:14,15). Elders are exhorted to know the condition of their flock. This means that elders are to engage with the people of the church, perhaps visiting with them in their homes, serving

¹³ 1 Timothy 5:3-16

together with them in church ministries, or other ways that reveal how the church member is doing physically and spiritually. Sometimes the church is large, and it makes it difficult for the elders to know everyone. It has been said that as a church gets larger it needs to get smaller. As the Lord increases the number of people in the local church, the elders are to see to it that each member is known and cared for. This may be accomplished by having small groups led by godly men or women who know the condition of each member of that group. These small group leaders must also then have access to the resources of the church to aid anyone in need in their group.

- Elders are to pray for their church consistently and specifically. This also is part of knowing the condition of the flock. However, this also includes the corporateness, the oneness of the body. The local church is to be functioning as one, unified in the Spirit, building itself up in love into Christ who is the head. (Ephesians 4). Elders need to be praying for this overall process of maturity of their church.
- Elders also need to make sure that the erring brothers and sisters are brought back to the truth with its proper outworking in their behavior. Are there disputes among members regarding business dealings? Are there troubles in marriages? Are there difficulties between parents and children? The elders are to see that these members are counseled in the truth to bring them back into proper relationship. James says: *Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sin.* - James 5:19-20. The elders need to make sure this work is being done even if they are not specifically the ones doing it.

Sacrificial Service

So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." -Acts 20:32-35

- As Paul ends his meeting with the Ephesian elders in Acts Chapter 20, he reminds them that the work of leading the church is one of hard labor and self-sacrifice. Every elder and potential elder should know this truth, eldering is a position of service. This service is what Paul calls the "good work" that a man desires if he wants to be an elder. If any man desires the prestige or power of leadership, he is not fit for ministry. All glory belongs to Christ and the Father. He is actively exercising His power to mature His church. Ours is a work of service as servants of the Great Shepherd of the church.
- There are plenty of things to give our lives to in this fallen world. Sometimes the pursuit of these things impedes us from the good work that the Lord has for us to do. The pursuit of wealth beyond our needs can take our time and mental energies away from service to the Lord. The pursuit of pleasure can distract us from this eternally rewarding work of under-shepherding His church. Demas was one of Paul's closest co-workers but in the end, he forsook Paul and

pursued the love of the present world rather than the eternal one. (2 Timothy 4:10).

- The hard labor of eldering can make us become weary and give up. We can desire to get away from it because it is just too hard. The apostle John said: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.” —3 John 1:4. The joy of seeing believers established in the truth and the church building itself up into Christ is highly motivational. This doesn’t always happen and there are often times in the work of eldering that people walk away from their faith, act harshly to one another, or otherwise grieve the Holy Spirit. Let’s keep in mind Paul’s exhortation to the Galatians *“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”*



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