

Rethinking Modern Paradigms

Rediscovering a
Biblical View of the Church

Jason C. Montgomery

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Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenburg which sparked the Reformation of the church in Europe in the 16th century.



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PREFACE

On November 15, 1998 a small group of believers gathered in a home for the study of the word of God. This providential meeting was the beginning point for what would later become the Faith Community Baptist Church. Those gathered were presented that day with what would become for them a guiding principle in the life of their fellowship. The principle? Everything in the life of the body was to be directed by the word of God. Tradition, habits, presuppositions, past experiences - all were to come under the examination of the Scriptures. For the better part of the next year, time was spent gathered weekly, in the corporate study of the Scripture, seeking to discover the will of God for His church. Out of this and several subsequent studies, has come the book you now hold in your hand: Rethinking Modern Paradigms.

This book, like our church, is truly a work in progress. We are constantly adding to our study as we discover from Scripture the mind of Christ. Constantly the church of Jesus Christ must be reforming. It is our prayer that this study will bless you as it has us. May we all seek the continual reform and renewal of the church of Christ to the praise of the Father. Amen.

Special thanks need to be given to numerous people for making this edition of the book possible. Thank you to Sheri Hare for “proofing” my poor typing. Her faithfulness to our work is indispensable. Also, a special word of appreciation to my fellow pastor Greg Simmons. He is a most helpful co-laborer in God’s field. His helpful and wise council throughout the course of this work has not gone without notice. Not enough can be said about the body of Faith Community Baptist Church who first had to “endure” the contents of this volume as messages. Their faithful hunger for the word of God is a constant encouragement to me as a pastor and preacher of the word. Final thanks and ultimate praise must go to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by His perfect grace has placed us on the path of “rethinking modern paradigms” or as we often say, “rediscovering a Biblical view of the church!”

Semper Reformanda
Jason C. Montgomery
Reformation Day 2007



INTRODUCTION

TIME MARCHES ON HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

This phrase is an interesting way to open a work concerning the recovery of a Biblical view of the church. What is the meaning of such a phrase and how does it relate to the issue at hand?

Actually, the meaning of the statement is self-explanatory. Time is progressive, unrepeatable, always moving forward, never to be seen or experienced after it is gone. In no way desiring to deny the linear nature of history, we have all experienced at different times and in a

variety of ways the repetitive nature of history as well. History, or the accumulation of the experiences occurring within time, has a way of repeating itself. The experiences themselves are being relived, although the players on the stage are often different.

The relationship between the phrase and the issue at hand is more complicated to lay out. In relation to time, the church, as the people of God, is continually changing. In relation to history, God's people continually find themselves repeating the actions of their forefathers for good and for ill. Much like the early church found herself repeating or being in danger of repeating the actions of her forefathers (the nation of Israel), the contemporary church should hear afresh the words of the apostle Paul:

NAS 1 Corinthians 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. 7 And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, " THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY. " 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as

some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

The admonition of the apostle is to “take heed.” The idea of taking heed here is seen by observing the original text for “heed.” “Heed” in the English comes from **blepo** in the Greek. It means literally “to see” and is a present tense imperative verb indicating the need for this watchfulness that is called for is to be continual.

Just as the people of God in the time of Moses failed to take heed to the weakness of the flesh (cf. Matt 26:41) and allowed pride, immoral lusts, idolatrous attitudes and actions, and grumbling to overtake them, so the people of God in any age can be overcome by such wicked things. Thus, they find themselves removed from the realm of blessing and under the mighty hand of the discipline of God (cf. Heb 12:7-13).

The time of Moses is not the only period of history that has much to teach us or provide for us wisdom which should be heeded. The period of the prophets, specifically the time of the prophet Jeremiah has much wisdom that should be heard. As in the days of the prophet Jeremiah... "an appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the

end of it" (Jer 5:30-31)?

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the nation was on the verge of the judgement of God. Jeremiah was the prophet bringing God's last warning before the great day of judgement on the nation, the judgement that was soon to follow. As one commentator has put it, "Jeremiah preached at eleven and was followed by the prophet Isaiah when the clock struck twelve and judgement had arrived."

Jeremiah was called to remind the nation of its sin. Allow at this point the word of God to speak for itself:

NAS Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, 2 of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month. 4 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." 6 Then I said, "Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth." 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. 8 "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the LORD. 9 Then the LORD stretched out His

hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

NAS Jeremiah 1:12 Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it."

NAS Jeremiah 1:16 "And I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

NAS Jeremiah 2:1 Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "I remember concerning you the devotion of your youth, The love of your betrothals, Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown. 3 "Israel was holy to the LORD, The first of His harvest; All who ate of it became guilty; Evil came upon them," declares the LORD. "'

NAS Jeremiah 2:7 "And I brought you into the fruitful land, To eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, And My inheritance you made an abomination. 8 "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that did not profit. 9 "Therefore I will yet contend with you," declares the LORD, "And with your sons' sons I will

contend. 10 "For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, And send to Kedar and observe closely, And see if there has been such a thing as this! 11 "Has a nation changed gods, When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. 12 "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. 13 "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.

NAS Jeremiah 2:20 "For long ago I broke your yoke And tore off your bonds; But you said, 'I will not serve!' For on every high hill And under every green tree You have lain down as a harlot. 21 "Yet I planted you a choice vine, A completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before Me Into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine? 22 "Although you wash yourself with lye And use much soap, The stain of your iniquity is before Me," declares the Lord GOD. 23 "How can you say, 'I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your way in the valley! Know what you have done! You are a swift young camel entangling her ways, 24 A wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness, That sniffs the wind in her passion. In the time of her heat who can turn her away? All who seek her will not become weary; In her month they will find her.

NAS Jeremiah 3:1 God says, "If a husband divorces his wife, And she goes from him, And belongs to another man, Will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted?

But you are a harlot with many lovers; Yet you turn to Me," declares the LORD. 2 "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; Where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them Like an Arab in the desert, And you have polluted a land With your harlotry and with your wickedness.

NAS Jeremiah 23:16 Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 "They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said,' 'You will have peace'; And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, They say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' 18 "But who has stood in the council of the LORD, That he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? 19 "Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, Even a whirling tempest; It will swirl down on the head of the wicked. 20 "The anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; In the last days you will clearly understand it. 21 "I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied. 22 "But if they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way And from the evil of their deeds. 23 "Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off? 24 "Can a man hide himself in hiding places, So I do not see him?" declares the LORD. "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?"

declares the LORD. 25 "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' 26 "How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, 27 who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? 28 "The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the LORD. 29 "Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock? 30 "Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who steal My words from each other. 31 "Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The Lord declares.' 32 "Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the LORD, "and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the LORD. 33 "Now when this people or the prophet or a priest asks you saying, 'What is the oracle of the LORD?' then you shall say to them, 'What oracle?' The LORD declares, 'I shall abandon you.' 34 "Then as for the prophet or the priest or the people who say, 'The oracle of the LORD,' I shall bring punishment upon that man and his household. 35 "Thus shall each of you say to his neighbor and to his brother, 'What has the LORD answered?' or, 'What has the LORD spoken?' 36 "For you will no longer remember the

oracle of the LORD, because every man's own word will become the oracle, and you have perverted the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. 37 "Thus you will say to that prophet, 'What has the LORD answered you?' and, 'What has the LORD spoken?' 38 "For if you say, 'The oracle of the LORD!' surely thus says the LORD, 'Because you said this word,' The oracle of the LORD !" I have also sent to you, saying, 'You shall not say,' The oracle of the LORD ! " " 39 "Therefore behold, I shall surely forget you and cast you away from My presence, along with the city which I gave you and your fathers. 40 "And I will put an everlasting reproach on you and an everlasting humiliation which will not be forgotten."

Forsaking the clear teaching of the word of God given through the prophet, they favored the “more relevant” teaching of man! Thus they brought reproach upon themselves, were cast away into exile, and it would be seventy years before they would return to their homeland in repentance. This return and repentance is recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah. Of significance for us here are the following passages detailing what happened following their return:

NAS Nehemiah 8:1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it before the square which

was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

NAS Nehemiah 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dirt upon them. 2 And the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. 4

Now on the Levites' platform stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Arise, bless the LORD your God forever and ever! O may Thy glorious name be blessed And exalted above all blessing and praise! 6 "Thou alone art the LORD. Thou hast made the heavens, The heaven of heavens with all their host, The earth and all that is on it, The seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them And the heavenly host bows down before Thee. 7 "Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, And gave him the name Abraham. 8 "And Thou didst find his heart faithful before Thee, And didst make a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite~ To give it to his descendants. And Thou hast fulfilled Thy promise, For Thou art righteous. 9 "Thou didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And didst hear their cry by the Red Sea. 10 "Then Thou didst perform signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants and all the people of his land; For Thou didst know that they acted arrogantly toward them, And didst make a name for Thyself as it is this day. 11 "And Thou didst divide the sea before them, So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; And their pursuers Thou didst hurl into the depths, Like a stone into raging waters. 12 "And with a pillar of cloud Thou didst lead them by day, And with a pillar of fire by night To light for them the way In

which they were to go. 13 "Then Thou didst come down on Mount Sinai, And didst speak with them from heaven; Thou didst give to them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. 14 "So Thou didst make known to them Thy holy sabbath, And didst lay down for them commandments, statutes, and law, Through Thy servant Moses. 15 "Thou didst provide bread from heaven for them for their hunger, Thou didst bring forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And Thou didst tell them to enter in order to possess The land which Thou didst swear to give them. 16 "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Thy commandments. 17 "And they refused to listen, And did not remember Thy wondrous deeds which Thou hadst performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But Thou art a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness; And Thou didst not forsake them. 18 "Even when they made for themselves A calf of molten metal And said, 'This is your God Who brought you up from Egypt,' And committed great blasphemies, 19 Thou, in Thy great compassion, Didst not forsake them in the wilderness; The pillar of cloud did not leave them by day, To guide them on their way, Nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way in which they were to go. 20 "And Thou didst give Thy good Spirit to instruct them, Thy manna Thou didst not withhold from their mouth, And Thou didst give them water for their thirst. 21 "Indeed, forty years Thou didst provide for them in the wilderness and they were

not in want; Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell. 22 "Thou didst also give them kingdoms and peoples, And Thou didst allot them to them as a boundary. And they took possession of the land of Sihon the king of Heshbon, And the land of Og the king of Bashan. 23 "And Thou didst make their sons numerous as the stars of heaven, And Thou didst bring them into the land Which Thou hadst told their fathers to enter and possess. 24 "So their sons entered and possessed the land. And Thou didst subdue before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, And Thou didst give them into their hand, with their kings, and the peoples of the land, To do with them as they desired. 25 "And they captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, Fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled, and grew fat, And reveled in Thy great goodness. 26 "But they became disobedient and rebelled against Thee, And cast Thy law behind their backs And killed Thy prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to Thee, And they committed great blasphemies. 27 "Therefore Thou didst deliver them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, But when they cried to Thee in the time of their distress, Thou didst hear from heaven, and according to Thy great compassion Thou didst give them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors. 28 "But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before Thee; Therefore Thou didst abandon them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to Thee, Thou didst hear from heaven, And many times

Thou didst rescue them according to Thy compassion, 29 And admonished them in order to turn them back to Thy law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Thy commandments but sinned against Thine ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. 30 "However, Thou didst bear with them for many years, And admonished them by Thy Spirit through Thy prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore Thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 "Nevertheless, in Thy great compassion Thou didst not make an end of them or forsake them, For Thou art a gracious and compassionate God. 32 "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who dost keep covenant and lovingkindness, Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before Thee, Which has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and on all Thy people, From the days of the kings of Assyria to this day. 33 "However, Thou art just in all that has come upon us; For Thou hast dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly. 34 "For our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our fathers have not kept Thy law Or paid attention to Thy commandments and Thine admonitions with which Thou hast admonished them.

NAS Nehemiah 9:38 "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

NAS Nehemiah 10:28 Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, 29 are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes.

NAS Nehemiah 13:1 On that day they read aloud from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, 2 because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it came about, that when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.

NAS Nehemiah 13:30 Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, each in his task, 31 and I arranged for the supply of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

But remember our initial premise: "Time marches on - History repeats itself." The nation of Israel, here purified, soon found herself

rejecting again the clear commands of the infinite God in favor of the confusing pablum of finite man. This rejection is recorded for us in the seventh chapter of the gospel of Mark.

NAS Mark 7:1 And the Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

Thus the struggle of the people of God in every age - to not forsake the word of God in favor of the words of men. These sections

of Scripture dealing with the nation of Israel serve as but mere illustrations of the contemporary evangelical church. We, as a people of God, are constantly in need of being **reminded** of the word of God, that we might **repent** and **return** lest we be found once again in a state of **rebellion**.

The church of today is modeling her predecessor, the people of Israel, in frightening ways. In the church today, as in the nation of Israel, "it will be, like people, like priest; so I will punish them for their ways, and repay them for their deeds" (Hos 4:9). The leadership of Israel had taken the nation down a slippery slope and found itself in steady decline. Having deceived themselves in their foolish wisdom, the leadership of the nation had forsaken the clear teaching of the word of God through the prophets in favor of the apparently more relevant and exciting wisdom of man. As the prophet Jeremiah noted, "(the) people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer 2:12-13). Whenever man first abandons the true religion of God, he soon establishes his own system that holds no water of refreshment. What man struggles to create and never perfects, is never as substantial as what God has made and freely offers being completely finished.

We, as a people of God, are constantly in need of being reminded of the word of God, that we might repent and return lest we be found once again in a state of rebellion.

Today, the body of Christ finds itself having committed these same evils as the nation of Israel did many years ago. She finds herself

running more like a secular business than a spiritual body, being led more by marketing strategists than by the master's shepherds, and putting forth a perverted gospel of self-esteem and self-fulfillment over self-denial. She, too, finds herself having forsaken the truth and having bought into a lie (cf. 2Thes 2:11-12).

Donald Bloesch, in his noted work, The Reform of the Church, writes about this disturbing trend within the church as well, calling her to repentance and reformation. Bloesch contends

the secularization of the church is one of the key themes of contemporary theology. Whereas the church in the late middle ages sought to subjugate the world, the modern (or contemporary) church appears to have surrendered to the world. Many theologians complain that the church today is not sufficiently in the world, but the real problem (Bloesch contends) is that the world is too much in the church.

Or as the writers of the recently penned Cambridge declaration state, “evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the spirit of Christ.” James Montgomery Boice, once pastor of the well respected Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia asked a penetrating question: “What is wrong with the church?” His stinging answer: “We have become worldly.”

The church is in desperate need of correction. She needs to return, to reform herself in accord with the will and word of God. The dictionary defines reform as the “making better by the removal of faults

and errors.” She needs to heed the word of the prophet Isaiah uttered thousands of years ago, “to the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (Isa 8:20). She is in need of leaders who take more joy in speaking God's word than they do their own (cf. Jer 23); and she herself must long for the pure milk of the word, knowing that only by it will she grow to maturity and beauty as the bride of her Lord (cf. 1Pet 2:2).

As the world around us grows more and more ungodly and hardened to the gospel, the church must not surrender to the temptation to capitulate to the desires of the age by softening her unchanging message and catering to the selfish desires of man. Rather, she must continue to preach the true gospel which is God-centered, not man-centered, both when men want it and when they do not (cf. 2Tim 3:1 - 4:4)! The church of today stands at a critical juncture. She will either be squeezed into the mold of the world or she will faithfully call it to repentance with the transforming message of truth. She has been called to be:

NAS 1Peter 2:9 A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the

Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We, must ever remain, as the church of Jesus Christ, committed to that divine calling. Furthermore, we endeavor to encourage other churches, as God extends our influence by His sovereign grace, to do the same. We must seek, through the careful study of the Scripture, believing it alone to have the answers we need (1Tim 3:15, 2Tim 3:16-17), to find what God intended and still intends to be the pattern for the church of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. We offer this work to that very end.

As the apostle Paul wrote his young disciple Timothy: "In case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1Tim 3:15). We believe God's word to be the manual for such conduct. Having committed ourselves to this truth and having carefully studied it to determine God's desire

The church should always be reforming, recovering her biblical identity.

for us as a body, we present the following as our understanding of God's design for the church, the body of Christ. In presenting these areas of focus in our study, we do not intend in any way to communicate that we have put the final seal on our research. As the Reformers said, the church should always be reforming, recovering her Biblical identity. This is in no way intended to be presented as an

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all encompassing study of ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church. We have sought in our research to identify those areas of contemporary neglect in the church of today. We begin at the foundation - the authority of the Scripture.



Wandering Off Into Myths

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Authority

Seldom if ever in its long history has the world witnessed such a self-conscious revolt against authority. So says John Stott in his work on preaching, Between Two Worlds. He continues and states:

Not that the phenomenon of protest and rebellion is new. Ever since the fall of man human nature has been rebellious, 'hostile

to God' and unwilling, even unable, to 'submit to God's law'. (Rom 8:7) And this basic fact about the human condition has had a thousand ugly manifestations. What seems new today, however, is both the world-wide scale of the revolt and the philosophical arguments with which it is sometimes buttressed. There can be no doubt that the twentieth century has been caught up in a global revolution, epitomized in two World Wars. The old order is giving place to a new. All the accepted authorities (family, school, university, State, Church, Bible, Pope, God) are being challenged. Anything which savours of 'establishment', that is, of entrenched privilege or unassailable power, is being scrutinized and opposed.

Though I personally would not have put the Pope in my list of "accepted authorities" I get the point. Everything is up for grabs in this postmodern age. In this age of relativized truth, the point of authority goes out the window. Everything is up for grabs and specifically, in regard to the church of Jesus Christ, men are left to wander off into myths. The idea that there would actually exist some repository of absolute, unassailable, unquestionable, sovereign authority in the church of Christ that oversees, directs and brings to pass its will over all other powers seldom, if ever seems to cross the mind of today's progressive and innovative church that is often making her way up as she goes.

Our contention and position set forth in this opening section of Rethinking Modern Paradigms is just that very truth - there is such a repository of absolute, unassailable, unquestionable, sovereign

authority in the church of Christ that oversees, directs and brings to pass its will over all other powers. In the following pages the following points will be set forth in regard to that very power:

§The Deposit of Authority
§The Manifestation of Authority
§The Recognition of Authority
§The Permanence of Authority
§The Administration of Authority

§The Deposit of Authority

First, we must understand where the deposit or store of authority is localized in the church. Where in the church must we go to find the resting place of all authority? The deposit of authority in the church must be understood to rest in Christ. Jesus declared:

all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:18-20).

Here Christ clearly and unmistakably claims sovereignty over all things.

NAS Ephesians 1:18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the

saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. 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 fulness of Him who fills all in all.

The power the Father used to raise Christ from the grave and seat Him in the heavenly realms, which is described as the power of the Holy Spirit later in the letter (cf. Rom 1:4, Eph 3:14-21), He further used to establish Christ in a position of authority which was, is, and always will be, above all other powers. It is important to note however, that when the Father places Christ in this position of authority, putting all things in subjection to His Son, he does so with the exception of Himself (cf. 2Cor 15:27-28).

He, that is the Father, placed Christ in a position of headship over His church. Later in this same letter to the church in Ephesus Paul states that this headship is specifically headship over the church which is His body!

But speaking the truth in love, we (the church) are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that

which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

Paul further states to the church in Corinth, “but I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

§The Manifestation of Authority

Having all authority rest in Christ is essential, but left at that, it is only theoretical. This authority that Christ possesses must be revealed to potential subjects. Scripture clearly states the authority that Christ possesses is communicated or made manifest through both His words and actions.

First His actions need to be examined and then we will turn our attention to what He has spoken. They say that actions speak louder than words. Perhaps we should not say that what Christ **did** is more important, authoritative, or carries more weight than what He **said**, but it would certainly be true to say that Christ’s actions do speak in their own right! What he did drew the attention of the multitudes and gave powerful evidence to His authority which would later be understood very clearly in His words.

The Apostle John, in his gospel, records for us the impact of the actions or works of Jesus on the crowds in general, especially early on in the ministry of our Lord. John writes of Jesus that when

23 “he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name, beholding his signs which he was doing. 24 but Jesus, on his part, was not entrusting himself to them, for he knew all men, 25 and because he did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for he himself knew what was in man” (Joh 2:23-25).

The public in general was amazed at the marvelous deeds which He performed. Yet still, this initial amazement wore off in the long run and vanished when they heard what the true mission of Jesus was all about. We will touch more on this later.

Still, however, there was a special group of followers on whom the affects of the works of Christ were more deeply felt. Luke records for us that:

22 It came about on one of those days, that He and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. 23 But as they were sailing along He fell asleep; and a fierce gale of wind descended upon the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. 24 And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. 25 And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" And they were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him" (Luke 8:22-25)?

The disciples here recognize that Jesus, on the basis of His works, is no ordinary man. They witnessed His authority over the natural elements of creation and pondered who then this must be?! Later, upon realizing who this man was, the Apostle Peter testifies to all his fellow Jews in Acts 2:22 saying, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.”

Jesus himself gave testimony to the fact that the authority by which He worked His works was an authority and a power communicated to Him by the Father. He told the Jews in John 5:19 "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." In fact, so closely do the Father and Son work together, it is the Father living/abiding in the Son who is actually working the works the Son performs. We learn this essential truth about Jesus in His words as they were recorded by the apostle John. "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (Joh 14:10). The Son never acts in Scripture independently of the Father or the Spirit. The triune God is always seen in complete agreement in both thought and deed.

The son never acts in Scripture independently of the father or the spirit. The triune God is always seen in complete agreement in both thought and deed.

Not only though, is the authority of Christ seen in his actions, it is seen more clearly in His words. Although the actions or works of Christ do give a vivid display of His power and authority, it is His words that provide direction and clarity to His works. The physical witness is powerful, but without the verbal its meaning can be unclear. His words like His actions brought powerful reactions from the people. Matthew records for us that, “the result (of His teaching) was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt 7:28-29). The crowds recognized His authority by the words that He shared, yet recognizing authority and submitting to it are two totally different things.

When the teaching of Jesus became more authoritative and demanding, most of the multitude turned away. John tells us of one such account. He writes,

As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore. Jesus said therefore to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. "And we have believed and have come to know that You are the holy one of God (John 6:66-69).

As with His works, His words have different effects on different groups. This understanding that there were two very opposing responses to the actions and the words of the Lord naturally lead us into our next category in dealing with authority - the recognition of authority.

SThe Recognition of Authority

It becomes apparent from only a casual reading of the gospels, that ultimately the authority of Christ was embraced by the few and rejected by the many. What is it that makes the difference in the responses of men? The gospel of John helps us understand the differing responses of men in regard to Christ. John refers to Christ in the tenth chapter of his gospel as “the Good Shepherd.” Further in this section of his work, he records the words of Christ that serve to separate the whole of mankind into two classes of people: the sheep and the non-sheep. These are the same classes of people designated by the gospel writer, Matthew, as the sheep and the goats (cf. Matt 25:32). There are those who are the sheep for whom the Good Shepherd gives His life, and there are those who are not of the fold. The true sheep hear and recognize His voice, and the non-sheep do not and remain in the rebellion of unbelief (cf. Joh 10:25), refusing to come because they are not the shepherd's sheep and, therefore, do not recognize His voice when He calls. Listen to the words of John:

NAS John 10:22 At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem; 23 it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon. 24 The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. 26 "But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow

Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Whereas John speaks of the sheep and the non-sheep, Paul speaks of the natural and spiritual man. The natural man cannot discern the voice of God and the spiritual man hears the Spirit clearly. Speaking to the church in Corinth Paul states,

NAS 1 Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul states very emphatically here that the world is divided into two types of people: those with the Spirit and those without. Those with the Spirit of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9) are here called spiritual, and those without the Spirit are designated as natural or fleshly. This concept of being able to discern the Spirit of God is closely related to

the teaching of Jesus in regard to understanding the parables.

NAS Matthew 13:1 On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. 2 And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 "And others fell upon the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 "And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 "And others fell on the good soil, and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 "He who has ears, let him hear." 10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" 11 And He answered and said to them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 "For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING,

BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM. ' 16 "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 "For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. 18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 "And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

A common contemporary understanding of the parables relating

to why Jesus used them states that Jesus spoke in parables to enable people to better understand and relate to His message. But the Scripture states just the opposite. Those who were closest to Jesus realized that rather than unveil His message, the parables confused the issue and actually served to conceal the truth Jesus spoke. Notice that even Jesus, as a concluding remark to His teaching to the multitude, said that he who has ears ought to listen. A physical understanding of this statement just won't do. Jesus is not saying if you have physical ears, use them to listen. This would be a useless admonition. All who were physically there heard, but all did not spiritually discern the meaning of the parable.

The ability to hear, understand, and respond to the parable is reserved for those whom he desires to know and understand the mysteries of the kingdom, leaving all others in the darkness of their sin, hardheartedness and rebellion.

The question that faces us, as it faced the disciples, is “Why?” Why did some in the crowd respond in submission to the lordship of Christ and others turn away, having physically heard a nice story, but having had no spiritual encounter with the Lord? Many would say the answer lay within the listener. In other words, Jesus fully intended to communicate the meaning of the parable to all, but in their stubbornness, they all would not listen. But read again the question posed by the disciples and hear again the answer given by Christ (cf. vs.10-16). Jesus’ answer is unmistakable: the ability to hear, understand, and respond to the parable is reserved for those whom He desires to know and understand the mysteries of the kingdom, leaving all others

in the darkness of their sin, hardheartedness, and rebellion. Here, to summarize the words of Christ, is a sovereign granting of hearing, discerning, and responding to the voice of God. The granting is reserved for the true sheep of the good shepherd.

§The Permanence of Authority

It would seem that since Christ is the one the Father has positioned as the head of the church, and this authority is made known through His words and His actions, we are, as the modern day church, at a bit of a disadvantage. In other words, it would seem that we are at a loss in regard to being able to recognize and submit to His authority, if in order to do so, we must hear His words or be exposed to His acts. Both of these are apparently out of reach for us today in America, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world!

Though this may seem to be the case, it is not necessarily so. God has seen fit through His providence, to preserve for us the authoritative actions and words of Christ through a permanent written record: the Holy Scriptures. The written Scriptures provide for us, as the true sheep, a place we can run to hear the authoritative voice of the Good Shepherd. The Scriptures clearly carry the authority of their author. In Mark chapter 7, Jesus rebukes the leadership of His day for not submitting themselves to the written commands of God. Instead they had placed the teaching of their elders (“the tradition of the elders”) on a level of greater authority than the word of God itself.

NAS Mark 7:1 And the Pharisees and some of the scribes

gathered together around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2 and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3 (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; 4 and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5 And the Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

The commandments of God serve as the abiding authority of the people of God. History has taken its toll on this truth at various times when men have exalted their own authority over that of the word of God. When this occurs, God's people are lost in darkness. In the early 1500's this darkness had come over the church just prior to a period in the history of the church known as the Reformation. The Roman Catholic Church had exalted its own authority over that of

Scripture, and had left its people crying for light and truth. The Reformer's theological principle of **sola scriptura**, where only Scripture was held as able to bind the conscience of men, set people free and once again called the church to embrace only Scripture as its ultimate authority. The church had failed to heed the admonition of Jude and "contend earnestly for **the faith** (the content of Christian doctrine contained in Scripture alone) which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The Genevan reformer, John Calvin, commenting on the authority of Scripture, said this in his Institutes of the Christian Religion:

Scripture has its authority from God, not from the church. When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent - unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself - as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks. Now daily oracles are not sent from heaven, for it pleased the Lord to hallow His truth to everlasting remembrance in the Scriptures alone. Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.

Regarding those who seek another authority over Scripture, which they deem to be the Spirit, Calvin has this to say:

Those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness. For certain

giddy men have lately appeared, who, while they make a great display of the superiority of the spirit, reject all reading of the Scriptures themselves, and deride the simplicity of those who only delight in what they call the dead and deadly letter. But I wish they would tell me what spirit it is whose inspiration raises them to such a sublime height that they dare despise the doctrine of Scripture as mean and childish. If they answer that it is the Spirit of Christ, their confidence is exceedingly ridiculous; since they will, I presume, admit that the apostles and other believers in the primitive church were not illuminated by any other spirit. None of these thereby learned to despise the word of God, but every one was imbued with greater reverence for it, as their writings most clearly testify. And, indeed, it had been so foretold by the mouth of Isaiah. For when he says, "My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever," He does not tie down the ancient church to external doctrine, as He were a mere teacher of elements; He rather shows that, under the reign of Christ, the true and full felicity of the new church will consist in their being ruled not less by the word than by the Spirit of God. Hence we infer that these miscreants are guilty of fearful sacrilege in tearing asunder what

Those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness.

the prophet joins in indissoluble union. Add to this, that Paul, though carried up even to the third heaven, ceased not to profit by the doctrine of the law and the prophets, while, in like manner, he exhorts Timothy, a teacher of singular excellence, to give attention to reading (1Tim. 4:13). And the eulogy which he pronounces on Scripture well deserves to be remembered, viz., that "it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect" (2Tim. 3:16). What an infatuation of the devil, therefore, to fancy that Scripture, which conducts the sons of God to the final goal, is of transient and temporary use? Again, I should like those people to tell me whether they have imbibed any other spirit than that which Christ promised to his disciples. Though their madness is extreme, it will scarcely carry them the length of making this their boast. But what kind of Spirit did our Saviour promise to send? One who should not speak of Himself, (John 16:13) but suggest and instil the truths which He Himself had delivered through the word. Hence the office of the Spirit promised to us, is not to form new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new form of doctrine, by which we may be led away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but to seal on our minds the very doctrine which the gospel recommends.

But what is the danger for the people of God to neglect His word? Calvin offers wisdom on this as well:

For if we reflect how prone the human mind is to lapse into

forgetfulness of God, how readily inclined to every kind of error, how bent every now and then on devising new and fictitious religions, it will be easy to understand how necessary it was to make such a depository of doctrine as would secure it from either perishing by the neglect, vanishing away amid the errors, or being corrupted by the presumptuous audacity of men. It being thus manifest that God, foreseeing the inefficiency of His image imprinted on the fair form of the universe, has given the assistance of His word to all whom He has ever been pleased to instruct effectually, we, too, must pursue this straight path, if we aspire in earnest to a genuine contemplation of God; - we must go, I say, to the word, where the character of God, drawn from his works is described accurately and to the life; these works being estimated, not by our depraved judgement, but by the standard of eternal truth. If, as I lately said, we turn aside from it, how great soever the speed with which we move, we shall never reach the goal, because we are off the course. We should consider that the brightness of the divine countenance, which even an apostle declares to be inaccessible, (1Tim 6:16) is a kind of labyrinth, - a labyrinth to us inextricable, if the word does not serve us as a thread to guide our path, it is better to limp in the way, than run with the greatest swiftness out of it. Hence the psalmist, after repeatedly declaring (Psalm 93, 96, 97, 99, &c.) that superstition should be banished from the world in order that pure religion may flourish, introduces God as reigning; meaning by the term, not the power which He possesses and which He exerts in the government of universal nature, but the

doctrine by which He maintains His due supremacy: because **error never can be eradicated from the heart of man until the true knowledge of God has been implanted in it.**

This statement of Calvin, reminds us of the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it" (Jer 5:30-31).

Footnote: A word must be said at this point regarding the accuracy of the permanent record of the church's authority which establishes its trustworthiness. In other words what does the Scripture say about its inspiration and correctness. We will allow Scripture to speak for itself at this point and save a detailed apologetic for the inerrancy of Scripture for another time. Many more texts could be listed, but the following will suffice.

NAS John 14:25-26 "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

NAS John 16:13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears,

He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you. 15 "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you.

NAS 2 Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

NAS 2 Peter 1:20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

NAS 2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote

to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Regarding the authority of the Scripture for the people of God, the writers of the Cambridge Declaration state powerfully,

We **reaffirm** the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We **deny** that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

Thus Scripture alone is left as the ultimate, conscience binding authority in the life of the believer. The believer, as a true sheep of the Good Shepherd, recognizes it, submits to it, follows it, and promotes it. With the authority of Christ over His sheep recorded permanently in His written commands, it remains for us to understand how that authority will be administered within the community of believers. To that we turn our attention now.

The Administration of Authority

Originally the administration of authority within the community rested in the apostles of the Lord Jesus. This was the practice of the early church as noted in Acts 2:42 where it reports that “they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” The apostles were recognized as the authoritative leadership of the early church. They settled practical issues (Acts 6), they made decisions in doctrinal disputes (Acts 15), they carried out and oversaw the discipline of the church (Acts 5), they established churches (Acts 14), appointed leadership in those same churches (Acts 14), and were faithful to the Great Commission to spread the gospel throughout the known world (the book of Acts and the Pauline and general epistles).

As the New Testament era came to a close Jude reminds his beloved friends in the faith to “remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 17). Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews, writing to a group in danger of forsaking their confession reminds his readers to

1 pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various

miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Heb. 2:1-4).

God had sent the apostolic witness to these to whom the writer of Hebrews addresses and they were not to fail to remember what they had heard.

Though the apostles were clearly recognized by the New Testament community as the carriers of Christ's authority over His church, there came a time when the apostolic witness was no longer verbally heard. Their witness to Christ, however, had been forever recorded on the pages of sacred Scripture, and the torch had been passed to a new generation of leadership. Though the office of the apostles was not carried on, having been a foundational gift to the church along with the office of the prophets (cf. Eph 2:20, 4:11), the authoritative witness of the apostles remained intact within the community as faithful shepherds oversaw the ministry of the church by communicating faithfully the truth of the word of God in which apostolic authority was to be found.

The Apostle Paul passed on this admonition for faithful oversight to young Timothy who worked with the elders of the church of God in Ephesus.

NAS 1 Timothy 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, 4 nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to

mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. 5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, 7 wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. 12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.

This glorious gospel with which Paul was entrusted, and the command to proclaim it faithfully, was then passed on to the Apostle's young apprentice. "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight" (1Tim 1:18). However, having it passed on to him was not enough. Paul cautioned Timothy about the need to take care of it as a guardian of the truth. "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge" (1Tim 6:20).

In his second letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul, sensing Timothy's struggle in the fight for the faith, encouraged him with these words:

NAS 2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, 10 but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. 12 For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. 13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

In an effort to strengthen the young pastor, Paul concludes his letter to Timothy with one of the most powerful and clear statements in all of Scripture relating the pastor's responsibility regarding the word of God.

NAS 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of

God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Finally, in regard to the passing of the torch (the responsibility to proclaim the word to the community and beyond), the Apostle Paul admonishes Timothy by the grace of God that something must not go unnoticed. Faithfully proclaiming the word is only one part of his obligation before God. To do this and stop was to fail in the call to ministry. He, having had the torch of responsibility passed on to him, must also pass the torch on to others who will also pass it on themselves to the next generation of faithful pastor/teachers. In 2Timothy 2:1-7 Paul tells young Timothy,

1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ

Jesus. 2 And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

This text leads to the understanding that the one having received the torch, now has the responsibility of proclaiming this apostolic witness to Christ, this witness being the very gospel record, passed on to faithful shepherds of the church. The New Testament speaks clearly regarding the responsibility of these pastors to continue to proclaim the authoritative word of God to the church of Jesus Christ. Ponder the following passages:

NAS 1 Timothy 1:3 As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,

NAS 1 Timothy 3:15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

NAS 1 Timothy 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

NAS 1 Timothy 4:11 Prescribe and teach these things.

NAS 1 Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

NAS 1 Timothy 6:20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"~ 21 which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

NAS 2 Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; 15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

NAS 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the

dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

NAS Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,

NAS Titus 2:15 These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

NAS Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

NAS 1 Corinthians 16:15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to

the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

The responsibility for faithfully communicating the word of Christ, recorded by the apostles, has been passed on from generation to generation by faithful under-shepherds in the church. The life of the church as the “pillar and support of the truth” depends on this faithful succession (cf. 1Tim. 3:15). As he proclaims this authoritative word, he will do well to consider the words of pastor Mark Dever in his work **9 Marks of a Healthy Church**:

Expositional preaching (he writes), presumes a belief in the authority of Scripture, but it is something more. A commitment to expositional preaching is a commitment to hear God’s word. Even as Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles were given not just a commission to go and speak, but a particular message, so Christian preachers today have authority to speak from God only so long as they speak His words. Thus the expositional preacher’s **authority begins and ends with Scripture.**



Great Is The Mystery of Godliness

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Confessionalism

The causes of a negative reaction or a turning away from “associational” life as set forth in our ancient Baptist confessions, are many and varied. A sampling of “reactions” against confessionalism is set forth in the items that follow:

1. The Mask of Scriptural Authority: Many say having a confessional-fellowship (CF) intrudes on the authority of Scripture in the life of the

believer and the church. “I believe the Bible,” they vehemently declare, even following their declaration up with verbiage about “inerrancy” and “infallibility” (themselves confessional declarations - but we will not quibble about that here). Simply put these brothers, many of them well-meaning, want to affirm the sole authority of the Scripture in the life of the church and they see the use of confessions to frame our fellowship as intrusive to that desire. Interestingly, in affirming “*Sola Scriptura*,” many of them seem to forget that many of our sound, orthodox creeds or confessions came out of the period of the Reformation and years following. Apparently the Reformers saw no contradiction between the formal principle of scriptural authority and the formal stating of their beliefs in a confessional framework.

2. The Cry for No Creed but Christ: Though this seems at first glance to be the most “spiritual” of the objections, it is but a smoke screen for today’s “individual” who wants his own personal Jesus who looks and acts more like a marionette puppet than the authoritative Christ making his demands on his people through his written word. Embedded in this cry is often an inherent dislike and opposition to authority and accountability to any outside the all sovereign self.

3. The Doctrine Divides Mentality: There seems to be a prevailing view among many in our anti-doctrinal age that doctrine divides. On the affirmative side, we agree, truth does in fact divide: it separates the wheat from the chaff, the weeds from the wheat, the true from the false, and the sheep from the goats. Doctrine does divide, thanks be unto God! On the flip side of this however, the label the preaching or statement of true biblical doctrine with the pejorative designation

“divider of unifies brethren” is to put the blame in the wrong place. It’s like blaming the doctor for ruining your “healthy” lung as his knife precisely makes its incision reveal a cancerous tumor within. The truth often sheds light on the error and “dis-unity” already present in the body. The truth of the word of God comes in like the two edge sword, with the first pass it exposes and lays bare and with the second it makes whole and brings healing. B. H. Carroll, that great Baptist theologian from the early 20th century said of this kind of church:

A church with a little creed is a church with a little life. The more divine doctrines a church can agree on, the greater its power, and the wider its usefulness. The fewer its articles of faith, the fewer its bonds of union and compactness. The modern cry, ‘Less creed and more liberty,’ is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy - it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but note the less deadly.

4. Modern Arrogance Against Heritage: Just like nobody wants to found driving their “father’s” Oldsmobile, nobody wants to be found holding on to their father’s confession. We live in the day where new is always better. In our church’s statement regarding the confession we rejoice that we are able in affirming it to find therein “a link with faithful brothers who have gone before.” Many see this as mere nostalgia and holding on to something dead and forgotten and long since needing to be buried and forgotten. But we disagree. New isn’t

always better, and we, like those who originally penned the contents of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (herein referred to as the Confession) “have no itch to clogge Religion with new words, but do readily acquiesce in that form of sound words, which hath been, in consent with the holy Scriptures, used by others before us; hereby declaring before God, Angels, and Men, our hearty agreement with them in that wholesome Protestant Doctrine.”

5. Overemphasis on Experience Centered Faith: Our is the day in which the age old quest to know God has been replaced with the new and improved journey of experiencing God. The idea of a confession just seems to “get in the way” and hinder the free-flow wonder of being lost in the divine. I am not always sure what that means, but that’s the point. We live in the day of the Protestant mystic seeking the unmediated encounter with God - in His undefined pure essence. This experience is often un-defined (by Scripture) and un-interpretable (even by the self). Since God is not defined by the Scripture and set forth clearly in confessional statements, one is left defining God on their own terms, much after their own image and desire. I believe I read something like this has happened before and the end was not good.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction;

my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes? (Jer 2:12-13, 5:30-31 ESV)

6. Denial of Invisible/Universal Church: Others reject the idea of a confessional fellowship or associationalism due to an overemphasis on the local church to the denial of or practical ignorance of the church universal. The Confession states emphatically right at the front of the chapter on the church in section 1 that

the catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Whether this is a hang over position from the days of J. R. R. Graves and his Landmark friends or simply an ignorance to the clear teachings of Scripture on the plan of God being larger and grander than simply the church of Christ taking local, bodily expressions in the end it smacks of an arrogance isolationism that keeps the body of Christ ever divided in this world and fails to give practical expression to the passion of Christ to see His church one.

7. Modern Evangelical Lack of Regard for Clarity: The “Rodney King” heart cry of “Can’t we all just get along” continues to be found even amongst the most conservative of our Baptist brethren. Doctrine matters, as long as it is doctrine that matters “to me!” As soon as we

touch on a point of Scripture material that seems divisive, difficult, or discouraging, we hear it declared a “non-essential” and are encouraged to just agree to disagree and get back to the main thing, which in my Baptist group is always “evangelism.” No to mention that it might help us do better evangelism if we stopped “doing” the gospel to perhaps discuss the “is” of the gospel - but that would take us away from “doing” and in the eyes of many - that’s a bad thing. By stating that we are a confessional fellowship we are saying, among other things, doctrine matters! All of it at that! Everything in the Scripture, though it may not have “equal weight” is in fact in bounds! We want the whole truth and nothing but the truth - So help us God!

8. Success/Market Ministry Syndrome: It seems that no matter how hard we try or how well intentioned we are, we fight in the ministry every day with the competition bug. We, like the opponents of the Apostle Paul are constantly fighting against the temptation to “measure (ourselves) by one another and compare (ourselves) with one another” showing that we are all too often “without understanding” (2 Cor 10:12 ESV). Shameful though it is, the church today is caught up with cultural definitions of success and giving evidence all too often that we are failing to be true servants of Christ and are rather quite content with seeking the approval of man! (See Gal 1:10) This sin keeps us apart! After all who wants to really get together, in the confessional sense, and when the other church is for all practical purposes - well - the enemy!

9. Purpose Driven Ministry Craze: I was tempted to put this with the one before, but I treat it separately on purpose (pardon the pun!). In

the purpose driven model of church life each church is challenged to “think up” their own purpose statement that captures their particular niche of the “market.” In other words, in this model, you have to creatively determine with God is saying to your church. You would think Blackaby and Warren got together for this one! The idea that God has a different “purpose” for each church works against the idea of confessionalism - for Christ doesn’t have messages and purposes for each church - rather the task of the church is to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. One message, in one book, for one purpose.

I am sure there are more reasons many in today’s church seem to reject confessionalism, but surely that’s enough for now. The problem, as I see it, all the arguments against confessionalism matter not - if Scripture itself affirms it. This I believe it does, and for good reason, as we hope to set forth in the points that follow. The following is a brief overview of the points we hope to cover in our paper:

§The Scriptural Mandate of a Confessional-Fellowship
§The Scriptural Means of a Confessional-Fellowship
§The Scriptural Motivation of a Confessional-Fellowship
§The Scriptural Mutuality of a Confessional-Fellowship
§The Scriptural Marks of a Confessional-Fellowship

Each of these would require a paper in their own right. For our purposes we intend to briefly cover each in one paper. Consider first with me:

The Scriptural Mandate of a Confessional-Fellowship

Mandate is a powerful term and should not be used arbitrarily. But it is a good word for us here with the subject matter at hand. For if in fact we have no biblical directive (either explicit or implicit) for a confessional-fellowship, at best we are wasting our time - at worst we are following our own self-made schemes. Fortunately we do in fact have just such a mandate. This mandate is clearly inferred from the scriptural teaching regarding Christ in his position, person, and finally in his petition.

The Position of Christ: The Head of the Church

Eph 4:15-16 (ESV) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

John Owen, the Puritan divine, once wrote:

The Lord Christ himself is the original and spring of this union, and every particular church is united unto him as its head; besides which, with or under which, it hath none. This relation of the church unto Christ as its head the apostle expressly affirms to be the foundation and cause of its union...And unless this union be dissolved, unless a church be disunited from Christ, it cannot be so from the catholic church, nor any true

church of Christ in particular, however it may be dealt withal by others in the world. From Christ, as the head and spring of union, there proceedeth unto all particular churches a bond of union, which is his Holy Spirit, acting itself in them by faith and love, in and by the ways and means and for the ends of his appointment. This is the kingly, royal, beautiful union of the church: Christ, as the only head of influence and rule, bringing it into a relation unto himself as his body, communicating of his Spirit unto it, governing it by the law of his word, enabling it unto all the duties of faith, love, and holiness. [John Owen, The True Nature of a Gospel Church: Of the Communion of Churches, Works, Vol 16, p.189-190]

The Person of Christ: The Embodiment of Truth

John 14:6 (ESV) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 18:37-38 (ESV) Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world— to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." [38] Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

Eph. 4:15 (ESV) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Eph. 4:21 (ESV) assuming that you have heard about him and

were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,

Eph. 4:25 (ESV) Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

The Petition of Christ: For Oneness in the Church

John 17:20-23 (ESV) "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

At this point in our study it is our hope that we have sufficiently established that the church is under the mandate of Scripture that their communion both within individual churches themselves and that communion they share with other local bodies is to be confessional. By way of the position of Christ as the head of the church, the person of Christ who is the very embodiment of truth, and the petition of Christ wherein he prays for the union of his people to reflect the very union that he has with the other members of the Trinity, which is a union in the truth, churches are mandated or directed by the authority Christ holds over his church to be confessional in their associations. With this

mandate established, we turn our attention to the subject of the means of a confessional fellowship.

The Means of a Confessional Fellowship

When we say that churches relating to one another are to be bound together in terms of confessionalism what does this really mean? Or rather how does it look? To answer this we turn again to the Scriptures themselves to see, by way of example, the pattern of the early church. We should not look for all of our direction in the imperatives of the New Testament. The habitual practice of the early church operating under the direction and leadership of the Apostles is also valid material from which to draw direction. Our early Baptist forefathers referred to this as primitivism - in the words of T. L. Underwood - it was “the emphasis in faith and practice on the first, earliest form or pattern as described in the New Testament that entailed efforts to re-create or imitate such a form in the present” (See Denominations or Associations? Chapter 4 by James Renihan on *Reformed Baptist Associations: Primitivism, Scripture, and the Confession of Faith*). As Jim Renihan has noted:

Primitivism was not simply an attempt to search the Scriptures for imperative, as if the sum duty of the Christian life is included in them. It was rather an attempt to look at the new Testament as a whole, and replicate the life present there.

Is this perhaps what the framers of our confession were pointing to in chapter 1 on the Holy Scriptures, article 6 where we read:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Listen carefully as it continues:

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word, and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

If this is the case, and Apostolic practice and church pattern, can legitimately serve us well in the establishment of policies and procedures for the church today, what do we learn as we examine the practice of the early church in regard to this issue before us, that of confessionalism. Did they practice it? What did it look like? What can we learn from their custom or habit? We have entitled this section of our study: *The Scriptural Means of a Confessional-Fellowship*

When we turn our attention to the pages of the New Testament record we find several repetitive patterns in the life of the New Testament churches that give insight into the expressions of

confessionalism held among them. First, we find that...

Scriptural Means 1: They Shared an Embodied Tradition - The New Testament speaks often of a collection or embodiment of tradition, material that was known, discernable, contained, and passed on from one to another.

As the saying goes, “Traditions die hard.” This is not always bad, especially when the tradition is the very embodiment of the teaching of the Apostle’s of Christ himself!

The following is a sampling of texts that speak to the matter.

2Th 3:6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

2Th 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

1Co 11:2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

These texts serve us well in establishing the existence of what can be called the “Apostolic Tradition” but in order to truly grasp the

authoritative understanding of “the tradition” that is passed on from the Apostles to the churches we have to go back to the very source of that “tradition” itself - the teachings of Jesus to his early followers. From early on Jesus established himself as the authoritative teacher of his people. Truly, truly “I say to you” were common words to hear fall from the lips of Christ. One event that seems to be “par for the course” in the ministry of Jesus is recorded for us in Matthew’s gospel, in chapter 15.

Mat 15:1-9 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, (2) "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." (3) He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? (4) For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' (5) But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," (6) he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. (7) You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: (8) ""This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; (9) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

This event is also recorded for us also in Mark 7. Jesus effectively demonstrates here that he has no interest whatsoever in supporting the “tradition of the elders.” He comes in support of the authority of the word of God and in a desire to establish his own

tradition for his church.

Consider Paul himself in this line of thinking in Galatians 1

Gal 1:14-16 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. (15) But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, (16) was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

Paul, like Jesus, is not interested in the “traditions of the elders” but rather in following the tradition of Jesus Christ - who has been revealed to him.

Col 2:8-10 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (9) For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10) and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Of what does this tradition consist? [Lane, *Overseas Missionary Fellowship, New Bible Dictionary*, 1211]

1. The historical facts of Jesus - 1Cor 11:23, 15:3, Luke 1:2

2. The theological interpretation of those historical facts - 1Cor 15

3. The manner of life that is to flow from this new understanding - 1Cor 11:2, 2Thes 2:15, 3:6-7

The New Testament often speaks of this tradition in differing terms: that which has been received, the faith, and the truth. Consider the following as samples:

1 Cor. 15:1-8 (ESV) Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, [2] and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain. [3] **For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:** that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. [7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. [8] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

1 Tim. 3:14-15 (ESV) I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, [15] if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, **a pillar and buttress of truth.**

1 Tim. 6:20-21 (ESV) O Timothy, guard **the deposit entrusted** to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," [21] for by professing it some have swerved from **the faith**.

Earlier in his letter Paul had mentioned to Timothy two such men who wandered from this "faith," this body of truth.

1 Tim. 1:18-20 (ESV) This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, [19] **holding faith** and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of **their faith** (lit. "the faith"), [20] among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

3 John 1:4 (ESV) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in **the truth**.

Jude 1:3 (ESV) Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for **the faith** that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Secondly, having observed this initial means of confessionalism of the early church - this shared embodied tradition - we turn now to the second means by which they established their confessional identity - their formulating of this same embodied tradition into confessional

statements and affirmations.

Scriptural Means 2: They Shared the Confessional Formulation of this Embodied Tradition - The tradition that they shared was one and the same. It had been delivered to them by the joint Apostolic witness. It was the Apostolic doctrine/teaching which the churches. Early on, in the life of the churches, this very teaching came to be formulated as confessional statements.

One of the principle and most clear examples of this reality is to be found in a familiar text that we have seen already. We begin again by looking at 1Timothy 3:14-16

1Ti 3:14-16 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, (15) if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (16) Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Carefully note the dependent relationship of verses 15 and 16. The text in v.15 states clearly the church's responsibility, that of upholding the truth. This is what they are called to be and do - hold up the truth of God - to be both its pillar and its support. But how? How could they fulfill this sobering obligation? Verse 16 follows with the answer - by confessing and holding to it faithfully together as a body.

The text of v.16 states that they were together to “confess...the mystery of godliness.” The following confessional substance is that which points to Christ - both his person and his work.

To continue with this thinking, consider the following as more than ample evidence of the churches commitment to confessionalism. One of the earliest and most concise of these confessional statements is the statement that “Jesus is Lord.” This is found in two epistles of Paul. The earliest is in 1 Cor. 12:3

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

A later and perhaps more developed phrasing of this confession is found in Paul’s letter to the brethren in Rome:

Romans 10:9 (ESV) because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Other confessional statements were more developed:

1 Cor. 15:3-5 (ESV) For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, [5] and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Notice how each of these confessions focus on the person and work of Christ. At times they became even more elaborate as the church developed in its theology, or more particularly its Christology.

Philip. 2:5-11 (ESV) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Hebrews 1:1-4 (ESV) Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. [3] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, [4] having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The confessional statements at times to a polemic tone as in 1John

1Jn 4:1-6 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (2) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, (3) and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (4) Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (5) They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (6) We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

2Jn 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

That they shared common confessions stands to reason when we consider thirdly...

Scriptural Means 3: They Shared a Common Body of Instructional Documents - The letters and documents of the New Testament were “common” and shared by all the churches as time went by. Thus they were in a sense, reading off the same page - a confessional page!

Several Facts Point to this Truth:

1. Letters were often written to multiple congregations.

Galatians 1:2 (ESV) and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

Notice that the Galatian churches were a region of churches established by Paul on his first missionary journey. This was not one letter for one church - this was one letter for many churches.

2. These letters were intentionally circular in nature - covering general topics of note for all believers.

Eph 1:1 (ESV) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus

Note the similarities between the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to the Colossians.

3. Some letters even mention other congregations by name with which letters were to be shared.

Col. 4:16, 18 (ESV) [16] And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. [18] I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains.

Grace be with you.

4. Letters, even though dealing with specific issues, were still to be seen as from one source: the Spirit of God - to multiple audiences: the churches with each of these letters with promises attached that are offered to all.

Rev. 1:10-11 (ESV) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet [11] saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

Rev. 2:7 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Rev. 2:11 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Rev. 2:17 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Rev. 2:29 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Rev. 3:6 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Rev. 3:13 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Rev. 3:22 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' "

5. Letters often assumed knowledge of the existence of others letters that were to carry equal weight for all the churches.

2 Peter 3:14-16 (ESV) Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

6. Paul's letters carried the specific identifier of his "signature" which told all the churches that it was in fact a letter from him - this would be unintelligible if the churches only knew of one letter.

2Th 3:17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.

Gal 6:11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my

own hand.

Col 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Phm 1:19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it- to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

With this we turn to a fourth and final means of the early church's confessionalism - they held to a common opposition against error or false doctrine.

Scriptural Means 4: They Shared Opposition to False Doctrine - It is fascinating to note that the majority of the New Testament epistles (Pauline and General) contain warnings against the dangers of false doctrine and the self-appointed teachers who propagate it. What is instructional for us here is that the presence of false doctrine was to be discernable for the churches based upon the truth that they had been taught. This reality clearly points to a confessional basis for fellowship within the Christian community.

There are many texts to which we could turn to shed light on this text. The entirety of both Corinthian letters, Gal 1:6-9, Eph 5:8-14, 6:12 (read with Acts 19), Phil 3, Col 2, 1Thes 4:7, 2Thes 2, 3:6, 14-15, 1Tim 1:18-20, 4:1, 6:20-21, 2Tim 3:1, 4:14-15, Tit 1:10-16, 2:15, 3:10, Heb 13:7-11, 1Pet 5:6-12, 2Pet 2, 3:17, 1John 4:1-6, 2John 10, 3 John 9-10

We will limit our examination of this means to one text: Jude 3. Thought any of the texts listed above would serve our purpose - this text from Jude is exceptionally clear and stands out among the others as a text that faithfully demonstrates how the New Testament community was to stand against false doctrine as a means by which they would affirm the common confession of the church to the truth delivered to them by God. Jude writes to his brethren:

Jude 1:3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

In this text the beloved servant of Christ, Jude, warns the church against false brethren who have crept into the fellowship seeking to subvert its purity and passion for Christ and his truth. Furthermore, coupled with this text from Jude should be a verse found later in the letter where the readers were directed to strengthen themselves or build themselves up in this faith against those who sought to cause divisions in the body. (See vs. 19-20).

The point that is of great note to us at this point in our study is this subject of “the faith.” What is it? What was it to which Jude so passionately pointed his readers and for which they were to earnestly contend in what seems like a passionate life or death spiritual battle? The Scripture, primarily the epistles of the Apostle Paul, make use of this phrase “the faith” often. As we read the Scriptural data we find the following six characteristics:

Characteristic 1: The Faith is a Taught Material

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Colossians tells them in 2:6-7 that “as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

The faith as it is explained here or associated with a body of taught material that has established us in the Christian life. The safeguard to ensure that we continue in Christ and walk in him as we are commanded to, is to be rooted and built up in him and established in the faith. These two realities: 1) being rooted/built up in Christ and 2) being established in the faith are inseparable realities. To think of one without the other is, well - unthinkable! There is no one without the other!

This truth/faith, that the Colossians had once received, would now serve to strengthen and established them in Christ, build them up in him, and lay their roots down deep and strong. One writer brings out the implications of the present passive participle translated here as “established” by translating this terms as: “being more and more established.” Thus they are here being “built up” and "established" in the faith/the doctrines which they were taught! Why would this so important for the Apostle to communicate? It would serve for them, that is - the faith and their being established by it, would serve for them as a safe-guard against false teachers and their subversive doctrines. Consider the broad context of our text from Colossians 2:1-10:

Col 2:1-10 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, (2) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, (3) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (4) I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. (5) For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (6) Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (8) See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (9) For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10) and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Notice Paul's pattern in vs.3-4 and 6-8. In vs. 3-4 Paul points them to Christ - for he is the fount of all wisdom and knowledge. Why does he do that? He provides the answer in v.4 - he doesn't want them to be led astray or deluded or to miscalculate in the face of the "plausible arguments" of the false teachers that had come their way. So he points them to Christ - to keep them safe. Then notice again a similar pattern in vs.6-8. First, in vs.6-7 he points them again to Christ reminding them of the reception of Christ and the instruction they receive regarding Christ from the faith. Why? Why point them again

to Christ and his truth? Because (v.8) predators abound! There is a wisdom of the world, a tradition of the world that is out of accord with the tradition of Christ that they have been given in the faith. The church (and the churches all around) were to have a united stand against false doctrine by standing for the faith, the truth they had been taught in Christ.

Characteristic 2: The Faith is a Nourishing Material

Paul encourages young Timothy by reminding him in 1Timothy 4:6 that

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

Fritz Rienecker records that "the metaphor (of nourishing oneself on the faith) is that of feeding with the idea of reading and inwardly digesting. . . (as a) continual process." The Apostle Peter communicates this same idea when he writes:

1Pe 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.

The NASB is probably a little more clear in its translation:

NAB 1 Peter 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

Characteristic 3: The Faith is a Mysterious Material

Consider first the following two texts highlighting the mysterious nature of the faith:

1Ti 3:9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

1 Tim. 3:9 tells us that deacons be “holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” Here the deep truths (NIV) /mystery (NASB) are seen as being contained within the faith itself. The mysterious nature of this faith refers to the fact that it is not from man but rather is something revealed to man by God himself! It is outside of man and must be given to him from some other source.

Other references that should be studied in regard to this element of the faith are 1Cor 2:6-10, Gal 1:11-12, 2Pet 1:20-21, and 2Pet 3:14-17.

1Co 2:6-10 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. (7) But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (8) None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"~ (10) these things God has revealed to

us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

Gal 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. (12) For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

2Pe 1:19-21 And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, (20) knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. (21) For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2Pe 3:14-17 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (15) And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, (16) as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (17) You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.

Characteristic 4: The Faith is a True Material

The faith is equated with the truth in Paul's second letter to Timothy. This is essential to grasp in trying to discern from a study of Scripture the essence of the faith. Here in this passage the faith is clearly equated with the truth of God. To oppose one is to oppose the other!

2Ti 3:8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

Characteristic 5: The Faith is a Ruling Material

The same passage noted above indicates that it will be by the standard of the faith/the truth that men/teachers will be judged by. When teaching the deposit of truth, we must hold all teachings encountered up to a certain standard...this standard is: "the faith." Hear from the text again:

2Ti 3:8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

This is very similar to what the apostle John said in his second letter when he wrote, "anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the father and the son. If anyone comes to you and

does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work." (2 John)

2Jn 1:7-11 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (8) Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. (9) Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, (11) for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

As teachers we must carefully screen all doctrine for a judgement awaits us if we do not. Recall James' warning: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." It is by the standard of this word that we are called to teach that we will in fact be judged and weighed in the balances.

Characteristic 6: The Faith is a Complete Material

Lastly, in trying to understand the essence of the faith we must see it as something that is complete, finished being delivered, and final. Remember the words of Jude when he urged the church to "contend for

the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." It is a "done deal!" Literally the Greek reads in this verse to "contend for the once for all delivered to the saints faith." This states clearly that the faith was and today stands as a delivered body of material that has been deposited with the church, those here called saints.

The use of the phrase "once for all delivered" (in the Gk. hapax) makes this certain. See for examples of this use of the term: Heb 7:27, 9:11-12, 9:26, and 10:10. Thus we conclude that the church is to make use of "the faith" for its teaching and nourishment. It is to serve as a ruling standard of truth by which all doctrines of men must be judged.

§The Scriptural Motivations of a Confessional-Fellowship

The Scripture presents us with several abiding realities that serve as strong encouragements or motivators for forming and framing our fellowship around confessional standards.

Scriptural Motivation 1: The Church Ever Remains an Impure Mixture

Matthew 13:24-30 (ESV) He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, [25] but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. [26] So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. [27] And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?'

[28] He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' [29] But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Scriptural Motivation 2: We are Called to Walk by the Rule of the Truth

Galatians 6:11-16 (ESV) See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. [12] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. [13] For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. [14] But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [15] For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. [16] And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

Scriptural Motivation 3: Our Associations Must be Pure

1 Cor. 5:9-12 (ESV) I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— [10] not at all meaning the

sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. [11] But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?

2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 (ESV) Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? [15] What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? [16] What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [17] Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, [18] and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." [7:1] Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Eph. 5:11 (ESV) Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Scriptural Motivation 4: False Teachers and Teachings Abound

1 Tim. 4:1 (ESV) Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

1 John 4:1-6 (ESV) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. [4] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. [5] They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. [6] We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Jude 1:3-4 (ESV) Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. [4] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus

Christ.

Scriptural Motivation 5: We are Commanded to not Associate with Those Who do not Hold to the “Teaching”

Romans 16:17-18 (ESV) I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. [18] For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

2 Th 3:6 (ESV) Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

2 Th 3:14 (ESV) If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

Tit 3:10 (ESV) As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

2 John 1:10 (ESV) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting.

The Scriptural Mutuality of a Confessional-Fellowship

By labeling this section with the term “mutuality” we seek to emphasize and draw attention to the fact that a confessional fellowship assumes a complementary and reciprocal relation between churches where there is benefit for all parties in the relation. In the words of the great Apostle Paul:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil 2:1-4 ESV).

This mentality of mutuality should be at the heart of the associational relationship. Recall the wording of the Second and First London Baptist Confessions of faith regarding the relation between churches is to effect:

Second London: [Churches should] hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.

First London: [Churches should seek] by all means convenient to have the council and help of another in all needful affairs of

the church.

The Second London is more particular in its elaborations, but in effect they state the same thing. If we line out the three benefits or the “scriptural mutuality” of the relation they are as follows:

1. We Are to Labor Together for Peace
2. We are to Labor Together for the Increase of Love
3. We are to Labor Together for Mutual Edification

For the expression of what this will “look” like, we turn our attention to the marks of this confessional fellowship.

§The Scriptural Marks of a Confessional-Fellowship

The “marks” or external evidences of this “internal” commitment to one another in a confessional fellowship are many of the same marks that will evidence healthy church communion itself. In other words - our confessional fellowship - will strive to give evidence to our confession of the headship of Christ, our love for him and our love for one another. Some of the tangible matters will involve the following:

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Love

1 Cor 16:14 (ESV) Let all that you do be done in love.

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Order

1 Cor 14:33 (ESV) For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

1 Cor 14:40 (ESV) But all things should be done decently and in order.

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Edification

1 Cor 14:26 (ESV) Let all things be done for building up.

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Truth

Eph 4:15-16 (ESV) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

3 John 1:8 (ESV) Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Illustration: The Jerusalem Council - Acts 15

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Care

Phil 2:1-4 (ESV) So if there is any encouragement in Christ,

any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

2 Cor 11:9 (ESV) And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.

Eph 4:28 (ESV) Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Phil 4:11 (ESV) Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

1 John 3:17 (ESV) But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Service

Service of Sharing Gifts: 1 Peter 4:10-11 (ESV) As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of

God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Service of Sharing People: Phil 2:25-30 (ESV) I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, [26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. [27] Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [28] I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. [29] So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, [30] for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Our Fellowship Must be Marked by Glory

1 Cor 10:31 (ESV) So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.



The Right Hand of Fellowship

Rediscovering a Biblical View of church Associationalism

Association or communion with like minded churches for the greater propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the edification of His church is a glory to Christ. It is a joy for the church of Jesus Christ to link arms and hearts with linked minded and like passionate brethren, seeking to have fellowship with them as the Lord provides opportunity. Like church membership for the individual, we believe that inter-church fellowship is fundamentally a Biblical matter. We must not and will not remain isolated and

disconnected from the rest of the body of Christ.

This passion for associational life has been a commitment of Baptist churches from the earliest days of Baptist life in England. Consider the following taken from an early Baptist confession of faith, The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith:

Each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification. [2LCF, Ch 26, Sec 14]

Although the particular congregations are distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit city in itself; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the council and help of another in all needful affairs of the church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head. [1LCF]

This is sound wisdom that should be heeded. Yet sadly, this passion, once strong among our Baptist brethren, no longer holds the attraction it once did in the lives of many of our congregations. The warning of the great Puritan divine John Owen, though not a Baptist, should be clearly heard:

The church that confines its duty to the acts of its own assemblies cuts itself off from the external communion of the Church catholic; nor will it be safe for any man to commit the conduct of his soul to such a church.

The benefits and blessings afforded the local church are numerous and substantial: the demonstration of visible unity to a watching world, communion with sister churches, wisdom from a multitude of counselors, encouragement to stay the course in days of compromise, prevention of corruption and abuse of church power, cooperation in the spread of the gospel, and the advancement of the Kingdom of God. We look forward to the deepening of the inter-church fellowship with our brothers and sisters of like-mind as the Lord God brings us together for the cause that is His alone and pray that this blog will be used by Him to that glorious end.



Jesus is Lord

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Ownership

Of foundational importance to the vitality of the church is a recovery of her identity as the people of God. To say this another way, the church must again come to see herself as God’s people. Though the phrases “the people of God” and “God’s people” are synonymous, the emphasis sought in the slight change in wording is of profound significance. Calling ourselves the “people of God” though Biblical, can be a point of pride rather than humility, if we are not careful. The concept of being the people of God

is brought out more clearly when we call ourselves “God’s people” - a people belonging to and possessed by God himself. It is not that we possess God, but rather that He possesses us. As the Scripture says, “know that the Lord Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psa 100:3, cf. Eph 1:14).

*The
church
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This truth is so clearly embodied in the words of our Lord in the gospel of Matthew 16:18 when He says: “I will build **My church**.” Though brief, it is a statement huge in theological significance. There should be no debate allowed at this point. Jesus has stopped the mouths of all objectors. There is no room in the body of the church for any other than Jesus to claim ownership of what is rightfully His. No board of elders, deacon body, congregation, committee, denominational structure, nor individual (no matter how much they tithe!) has any right at any time to pronounce by word or deed that the church of Jesus Christ belongs to them in the slightest measure. Even in the phrase “my church” there lurks the subtlety of potential danger. As the apostle Paul wrote young Timothy, we are the “household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1Tim 3:15). None of us can come close to saying of ourselves what Paul credits God with doing, when he reminds the Ephesian elders that they were “to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). God has paid the purchase price for the souls of those who make up the church. A ransom has been paid - we have been purchased. We are not our own and our personal rights have been

surrendered to a new owner. Paul reminded the church in Corinth, “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (2Cor 6:19-20). Since then we have been bought, the ultimate goal we should strive for as “the people of God” is to recognize His sovereign right to claim ownership, and to seek His glory in all we do.



I Will Build My Church

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Growth

Just as the church has lost her understanding of God's sovereign ownership of His church, so she has forgotten His promise to be sovereign in regard to her growth as well. We have forgotten the declaration of the Lord Jesus when He told Peter, "and I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build** My church; and the gates of hades shall not overpower it" (Matt 16:18). When asked in an interview with Growing Churches magazine (the church growth publication of the Southern Baptist Convention) the question "What

concerns do you have today regarding the church growth movement?”, John MacArthur had the following response:

First of all, let me say that I am for the growth of the church. It's the passion of my life to be an instrument by which the Lord can build His church, but I'm not under some illusion that I can build the church. A reporter asked me years ago if I had a desire to build the church. I said, "No, Jesus said He'd do that and I don't think I'll compete with Him." The thing I worry about is that it becomes manipulative - that it forgets you don't smash the fortresses of human ideologies and false religious systems with human weapons. Church growth is not a matter of cleverness and technique. We just have to depend upon the transcendent Word of God to penetrate all these various lives.

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Though in theory most in modern day evangelicalism would affirm God's sovereign oversight of the growth of His church, in practice we act as if God has left growing the church up to us, His all-wise subjects. The growth of the church of Jesus is stated in Scripture as a divine reality, not as a human possibility.

The growth of the church and its relationship to God's ownership of the same church, should be more understandable in light of the fact that as we have assumed (in practice) ownership of the church we have made the sovereign creator dependent on the sinful creature to bring growth to what He designed and brought into existence. Realizing that the church began by the work of the Spirit, we act today as if it should be perpetuated by the work of the flesh.

How we often resemble the foolishness of the Galatians. Having begun the Christian life as individuals in the Spirit, we think we can carry on this once begun work of grace in the flesh. Paul wrote the church in Galatia a scathing rebuke stating,

NAS Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Though in theory most in modern day evangelicalism would affirm God's sovereign oversight of the growth of His church, in practice we act as if God has left growing the church up to us, His all-wise subjects. The growth of the church of Jesus is stated in Scripture as a divine reality, not as a human possibility.

If this will not work on an individual level, how foolish we are to think it can be accomplished on a corporate level. As Mark Dever states in his work, **The Nine Marks of a Healthy Church**,

Today many books on the market and speakers on the circuit are asserting that almost every conceivable attribute, worship style, computer program, book, sound system, seminar, ministry, education program, group, philosophy, methodology, doctrine, virtue, spiritual encounter, parking lot design, or management structure is **the key** to a successful church.

Any growth accomplished in the flesh cannot bring glory to God and all our labor will have been in vain. As the Psalmist has recorded for us, “**unless the Lord** builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; **unless the Lord** guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain” (Psa 127:1).

All true, God-honoring growth comes from God himself. The only growth in the church that can be called “true” growth is from God. Only this growth honors the Lord. And only He can accomplish it. Yes, He uses His subjects to bring it about, but in the final estimation of it all, as Paul wrote the church in Corinth: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (2Cor 3:6-7). God is the “causative agent” in the growth of His church. He

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infuses it with life, sustains it, and brings about its growth and reproduction. As Luke records for us, “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

This is further in keeping with what the Apostle Paul made clear to the church in Colossae when he admonished them to

18 let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 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** (Col 2:18-19).

Placing our thoughts and redirecting our efforts toward the growth of the church demonstrates that our thinking has become perverted and we are in danger of being defrauded of our prize for faithful devotion to Christ. When we forget growth comes from Him alone, we have become, as a body, detached from the head, Christ, from whom all growth comes. This loss we cannot afford!

When we forget growth comes from Him alone, we have become, as a body, detached from the head, Christ, from whom all growth comes.

The early church understood this principle all too well both in theory and in practice. Luke records for us that they were continually “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” (Acts 2:47).

What is the answer? What is the key? How is the church to be successful, perpetuate itself, and grow? Try humble faithful service and let God do the rest! This concept is not a “Let go and Let God” approach to ministry. It is the church taking its position under its Sovereign in faithful humility and fervent service. We are stewards of something that belongs to someone else. The church is His, and He will do with it what pleases Him most! The Scripture reminds us at this point that “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (2Cor 4:2 KJV). Faithfulness is our responsibility, growth is God's business.



Feed My Sheep

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Leadership

The last sentence under the category of the church's authority is crucial to our study as we turn our attention to the study of leadership: "The expositional preacher's (pastor's) authority begins and ends with Scripture." This idea serves to define authoritative parameters within the body of Christ. Outside the bounds of Scripture the pastor/shepherd of the flock has no right to claim any kind of authority or leadership over or above those in his charge. However, within that realm, the pastor is called to lead and the

flock is called to submit.

This is all the more crucial to understand and embrace in an age where leadership is constantly being undermined by men who seek to define it outside of Biblical parameters. Understanding the purpose and intention for which Christ has given to the church the gift of leadership through godly men is crucial to recovering in our age a Biblical pattern of God-honoring church life. With this understanding in mind, seeking to define leadership outside of the Biblical revelation leaves the church open for the world to creep into the church at the highest levels. Noting this truth, we turn our attention to examining the following areas regarding Biblical leadership:

- § The Nature of Biblical Leadership
- § The Source of Biblical Leadership
- § The Recipients of Biblical Leadership
- § The Offices of Biblical Leadership
- § The Sharing of Biblical Leadership
- § The Task of Biblical Leadership
- § The Qualifications of Biblical Leadership
- § The Responsibility of Biblical Leadership
- § The Accountability of Biblical Leadership
- § The Appointment of Biblical Leadership

To add focus to our study, Eph 4:7-12 will be the central text in our investigation of the subject of Biblical leadership. Hear the words of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians:

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure

of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "when he ascended on high, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (Now this expression, "he ascended," what does it mean except that he also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is himself also he who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) and he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."

§The Nature of Biblical Leadership

Let us begin by turning our attention to laying our foundation for Biblical leadership. Leadership is presented in this passage as a gift. The statement, "and he gave," at the beginning of v.11 connects v.11 to the end of v.8. Verses 9-10 serve as a parenthetical statement regarding Christ's work in gaining victory over death and the grave. By examining the context, it becomes obvious that the gift itself is an expression of the grace offered by Christ in v.7. Thus leadership is to be seen as a "grace gift" - undeserved, yet given freely. This knowledge ought to promote both humility and gratitude within any church.

The question arising at this point is from where did this gift come? The text of Scripture is very specific regarding its source.

§The Source of Biblical Leadership

Christ is the one who won the right to give gifts to men by

triumphing over death and the grave. John MacArthur in his commentary on Ephesians says the phrase "he gave" emphasizes the sovereign choice and authority given to Christ because of His perfect fulfillment of the Father's will." This choosing cannot be overemphasized. Those appointed to leadership in the church are not only men of God, they are God's men; not simply spiritual and qualified for the office, but set apart by God for it specifically. The offices and the men who are to fill them are established by sovereign design. Thus leadership is not a concession or a choice - it is a calling and a command!

The Apostle Paul sought to highlight the imperative nature of the calling of a man of God to the task of shepherding when he stated to the Ephesian elders that they had been placed in their respective

The offices and the men who are to fill them are established by sovereign design. Thus leadership is not a concession or a choice - it is a calling and a command!

office by the Holy Spirit himself. "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" (Acts 20:28).

Trying to impress upon his young protégée in the faith the importance of his duty before God, Paul writes to young Timothy this word of exhortation, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and

out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2Tim 4:1-2).

Paul himself saw his own ministry as holding a divine accountability. He wrote the church in Corinth stating, “if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (2Cor 9:16). Paul uses here a language familiar to the Hebrew prophets - the prophetic woe! Paul believes with all he is that if he neglects his responsibility to preach the gospel and fulfill his apostleship he stands in danger of the wrath and judgement of God. This woe is the same as that experienced by the prophet Isaiah when he was in the temple and the holiness of Yahweh was revealed to him.

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." and the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts (Isa 6:1-5).

All too often the church, especially in recent years, has viewed the calling of a “pastor” as something “they” do. This practice has led

to much pride and subsequent sorrow. The late Martyn Lloyd-Jones, pastor of the Westminster Chapel in London, England, earlier in this century, made the following striking statement about the church and how she often chooses her leaders. He writes:

Generally speaking, men have not been called to these high offices because of their spirituality or understanding of truth, but rather because of their natural birth, their natural ability or secular learning. The Christian church is constantly in danger of forgetting the teaching of the apostles, the foundation on which we are built, with the result that the world does not even look at the church but ignores her. The world sees the worldliness in the church, sees the office-seeking, the rivalries and scheming and manipulating with which it is so familiar in its own sphere, and it says that it is therefore not interested in the church. In other words, one of the most urgent needs of the hour is that we should demonstrate to the world that the church is still the body of Christ, that she is still spiritual, that everything about her, and especially these offices, is determined by the Lord.

Thus the nature of the office is that of a gift that has been given, not because of **human design or desire**, but because of **sovereign choice**. God saw leadership was needed and so "He gave" it to the church.

The Recipients of Biblical Leadership

It is important to note that these gifts (v.8) that He gave to men as a result of His victory over Satan by the power of the resurrection, are gifts given not to men in general, but specifically to the men of the church. In vs. 11-13 we read that

he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

The recipients here are designated as the body of Christ, the saints, those doing the “works of service.” This is the church. The place where the apostle Peter says “as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1Pet 4:10).

Thus the gifts of the offices of leadership (which we will study more specifically later) are not to be seen as a burden to the church. They are gifts of grace from the Lord to His bride. He gave them for her benefit, her building up, her growth.

Thus the gifts of the offices of leadership are not to be seen as a burden to the church. They are gifts of grace from the Lord to His bride. He gave them for her benefit, her building up, her growth.

In examining our text we see immediately that when God appointed leaders for the church, He designated them with particular titles. To these titles or offices we will turn our attention now.

§The Offices of Biblical Leadership

Here in Ephesians 4:11 Paul lists several specific offices referring to them as gifts given by Christ to His church. These are easily distinguished by seeing them as two groups, involved in two types of ministry.

The first group we might call itinerant ministers. These are the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, the apostle and the prophet being those offices upon which the church was founded. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone” (Eph 2:19-20). Being foundational gifts, these no longer continue to be found as specific offices or gifts in the church today.

One called to serve as an evangelist was one who made it his life's work to go from area to area spreading the gospel of Christ. An evangelist has been described as “one who proclaimed the gospel which he had received from the apostle. He was particularly a missionary who brought the gospel into new regions.” Much like we see today in the ministry of a church planter or missionary. One example of an evangelist in Scripture can be found in Acts 21:8 where Philip is designated as “the evangelist.”

The second group of ministers we will refer to as local ministers. These are men Christ has gifted in His church and called to fill the office of pastor/teachers in the local assembly. Rather than moving from place to place in ministry to the saints, those men called as pastor/teachers would be localized, holding a more permanent ministry.

You have probably noticed by now that I have left out the conjunction "and" placed between the words pastor "and" teacher in your Bible. I have done so intentionally. Without getting overly technical, the structure of the Greek here lends itself to the combining of these two words as if they referred to one office. The two words (pastor and teacher) are connected by the conjunction here translated "and." They are preceded by one article "the" in the plural, here translated "some." When two nouns are connected by "and," and share the same article, this is a common way of referring to the same item with different terms. For example, Peter uses this in his first letter when he refers to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. 1Pet 1:3). Peter was not saying Jesus had a Father and a God. He was referring to God by calling him both "the God and the Father" of Christ. With this office being so designated as that of a "pastor/teacher" or even as a "teaching pastor" it would seem as though two related aspects of the pastoral office are being highlighted for us. Those of: **pastoring and teaching**.

Pastors

The word pastor, coming from the Greek **poimen**, means "shepherd" - one who cares for sheep. Historically the word has rich

meaning. It has been used throughout history in many ways. In the writings of classical literature it is used as a title for kings and governors. In the Old Testament it is used for God himself as the shepherd of Israel. It is further used in the Old Testament literature for Moses - the shepherd of God's people. In the New Testament the word "pastor" is used in reference to Christ:

Heb 13:20 "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord."

1Peter 2:25 "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."

1 Pet 5:4 "And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Finally, and most noteworthy for our study here, the New Testament writers use the concept of shepherding in direct relation to local pastors/elders of the church.

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, **shepherd the flock of God** among you, exercising **oversight** not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted

to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1Pet 5:1-5).

Peter's primary exhortation to the pastors/elders/overseers is to "exercise oversight of the flock of God." This was their responsibility or divine mandate if you will. They were to do this:

- 1. Not under compulsion, but voluntarily**
- 2. Not for sordid gain, but eagerly**
- 3. Not as lords, but as examples**

This concept of leadership by example is foundational to the entire New Testament concept of shepherding or pastoring. The apostle Paul instructs Timothy to, "let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, **show yourself an example** of those who believe" (cf. Joh 13:1-17). Leadership by example is desperately needed by the church again today. J. Oswald Sanders in his book Spiritual Leadership, quotes from the work of Samuel Brengle concerning the power of personal example in leadership and says this,

One of the outstanding ironies of history is the utter disregard of ranks and titles in the final judgment men pass on each other...the final estimate of men shows that history cares not an

iota for the rank or title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart.

Alexander Strauch in his work Biblical Eldership notes

today men and women crave authentic examples of true Christianity in action. Who can better provide the week-by-week, long-term examples of family life, business life, and church life than local church elders? This is why it is so important that elders, as living imitators of Christ, shepherd God's flock in God's way.

Why does the pastor/elder do this? Why strive to lead by example? Why struggle for the call of the ministry? Because there is coming a day when the chief shepherd will appear and bring His reward in His hand - an unfading crown of glory for the faithful shepherd who lives and works to the glory of his Lord.

Teachers

Not only is he to be a pastor, he is to be teacher as well. One cannot be a good pastor without also being a good teacher, skilled in the word of God. This aspect of their title emphasizes the importance of instruction. As teachers, pastors give progressive, systematic instruction concerning God's redeeming purposes as lined out in the Scripture. In the days of the Old Testament this responsibility was the task of the scribes as seen in the work of Nehemiah.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "amen, amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading (Neh 8:5-8).

Here the task of the scribes and the Levites was to translate the passage and interpret it for the understanding of the people. They were to "give the sense" of the passage. The NIV says they were "making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read."

Having been in exile for some 70 years according to the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jer 29:10), the people had forgotten the Hebrew language and needed once again to have the Scriptures taught them plainly. The responsibility of teaching the church and overseeing the soundness of the church's doctrine rests on the shoulders of the pastor/teachers within the flock. Paul tells Titus, who was given the responsibility of appointing leadership/eldership in the churches on the isle of Crete, to appoint men that "(hold) fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching: that (they) may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Tit 1:9). John MacArthur

states clearly that "the teaching pastor strives to sharpen the understanding and to engage the will of the pupil. He must not simply stir the emotions, he must actively pursue an encounter with the mind and will of the listener."

§The Sharing of Biblical Leadership

One point on which Scripture is very clear - leadership is to be shared. In each of the examples of leadership given in Ephesians 4:11, though they differ, there is one thing they hold in common - plurality! The text clearly states that pastor/teachers, or teaching pastors, have been given to the church for its equipping. Paul writes with either the assumption that the Ephesians would understand this from personal experience, or would begin (as a result of his writing) to appoint men to leadership as pastor/teachers within their own congregation.

Though a plurality of pastor/teachers within one local church is foreign to many of us today (especially us Baptists!), it was not so to the early church according to the witness of Scripture. Scripture is filled with examples of how the early church was led by a plurality of godly men appointed by and called to the office by God himself.

Scriptural Support Regarding a Plurality of Leadership:

NAS Acts 11:30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

NAS Acts 14:23 And 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.

NAS Acts 11:30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

NAS Acts 15:4 And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

NAS Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

NAS Acts 15:22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas~ Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,

NAS Acts 15:23 and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

NAS Acts 16:4 Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.

NAS Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.

NAS Acts 20:17 *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.*

NAS 1 Corinthians 16:15 *Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.*

NAS Ephesians 4:11 *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.*

NAS Philippians 1:1 *Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:*

NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:12 *But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.*

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

NAS Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

NAS Hebrews 13:7 Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

Heb 13:NAS Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

NAS James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

NAS 1 Peter 5:1 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; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

With such an abundance of evidence, it is astounding how this principle of plurality of eldership could have fallen into disuse. Alexander Strauch in **Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership**, comments along these same lines. Regarding a plurality of leadership in the local church Strauch states,

Interestingly. . . Protestants don't challenge the plurality of deacons in an effort to create a singular deacon, yet many challenge the plurality of elders. It is strange that Christians have no problem accepting a plurality of deacons, but are almost irrationally frightened by a plurality of elders that is far more evident in the New Testament. Despite our fears, a plurality of leadership through a council of elders needs to be preserved just as much as a plurality of deacons.

The Task of Biblical Leadership

Having gifted the church with the offices of leadership, Christ calls on these pastor/teachers He has put into His church to fulfill their God-given task. A task is a duty, a charge, function or role. What exactly is the role or function of Biblical leadership? To help define the leader's functional role, it can be easily broken down into both a responsibility and a duty. A responsibility that he has before God and a duty that he has to his congregation.

First, consider their responsibility before God. Pastor/teachers have a responsibility before God in regard to their calling. This responsibility is highlighted by the Scripture in James 3:1, "Let not

many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.” As the Apostle Paul told young pastor Timothy, the teacher is to guard his doctrine closely. “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1Tim 4:16). For what they teach, pastor/teachers will be held accountable.

Furthermore, the pastor/teachers hold a responsibility before God as pastors. In Hebrews 13:17 the Scripture says boldly “obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you **as men who must give an account**. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.” As a pastor he has been given the charge of souls which have eternal value to God and for which he must give a report.

Bible commentator R. H. Lenski soberly notes that “whoever assumes or is given responsibility over the souls of any other, even of only one other, is fully accountable.” This concept of accountability for those in one's charge has its roots in the Old Testament period regarding the leaders of the nation of Israel.

NAS Ezekiel 34:1 then the word of the Lord came to me saying,
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. 5 "and they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 "my flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and my flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek for them." "

Ezekiel, as a prophet of God, was to speak clearly God's rebuke to the shepherds, the leaders of the nation. They had failed to feed and care for the people, and rather, had fed themselves! Because of the neglect of the shepherds in the fulfillment of their responsibility, the sheep - the people - had been scattered. These shepherds had failed, thus the prophetic woe had now come upon them. God would now care for the people and rid himself of these burdensome men. Later in the same chapter the Lord states: "I will feed my flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment" (Eze 34:15-16). God held the shepherds of Israel accountable to feed his sheep and he does no less today!

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It is important to understand here that the

message that the prophet was given was not to be altered and was to be given in full.

NAS Ezekiel 3:16 now it came about at the end of seven days that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 17 "son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, warn them from me. 18 "when I say to the wicked, 'you shall surely die'; and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 "yet if you have warned the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself. 20 "again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he shall die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 "however, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself."

The Apostle Paul well understood the responsibility and accountability he had before his God as a carrier and proclaimer of the revealed gospel. Paul had a divine commission and a divinely revealed message for which God would demand that he give an account. Paul expresses an understanding of this stewardship, when he declares to the

Ephesian elders in words very similar to the prophet Ezekiel's, "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). This is quite a bold declaration, even for someone as faithful as the great Apostle Paul. What was it that made Paul able to make this assertion with such confidence? He goes on in the following verse of the passage to answer just that very question. Paul says, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27).

The prophet Jeremiah was given a command that no pastor/teacher can afford to forget. . ."thus says the Lord, 'stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, who have come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word" (Jer 26:2)! But not only does a pastor have a responsibility before God, in the fulfilling of his task, he also has a duty to his congregation.

Second, consider the task of pastor/teachers in relation to their congregations is shown here in the fourth chapter of Ephesians to be that of "equippers." As the New International Version of the Bible reads, they are to prepare "God's people for works of service" (Eph 4:12).

The word "equip" in v.12 has been used historically to refer to a variety of activities: furnishing a room, mending or folding fishing nets, setting a broken bone, and even of outfitting a ship for a long journey. Its basic meaning is that of restoration or preparation. As one writer said, "it is to prepare or perfect a thing for its full destination or

use." It has a functional force and speaks of a dynamic activity where people are "properly conditioned" for specific tasks at hand.

At the very least, three aspects are involved in the equipping process. These three are all interrelated in the pastoring process and are highlighted by the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts chapter 20. In Acts 20:28-31 we read the words of Paul to the Ephesian elders:

"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. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."

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From this passage several Biblical truths regarding the task of pastoring emerge. Pastors are to provide caution, care, and counsel to their beloved flock for which they are accountable to God.

Pastoring Involves Providing Caution: Guarding the Flock

The battle for the minds and souls of men, the shepherd knows, is a "war of words. It is by the speaking of "perverse things" that men will be drawn away. Good shepherds will be certain to warn their people of that doctrine and teaching of men that is unsound and damning to the soul.

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Thus it is imperative for churches to heed the admonition of the writer of the book of Hebrews as he seeks to impart understanding into the minds and hearts of the congregation to whom he writes concerning the watch care of their leaders for their souls. He writes: "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17)

The root of the word for "watch" is significant. It literally means sleeplessness. Pastors are men who should be willing to lose sleep watching over the souls of others. They will give or render an account to God for how alert they were at their posts. Lenski adds in his comments regarding this aspect of leadership that, "watching implies keeping oneself and others safe where danger is known to exist or where one fears its existence. Where no danger exists watching is not needed. All this applies to the church in the highest degree where the safety of souls is to be guarded." Alexander Strauch notes that "since false teachers and spiritual pitfalls abound, since all Christians start out as

newborn babes in Christ, and since some Christians are perpetually weak in faith, watching over the spiritual development of God's people is indispensable, continuous work." J. Oswald Sanders profoundly and soberly reminds us that to give one's life in suffering for the soul of another is a "worthy objective."

Spiritual/Biblical leadership is not for the lazy, half-hearted, or the uncommitted. It is laborious work that must be taken seriously, both by those who are called to it and by those who are called to submit to it. It is a position within the body that is to be held only by men - the

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Apostle Paul told Titus - who are "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Tit 1:9). Why must they have this ability? The apostle goes on, "for

there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision" (Tit 1:10).

Pastoring Involves Providing Care: Shepherding the Flock

Here the pastor exercises oversight of his people and so cares for them as a shepherd would his sheep. He equips them by ensuring they are provided for. Here again we turn our attention to the teaching of the writer of the book of Hebrews. And yes, once again the passage that attracts our attention and demands our full focus is 13:17. "Obey your

leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over **your souls**, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

Just as important as it was for the writer of Hebrews to help the assembly understand the “watching” role of their leaders, so he directs their attention to just what it is they watch over their very “souls!” Regarding the pastor, one writer said:

His throne is the pulpit, he stands in Christ's stead, his message is the word of God, around him are immortal souls, the Savior unseen is beside him, the angels gaze upon the scene, and heaven and hell await the issue. What associations, what a vast responsibility.

Strauch says that here the word “soul”

seems to have a deeper meaning that relates to the inward, spiritual dimension of life (cf. Heb. 10:39, 3John 2). Above all else, these leaders keep watch for the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Their task, if taken lightly, could result in serious harm to the spiritual lives of God’s children.

Shepherding is spiritual care-giving for souls - souls precious to God, souls that, in the words of the apostle to the Ephesian elders, God “purchased with his own blood.”

Pastoring Involves Providing Counsel: Feeding the Flock

It is here that the most essential aspect of the pastor's role as equippier comes in to view (cf. Eph 4:11-12). Paul said in v.31 that he "admonished" them constantly. The word (**noutheteo**) carries with it the idea of warning, instructing, or admonishing. It literally means "to place or to set in the mind." Thus Paul is saying that during his ministry in Ephesus he consistently placed in the minds of those in his care warning, instruction, and admonishment. Paul is basically saying, "I have admonished you, now you admonish your people!" The great apostle has set the example for all others to follow. But how can they? What resource do they have at their disposal upon which they can draw to fulfill their task of guarding, shepherding, and feeding their flock (cf. v.32)?

Here Paul commends these shepherds to God and to His Word. To be commended to something means: **to be deposited to the care of another as a trust for protection**. Paul literally deposits the Ephesian elders here to both the sovereign God and to His powerful word as sufficient resources for the fulfillment of the task which has been set before them.

With trust in the God of the word and the word of their God, they will be fit for the task of guarding/shepherding/feeding the flock of God that has been given to their care. It has been said that "a shepherd who fails to

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feed his flock (from the word of God) will not have a flock for long. His sheep will wander off to other fields or die of starvation." The pastor realizes that it is the word of God that is the believer's primary tool for spiritual growth in the Christian life. Without it growth will not take place. He must make it "the central element" of his ministry, to exhort his people, as did Peter, to "long for the pure milk of the word, that by it (they might) grow in respect to salvation" (cf. 1Pet 2:2).

The man of God is convinced that it is the word of God that is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (cf. 2Tim 3:16-17). The word alone is sufficient, and it is sufficient alone for the duty of feeding the flock of God.

The Qualifications of Biblical Leadership

I once read of a church that had recently found themselves in need of leadership. Having had several positions quickly become vacant in their leadership, they felt the need to quickly fill these positions. One Sunday evening following the service, the pastor called a meeting in the basement of the church. He presented the congregation with the needs at hand and proceeded to solicit nominations from the body for various positions of leadership in the fellowship. After several suggestions were made, enough to fill the

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vacancies, a vote was taken and the men were placed into their various new positions! After all, how hard can it be! We have a hole; we need to fill it! And the faster the better!

The above scenario may seem a little hard to believe, but all too often this scene is replayed in church after church when it comes time to replace the leadership of the body. At the bottom line, the replacement of leadership is seen by many as a practical issue. Here's a vacancy, here's a willing person - voila - here's a leader!

The problem in this bottom line approach, however, is that replacing leadership is not merely a practical issue, but also, and fundamentally, a spiritual issue - an issue to which the Bible has much to say. A strong warning was given by the Apostle Paul to young Timothy when Timothy was in a precarious situation requiring new leadership. The apostle instructed his young son in the faith, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin" (1Tim 5:22). Timothy was told that a hasty decision regarding the "who" of church leadership could be costly - costly both for him and for the church he was called to shepherd.

Only God's men were to be appointed to the task. Biblical leadership is leadership that measures up to Biblical criteria and standards. Biblical leadership is not just for those who are willing and available, it is for those who are called and qualified. The Scripture has much to say about the qualifications for one to serve in leadership. The

clearest and most detailed listings of qualifications for the leadership/eldership of the church are given in 1Timothy and Titus. Timothy and Titus were both left in their respective churches with clear instructions regarding the appointment of elders in the churches. This process was not to be approached casually, but carefully.

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The first thing that must be noted regarding the qualifications for church leaders is that these qualifications are absolute. What we mean by absolute is that they are clear and well defined. They are in no way ambiguous and do not leave room for debate. Thus it should be understood that they are both necessary and non-negotiable. The text in 1Timothy 3:2 states clearly that if any man seeks this office, he "must" meet these particular criteria. The word for "must" in the Greek New Testament is a word of necessity. It leaves no room for questions and neither do these qualifications. It is important to note here that these qualifications are absolute, ultimately, because they have been revealed. This list is not a man-made list of what churches are to look for in a pastor. These qualities comprise the kind of character God builds into the men He calls to the task.

Secondly, these qualifications are exhaustive. In other words, they are not open to addition or subtraction, change or alteration. Granted, there are other passages that mention the character of the overseer but they can all be summed up clearly under the lists given in

1Timothy 3 and Titus 1. We must keep this essential point in mind. The qualifications listed are a fixed part of Holy Writ. Man does not have the option available to him of “meddling” with the text of Scripture. The church of the late 20th century would do well to remember this very thing. A recent issue of Christianity Today magazine, a magazine once dedicated to the inerrancy and authority of the word of God, had the following to say regarding the kind of man that is required by the modern day congregation in the contemporary society in which we live. A pastor was to be:

a compassionate and innovative team member...dynamic and vigorous individual who relates to kids on their level...skills in leadership, program, and people development; and team building. Must have strong organizational skill with a progressive mentality toward education. Large church involvement will be an advantage. Personal characteristics should include the ability to adjust to and initiate change...Team building, leading change; excellent relationship skills...Gen-X Director/Pastor...He/she shall design and implement a music program that is broad, exciting, challenging, and diverse . . .an approachable team leader who is committed to “gift-based” ministry where the laity are unleashed...Music degree required and theological degree preferred...dynamic and catalytic leader.. This servant leader will possess a demonstrated record of relevant, transformational preaching, a team orientation in a complex environment of diverse backgrounds, interest, and affiliations...We are looking for an innovative leader who has both enthusiasm and energy...(someone) who

has a heart for God, a passion for leading God's people into His presence in innovative and authentic ways ...Candidate must be a team player and a team builder with a proven track record. . .(able to lead) congregational worship, worship teams, drama, choirs, instrumentalists, audio-visual, and dance, an Executive Pastor who can relate well to affluent, "fast-track" commuters and their families...highly relational, self-motivated individual who can develop and motivate leaders, design and build infrastructure, envision and create ministry delivery teams, oversee staff, and direct operations. Seminary degree unnecessary and a business background preferred...(someone who will create) a care infrastructure within the church body...a pastor/coach to join its leadership team.

With so much personal ability and promise, one must wonder if a congregation led by such a man would have any need for God at all. God does not call men to be "personally amazing." God calls the weak things of the world to shame the strong. It is through men, who like Paul, see themselves as the chief of sinners, that God leads His church. It is not perfect men of amazing power that God has to shepherd His flock, but humble men of little power, who serve an omnipotent God. The church, by far, has missed the mark in the calling of men to fill the office of leader in the church of Jesus. God is seeking weak vessels through which He can display His glory. The qualifications listed in Scripture do not highlight personal ability, but rather, they give a vivid display of character God has built into the life of the man He calls.

A third point to make regarding the qualifications listed is that

they are observable. They are objective, tangible, and testable. These qualifications are to be observed in one who is aspiring to the office. This concept of observation is brought out clearly by the instructions given Timothy by Paul regarding the testing and non-hasty appointment of those in church leadership:

NAS 1Timothy 3:10 “And let **these also first be tested**; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.”

NAS 1Timothy 5:22 “Do not **lay hands upon anyone too hastily** and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”

Finally, these qualifications are specific. Here we must observe the lists themselves. In order to aid better understanding, the lists can be naturally broken down into four categories:

Category 1: Moral Qualifications

Category 2: Social Qualifications

Category 3: Familial Qualifications

Category 4: Spiritual Qualifications

Before lining out the details of each specific qualification under the four categories, it is important to note that giving direction to all the qualifications is the one overarching qualification, namely, that the one who seeks the office of the overseer must be "above reproach." Literally this word (**aneplamptos**) means that he is not to be able to be taken hold of in any of the areas listed. According to Fritz Reinecker, noted

Greek scholar, "the word implies not only that the man is of good report, but that he is deservedly so." Morally, socially, familiarly, and spiritually, he is to be a man that cannot be arrested in any area of his life - he is above reproach. He is not perfect, but when examined closely there is nothing in his life that would disqualify him for service in the house of God. John MacArthur said that "a life without blame is the overarching requirement for leadership in the church." He is not sinless, but his record is clear. The necessity for this clear record among the leadership of the church has been profoundly stated by the Puritan pastor of seventeenth century England, Richard Baxter:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours . . . one proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonour Him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet condemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach His laws, and wilfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous,

how dare you venture on it? If it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you know the judgement of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death; and yet will you do them? Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, or be drunk, or covetous, art thou such thy self? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? What! Shall the same tongue speak evil that speakest against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbite your neighbor, that cry down these and the like things in others? Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. O brethren! It is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it.

Category 1: Moral Qualifications

Morally, the one seeking office is to be above reproach in several areas of life. When the lists from Timothy and Titus are combined, both positive and negative qualifications are given. For the purposes of our study we will seek with each qualification to give **the Greek transliteration** of the word (or phrase), the corresponding literal

definition/translation of the term (or phrase), and the significance of the qualification.

Positively the Scripture says that an overseer is to be the "husband of one wife" (**mias gunaikos andra**) or a "one woman man." This qualification is given primacy in order of importance by being listed first after the demand that the overseer/elder be above reproach in both Timothy and Titus. The significance of the qualification can be viewed both negatively and positively. Negatively, this qualification is not concerned with marital status. The translation given in most bibles is misleading at best, if not just outright wrong. The literal translation of the Greek is, "one woman man." The issue is not current marital

status, previous marital status, or divorce record.

Paul is not saying, "he can only serve if he is married" thus disqualifying himself and the Lord Jesus for that matter! He is not saying, "he can't serve if he's been divorced." The Bible clearly states that there are Biblical allowances for divorce which allow for remarriage and freedom of conscience toward God (cf. Matt 5:31-32 and 2Cor 7:8-16). The Apostle Paul actually goes so far as to say in 2Cor 7 that singleness frees one, not restricts him, for greater opportunities for service. **Marriage is**

Many temptations and struggles will face a man in the ministry. . . a sound marriage and/or character are imperative.

not the issue, character is. Paul is not looking for

only men who are married to one woman, but men, who if married are devoted to only one woman - namely their wife! In other words, it is a one woman "kind" of man the apostle seeks. Many men are married and their heart is somewhere else. This kind of man is unfit for the

ministry having shown that he is unwilling to fulfill his vow to God regarding his wife. Sexual purity and devotion to one's spouse (if present) is being sought for. If there is no wife, he still must be a one woman "kind" of man. Many temptations and struggles will face a man in the ministry. A sound marriage and/or character are imperative.

Second, he must be "temperate" (**naphalion**) - sober, sober-minded, or clearheaded. Although this word can be used to describe someone who avoids the heavy use of alcohol, here Paul is using it to emphasize sobriety of mind not necessarily body. Kelly states that "the word originally connotes abstinence from alcohol, but here it has a wider, metaphorical sense." It means to be sober minded, clearheaded, or discerning. This is indispensable to leadership. The church cannot be led by men who are unclear as to her purpose/mission. Like the men of Issachar, the church is in need of men who understand the times and know what she is to do (See 1Chron 12:32)!

The church cannot be led by men who are unclear as to her purpose/mission.
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Another essential qualification is "prudent" (**sophrona**) or self-controlled, thoughtful. Prudence carries the idea of temperance further to state that the overseer must be in control of his thoughts and attitudes. He is thoughtful, not rash or impulsive. Often in the Proverbs prudence is coupled with wisdom, truth, discretion, knowledge and righteousness all stemming from a proper fear of God (cf. Pro 8). That idea fits well here.

Furthermore an overseer must be respectable (**kosmion**) or orderly. An overseer must be one who is worthy of respect. He must have a life that communicates some sense of order, rather than random chaos. The concept of order is communicated with the Greek **kosmios**, from which we get cosmos - signifying the order of the created universe. The word is further used in 1Tim 2:9 of the proper order with which a woman who professes to know God ought to adorn herself in living a life of worship. Particularly when she comes to the worship of the church is this order of propriety required. Homer Kent has said that "the ministry is no place for the man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities."

"The ministry is no place for the man whose life is a continual confusion of unaccomplished plans and unorganized activities."

A fifth character trait required of the overseer is that he be "hospitable" (**philoxenon**). This does not mean he is to head up the hospitality committee or shake everybody's hand at the church social. As a matter of fact, it is not related to his life with other church members in particular at all! Literally the word for hospitable means "a lover of strangers." Strangers are just that - people God brings across our path in need to whom we have no connection. An overseer must be a man who can reach beyond himself, and beyond those he knows and loves, to those who are strangers to him, but not to his Lord.

He must also be "gentle" (**epieika**) or forbearing, lenient. As the Proverb says, "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Pro 15:1). Within the

community of faith many potentially volatile moments arise. A man who is gentle will calm them with grace-filled words. This idea is brought out in 2Timothy 2:24-26 where Paul instructs Timothy that

the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

To be gentle he must be fair, mild, and forbearing. He must be a man of great patience, manifesting spirit-filled fruit in his life. This leads naturally to a seventh characteristic.

“Uncontentious” (**amaxon**), not quarrelsome, without fighting. The word here literally means “not a fighter.” The context suggests that he is not to be a fighter with words (cf. 2Tim 2:24-26).

He is also to be “free from the love of money” (**aphilarguron**), “not a lover of money.” Men ruined by and disqualified for service from a wrong attitude toward and lust for financial gain have been around since the days the Scriptures were written. In 1Timothy 6:3-10 Paul relates the temptations of money and how it can destroy the one in ministry.

NAS 1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. 6 but godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. 7 for we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 and if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 but those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 for the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

A man in the ministry for money is in it for the wrong reasons. This does not mean he should not be well compensated for his labor of eternal worth, but money cannot provide his motivation for service or he will find himself caught in the snares of temptation, ruined and destroyed.

The ninth characteristic of the man seeking the office of overseer in the church is that he must be “loving what is good” (**philagathon**). Literally he is to be a “lover of what is good.” One writer said this qualification means that the overseer is to be devoted “to all that is best.” Literally he is a lover of good things. As Paul wrote the

church in Philippi, the overseer is one who has the habit of placing his mind on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute” (Phil 4:8).

In addition he must be “just” (**dikiaon**), righteous or fair. The usual meaning of this word is righteous, as in obedient. Yet another, not uncommon meaning is fair. Again with the stress of the list of qualifications being on character rather than action, fair/just, seems to fit the context best. An overseer must be fair in his dealings with his flock. The word is used in this manner in 1Peter 2:23 referring to the confidence that Christ had in the Father, that the Father would treat him in a manner that was righteous, just, and fair.

He must further be devout (**hosion**) or holy - not tainted by the world. Again the emphasis here is on the character of the one being examined. If there is not devotion, holiness in the leadership, what will happen to the flock? One scholar noted,

the word stood for that which was in accordance with divine direction and providence. The word describes the pious, pure, and clean action which is in accordance with God's command. The hands are holy (cf. 1Tim 2:8) which have not been given over to deeds of wicked lust.

Finally, as far as the positive moral qualifications go he must be a man of self-control (**egkrates**). He must have control over himself - self mastery. To ensure this holiness of life is maintained, these must

be men in control of themselves. The word signifies self-mastery. Where “prudent” shows them in control of their thoughts, “self-control” shows them to be in control of their lives. Holy men in thought and deed.

Just as some of the moral qualifications are stated positively - what they ought to be like, there are several stated negatively - what they should not be like morally speaking.

Where “prudent” shows them in control of their thoughts, “self-control” shows them to be in control of their lives. Holy men in thought and deed.

It is stated first and foremost that they are “not (to be) addicted to wine.” (**paroinon**) they are to not be “given to drink, not to sit alongside wine.” The characteristic to examine here is not “Does he drink?” But rather, “Is he a drunkard?

Is alcohol (here wine) a controlling substance in his life? The word literally means “to sit alongside wine.” The Proverbs state vividly that wine leads one down a path of destruction when it is lingered over.

NAS Proverbs 23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. 31 do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; 32 at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. 33 your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. 34 and you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the

top of a mast. 35 "they struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.

Leadership must be in a constant state of readiness for action and decision making. Too much drink dulls one's ability to lead effectively in a manner that honors the Lord, the Chief Shepherd (cf. Acts 6:5, Eph 5:18).

Further they must "not (be) pugnacious" (**me plekten**) or "not a bully, not a giver of blows." In the previous section it was said that the pastor needed to be uncontentious - not a verbal fighter. Here it is made more visual by stating that he is not to be a physical fighter either. He is not to be pugnacious.

They are "not to (be) self-willed" (**me authade**), "not self-pleasing, or arrogant." It is the will of God, not the will of self, that must lead this man's actions and attitudes. A self-willed man, Reinecker states, is "reckless of the rights, feelings and interests of others." He is arrogant, obstinate about his own opinion, always has to be right, and refuses to listen to others. This man will not have a ministry that honors God or cares for God's people. He, like the shepherds of Israel, is more concerned with feeding himself than his flock.

NAS Ezekiel 34:1 then the word of the Lord came to me saying,
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. 5 "and they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 "my flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill, and my flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth; and there was no one to search or seek for them." "

This man is not fit for the office and should be refused the opportunity to serve. He is like "Diotrephes, who loves to be first" (3 John 1:9).

They must also "not (be) quick tempered" (**me orgilon**), "not prone to anger, quick tempered, or irascible." A man inclined to anger cannot serve God's church as its overseer. A shepherd who abuses his people by his flesh cannot minister to them in their spirits. James says we are to be "slow to anger." This quality should certainly be found among God's overseers.

A shepherd who abuses his people by his flesh
cannot minister to them in their spirits.

The one final moral qualification listed is that he must "not (be) fond of sordid gain" (**me aischrokerde**), "not greedy of shameful gain."

This is the corollary to the qualification mentioned earlier: the overseer is to be free from the love of money. Here he is to not be fond/greedy for sordid gain. A man who serves money cannot serve God. This is true in the Christian life in general (cf. Matt 6:24); how much more within the eldership!?! The man is greedy for shameful gain and wants the money of those he is called to serve. He takes and gives not. He is not to be called a man of God!

Category 2: Social Qualifications

Socially speaking he must be one who has "a good reputation with those outside the church." The Greek here is "**dei de kai marturian kalen echein apo ton exothen**" being literally translated, "and (he) must also have/hold a good testimony from the outsiders." Too little concern is ever given to the witness or testimony of those outside the church or the unbelieving world regarding the candidate for office. How many times in the history of the church has one been placed into service only to discover later they led a "secret" life outside, unbeknownst to any within the fellowship?

The outside community must not just know about the candidate for ministry, they must have good things to say about him. In other words, what is his reputation? He should be an exemplary witness for Christ on the job, in the neighborhood, and within the community. This report, given by the outside community, should as George Knight III states, should be based on "their awareness of the particular man's commitment and consistency in terms of his Christian faith." This must be so to avoid being found reproachable and caught in the

snare/trap laid by the devil. This leaves the flock in danger. If Satan gets to the shepherds, he can then get to the sheep.

Category 3: Familial Qualifications

Probably no place will be more of a testing ground for and a revelation of a man's character than the home. It is here that all guards and pretenses are often let down and the real man inside rises or falls. Several qualifications are listed for examination in regard to the family.

The first of these is a candidate's relationship to his wife. It is said that he must be the "husband of one wife." For more on this qualification we would direct the reader's attention back to the section under the moral qualifications above.

Second, he is to be found to "manage (his) household well" (manage = **prohistamenon**), "to stand before, to rule over." Two ideas are embodied in this qualification. First, the man seeking the office of overseer must understand his role as manager/head of his household. His role as head of his wife (cf. 2Cor 11:1-3) must be understood. Yet managing (Lit. **to set or place before**) his family as its leader is not enough. Second, the text says he must perform this task "well." In this way he proves himself worthy and able to care for "the church of God." His home is a model of godly leadership and virtue, setting himself up as an example to every man in the community of faith, lending credibility to his position of leadership in the church.

Furthermore, his "children must be kept under control with all

dignity” (control - **upotage** dignity - **semnotetos**). Literally his “children must be kept in submission with stateliness/courtesy.” Related to and descriptive of the qualification of managing the household is this qualification regarding his children. He is to keep them in submission or control, but this characteristic like the preceding one is given further qualification. He must do this with all dignity. Many fathers keep their children under control, but they sacrifice their dignity in the process. An undignified father of children will make an undignified shepherd of sheep.

His home is a model of godly leadership and virtue, setting himself up as an example to every man in the community of faith, lending credibility to his position of leadership in the church.

His children must further “believe (and) not (be) accused of dissipation or rebellion.” The significant Greek words here are as follows:

believe - pista
accused - kategoria
dissipation - asotias
rebellion - anupotakta

Literally the qualification would read that he is to have “children who are faithful (and cannot be) charged with excessive wastefulness or insubordination.” The key to understanding this qualification is the word “believe.” There is some question here in regard to the translation of the word **pistos**. It is translated "believe" in the NAS. But is this the best translation? Its more common usage is

not "believe," but rather, "faithful." This fits our context much better. Here, the children of the overseer, being kept under control, are subject and obedient to their father (parents), and are seen as faithful. Here this qualification is further explained by stating that the children are judged as faithful because they cannot be charged with excessive waste or with insubordination. Thus the children of the overseer reflect in their lives what their father is in his character.

Category 4: Spiritual Qualifications

A final realm of examination is in regard to the spiritual qualification or character of the one seeking office. The first requirement listed here is that he "not (be) a new convert" (**me neophuton**), "not newly planted." The task of leading a flock requires a seasoned shepherd. The storms of the ministry require that he have deep strong roots and that he has survived the storms of life. The term used for "new convert" means newly planted. It is an agricultural term. He must not be without roots. Why? A new convert would be prone to become conceited, holding such a high office, and fall into the condemnation of Satan. Satan became filled with pride in his lofty position and forgot his proper place under the authority of his maker and was cast down due to his pride (cf. Eze 28 and Isa 14). The shepherd needs the roots of maturity and humility to keep him safe from this condemnation.

Second, he must "manage/care for the church of God" (**epimelesetai**). A new convert would be unable to manifest this qualification as well. He would be too busy caring for himself and

needing to be watched over himself. Thus he would not have the time, knowledge, or ability to care for the church of God being so immature in the faith. He is simply not ready for such a task. As George Knight III states, “the **ekklesia** (the church) belongs to God, and only those evidently equipped and qualified are to be entrusted with its care. The rhetorical question indicates that anything else is unthinkable and is to be denied.”

Third, he must understand himself to “be God’s steward” (steward = **oikonomon**). A steward is a manager of a household or family. In caring for the church, the overseer acts as God's steward. As a steward he cares for something not his own, as if it were his own.

A congregation must understand that in recognizing one for the eldership, they will now come under his charge. Faithful stewardship is indispensable to a successful ministry.

This is a grave responsibility that should be pondered deeply by any man seeking the office, believing himself to be called to it. A congregation must understand that in recognizing one for the eldership, they will now come under his charge. Faithful stewardship is indispensable to a successful ministry.

He must be “able to teach” (**didaktikon**), “skillful in teaching.” Here we are not so concerned with what but with how? Being “able to teach” is just that, possessing an ability to effectively communicate the truth of the word to another. Sometimes this can be translated “skillful in teaching.” This ability is indispensable to the overseer as will be obvious after the following qualifications are elaborated on.

Related to the above qualification is this one, that he “hold to the faithful word” (faithful word = **pistou logou**), “the trustworthy message/word.” The word that he is able to teach, he must hold to faithfully. It is believed by the community that this word is the “faithful word.” This word is the word Paul described in Acts 20 as the “whole counsel of God.” He must know and hold on to the truth of Scripture. The word is central to all he does in the ministry; nothing must come before its faithful distribution.

The final two qualifications listed regard his ability to both exhort and refute. First he must be “able to exhort in sound doctrine” (exhort = **parakalein**), “urge, summon.” He must know the word to the point that he is able/powerful in exhorting people in sound doctrine. He must be able to come alongside his flock and encourage them with the sound, whole, and healthy message of the word. He is called to adhere to the command of Paul to young Timothy.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths (2Tim 4:1-4).

Finally, he must be able “to refute those who contradict (sound

doctrine)” (refute = **elegchein**), “reprove, convince, rebuke, to convict.” He must not only exhort in doctrine that is sound, he must refute those who contradict that sound doctrine he is trying to put forth. Ours is a day when speaking out against error is seen as unloving, unkind, even unchristian. Yet here, the overseer is not only to expose false doctrine, he is to expose those and refute those who teach it as well! He is to act and speak in such a way that will convince those who speak against truth of the error of their way. Paul says (cf. Tit 1:11) that in doing so he will silence the false teachers. Nothing expels the darkness better than the light of the word of God in capable hands.

He is to act and speak in such a way that will convince those who speak against truth of the error of their way. .
. nothing expels the darkness better than the light of the word of God in capable hands.

In summary the question faces us, why must he be such a man? Why must he be above reproach in regard to his morality, social life, family relationships, and spiritual walk? The Apostle Paul tells us why in Titus 1:7. He “must be above reproach as God’s steward.” He and those men with which he serves, have been given charge over God’s house and they will give an account to the owner of the house when he returns. This is a task that cannot be turned over to just any kind of man.

§The Responsibility of Biblical Leadership

It should be noted up front in this section that the list provided here of pastoral responsibilities is not exhaustive. Many more instructions are given to the shepherds of God in Scripture that could

be added to our list. The important thing to understand regarding this list is that of its source: **Scripture**. Many “job descriptions” are presented to pastors in churches today (maybe you have seen or even prepared one) which give no mention of Scripture at all. It is amazing how we treat the highest office that God calls men to fill as if God has said nothing in regard to what they are to do. Job descriptions today contain everything from mowing the lawn to attending all the community functions and football games. Very few ever really touch on the essentials God desires out of his shepherds. Many are so full of needless and misdirected activities that one has no time left over for the essentials of ministry anyway. Do to the nature of the issue, the instructions given in Scripture regarding a minister’s duties will be given in list form. The ones we seek to emphasize here are as follows: Teaching, Protecting, and Caring. We begin with the Scriptural instruction to pastors regarding teaching.

Teaching

Instruct with the Word: NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

Be Constant in the Word: NAS Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Declare the Whole Counsel of God: NAS Acts 20:27 "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Preach the Word: NAS 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

Do the Work of an Evangelist: NAS 2 Timothy 4:5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Exhort in Sound Doctrine and Refute That Which Contradicts: NAS Titus 1:9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Be Faithful Examples of the Christian Life: NAS 1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

Equip the Saints for the Works of Ministry: NAS Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

Protecting

Guard the Flock: NAS Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you

overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Oversee the Condition of the Flock: NAS Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Admonish the Flock: NAS Acts 20:31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Caring

Labor: NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

Have Charge over the Flock: NAS 1 Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction.

Be Devoted to Prayer: NAS Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer.

Be Sober: NAS 2 Timothy 4:5 But you, be sober in all things.

Pray for the Sick: NAS James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Receive and Encourage Confession: James 5:13-18 (see above)

§The Accountability of Biblical Leadership

These responsibilities as they have been lined out, form what one might call a Biblical "job description" for the elders of a church. As responsibilities, they (the elders), must be held accountable in the fulfilling of them. In order to come to a Biblical understanding of elder accountability it is imperative that one sticks with the Scripture itself in approaching leadership within a fellowship. It is a serious thing when any believer strays from the truth in a life of rebellion, but it is even more costly when a leader does so. In light of this potential cost, holding leaders accountable in a Biblical manner is essential. They are not just

held accountable for everything. Rather, they are to be held to account for those things for which the Scripture says they are responsible! In this way, they will be held responsible not to the whims of men, but to the will of God.

In order to come to a fuller understanding of this subject we will focus our attention on the words of Paul to Timothy regarding this issue in 1 Timothy 5:17-25. The following table provides a brief overview of what will follow in this section on keeping leadership in the church accountable.

The Honor Due Biblical Leadership
The Protection Provided for Biblical Leadership
The Accusation of Biblical Leadership
The Discipline of Biblical Leadership
The Installation and Appointment of Biblical Leadership
The Examination Necessary for Biblical Leadership

The Honor Due Biblical Leadership: Vs.17-18

NAS 1 Timothy 5:17 "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Elders (the Scripture says) are to be considered worthy of double honor. The Greek word here for honor is the word from which we derive the English word "honorarium." This is financial

payment/assistance for work done or service rendered. Though some commentators object to financial assistance in the word “honor,” it would seem that Paul undoubtedly had money in mind. The context leaves no question. Paul explicitly states in verse 18 what he means by honor. There Paul writes, “for the Scripture says, ‘you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘the laborer is worthy of his wages’” (v.18).

Paul calls upon the Scripture in two places to support his statement. One line of support comes from the law written by Moses and another is a quotation of the words of Jesus himself, though he does not cite the reference. Moses had written in the law that “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing” (Deu 25:4). This truth was quoted again in 1 Corinthians 9:6-13 where Paul writes

Do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?
7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "you shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is he? 10 Or is he speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more?

Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

If this were not enough Paul cites the words of Jesus written by Luke in Luke 10:7 where Jesus said, “Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.”

Both of these statements - one from the law declaring the ethical treatment of animals, and one a universal principle of compensation - declare beyond a shadow of a doubt that Paul had in mind the support of the elders in a church when he said that they are deserving of honor. Alexander Strauch, quoting J.E. Huther writes,

the 18th verse makes it evident that , if the word **times** (honor - v.17) does not distinctly mean reward or remuneration, this idea was prominent in the apostle's mind as connected with the honor of which these presbyters were to be accounted worthy. The quotation from the Old Testament in the first clause as united with the words...of the second, and as used and applied in 2Cor 9:9, scarcely admits of any other explanation.

Later Strauch himself states: “The word ‘honor’ expresses financial compensation in a thoroughly Christian manner. Financial

provision for elders is really honor due the elders, and such honor conveys the congregation's esteem, thoughtfulness, and loving concern." This concept of financial compensation as an expression of honor is to be coupled with the idea of honoring leaders by esteeming them as well. This is pointedly expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians writing them "to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." (1Thes 5:12-13). Thus, honor should be seen as financial compensation coupled with esteem. One without the other would be lacking the full meaning of honor. The reformer John Calvin appropriately noted "What could be more unkind than to have no care for those who have the care of the whole church?"

Paul essentially adds authority to his own inspired words by calling in the support of Scripture itself. Strauch states "for the believer, just the mention of the word 'Scripture' signals the ultimate voice of authority - **God's word** (Joh 10:35). By using this qualifying phrase, Paul is saying that complete unity exists between the Old and New Testaments - both Moses and Jesus agree that a laboring man 'is worthy of his wages'." And further, that twice in the New Testament, Deuteronomy 25:4 is quoted to support the right of teachers and preachers to receive material sustenance for their labors (2Cor 9:9, 1Tim 5:18). To refuse to support

hardworking teachers of the word is as unjust, heartless, and selfish as muzzling an animal while it is working, which was a common practice among greedy, ancient farmers. The passage thus implies the provision of adequate living support, not merely token gifts, for the worker.

Just the mention of the word 'Scripture' signals the ultimate voice of authority - God's word.

At times like this it is common for churches to reply, “But how can we pay them all?” But this is not the issue for the church - worrying about the money. The issue for the church is faithful obedience. God takes the faithfulness of the church and multiplies it with grace upon grace. The issue the church needs to face is what does the Scripture teach and will we be obedient to follow its commands. Strauch notes “no matter how poor a local congregation is, it must exercise faith and liberality before the Lord (2Cor 8:1-5) in giving to those who labor in the word. In short, God's people must honor their elders.” Jesus' saying itself here states the justness of such wages, and has the effect of what one has called an “ethical imperative.”

But the question remains, “Why?” What labor is it that they do for the church that makes them worthy of this “double honor?” Why should they be compensated? The Scripture states here that their task can be summed up as: ruling the church well and laboring at preaching and teaching. Let us take each of these in the order given.

The first thing stated about their labor is that they “rule the church well.” Paul writes in 1Thessalonians 5:12 that “we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who **diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord** and give you instruction.” They labor diligently and have charge over the flock. Coupled together these give the same idea as ruling well. One Greek scholar commenting on the concept of “rule” has this to say: “the word (**prohistemie** = to stand first) means general superintendence, and describes the duties allotted to all presbyters.” According to George Knight III the “participial form **proestotes** is used here of one who has been placed

before, or at the head of the church, and who has responsibility in that position both to ‘rule, lead, or direct’ and to ‘be concerned for and care for’ the church.” It is the idea communicated by the writer of Hebrews when he admonishes the church to, “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for **they keep watch over your souls**, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (13:17).

Not only do they rule well, it is further stated that they labor at **preaching and teaching**. Literally here this section should be translated, “they labor or work to the point of exhaustion in word and doctrine.” In other words, these men have a voracious hunger for the word. They seek to study it, meditate upon it, systematize it, and communicate it for the feeding of the sheep. This takes time and effort and is worthy of support from the flock.

Just a footnote here on the use of the word “especially” in 1Timothy 5:17. Some groups take this to mean two separate groups are being referred to here, as if all the elders rule, but only some rule well and it is those who are worthy double honor, because they labor at preaching and teaching. They take the word “especially” as denoting two separate groups. This is unlikely for several reasons. One is that the concept of ruling well is to be distinguished from those who do not rule well in vs.19-25 where some are found to be in sin and disqualified from office. A second reason is that this would break down the eldership, which is to be a body of equals, into two classes of men. There would be the elders and then there would be the elders worthy of double honor. This seems unlikely. A third and most compelling reason, according to

this writer, is the use of the word “especially” in other contexts. The translation of **malista** in the NASB translated “especially” is not without debate. The word could also be translated as “that is.” In other words, this would signify not another group of elders, but the phrase “labor at preaching and teaching” would be descriptively used here of the phrase “rule well.” In George Knight's commentary on the pastoral epistles, he (citing Skeat) states “that **malista** can at times have the meaning ‘that is,’ (thus) Paul is giving here a further description of those he has already mentioned. In this case the elders who rule well are the ones laboring in word and doctrine.”

If the position is truly honored, it will not be needlessly criticized. This outward expression of financial honor will be the visible manifestation of an inner commitment among the membership to esteem and highly regard the eldership. However, the honor of esteem will not always be shown to those in the eldership as it should. Thus there will be a need for the protection of the eldership within the body.

SIDE NOTE:

This use of **malista** is found several other times in the New Testament where a second phrase introduced by **malista** is used in a descriptive way of the first phrase.

NAS 1 Timothy 4:10 "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the savior of all men, especially (**malista** - that is) of believers."

NAS 2 Timothy 4:13 "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially (**malista** - that is) the parchments."

NAS Titus 1:10 "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially (**malista** - that is) those of the circumcision."

The Protection Provided for Biblical Leadership: V.19a

NAS 1 Timothy 5:19 “Do not
receive an accusation against an elder. . .”

Because of this honor, accusations are not to be freely entertained, and protection is to be provided for the elders themselves. Paul told the church in Corinth:

I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men (2Cor 16:15-18).

As we have already seen several times, the church in Thessalonica is requested to “appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another” (1Thes 5:12-13). Leadership by nature of its position of visibility often becomes the target of needless and destructive criticism. Ministry with needless critique can become a burden and injure the entire congregation. Tired shepherds make for weary sheep!

The criticism of leadership is a serious matter and should not be given lightly without consideration for repercussions on the one who

gives it, the shepherd, or the congregation. The Psalmist said in Psalm 105:15 "Do not touch my anointed ones, and do my prophets no harm." Here is a stark warning against the one who would flippantly seek to injure the ministry by making false accusations or even true accusations in an unchristian manner against another. John MacArthur notes in regard to this verse that "those who set out to falsely accuse God's servants are treading on dangerous ground." It is easy to criticize. The prophet Amos in 5:10 proclaimed "they hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks with integrity." Strauch commenting on this problem within the church says,

At heart, we all love to hear rumors and scandal. Proverbs 18:8 says, 'the words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, and they go down into the innermost parts of the body.' But Christians are to be people of truth, love, and light. Therefore, we should hate scandalous tales and unsupported rumors. We should silence them whenever we hear them because they are destructive and harmful to individual people and to the life of the community. Good people have been ruined by unfounded accusations, and we should not allow this to happen in the Christian community.

We should keep in mind the old saying, "No judgement without the facts." False and needless accusations will occur. It remains the task of the others

We should hate scandalous tales and unsupported rumors. We should silence them whenever we hear them because they are destructive and harmful to individual people and to the life of the community. Good people have been ruined by unfounded accusations, and we should not allow this to happen in the Christian community.

within the eldership to offer and provide protection for the accused in such cases, allowing time to sift out fact from fiction.

The Accusation of Biblical Leadership: V.19b

*NAS 1 Timothy 5:19 “. . .receive an accusation. . .
(only) on the basis of two or three witnesses.”*

This leads us to a third issue regarding the accountability of Biblical eldership. Though honor and protection are necessary in maintaining a sound and encouraged leadership, they are never to be honored so highly or protected so carefully that they are presented as beyond the possibility of accusation. Protection against individual grumblings that are unsubstantial opinions is absolutely essential. But, valid errors in the leadership, verified by several in the congregation are to be heard and examined along Biblical guidelines.

For the most part, the discipline of elders is to follow the pattern of discipline of any member as lined out in Matthew 18:15-20.

15 And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 but if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17

and if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax-gatherer. 18 truly I say to you,

Just a footnote here. For elaboration beyond what is given regarding the discipline of elders, the reader is referred to the section on the discipline of the church.

whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. 20 for where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.

This teaching found in the New Testament is based on a portion of the Old Testament law of Moses found in Deuteronomy 19:15-21.

15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. 16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. 18 "And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. 20 "And the rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. 21 "Thus you shall not show pity: Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

This principle is illustrated for us in another passage in Deuteronomy 17:2-7.

2 "If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does

what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant, 3 and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, 4 and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then **you shall inquire thoroughly**. And behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed, to your gates, that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death. 6 **"On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses**, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. 7 "The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

The application of this principle served as a protection for the community and for the accused party who may have been in fact innocent. The judgement that would fall on the one who accused falsely served to keep needless accusations from arising. Jesus affirmed this practice in the New Testament when he said in John 8:17 "Even in your law it has been written, that the testimony of two men is true." And in Hebrews 10:28 it says that "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." Don't misunderstand. We are not advocating stoning. We truly do now live under a covenant of grace. However, the principle of discipline does still apply though it may

On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

be fleshed out a little differently. Strauch quoting Knight says,

In effect, Paul is urging Timothy to follow . . . Matthew 18 and the O.T. before the church accepts or acknowledges as correct an accusation against an elder. The process may consist of two or three witnesses bringing an accusation, but normally it would consist of two or three witnesses verifying an accusation that may come from only one individual before it is considered further. An accusation of sin that is substantiated by witnesses must be heard; it cannot be brushed aside. As unpleasant and time consuming as a fair investigation into an accusation might be, it must be done. Sin must not be hidden, nor can an innocent person remain falsely accused.

Upon examination, if found guilty, the elder is to be disciplined. To help in understanding this section of the passage, a "**WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY AND HOW**" approach will be taken.

The Discipline of Biblical Leadership: Vs.20-21

*NAS 1 Timothy 5:20 "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.
21 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality."*

Who? Elders Found in Sin

Those elders found to be in sin, guilty as charged, are to be

disciplined. This sinful behavior of life disqualifies them from their service. They are no longer “beyond reproach.” They have been taken hold of and are found to no longer be qualified for the office. They must be formally removed and should willingly step down from their position of authority over the flock.

What? Rebuke

The elder, being found in sin, being no longer fit for office, is to be rebuked for his unfaithfulness. He is a vessel no longer fit for use in his present condition. The Apostle Paul told Timothy that:

20 In a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. 22 Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2Tim 2:20-26).

He has failed his charge given before God. That the elders

charge is given before God is made clear by Paul's admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

He did not maintain his life and doctrine together (cf. 1Tim 4:16). He is to be rejected as were Hymenaeus and Alexander from their place of service.

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme (1Tim 1:18-20).

Knight says here that rebuke from the Greek "**elegcho** means here 'rebuke, reprove, or correct' in the sense of show someone his sin and summon him to repentance."

When? Implied: After Examined and Found Guilty

According to the principle of discipline as elaborated in Matthew 18:15-20 the sinning brother is to be brought before the church. The church here in 1Tim 5:19 is seen as the other leadership which would act in representative fashion of the body. It is still possible that the brother is being accused falsely. The leadership is to fully examine the issue at hand. If found guilty, the rebuke is to follow immediately! Sin cannot be tolerated in the body; evil is to be purged from the midst of the fellowship.

Where? In the Presence of All

The text says the elder found in sin is to be rebuked in the presence of all so that the rest may be fearful of sinning. The location of the arena for rebuke hinges on the meaning of “rest” and “all.” Keeping the Old Testament idea of public rebuke it seems best to understand “all” as meaning the entire congregation. (More will be said about “the rest” in the following section.) John MacArthur states in this regard that “there are no exegetical grounds for limiting all to the other elders. It means everyone, elders and congregation. A sinning elder has nowhere to hide...the church needs to decide whether to protect men's reputations, or God's.”

This principle of public rebuke is illustrated in the New Testament in the book of 3 John.

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, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church (3John 9-10).

Why? That the Rest May Be Fearful

The “rest” would refer not to the people as a whole but rather to the rest of the elders within the council. This is further supported by the translation of the NAS leaving “of sinning” in italics indicating that these words are not in the Greek and are simply the translator’s addition. Literally then, we should understand this to be a public rebuke “in the presence of all the congregation, so that the rest of the elders may be fearful.” “Have/be” (**echo**) is used here in the sense of “have as one’s own.” One writer said this was “so that they have **phobos** (fear) as an appropriate inner characteristic in the face of sin and discipline.” This fear of having such a rebuke given to them before the body of believers they have been called to shepherd then serves as a motivator for godliness in their ministries.

How? In the Presence of God, Christ and the Angels Without Bias or Partiality

Timothy and the rest of the elders are to fulfill their task of oversight in the exercise of discipline over sinning elders with an awareness that they perform their duties under divine scrutiny. This is a divine charge that rests upon Timothy and his fellow elders. Timothy was told by Paul in 1Timothy 6:13 that he was being charged "in the

presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate." In 2 Timothy 2:14 he was to "remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers." Jesus himself said in Luke 9:26 that "whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." Strauch has written that:

the failure to publicly discipline church leaders demonstrates a grievous lack of love for God and his word. . .no matter how difficult or unpleasant such discipline may be, we must 'maintain these principles' in obedience to God. The fear of God's judgment and assessment of our stewardship is to be our constant motivation and encouragement in all such difficult matters.

In Ephesus, Timothy was in a very difficult situation. He had been left by the apostle Paul in a church with unprincipled leadership. The corruption was widespread. What would motivate him to fulfill his duty? Hiebert writes in his commentary that "Timothy is to carry out his task under the consciousness of working under the direct gaze of the spiritual world." Ministry, like life itself, is to be fulfilled *coram Deo* - before the face of God!

The fear of God's judgment and assessment of our stewardship is to be our constant motivation and encouragement in all such difficult matters.

They further are to fulfill their duties without bias/pre-judgement. This would fit the modern day legal concept of "innocent

until proven guilty." Furthermore they were to carry out this task "without partiality/leaning to one side in favor of the other." Partiality is not to be found in the life of the body of Christ. James says "my brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism . . . but if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jam 2:1,9). This attitude is not to be found in the body for the Scripture is clear it is not found in God. Therefore it is not to be found among His people.

NAS Acts 10:34 "And opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality'."

This attitude (of partiality) is not to be found in the body for the Scripture is clear it is not found in God.

NAS Galatians 2:6 "But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me."

NAS Ephesians 6:9 "And, masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

NAS Colossians 3:25 for he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."

This understanding of God in the New Testament has its roots in the law of Moses. "For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the

Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God Who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe" (Deu 10:17). It is further seen in 2Chronicles 19:7 where we read "now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe." This character trait or attribute of God is summed up concisely by the apostle Paul when he writes "there is no partiality with God" (Rom 2:11). In seeking to relate this concept of impartiality to the matter of discipline within the church, E. B. Easton notes profoundly that "the well-being of every community depends on impartial discipline."

The Appointment of Biblical Leadership: V.22-25

NAS 1Timothy 5:22-25 22 Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. 23 No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. 24 The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. 25 Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.

The following serves as a brief overview of where we seek to go with this text:

A Word About Timing
A Word About Purity
A Word About Judgement
A Word About Installation

A Word About Timing

*NAS 1Timothy 5:22 "Do not lay
hands upon anyone too hastily and thus
share responsibility for the sins of others;
keep yourself free from sin."*

In order to prevent the need for discipline in the eldership, the apostle provides some preventative measures that can be taken on the front end in regard to the appointment of the shepherd elders. Paul begins this section by introducing us to and reminding Timothy of a very common practice (one which Timothy himself had experienced) in the installation of leadership in the nation of Israel: the laying on of hands. Appointment to a place of leadership within the community of the faithful is a very common practice in the Scriptures. For example:

1. Appointment of Hebrew Leaders

NAS Numbers 27:15 Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, 16 "May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, 17 who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd." 18 So the Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and **lay your hand on him**; 19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation; and commission him in their sight. 20 "And you shall **put some of your authority on him**, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him. 21

"Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the urim before the Lord. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, both he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." 22 and Moses did just as the Lord commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation. 23 Then he **laid his hands on him and commissioned him**, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.

2. Appointment of the Seven in the Early Church

*Acts 6 provides an early **paradigm** for the office of the deacon.

NAS Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And 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 "But select from among you, brethren, 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 And 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.

3. Appointment of Early Missionaries/Representatives from Churches

NAS Acts 13:1 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 And 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. Appointment of Apostolic Delegates

NAS 1Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

NAS 2Timothy 1:6 And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

5. Appointment of Elders in a Local Assembly

NAS 1Timothy 5:22 Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

Paul seeks here to give Timothy some practical advice/instruction on the installation of overseers in the church. Before hands are placed

on one to commission him for service, two things need to be considered. The **first** is that this is a process that requires care and patience. Something important, done right, usually takes time. The old saying fits here well, "If you are going to do it, do it right the first time." I have a friend who planted a flower bed. When he planted it he became aware that there were some weeds in the area where he was planting the flowers but he really didn't want to take the time to deal with it then and just thought that over time he could pull them all up. You can probably tell the end of the story already. The weeds did not get pulled up but rather grew! Soon the flowers were choked out by an abundance of weeds. The flower bed needed to be completely uprooted and my friend had to begin again. At this point, another old saying comes to mind - "Prevention is nine tenths of the cure." It is not my point here to bore the reader with old sayings and stories about my friend's lack of a green thumb. I hope and trust the point has been made: the selection of proper leadership takes time, care, and prayerful preparation. Alexander Strauch has noted that:

the more we understand the solemn, personal responsibility of appointing people to positions of leadership in the church, the more we will exercise reservation, thoughtfulness, and prayerfulness in our appointments. One good reason to encourage the practice of the laying on of hands is that it creates an observable, personal, and tangible sense of responsibility and fellowship between the parties involved.

Paul further admonishes Timothy to take care in the process of appointment so that he might maintain personal purity. The Scripture is replete with admonitions to maintain purity and to have no sharing or

fellowship with the sin of others. Allow Scripture to speak for itself at this point:

NAS Ephesians 5:11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them.

NAS 1Corinthians 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people.

NAS 2Corinthians 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

NAS 2Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

NAS 1Timothy 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

NAS 1Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

NAS 1Timothy 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

NAS 2Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

NAS Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

A Word About Purity - v.23

NAS 1Timothy 5:23 No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

Following Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding the issue of timing and the appointment of a Biblical eldership (v.22), and before proceeding to instruct Timothy regarding their judgment or examination of those seeking appointment (vs.24-25), as a bit of a personal aside, the beloved apostle takes time for a word of exhortation to young Timothy.

The final phrase in v.22 "keep yourself free from sin" is literally translated "keep yourself pure." Using this concept of purity Paul takes an opportunity to give a bit of encouragement to his young son in the faith. Timothy, at some point, had become ill. His illness was getting worse due to the fact that he refused medical treatment (the taking of wine - used as a medicine). Commenting on the use of wine as a

medicine Hiebert notes (quoting Wuest) that "wine was one of the chief remedial agents of those times in which the science of medicine was in its infancy among Greek physicians."

Why? Why refuse treatment? Possibly the pressures of ministry, Timothy knowing people (other elders?) were watching his life and would judge him if he were to drink. Thus, feeling the pressures of ministry Timothy chose not to take any action, so as to not in any way tarnish his ministry. As Knight has stated,

Paul does not criticize his practice *per/se* , but does encourage Timothy not to forego a little wine for medicinal purposes. Since Paul knows that his young colleague is certainly feeling the pressure and demands of the preceding verses, he pauses to express his concern for Timothy as a person and for his health.

With that said regarding the text in 1Timothy 5:23, we need to turn our attention with Paul, back to the matter at hand. So as not to be hasty and share in the responsibility for the sins of others (the candidates for office), Paul says examine them thoroughly before you install them.

A Word About Judgement - vs.24-25

NAS 1Timothy 5:24 "The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after.

25 Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed."

It is right and proper to examine a man before he is put in a

place of service. The Biblical instruction on this matter is found in 1Timothy 3. There Paul writes, "and let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (1Tim 3:10). Here Paul is addressing the issue of the service and testing of the deacons. The context of the passage concerns the qualifications of the overseers and the deacons, as well as women servants/helpers in the church (See Appendix 3). Paul clearly states in v.10 that the deacon is to be tested. But what about the overseer? Notice the construction of the apostle's command. "Let these (**the deacons**) also (**in addition to the overseers**) first (**before service**) be tested (**examined**), then (**after being tested and found qualified**) let them serve (**as deacons or overseers**)." (**Parentetical statements added for understanding.**) There is no other valid exegetical or interpretive explanation for the use of "also" in v.10 unless it refers back to the office of the overseer.

It is essential to keep in mind that the judgement called for here must be spiritual and right. When Scripture admonishes us to make a judgement regarding something or someone, our judgement must be right. Hear the Scripture from both testaments regarding the making of a right or righteous judgement:

NAS Zechariah 7:9 Thus has the Lord of hosts said, 'dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother.

NAS Zechariah 8:16 These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates.

NAS Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.

NAS Leviticus 19:15 You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

NAS Matthew 7:1 Do not judge lest you be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

NAS John 7:24 Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

This ability to make a righteous judgement is made possible by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, as Paul makes clear to the church in Corinth.

NAS 1Corinthians 2:11 For who among men knows the

thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit Who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

In examination or judgement some will be found to be unqualified and some qualified. This is not too difficult a task for Timothy (possessing the mind of Christ) or for any who follow him, and it must be done to determine who is fit for service in God's house. In Paul's second letter to Timothy he uses some vivid imagery to show Timothy how he is to be ready for his Master's use, and how he is to abstain from those things which would disqualify him for service. Paul writes Timothy in 2Timothy 2:14-26 that he is to

14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further

ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some. 19 nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, " the Lord knows those who are his, "and," let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness. " 20 now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared for every good work. 22 Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 23 But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Timothy is to examine and appoint men who are ready and fit for service, those who, like gold and silver vessels, are useful to the master and prepared for service. Thus as Strauch states, "armed with these words of encouragement, Timothy and the church leaders are prepared to accomplish the challenging task before them." And Lenski further adds in his commentary that "as far as avoiding mistakes is concerned and thus possibly making the wrong man an elder, Timothy need not

worry, for the difficulty as to judging is not great. This is said for Timothy's comfort."

This responsibility for judging or examining potential candidates for service is at the heart of Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1Tim 5:24-25. Knight believes that "vs.24 and 25 are symmetrical and state the same truths, first about sin and then about good deeds. Thus delay in laying on hands can also, positively, make possible discovery of men whose worthiness is not readily apparent."

Paul first mentions those unqualified or unfit for office. He states that "the sins of some men are quite evident going before them to judgement" (v.24). Within this first group of unfit candidates are some whose sin is so evident it is as if they precede them into the courtroom and declare the candidate's unfitness. With others, however, careful examination is required before anyone might suspect something to be wrong. Of this group Paul says "their sins follow after" (v.24). Lenski writes regarding this group that "their sins march right into the meeting behind them and refuse to be left outside."

The next group Paul deals with are those who are fit for service in the eldership and whose examination reveals this truth. As within our first group of unfit candidates whose disqualification was obvious, there are those whose fitness is obvious as well. Generally this is true of good deeds. They shine like a light on a hill (cf. Matt 5:15-16). However, this is not always the case and there are men who require closer examination to be found well qualified. In this group of fit men, there are deeds of which Paul states, "and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed." Here we have deeds which are said to be "otherwise." These are not

deeds that are not good, but rather deeds which are not obvious or evident as in the previous group's sins which are concealed until after close examination.

Examination must precede installation. Sufficient time must be allowed for proper judgement or righteous judgement to transpire. Without care and diligence given to this process the wrong men may be appointed or the right men may be dismissed prematurely. Both of these situations would dishonor our great God and bring harm to His body, the church of Jesus Christ.

A Word About Installation

Official installation of a man to the eldership is essential and must not be overlooked or done in a casual manner. In most cases, a church will have an established eldership and one or more will be added to it by appointment. Here there must be some official recognition and welcome into the group for the new member. Just saying "Hello," and "Come on in!," are insufficient methods of incorporating new leadership within the existing body. Appointment should be formal, visible, and recognized by the entire congregation to whom one is being called to serve as a shepherd. There is to be no "sneaking in the back door" so to say.

In order to be fully functional and effective within the eldership of a local church, a man must meet what we might here call the "criteria for appointment." To be appointed to the office of an elder a man must meet each of these.

The first thing a man must do is to aspire to the office of the overseer. Paul said it this way, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1Tim 3:1). Two things are mentioned in this one verse as characteristics of the one seeking office. The first is that he should be aspiring to the office. Here the word means to "stretch one's self out" toward something. When compared with the concept of desire (an internal moving and compulsion), the idea of aspiring to something is more external and visible. It has been said that before a man is ever installed or even considered for the office, he will already be doing the work. To place someone in the office who has never tasted the task would be devastating. One way to aid a man in the discerning task of discovering the will of God in regard to the eldership is to allow him (under the supervision of an elder) to taste of the work of the ministry. If he is called, he will know soon enough!

Another thing, as already mentioned, that must be considered is his desire for the work. This is not just a desire that says "I want to." This is a desire that says, "I have to!" The verb "desire" means to "set one's heart upon" something. This is an internal compulsion of the spirit that cannot be quenched. God will not let this man rest until the work is his to do. It is important to note here that his desire is for the work, not the office. This man is not seeking a position of power for himself; he seeks to serve through laboring for the king and his subjects. Further we note that the work he desires is a "fine" work. The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible translates this "fine work" as a "noble task" along with the Revised Standard Version, and the KJV calls it a "good work." Of this work the seventeenth century American Puritan Cotton Mather said,

The office of the Christian ministry, rightly understood, is the most honourable, and important, that any man in the whole world can ever sustain, and it will be one of the wonders and employments of eternity to consider the reasons why the wisdom and goodness of God assigned this office to imperfect and guilty man! . . . The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher are to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men, to display in the most lively colours,

The great design and intention of the office of a Christian preacher are to restore the throne and dominion of God in the souls of men, to display in the most lively colours, and proclaim in the clearest language, the wonderful perfections, offices and grace of the Son of God, and to attract the souls of men into a state of everlasting friendship with Him.

and proclaim in the clearest language, the wonderful perfections, offices and grace of the Son of God, and to attract the souls of men into a state of everlasting friendship with him. . . it is a work which an angel might wish for, as an honour to his character, yea, an office which every angel in heaven might covet to be employed in for a thousand years to come. It is such an honourable, important and useful office, that if a man be put into it by God, and made faithful and successful through life, he may look down with disdain upon a crown, and shed a tear of pity on the brightest monarch on earth.

Or as the twentieth-century English preacher Will Sangster wrote,

Called to preach! Commissioned of God to teach the word! A herald of the great king! A witness of the eternal gospel! Could

any work be more high and holy? To this supreme task God sent his only begotten Son. In all the frustration and confusion of the times, is it possible to imagine a work comparable in importance with that of proclaiming the will of God to wayward men? . . . **Not by accident, nor yet by the thrustful egotism of men, was the pulpit given the central place in the reformed churches. It is there of design and devotion. It is there by the logic of things. . . it is there as 'the throne of the word of God.**

This must not be missed. It is this noble task he desires do. "The work of preaching and leading the church which our Lord purchased with His blood," writes John MacArthur, "is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called."

One more point must be stressed here. Though it is a fine and noble work he desires, it is still a work. In it he must be prepared to labor and give his life. He may have another job (as Paul did in making tents), yet the ministry is his life. To this all effort must be given. It is a task in which he will labor to the point of exhaustion. He will find that it consumes his thoughts and his energies. His heart will be in his calling at all times. Of this task Paul writes, "We proclaim him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me" (Col 1:28-29). Paul said for this he labored. The word here is **agonizomai** from which we get the word "agony." Reinecker says it means to "strive,

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to exert effort. The athletic picture behind this word emphasizes Paul's missionary work, with all its attendant toil, its tireless exertion, and its struggles against all manner of setbacks and opposition" (cf. 1Thes 5:12).

Third, a man must be tested and found beyond reproach. Finding a man in a local assembly who both aspires to the office and desires the work of that office should be an encouraging thing to any local assembly. What must be done at this point is an examination of the man. This point is often overlooked or just given a casual glance at best. This must not be allowed to happen. The eldership is not a popularity contest between the men that we have known the longest or like the most. The eldership is not a good-ole-boy network! These men are the under shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Their placement in the office must be preceded by examination, and the examination should fit the weight of the office. The lists of criteria for appointment as has been noted already are given in 1Timothy and Titus.

NAS 1Timothy 3:2 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, uncontentious, 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, lest he 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 may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

NAS Titus 1:6 If any man be 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, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Footnote: It must be noted here that only those God has qualified and gifted by the Spirit of Christ for ministry are to be called and set apart by the church. Here, the words of the great Puritan John Owen should be heard.

The Church hath no power to call any unto the office of the ministry, where the Lord Christ hath not gone before it in the designation of him by an endowment of spiritual gifts; for if the whole authority of the ministry be from Christ, and if He never give it but where he bestows these gifts with it for its discharge, as in Ephesians 4:7,8,etc., then to call any to the ministry whom He hath not so previously gifted is to set Him aside, and act in our own name and authority.

To call any to the ministry whom He hath not so previously gifted is to set Him aside, and act in our own name and authority.

With that said, a man found meeting these

three criteria (aspiring, desiring, and being found to meet the qualifications listed), ought to be appointed. His gifts are left at this point to be recognized by the existing leadership in the church and by the congregation itself. Once duly recognized, he is to be given a place to serve and welcomed into the eldership. As the Scripture states, if any man is gifted and called, let him serve (cf. Rom 12:4-8, 2Cor 12:4-7, 1Pet 4:10-11).

A fourth requirement for a man becoming fully functional within the established eldership of a church is that he must be set apart by the existing leadership and publically affirmed before all to the office by the laying on of hands. Often in Scripture the visible appointment of men to service is accompanied by prayer and fasting. Laying on of hands with prayer and fasting should not be seen as a command, but a common practice that should be encouraged in the churches. Consider the following texts as examples of the practice:

1) Jesus Sets Apart the Apostles

NAS Mark 3:13 And he *went up to the mountain and *summoned those whom he himself wanted, and they came to him. 14 And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach.

2) The Apostles Lead in Appointing Another Apostle

NAS Acts 1:21 It is therefore necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us- 22 beginning with the baptism of John, until the day

that He was taken up from us~ one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection. " 23 And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed, and said, "Thou, Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place. " 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

3) Apostles Set Apart Apostolic Delegates/Elders

NAS 1Timothy 4:14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

NAS 2Timothy 1:6 And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

NAS Acts 14:23 And 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.

4) Apostolic Delegates to Elders

NAS 1Timothy 5:22 Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

NAS Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.

5) Elders to Elders

NAS 2Timothy 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Footnote:

This is all predicated on the understanding that the selection of the leadership is simply a visible witness of what the Holy Spirit has already made a reality. In Acts 20:28 Paul admonished the Ephesian elders to

"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."

A fifth and final requirement that remains to be done in order to fully establish a man as part of the existing eldership of the church is that he must be recognized by the congregation. There is a call in the Scripture for congregations to acknowledge, recognize, and submit to their appointed leadership. Due to the visible nature of the ministry these men will have within the fellowship, congregations need to publically acknowledge their affirmation of these who have been set apart by the Holy Spirit for service. The Scripture gives clear instruction to the congregation on this very important matter of visibly recognizing those men God has appointed to be her shepherd leaders.

NAS 1Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered

worthy of **double honor**, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

NAS 1Corinthians 16:15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also **be in subjection** to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 And I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus; because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore **acknowledge** such men.

NAS 1Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you **appreciate** those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you **esteem them very highly** in love because of their work. **Live in peace** with one another.

NAS Hebrews 13:17 **Obey** your leaders, and **submit** to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.



Choose From Among You

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Deacons

When one considers the concept of the servants or the ministers of the church, a multitude of thoughts begin to bombard the mind. For many, if not most, being asked to identify the servants or the ministers of the church brings to mind the church’s pastor or pastoral staff. They are, in the mind of many, the “Ministers” of the local assembly. Others, coming out of or having been influenced by the emphasis that has emerged in the last half of the 20th century of “every member ministry” or the “lay ministry”

concept, may be prone to identify the members of the body as the ministers of the church.

Both of these options have Biblical support and carry much weight theologically and practically in the life of the church. The Lord has certainly called certain men and gifted them to be “Ministers” to his flock. The Apostle Paul told the church in Ephesus that “He (Jesus) gave (to the church) some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). These pastor/teachers were to, in the words of the Apostle Peter, “shepherd the flock of God. . . , exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness” (1Pet 5:2). To use our word here, they were to “minister” to the flock. Also, the concept of every member of the assembly being called and gifted for service is very Biblical. The Apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 4:10, admonished the brothers to whom he wrote, that “as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” This concept is supported throughout Scripture and is embodied in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This is a concept of ministry that is all too often neglected in the church today, and one she much needs for the fulfilling of her mission of bringing glory to her God.

As Biblical as these avenues for service and ministry are in the

body, these are not the “ministers” or “servants” we are considering here under the title “The Servants of the Church.” Another body of ministers presented in the New Testament Scripture is that of the diaconate. “Diaconate” is from the Latin “**diaconatus**” and means “a body of deacons.” This official body (the diaconate), performs for the church specific ministry, distinct, yet not separate from, the ministry of the members and that of the pastoral leadership of the church.

Common Misconceptions of the Diaconate

The office and ministry of the diaconate has fallen on hard times in recent years. These “hard times” are the direct result of a lack of attention by the church to the teaching of the Scripture, as it relates to their calling and purpose. A multitude of examples could be given of these “hard times” resulting from misconceptions as to the exact nature of deacon ministry. The church is not hurting, necessarily, from lack of attention to the “deacon” issue. Much has been written recently, and throughout the history of the church, in regard to the ministry and office of the deacon. Yet many, if not most, of these are filled with the vain imaginings of men rather than the clear teaching of the word of God. Though many misconceptions could be examined, we will limit ourselves to five here for the purpose of making our point.

Probably the most common and most destructive mistake in utilizing the diaconate in the church is in seeing the

The church is not hurting, necessarily, from lack of attention to the “deacon” issue. Much has been written recently, and throughout the history of the church, in regard to the ministry and office of the deacon. Yet many, if not most, of these are filled with the vain imaginings of men rather than the clear teaching of the word of God.

deacon body as the ruling body of the church. When this misconception of the deacon body is held it can often be seen when reference is made

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to the group as the “Board of Deacons.”

This concept, being carried in from the contemporary business world, views the deacons as a board of executives, possessing authority over the church in regard to administrative matters. W. A. Criswell, in his book on pastoral ministry in the church refers to the

deacons as the “board of directors” of the church! They, according to Criswell, are to officiate in all legal matters for the church. In functioning as a board, deacons make decisions for the church, make recommendations, and these recommendations are practically accepted as law. In The Guide to Practical Pastoring, C. Summer Wemp, in his section on deacons and their purpose in ministry, after making several positive and Biblical statements, makes the following assertion regarding the deacons and their relationship to the pastor.” Deacons serve as the pastor’s advisory and sounding board. Often deacons are wiser about certain matters than is the pastor. They can help you achieve goals and avoid problems.” Needless to say, no Scripture was listed in support of his assertion!

A second misconception regarding the ministry of deacons in the local church is when the church appoints deacons to be property/building managers. Far be it for the church to officially dub them such (though I would not be surprised if this were actually done), but this, in the practical working out of church life, is what it boils down to. If the windows are dirty, toilets are broken, AC unit is blowing hot

air, or the grass needs mowin', the cry from the pew is heard: "Who's the deacon of the week!" Alexander Strauch refers to this concept often found in a deacon ministry as making the deacons "sanctified groundskeeper." He further adds, and we would concur, that "this view . . . seriously demeans the office of (the) deacon and denies the local church the necessary ministry God designed the diaconate to provide for His people."

A **third** area of decline and deficiency, highlighting the church's misunderstanding of the role of her deacons, regards her seeing deacons as the church factotums. As defined by the Oxford dictionary a factotum is "an employee who does all kinds of work." Seeing the deacons in this way makes them wear a multitude of hats and bear the title: "Universal Deacon." In his work, The Emerging Role of Deacons, Charles W. Deweese states that:

The potential areas of deacon service are unlimited. Deacons can engage in such diverse ministries as teaching, preaching, visiting, becoming involved in social action, counseling, leading in charitable giving, organizing, administrating, carrying out the Lord's Supper, and meeting basic needs of the pastor. Deacon history has demonstrated the need for flexibility in what deacons do in individual churches. Forms of deacon ministry are endless - depending, of course, on the creative imagination of each local church and the deacons in it.

Since when has God left His work up to the "creative imaginations" of his people? This is a recipe for disaster! Alexander Strauch, in seeking to correct this misconception states that

Such unlimited spheres of service completely blur the distinctive purpose and duties of the New Testament diaconate and can only frustrate deacons. In their zeal for deacon renewal, many churches have gone too far, beyond the bounds of Scripture. They have placed too much authority and diverse responsibilities into the hands of deacons. In fact, some of the same mistakes that churches made in the middle of the second century are being made again: deacons are placed in various positions of authority that God has not authorized.

In addition to these, the diaconate in many places is filled with men who simply want to do just that: fill a hole! They see the diaconate as an office to hold, not a duty to perform to the glory of God and for the benefit of His sheep. Here the diaconate is a position of pride within the church and possibly the community as well. This is seen in the church that can tell you how many deacons they have (7 is always a good Biblical number) and where they sit (on the front row). Yet for all this abundance of information, they can't tell you what they do!

One **final** observation regarding contemporary misconceptions as to the nature of the diaconate is the concept in which the diaconate is simply seen as a "leg up" to the pastorate. This is historically found in the Roman Catholic Church and some Episcopal churches as well. John Calvin, the reformer in Geneva, Switzerland in the 16th century said that for the deacons in the Catholic Church "it is not really an office for them but only a step toward the priesthood." The reformers - Calvin and others - sought to counter this misconception by instilling once again the permanent office of the deacon in the churches.

These misconceptions, presented here in brief, should give the reader an initial grasp of the serious problems that exist in the contemporary church regarding the ministry of its deacons. All of these problems can be summed up and focused for us in the words of Alexander Strauch in his book on deacon ministry, Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon. There he writes,

A serious, fundamental problem regarding the diaconate still exists: far too little in-depth consideration is being given to the Biblical texts and the Biblical parameters set for deacons. This problem is symptomatic of a much bigger problem among Christians today, which is a shameful lack of trust in God-breathed, Holy Scripture. But, as we shall see, the Scripture is perfectly sufficient to answer our questions about deacons. Indeed, the only diaconate worth discovering is the one found on the pages of the inspired New Testament. No matter how limited that information may at first appear, God, in His perfect wisdom, has given us all the information we need. If we don't adequately consider the texts of Holy Scripture or limit ourselves to Biblical teaching on deacons, we invariably corrupt God's design and invent a diaconate of our own imagination.

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Word Study

Before we examine the Biblical evidence of which Strauch speaks, it will behoove us to pause and consider first in brief several words in the Greek New Testament

that affect one's understanding of the diaconate.

Meaning:

<u>English</u>	<u>Greek (part of speech)</u>	<u>Translation</u>
1. Deacon	diakonos (noun)	deacon, servant
2. Service	diakonia (noun)	service
3. Serve	diakoneo (verb)	serve

This word group/family comes from a root joined by an intensifying preposition. The root is **konis**, meaning "dust." This root is joined by a prepositional prefix, **dia**, meaning "through." A. T. Robertson says of this word that it has the literal meaning of "raise a dust in a hurry." Putting these together we see one who is moving quickly through the dust, serving, and on the move.

Usage:

1. General Service: Many occurrences or uses of this word family are in reference to general acts of service. Several of these instances, found in the writings of the New Testament are listed below:

NAS John 2:5 His mother *said to the servants (**diakonos**), "Whatever He says to you, do it."

NAS John 2:9 And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants [**diakonos**] who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter *called the bridegroom,

NAS Matthew 22:13 "Then the king said to the servants,(**diakonos**) 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

NAS Matthew 8:15 And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and waited (**diakoneo**) on Him.

NAS Luke 10:40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him, and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving (**diakonos**) alone? Then tell her to help me."

NAS John 12:2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving (**diakonos**); but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.

NAS Romans 13:4 for it is a minister (**diakonos**) of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.

2. Christian Service: In addition to “general” acts of service, the New Testament record also gives evidence that this word grouping was used of specific acts of “Christian” service. Several instances of this type of usage are given here:

NAS Romans 15:8 For I say that **Christ** has become a servant (**diakonos**) to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to

confirm the promises given to the fathers,

NAS Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a servant (**diakonos**) of the church which is at Cenchrea;

NAS 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is **Apollos**? And what is **Paul**? Servants (**diakonos**) through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

NAS 2 Corinthians 6:4 but in everything commending **ourselves** as servants (**diakonos**) of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

NAS Ephesians 6:21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, **Tychicus**, the beloved brother and faithful minister (**diakonos**) in the Lord, will make everything known to you.

NAS Colossians 1:7 just as you learned it from **Epaphras**, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant (**diakonos**) of Christ on our behalf,

NAS 1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving (**diakoneo**) one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves (**diakoneo**), let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the

glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

3. Official/Appointed Service: In this category a distinct usage of the “deacon” word group is found. Here, rather than being used generally or even in a distinctly Christian context, the “deacon” word group is found being used in an official capacity. Here we find certain individuals designated as servants or deacons of the church in a specific local church/congregational context. All of these passages will be dealt with more fully in the following sections of our study. For now we will list them with a few minor comments.

First, we see in 1 Timothy, deacons of the church in Ephesus being overseen by Timothy and the elders of the congregation. Here the word “deacon” is used twice in two verses.

NAS 1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons (**diakonos**) likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,

NAS 1 Timothy 3:12 Let deacons (**diakonos**) be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households.

Second, we see the “deacon” word group employed in referring to Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. There is some debate as to whether Phoebe should be considered an official “deacon” or simply a “servant” of the church from which she came. More will be said of this debate later.

NAS Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (**diakonos**) of the church which is at Cenchræa; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

A third use of the “deacon” word group in an official church capacity is found in Phil 1:1, where it is coupled with another word we have already encountered in our study, “overseer” (**episkopos**).

NAS Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons (**diakonos**).

A fourth, and final use of the “deacon” word group used in connection with official church servants is to be found in Acts 6:1-7.

NAS Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving (**diakonia**) of food. 2 And 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 (**diakoneo**) tables. 3 "But select from among you, brethren, 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 (**diakonia**) of the word." 5 And 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. 7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

Thus we see people, men and women, in various capacities, serving in the New Testament record. People are serving things like drink and food. They are serving at events such as a wedding feast. People are found to be serving God in the realm of government. People are serving people groups like the Jews and the Gentiles in the proclamation of the gospel. God, Christ, and the church are all served and ministered to. Service is a multifaceted/multicolored activity in the Scriptures. Yet how this service relates to the ministry of the diaconate, the purpose of study, has yet to be established. For a more thorough understanding of that specific issue, we must turn our attention, as mentioned previously, to a more thorough exposition of the Scriptures themselves.

Pertinent Texts

Before we look at the individual passages themselves, let us be reminded of the words of Alexander Strauch we were given to consider earlier:

the Scripture is perfectly sufficient to answer our questions about

deacons. Indeed, the only diaconate worth discovering is the one found on the pages of the inspired New Testament. No matter how limited that information may at first appear, God, in His perfect wisdom, has given us all the information we need.

If this is the case, that the Scripture provides sufficient information for us on the ministry of the deacon, and we would agree that it does, just what does the Bible have to say about the ministry of the New Testament diaconate? Several pertinent texts will guide us in our study as we seek to understand the ministry or service of the diaconate. Each of these texts answers at least one important question in our pursuit of understanding the New Testament diaconate. Here are the questions we will seek to answer in our study:

The only diaconate worth discovering is the one found on the pages of the inspired New Testament.

- _____ 1. Does the New Testament give support to the claim that there was in the early church a distinct office for the deacon?

2. Where did this office originate from and what did they do? Or, should Acts 6:1-7 serve as a paradigm for deacon ministry in the context of the local church today?

3. What kind of men would serve the church in this office? Or, what specific qualifications were given, that the men who would fill these offices in the later development of the church were to be measured by?

We will further seek to put forth an answer to a fourth question that will not have a particular accompanying text:

_____ 4. How should these men be selected and placed in service within the context of the local church?

Question 1: Does the New Testament give support to the claim that there was in the early church a distinct office for the deacon?

The text that we would consider pertinent to our study in answering this important question is found in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. In Philippians 1:1 we read the following. . .

Philippians 1:1 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, here, in addressing the Macedonian church of Philippi, which was very close to his heart in the sharing of the gospel ministry, specifies in the opening section of his letter to whom the letter is addressed. Although he addresses the letter in general to the church at large ("all the saints"), he specifies two groups in particular: overseers and deacons. These two groups are set aside and singled out. It is also important to notice that they are mentioned together, in much the same way that they are placed together in Paul's first letter to Timothy (cf. 1Tim 3: 1,8). Some would contend that the designation here of "overseers and deacons" is not to designate two separate offices of responsibility in the church, but rather simply to have a "functional" force. In other words, the words simply highlight activities that go on in

body life. However, as noted by Peter O'Brien, in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Paul "has in view particular members of the congregation who are specifically described and known by these two titles." He further says this must be what Paul has in mind or "otherwise the additions (of these two groups) seem to be meaningless." O'Brien, who is supported in this summation by Moises Silva (professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary), has in mind here the words of H. W. Beyer who states that "there are. . .two co-ordinated offices" in the church at the time in which Paul writes his letter to the church in Philippi. O'Brien goes on to say that Paul, in referring "to two definite groups in the prescript of his letter," is suggesting "that they have special, self-evident authority." Further evidence of these being two groups specified as distinct, yet not separate from the body, can be found

There are two co-ordinated offices in the church at the time in which Paul writes his letter to the church in Philippi.

by the use of the Greek preposition *sun* = "with" or "including" (NAS). Here the use of *sun*, according to Greek scholar Fritz Reinecker, "implies close fellowship or cooperation" between the two groups and the congregation as a whole.

Question 2: Where did this office originate from and what did they do? Or, should Acts 6:1-7 serve as a paradigm for deacon ministry in the context of the local church today?

These questions are answered for us in the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 6:1-7, we find the following account of a potential crisis that was developing in the life of the early church.

Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in

number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And 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 "But select from among you, brethren, 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 And 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. 7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

This text provides early testimony in the life of the church as to the early development of "needs based ministry," or "ministries of mercy." We see here in Acts 6 the recognition of needs that recur in every location and every generation throughout history. This "mercy ministry" later developed in the early church into the primary ministry of the diaconate. Let us examine Acts 6:1-7 briefly here to ascertain how this ministry to particular needs within the early community of faith moved from an act of serving, meeting needs, into a responsible and respectable office in the early church for which the prime duty would be, the meeting of tangible needs through "ministries of mercy." In order to facilitate our learning of this passage, this section of Scripture will be

naturally broken down into three subsections. We will examine the section as follows:

- I. The Situation and Dilemma of the Early Church
- II. The Solution or Decision of the Apostles
- III. The Success and Distribution of the Gospel

Let us examine each of these sections in turn.

I. The Situation and Dilemma of the Early Church

The situation is stated in the first verse where we read that “a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews.” Thus we are faced immediately with a situation that to say the least, is not positive. In fact, the situation is quite desperate and threatens to undue the health of the early, thriving Christian community. Conservative estimates place this occurrence about 5 years after Pentecost and the early community numbering easily 20,000 or more. One can only imagine a complaint arising from a group of such magnitude being overseen by twelve men, even if those men happened to be the Apostles. The word for complaint here is “goggusmos” and can also be translated “whispering.” A. T. Robertson here states that “it is

Thus we are faced immediately with a situation that to say the least, is not positive. In fact, the situation is quite desperate and threatens to undue the health of the early, thriving Christian community.

the secret grumblings that buzz away till they are heard.” This grumbling is brought about by the Hellenistic Jews (whose widows were the ones being overlooked) due to an

oversight (intentional or unintentional) of certain widows “being overlooked in the daily serving of food.” It is important to note here, that this “daily serving” (“daily ministration” - KJV, “daily charities” - MLB, “daily distribution” - RSV, “daily distribution of funds” - TEV, “daily distribution of food” - WNT, “the distribution of alms” - MNT, “the daily ministration/distribution of relief” AB) was a significant ministry to the needy of which the full scope of lining out here the background and significance of would far surpass the purposes of our study. However, it must be noted, this was a daily serving of food or the distribution of a daily food allowance, for the care of the widows of the believing community. The monies and/or food that were to be distributed for the care of the widows was necessary to their daily living. Though the Apostles had overseen this “distribution of funds” up to this point, it had apparently been delegated to others, under their direction, to fulfill, and it was not being taken care of adequately (cf. Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35). It was, before God, a necessity that this ministry was performed. This could not be overlooked. To do so was a sin before the eyes of God.

The complaint arose between two variant groups: the Grecian/Hellenistic Jews and the Native Hebrews. The Grecian Jews were those Jews who had “contact” with the outside (Greek speaking) world, so to say. They had left their homeland in what is known in history as the diaspora or the dispersion. This dispersion was due to a variety of reasons historically, primarily persecution. When they spread out, they found themselves in a new culture, with new habits, and a new language. They adopted the Greek language and some of their cultural practices, and for such they were not always looked upon favorably by those Jews who saw themselves as “uncorrupted” by the outside world

and its influences. These were the Native Hebrews. They spoke Hebrew and were faithful to their heritage (or at least they were in their own eyes!). Though this may be understandable behavior in the realm of those outside the church, to those held captive to sins of every kind, within the walls of the faithful, it cannot and would not be tolerated. The Apostles, receiving word of this developing crisis in the rapidly growing community, took action quickly and provided a wise solution.

Though this may be understandable behavior, whispering and grumbling, in the realm of those outside the church, held captive to sins of every kind, within the walls of the faithful it cannot and would not be tolerated

II. The Solution or Decision of the Apostles

In verses 2-6 of this section we are provided with a detailed description of the Apostolic solution or decision regarding the situation. We are told first that they “summoned the congregation.” Calling the congregation to them, they acknowledged that they were aware of the problem and its serious nature, but that it would not be right for them “to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Often, when this is read, it is assumed, wrongly, that the Apostles believed they were too good to “serve tables.” This is simply not the case! To neglect one good duty, in order to fulfill another is simply not wise. Rather than drop their own responsibilities, they urged the congregation to choose from among themselves “seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”

Notice several aspects relating to the solution. First, notice that

the congregation was called to act responsibly. The Apostles did not simply say, “We’ll take care of it.” They called the congregation to action. Surely, the Apostles oversaw the process, but the congregation was not to be idle. Furthermore, in turning over this duty to the congregation, the Apostles acted in wisdom by providing parameters or guidelines for the people in their selection of the men. Five qualifications were to be sought after in the men that were selected. They must be found qualified, in order to effectively perform the task of ministry in a very delicate situation. Lining out the qualifications might look something like this:

1. They were to be men: This was to be a position of leadership and great responsibility in the community that required male leadership.
2. They were to be from “among” the people: Several commentators believe that the men chosen, were from the Hellenistic community due to the men selected all having Greek names. This certainly would have given assurance to the Hellenistic Jews that their widows would not be overlooked in the distribution of their daily allowance.
3. They were to have a good reputation: They were going to minister among people, and a good rapport with those among which one works is essential. They would need to be men who had proven themselves and stood out as reliable within their community.
4. They were to be full of the Holy Spirit: This qualification

highlights the spiritual nature of the task. This was not going to be serving food as at a local restaurant. These men were being placed in charge of a vital area of ministry to the faithful.

5. They were to be men of great wisdom: These men would be called upon to make hard decisions. The Apostles wanted to be free to minister through the word and in prayer. To do this effectively, they needed the assurance that the tangible ministry to the needs of the hurting in the community was being taken care of by wise men.

Second, notice that the congregation gave approval to the proposal. This seemed wise to the whole congregation. There was a oneness, a sense of agreement between the leadership and the people.

Following the congregation's approval of the proposed solution, the people put forward several men to oversee this "ministry of mercy." Notice the men they put forward: "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." All seven of these men have names that must not go unnoticed - Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas. All of these men's names share a common thread - they are all Greek names! These men are Hellenistic Jews, chosen from the Hellenistic circle of the believing community. This shows a great humility and desire on the part of the congregation as a whole to quench any existing sectarian spirit that would have been detrimental to the future health and witness of the church.

These men are then placed before the Apostles for their final approval through prayer and the “laying on of hands” as the visible means of officially instilling them into service. (Note: For more

These men are Hellenistic Jews, chosen from the Hellenistic circle of the believing community. This shows a great humility and desire on the part of the congregation as a whole to quench any existing sectarian spirit that would have been detrimental to the future health and witness of the church.

information on the “laying on of hands,” as the means used by the early church of officially instilling people into service, the reader is referred to the precious chapter in

the section on the appointment of elders).

III. The Success and Distribution of the Gospel

Having seen the situation that faced the early church, and the following solution presented by the Apostles and embraced by the congregation, we need to see the resulting success of this new direction for the church and the ensuing powerful spread of the gospel. It is important to note here that verse 7 is not included and does not follow the record of this incident by accident, but rather (as with all of sacred Scripture) by sovereign design. Hear again the word of God describing the events that followed the selection of the men in the early church: “And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” What began as a crisis, resulted in the spread of the gospel, the increase of the disciples, and obedience to the faith! All this, by a proper response of godly wisdom and the providential hand of God. John MacArthur has rightly stated

in his comments on this passage that:

the organization of the church freed the Apostles to devote themselves to prayer and the word. . . (This spread of the gospel was) a direct result of the freeing of the Apostles to carry out their primary ministry, and also of the church's unity. . . The church today needs organization for the same reasons as the first fellowship. Pastors must be freed to focus on the preaching of the word and prayer. Better organization can help meet the needs of all members and thus avoid conflict. And a unified, well-taught church will be a powerful witness to the lost world.

What began as a crisis, resulted in the spread of the gospel, the increase of the disciples, and obedience to the faith!

Now, with all of that said, and the situation in the early church being more clearly understood, our questions still remain for us and beg to be answered. "Where did this office originate from and what did they do?" Or, to phrase this a different way, "Should Acts 6:1-7 serve as a paradigm for deacon ministry in the context of the local church today?"

A unified, well-taught church will be a powerful witness to the lost world.

It is our conviction that what later developed in the church as the office of the deacon, finds its origins in Acts 6, at least in the form of a paradigm, or a pattern, that would be followed in other contexts, both culturally and geographically. In order to make our case, we believe it will be helpful to line out the opposing view point, followed by our rebuttal which we believe will make our case.

A most noted, and respected New Testament scholar, Gordon

Fee, states emphatically in his writings that Acts 6 should in no way be seen as a paradigm for deacon ministry in the church. In dismissing the idea he states that:

An appeal to Acts 6:1-6 is of no value, since those men are not called deacons. In fact they are clearly ministers of the word among Greek-speaking Jews, who eventually accrue the title “the Seven” (Acts 21:8), which distinguishes them in a way similar to “the Twelve.”

The assessment of Fee can be summed up in two distinct points. Fee believes that these men in Acts 6 in no way constitute a paradigm for the diaconate because:

1. The word/title “deacon” is not ascribed to them, and
2. They are more properly to be seen as “Ministers of the word.”

In seeking to evaluate/refute the position of Dr. Fee and state our own case, we will take each of his arguments in reverse order. In the second part of Fee’s two part assessment of the identity of the men in Acts 6, he states that they should be understood to be “ministers of the word,” not unlike (but very much like) the Twelve (ie. the Twelve Apostles). This is incredible! This in no way can be substantiated by the text or the context of Acts 6. They (the seven men of Acts 6), were clearly appointed by the Apostles to care for the needy widows in the community of faith. This appointment, by the way, was in direct contrast to the ministry of the Apostles themselves which was a “ministry of the word” (See Acts 6:2)! The ministry of the seven was to be a ministry, not of the word, but of the table. Of the seven, only Stephen

(an apologist - Acts 6:8-7:60) and Philip (an evangelist - Acts 8:4-40) are mentioned as having “word” related ministries. These ministries that both of these men received and fulfilled to the glory of God, are clearly subsequent to, and to be distinguished from, the ministry they had with the other men in the Jerusalem church. In spite of the obvious, Michael Green, a professor from the same school at which Fee teaches, states that the duties of the seven involved “preaching and disputing with the Jews, evangelism and the performance of wonders and miracles.” To this astonishing claim regarding the seven, Alexandar Strauch replies:

This is not true, however. Because Philip baptized people (Acts 8) does not mean that all deacons must baptize. Philip’s baptizing of new converts was related to his evangelistic efforts, which he carried out after leaving Jerusalem where he served the church’s widows for a certain period of time. The Seven were not chosen by the congregation and appointed by the Apostles to teach. Rather, the Seven were commissioned as an official body of servants to the specific task of providing relief to the needy. By virtue of their God-given gifts some of them also taught.

Second, we must respond to Fee’s first objection: the absence of the word “deacon” used as an official title makes an appeal to Acts 6 of no value. This is a typical argument from silence! Simply because the word is not present, does this negate in any way the clear presence of the concept of service being rendered by one on behalf of another in the Acts 6 scenario? Surely not! These men were clearly an officially appointed body, carrying authority within the early church for the care

of the needy within the community. This pattern of ministry and care could easily have been copied (and clearly was as Phil 1:1 attests) by other churches in various contexts. Furthermore, the use of the words “diakonia” and “diakoneo” both carry the concept of caring for the needy as has already been shown. When these words are used to refer to the actions of men, it is only natural to assume that the aid of the needy is being performed.

This is clear from a wide variety of uses of the words in the New Testament record.

For example:

When these words are used to refer to the actions of men, it is only natural to assume that the aid of the needy is being performed.

NAS Acts 11:29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution (**diakonia**) for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.

NAS Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission (**diakonia**), taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

NAS Romans 15:25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving (**diakoneo**) the saints.

NAS Romans 15:31 that I may be delivered from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service (**diakonia**) for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints.

NAS 2 Corinthians 8:4 begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support (**diakonia**) of the saints.

NAS 2 Corinthians 9:1 For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry (**diakonia**) to the saints.

NAS 2 Corinthians 9:12 For the ministry (**diakonia**) of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

NAS 2 Corinthians 9:13 Because of the proof given by this ministry (**diakonia**) they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.

In each of these texts and their surrounding contexts, a ministry of service to help lend aid to the needy in the Jerusalem church is being referred to. C. E. B. Cranfield in his classic two volume commentary on Romans, states clearly that a linguistic connection between the use of the words and the action they intend to convey is present when he says:

We have now seen that there is in the New Testament a specialized technical use of **diakonein** (the infinitive form of the verb **diakoneo**) and **diakonia** to denote the practical service of those who are specially needy 'in body, or estate', and that it is highly probable that the specialized technical use of **diakonos** also has the same reference.

We have now seen that there is in the New Testament a specialized technical use of *diakonein* (the infinitive form of the verb *diakoneo*) and *diakonia* to denote the practical service of those who are specially needy 'in body, or estate', and that it is highly probable that the specialized technical use of *diakonos* also has the same reference.

Alexander Strauch comments regarding Cranfield's assessment of the linguistic connection in the following:

Therefore, since an office in the church called **diakonos** is concerned with the physical needs of the people (1Tim 3:8-13), and since an official body of men was appointed to help meet (**diakoneo**) the physical needs of the poor (Acts 6:1-6), we cannot but assume there is a connection between the two groups. The inclination to associate the church officers called 'servants' (**diakonoi**) in 1 Timothy 3 with those whom the Apostles appointed to 'serve tables' (**diakoneo**) in Acts 6 is quite natural. At the very least, the similarities should not be ignored.

In the words of John MacArthur from his powerful work The Master's Plan for the Church,

Although we cannot say definitively that Acts 6 talks about (or sets a paradigm for) the church offices of elder or deacon, we can clearly see (in the life of the church) there is a need for two areas of ministry: one is teaching and praying (v.4), which involves spiritual care; the other is administration and oversight of needs (vs.1-3), which involves both spiritual and physical care.

As we asked at the beginning of this section: "Did the office of the deacon find its origins in the life of the early church from the event that occurred in Acts 6?" Or phrased differently, "Should Acts 6:1-7 serve as a paradigm for deacon ministry in the context of the local church today?" We believe the answers to these questions should be clearly yes! The church of Jesus must be taught and fed the word of

God. She is also filled with people that have a multitude of tangible needs. Both areas, teaching and caring, must be addressed with grace and wisdom. God, in his providence, has provided mature shepherds to feed his sheep His perfect word and wise servants to care for and minister His mercy to His flock.

I would like to end this particular section of our study on somewhat of a personal note. Some time ago my family and I were on vacation. We were out to dinner one evening with my in-laws at a local restaurant. Our waitress came to the table and these were her first words: "My name is (so and so), and I'll be taking care of you today!" This is the kind of religion God looks for today. Religion that cares for the needy within its midst. We cannot afford to overlook it!

This is the kind of religion God looks for today.
Religion that cares for the needy within its midst.
We cannot afford to overlook it!

Question 3: What kind of men would serve the church in this office? Or, what specific qualifications were given, that the men who would fill these offices in the later development of the church were to be measured by?

Here we will examine in some amount of detail the text of 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

1 Timothy 3:8 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 And let these 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 Let deacons 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.

Many principles guarding the selection of a Biblical eldership, serve to guide the selection of a Biblical diaconate as well. These may be seen as principles that will act as safeguards for the integrity of the entire process of selecting new leaders and subsequently allowing them to serve. Though the ministry of deacons in the New Testament church is very practical - that is to say “hands on ministry,” the selection of the men for the task is not primarily a practical, but rather a spiritual issue. A spiritual issue, that is, to which the Bible has much to say.

A **first principle** to be considered is that the selection of officers in the church should never be done in haste. A strong warning is given by the apostle Paul to young Timothy when Timothy was in a precarious situation requiring new leadership in the Ephesian assembly. The apostle instructed his young son in the faith to "not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself

Though the ministry of deacons in the New Testament church is very practical - that is to say “hands on ministry,” the selection of the men for the task is not primarily a practical, but rather a spiritual issue.

free from sin" (1Tim 5:22). Timothy was told that a hasty decision regarding the "who" of church leadership could be costly. Costly both for him and the church he was called to shepherd. Though we know that the Apostle's instruction given to Timothy in 1Tim 5:22 is directed to the selection of elders, we feel this would be a wise principle to apply during a period of testing in the selection of those who would serve in the diaconate as well. Scripture seems to support this conclusion most clearly when it states in 1Tim 3:10 that those who would serve as deacons should "first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach." The word "tested" here is in the present tense, indicating that this testing is not a single event, but rather a period of examination to be "endured" before being placed into the active service of the diaconate.

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A **second principle** guarding the process is that we must not compromise the integrity of God or His church. Only God's men are to be appointed to His work. The diaconate is a position that is guarded by Biblical criteria and standards. The Scripture has much to say about the qualifications for the one who will serve in this position. The clearest and most detailed listings of qualifications for the leadership: the eldership and the diaconate of the church, are given in 1Timothy. Timothy had been left with clear instructions regarding the appointment of leadership in the church at Ephesus: overseers and deacons. It was not to be approached casually, but carefully, following specific guidelines.

Before we examine each qualification individually, a few things

must be said about these qualifications in general. **First**, it must be noted in regard to the leadership qualifications given for deacons, that these qualifications, like those listed previously for the eldership, are absolute. What is meant here is that they are clear and well defined. They are in no way ambiguous and do not leave room for debate. Thus they should be understood to be both necessary and non-negotiable. The text in 1Tim 3:2 states clearly that if any man seeks the office of overseer, he "must" meet these certain criteria (note that "must" in v.2 grammatically should be understood in v.8 as well). The word for "must" in the Greek New Testament is a word of necessity. It leaves no room for objections and neither do these qualifications. It is important to note here that these qualifications are absolute ultimately because they have been revealed. This is not a man made list of what churches are to look for in a leader. This is the kind of character God builds into the men He has called to the task of ministering to His church. Thus, these qualifications for character are absolute.

Second, these qualifications are exhaustive. In other words, they are not open to addition or subtraction, change or alteration. We are not free to just go and make up our own list or add to the list to make it "better." (Refer back to the section on qualifications in the chapter on the rediscovering a biblical view of church leadership.)

A third point to make regarding the qualifications listed is that they are presently observable in the life of the candidate. They are objective, tangible, and testable. These qualifications listed are to be

These qualifications are exhaustive. In other words, they are not open to addition or subtraction, change or alteration.

presently observable in one who is being considered for office. This concept of examination is brought out clearly by the instructions given Timothy by Paul regarding the testing and non-hasty appointment of those in church leadership.

NAS 1Timothy 3:10 “And let **these also first be tested**; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.”

NAS 1Timothy 5:22 “Do not **lay hands upon anyone too hastily** and thus share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.”

His life and doctrine are to be examined for what they presently are; therefore, adequate time must be given for this. He is not to be examined for what he was. For by the grace of God he is no longer what he used to be. Nor are we here to examine potential. We are not examining past failures or future potential, but present realities!

Finally, these qualifications are specific. Here we must observe the lists themselves. Though not identical, the qualifications for the deacon are very similar to those of the elder and at times overlap. In order to aid better understanding, the lists can be naturally broken down into four categories:

- Moral Qualifications
- Social Qualifications
- Familial Qualifications
- Spiritual Qualifications

Overarching Qualification: Beyond Reproach

Before lining out the details of each specific qualification under the four categories it is important to note that giving direction to all the qualifications is the one overarching qualification. . .namely, that the one who seeks the office of the deacon must be "beyond reproach." The Greek word translated here as "beyond reproach" in the NASB is **anegkletos**. **Anegkletos** means "not having been called up or arraigned before a judge; hence, free from reproach, blameless, not accused for having done anything wrong" (1Tim 3:10). This is to be the final estimation of his character, "beyond reproach." George Knight III says here, that "beyond reproach," he is to be found "blameless in the moral realm if a fair appraisal judges that they have each of the listed positive qualifications and none of the listed negative traits as characteristics of their life." These qualifications list out the standard (a divine standard at that!) to which these men are to be held up to and measured. In the words of John MacArthur, "deacons must not have any blot on their lives, nothing for which they could be accused, arraigned, and disqualified." In seeking to apply this theory in practice; however, one writer gives some good advice: "God uses men before they are completely sanctified, and the church perforce must do likewise." We are not seeking perfection in those who would serve the church, else no service would ever be rendered. Even the best of our righteousness is as a filthy rag! Or as it has been said, "The best of men, are men at best!" Yet, we

are seeking men of outstanding character, standing out and above the rest of the flock that they might set an example in their service.

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A synonym of **anegkletos** is found in 1Tim 3:2, **aneplamptos**, there translated as “above reproach.” Literally this word (**aneplamptos**) means, in regard to the man under consideration, that he is not to be able to be taken hold of in any of the areas listed. According to Fritz Reinecker, noted Greek scholar, “the word implies not only that the man is of good report, but that he is deservedly so.” Morally, socially, familialy, and spiritually he is to be a man that cannot be arrested in any area of his life - he is “above reproach.” He is not perfect, but when examined closely there is nothing in his life that would disqualify him for service in the house of God. John MacArthur states that “a life without blame is the overarching requirement for leadership in the church.” He is not sinless, but his record is clear. The necessity for this among the leadership of the church has been profoundly stated by the puritan pastor of seventeenth century England, Richard Baxter:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and

A life without blame is the overarching requirement for leadership in the church.

lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours . . .one proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.

Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which

you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonour him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet condemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach his laws, and wilfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? If it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you know the judgement of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death; and yet will you do them? Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, or be drunk, or covetous, art thou such thy self? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? What! Shall the same tongue speak evil that speakest against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbite your neighbor, that cry down these and the like things in others? Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness. O brethren! It is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it.

Though Baxter's comments are aimed at pastors, the man who desires service in the diaconate of the church of God should humbly hear his warning as well!

*It is easier to chide at sin, than
to overcome it.*

Moral Qualifications

Morally, the one seeking office is to be above reproach in several areas of life. For the purposes of our study we will seek with each qualification to give the Greek transliteration of the word (or phrase), the corresponding literal definition/translation of the term (or phrase), and the significance of the qualification. The moral qualifications listed and examined here are derived from 1 Timothy 3:8.

Deacons, says the Scripture, when considering their moral life, are to be men of dignity. The Greek here for "dignity" is **semnos**. **Semnos** is used in the Scripture in regard to persons, to designate "that which in a human being calls forth veneration and respect from others." It is something in the character of a man that shows him before others to be "honorable, of good character, worthy of respect." It is further used to refer to things that are "worthy, honorable, noble" as in Philippians 4:8. There the Apostle Paul writes and urges the church in Philippi, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Here, it is those things which are "honorable" that are to fill and capture the attention of their minds. Used here in 1Tim 3:8 in regard to the deacon, it speaks to the man's character or moral foundation. Fritz Reinecker, a well respected Greek

scholar states that “It describes the characteristic of the man who carries himself with the perfect blend of dignity and courtesy, independence and humility to his fellow men.” This is seen in the character of the men selected to minister to the widows in Acts 6 by stating that they were to be found “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (See Acts 6:1-6). This characteristic of dignity can also be seen in the positive qualities listed of the overseer in 1Tim 3:2. John Mac Arthur sums up the force of this characteristic by stating that “a deacon must not be a silly, flippant person, one who makes light of serious matters. Although not a cold, joyless person, a deacon” is to be one who “understands the seriousness of life.”

A second moral characteristic or qualification to be found in those filling the office of the diaconate is that they are not to be “double tongued.” The wording used by Paul here in the original language is that he is not to be **dilogos**. This means he is not to be found “saying the same thing twice; hence, of speaking one thing and meaning another hypocritical, insincere, (or) deceitful.” The word has a broad diversity of meaning. Fritz Reinecker states that “the word could mean ‘talebearer,’ suggesting the idea of gossip, or it could be ‘consistent in what one says,’ i.e., ‘not saying one thing while thinking another,’ or ‘not saying one thing to one man and a different thing to the next’.” At any rate, the one who is double tongued, clearly lacks integrity in his speech.

A deacon must not be a silly, flippant person, one who makes light of serious matters. Although not a cold, joyless person, a deacon is to be one who understands the seriousness of life.

Thus, one who is **dialogos**, cannot be trusted and forfeits the privilege of serving the church of Christ as a deacon.

Thirdly, a deacon is not to be “addicted to much wine.” Here the Greek for “addicted” is **prosecho**. When actively translated it is seen as “turning or holding one's mind to someone or something.” It is used in a variety of ways in various settings. In Acts 8:10 it is used of people giving heed to or paying attention to the magical/demonic works of Simon, and in Acts 8:6 of “the multitudes with one accord. . . giving attention to” the proclamation of the gospel by Philip. In a similar vein, it is used in 1Timothy 4:13 of giving attention to the reading, exhortation, and teaching of the word of God in the public worship/assembly of the church. It further means to hold to or cling to something, as in Paul’s admonition to Timothy to be alert to/aware of those who hold to, cling to, and occupy themselves with unsound doctrine (cf. 1Tim 1:4 and 4:1).

The word as used here, in 1Timothy 3, refers to one who holds drink before them in the sense that it has their full attention. The question is not “Does he have the drink?,” but rather “Does the drink have him?” Notice the very significant distinction. In the first question the individual is in control of the situation. In the second, the substance controls the individual. This is brought out by the emphasis in the phrase “not . . . addicted to much wine,” being placed on the word “much.” Thus, it is not as if he cannot drink, but that he absolutely cannot partake in “much” drink.

This is seen more clearly by examining a similar admonition given or qualification listed for the overseer in 1Tim 3:3. It is stated first and foremost that he is “not (to be) addicted to wine” (addicted = **paroinon**). They are to not be “given to drink, not to sit alongside wine.” The characteristic to examine here is not, “Does he drink?” But rather,

“Is he a drunkard?” Is alcohol (here wine) a controlling substance in his life? The word literally means: “to sit alongside wine.” The Proverbs state vividly that wine leads one down a path of destruction when it is lingered over.

NAS Proverbs 23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? 30 Those who linger long over wine, those who go to taste mixed wine. 31 Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; 32 at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. 33 Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. 34 And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. 35 "They struck me, but I did not become ill; they beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.

Leadership must be in a constant state of readiness for action and decision making. Too much drink dulls one’s ability to lead effectively in a manner that honors the Lord, the Chief Shepherd (cf. Acts 6:5, Eph 5:18).

Leadership must be in a constant state of readiness for action and decision making. Too much drink dulls one’s ability to lead effectively in a manner that honors the Lord, the Chief Shepherd.

A fourth, and final, moral qualification is that he, the one holding the office of the deacon, must not be “fond of sordid gain.” The Greek word here is **aiscrokerdes**, which means “covetous of, eager for dishonest gain, greedy in a shameful way.” The central characteristic that

is under consideration here is greed! Like the overseer, the deacon is to be “free from the love of money” (**aphilarguron** = literally - “not a lover of money” as used in 1Tim 3:3). Men ruined by and disqualified for service from a wrong attitude toward and lust for financial gain have been around since the days the Scriptures were written. In 1Timothy 6:3-10 Paul relates the temptations of money and how it can destroy the one in the ministry.

NAS 1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. 6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

A man, who is in the diaconate for financial gain, is in it for the wrong reasons. Money cannot provide his motivation for service or he will find himself caught in the snares of temptation, ruined and

destroyed. More reasons will be seen for the necessity of this qualification in our study of Acts 6 where we will discover the financial aspects to the work of the diaconate.

Social Qualifications

Not only must a man in the diaconate be qualified morally, he must meet and fulfill certain social qualifications as well. A deacon does not perform his ministry in a closed closet or box, he must interact with those whom he is called out to minister to, and he must have the reputation that allows him to fulfill his duty well. The Scripture says that he must be a man of “good reputation.” This characteristic (unlike the others taken strictly from 1Tim 3) is taken from Acts 6:3, where Luke records for us an event in the life of the early church. There we find the Twelve Apostles urging the congregation to “select from among (themselves), . . . seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”

The Greek here for “reputation” is **martureo**. Used here passively it means that he is to, by the evaluation of others, “receive a good report, be well spoken of, be approved, have a good reputation.” The overseer in 1Timothy 3:7 is also to have a good reputation, but the focus, in regard to the overseer, is the reputation he is to have with those outside the church - unbelievers (See previous chapter under qualifications for elders for more on this point). The focus of the deacon’s reputation is in regard to those whom he will serve. He is to have a good reputation with those in the church - his realm of service.

Familial Qualifications

The deacon, like the overseer, is to be found qualified by an evaluation of his home life. He must be found “beyond reproach” in his marriage to his wife (if he has one) and in the fatherhood of his children (supposing he has them as well).

First, in relation to his home, the Scripture states he is to be the “husband of one wife.” The Greek for this phrase is transliterated as follows: **mias gunaikos andres**. Lining this transliteration out a little more clearly with a corresponding literal translation may look like this:

mias (one) **gunaikos** (woman/wife) **andres** (man/husband)

Positively the Scripture says that the deacon, like the overseer, is to be the "husband of one wife" (**mias gunaikos andra**) or, strictly speaking, a "one woman man." The significance of this qualification can be viewed both negatively: examining what the statement is not saying, and positively: seeking to discover just what is being asked for. Negatively, this qualification is not concerned with marital status. The translation given in most Bibles is misleading at best, outright wrong at worst! The literal translation of the Greek is, "one woman man." The issue is not current marital status, previous marital status, or divorce record. Paul is not saying, "he can only serve if he is married" thus disqualifying himself and the Lord Jesus for that matter! He is not saying, "he can't serve if he's been divorced." The Bible clearly states that there are Biblical allowances for divorce which allow for remarriage and freedom of conscience toward God (cf. Matt 5:31-32 and 1Cor 7:8-16). The Apostle Paul actually goes so far as to say in 1Cor 7 that singleness

frees one for, rather than restricts him from, greater opportunities of service (cf. 1Cor 7:25-35). Marriage is not the issue, character is. It should be noted further at this point that all the qualifications (this one included) are present, observable characteristics. Paul is not “skeleton” hunting. Wanting to drag out old sins from the closet of one’s past. The question is not “What kind of man was he?” But rather, the question being asked is, “What kind of man is he!?” Or, to phrase this differently, “What kind of a man has God made him to be!?”

Furthermore, Paul is not looking for men who are married to only one woman. Polygamy would not have been acceptable in the church for any man to engage in! Therefore, to single this out as a qualification for a deacon would be superfluous. Rather, he is seeking here, men, who if married, are devoted to only one woman, namely their wife! In other words, it is a one woman "kind" of man the apostle seeks. Many men are married, but their heart is not at home! This kind of man is unfit for the ministry, having shown that he is unwilling to fulfill his vow to God regarding his wife. Sexual purity and devotion to ones spouse (if present) is being sought for. If there is no wife, he still must be a one woman "kind" of man. Many temptations and struggles will face a man in the ministry. A sound marriage and/or character are imperative (See also Appendix 3: The Women of 1Tim 3:11).

Many men are married, but their heart is not at home! This kind of man is unfit for the ministry, having shown that he is unwilling to fulfill his vow to God regarding his wife.

Secondly, the deacon is to be a “good manager of his children and household.” The Greek here translated in the NAS “manager” is the Greek word **prohistemi**.

It means in the reflexive sense to “to put oneself (responsibly) at the head, lead, direct, rule” as in 1Tim 5:17. Actively it means to provide “protective leadership, care for, help, or give aid” as in 1Thes 5:12.

The deacon here is to be found to be a “good manager of his household” (manage = **prohistamenon**). The word means “to stand before, (or) to rule over.” Two ideas are embodied in this qualification. First, the man seeking office must understand his role as manager/head of his household. His role as head of his wife must be understood (cf. 2Cor 11:1-3). Yet managing (Lit. “to be set or placed before”) his family as its leader is not enough. Secondly, the text says his performance in this task, having been examined, must be found to be “good.” His home is a model of godly leadership and virtue, setting himself up as an example to every man in the community of faith, lending credibility to his position in the church. In the words of George Knight III, “the home is the proving ground of fidelity for all officers.”

*The home is the
proving ground of
fidelity for all officers.*

Spiritual Qualifications

The man who seeks to hold office in the diaconate must not only be morally, socially, and familiarly qualified, he must be qualified spiritually as well. Spiritually speaking, in regard to the word of God and his life he is to hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1Tim 3:9). The Greek phrase here is “**echontas to mysterion tes pistos en kathara suneidesei.**” The two words, mystery and conscience, serve as keys to understanding this phrase.

The first of these two keys is the word mystery: **mysterion**. It

has been noted that “in the cults of the Graeco-Roman world,” this is “a religious secret confided only to the initiated.” Similarly, in the New Testament, which we are most concerned with here, a mystery is “ what can be known only through revelation mediated from God.” A mystery is something in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, and particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul, that has been revealed. A mystery to the Apostle, was something that had been unknown to men, but by God’s grace, it had been revealed. He states this in Ephesians 3 when he writes. . . “that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery” (Eph 3:3). Paul clearly demonstrates that this mystery is the gospel: the good news contained in the Scriptures that the church is to carry and proclaim about Christ. This mysterious, hidden nature of the gospel, which had been revealed to the Apostle Paul, is highlighted in the following texts:

NAS Romans 16:25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery** which has been kept secret for long ages past.

NAS Galatians 1:11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it **through a revelation of Jesus Christ.**

NAS Ephesians 3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is **the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God,** who created all

things.

NAS Ephesians 6:19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness **the mystery of the gospel.**

NAS Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out **the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations;** but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Here, in 1Timothy 3, the concept of “mystery” is applied to “the faith.” “The faith,” is that body of Christian teaching that has been given to the church and contained in the Holy Scriptures alone (cf. Jude 3-4). [For a full study on this issue of “the faith,” the reader is referred to the chapter in this work on confessionalism where the subject is treated in full measure.] It is this “mystery of the faith,” the revealed body of Christian doctrines contained in the Scripture, that the one candidating for the office of the deacon was to hold and to keep with a clear conscience (**suneidesis**). This conscience is “the faculty of moral consciousness or awareness by which moral judgments relating to right and wrong are made.” In other words, his life is to match what his

mouth says he believes.

Thus, in order to “hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” he must continually keep and faithfully hold to the truths of the word of God in both principle and practice, so that his conscience (the inner life before God), and his habits (his outer life before man), are in agreement. He must, in the words of George Knight III, seek “to live according to the ethical demands of the revealed faith that he holds fast.” This requires a faithfulness in both heart and hand. Homer Kent has said that, “the great truths of the faith are not to be held as theological abstractions, but are to be properly employed in daily life. To hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience is so to live in the light of Christian truth that the enlightened conscience will have no cause to condemn. A pure conscience indicates a pure life.” Like Timothy, he must “pay close attention to (himself) and to (his) teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1Tim 4:16). He must be careful to live his life in accordance with the doctrine, this will have a preserving effect on both himself and those he is called to serve. A good and wise note to conclude our examination of the deacon’s qualifications, are the words of George Knight III, who has aptly observed in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, that “without the life the profession is empty.” And to that we say, Amen.

In order to “hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience,” he must continually keep and faithfully hold to the truths of the word of God in both principle and practice, so that his conscience (the inner life before God), and his habits (his outer life before man), are in agreement.

Question 4: How should these men be selected and placed in service within the context of the local church?

To answer this question we do not present so much an exposition of a text of Scripture, but rather a process that we believe has the wisdom of the Scripture within it. No specific plan or procedure is laid out for us, the church, in the Bible dictating to us just how the installation of men to the diaconate is to occur. The fact that it is to occur is not questioned, what is questioned is “How?” We would present the following steps as a procedure for your consideration that we practice in our fellowship:

Step 1: Establishment of a Biblical Eldership

This may sound like a strange first step for the establishment of a diaconate in the local church, but we believe it to be the starting point. Without a Biblical eldership in place, a diaconate will lack direction and accountability. Lacking these things, the diaconate will gravitate away from their primary area of responsibility (the meeting of tangible needs through expressions of mercy within the community), to areas where they should not be (oversight of the congregation which is the role and duty of the church’s pastors), rightly sensing a lack of leadership.

Step 2: Recognition of the Biblical Necessity of a Diaconate

Those who oversee the teaching of the word of God in the congregation must communicate to those in their care, the teachings found in the Scripture regarding the necessity of this

office for the greater health of the fellowship. Without a Biblical conviction and understanding of the necessity and nature of the diaconate, the congregation will not understand the movement of the leadership to establish this ministry. The teachers within a congregation must always root their movements in the word of God before the eyes of their people.

Step 3: The Selection of Men

Men must be selected from the congregation for service. Exactly how this is to be done is somewhat flexible. Our practice at Faith Community has been to lay before the congregation the teaching of Scripture regarding the issue of the diaconate. We then mail out ballots to the congregation for them to nominate together as families (family ballots), men they believe to be qualified to serve the church in this capacity. These names of men are then received and reviewed by the elders of our church. Following this review, those men approved by the elders are subsequently approached in accordance with the will of the church, and are asked to prayerfully consider serving the church in this capacity. Following their consent, the elders of the church place these men in a “deacon candidate training class” for a period of at least 6 months. The purpose of this class is to lay a common understanding between these men and the eldership as to the nature of the diaconate, as well as ground them further in the word of God. At the close of this class (which also serves as a period of testing - See 1Tim 3:10) they are presented to the congregation for public examination.

Step 4: Testing/Examination

As mentioned, following their training period, these men should be placed before the congregation for examination/testing regarding their fitness for service of the church in this way. We would refer the reader back to the section on qualifications for more information on this matter.

Step 5: Installation

If found “beyond reproach” these men are to be allowed to serve the church of Jesus Christ as deacons, official servants of the church. We, here at Faith Community, follow the pattern of the early church when the Apostles installed the seven by prayer and the laying on of hands. Thus, these men will be placed into service visibly, before the community they are being set apart to serve.

Conclusion

These men are true “Servants of the Church.” Not a group of dictators, not a body of men that care for the building we often mistake for the church, or a lowly stack of doormats, that do everything none of the rest of us want to do. No, the “Servants of the Church” are an officially appointed and qualified body of men called by God to serve/minister to His church. They are to be ministers of mercy, meeting the tangible, genuine needs of the flock of God. By fulfilling their ministry they bring honor to God, aid to the body of Christ, and assistance to the overseers of the church by freeing them to devote

themselves, like the apostles before them, to the ministry of the word, and to prayer for the people of God. And this we will do, longing to see the move of the mighty hand of God again sweep over His church, that “the word of God (might keep) on spreading; and the number of the disciples (continue) to increase greatly and a great many becoming obedient to the faith.” May God be pleased to make it so!

By fulfilling their ministry they bring honor to God, aid to the body of Christ, and assistance to the overseers of the church by freeing them to devote themselves, like the apostles before them, to the ministry of the word, and to prayer for the people of God.



They Were Added To Their Number

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Membership

The Biblical idea or concept of church membership has fallen into disrepute in recent years. The idea of being a “member” of something larger than oneself is a difficult concept to communicate with understanding to a culture in which there is in one’s own reality nothing bigger than self! However, the Biblical teaching regarding church membership cannot be disregarded no matter what the current of the culture. Though George Barna may believe “**the audience, not the message is sovereign**” as he states in his book which

bears of all titles, Marketing the Church, we must maintain the converse, **“the message, not the audience, is sovereign.”**

So in a culture consumed with the self and its desires, people today are much more comfortable being **attenders** and not **members**. If we listen to Barna and his bunch, we should become comfortable with this too, for this is just the way it is. One article I read recently told of a woman who visited a church where she was allowed to just "come" for years with no pressure or even significant invitation to "join" whatsoever. Barna and the gang may be all right with this idea, since the audience is sovereign anyway, but I wonder how comfortable God is. In this I believe the church has succumbed to a cultural reversal. God is not content with a “come as you are, stay as you are, just hang out” mentality. He beckons sinners to come, repent, join!

The idea of being a “member” of something larger than oneself is a difficult concept to communicate with understanding to a culture in which there is in one’s own reality nothing bigger than self!

The Church Has Succumbed to a Cultural Reversal.

In order to understand why the concept of membership is so important, one must gain an appreciation for the nature of the church itself. The nature or essence of the church is that it is the **ekklesia**: the body of called out ones. The church is made up of those who as the apostle Peter has written:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies

of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1Pet 2:9-10).

These who have been called as it were out of an existence in darkness (sin and error) and into the marvelous light of God's holiness (righteousness and truth), have been brought together into the life of His son Jesus and made into a body: a race-priesthood-people of mercy! They have been placed into what theologians have called the "invisible" church. This "invisible" church, consisting of all the redeemed of all the ages, the number and contents of which are known only to God, is seen in somewhat of a "mirror" image in what theologians have termed the "visible" church. All those who name the name of Christ and have assembled themselves in visible bodies around the world make up this visible church. **In other words all the visible churches make up the visible church.**

The visible church is a tangible expression of the invisible church and is to show or embody the same characteristics as its spiritual counterpart. The two were so closely connected in the history of the church that to be a member of one was to be a member of the other. To not be a member of the visible and claim participation in the invisible was confusing at best and heretical at worst!

The problem comes in when one begins to examine the health and wholeness of the visible church when compared with the invisible church

It has been said that the problem with the church is that she looks like the world. In reality, the problem may be, that the church is the world!

which she is intended to mirror. Only those God has redeemed are granted entrance and placed into the invisible body of Christ. In theory, only those who are truly redeemed are to be allowed in the visible church as well, but all too often this is not the case. We do not intend to sound as if we have the perfect solution to the problem. But the problem has become so widespread, that the problem must be addressed. It has been said that the problem with the church is that she looks like the world. In reality the problem may be that the church is the world! Requirements and standards for members and membership within the local visible church have become so lax that practically anybody and everybody can say they belong! The local Lions or Kiwanis clubs may and many times do have stricter standards for belonging! In trying to help the problem several things must be considered. We would present the following three:

-
1. What are the scriptural qualifications for membership?
 2. What are the requirements Scripture makes of members?
 3. What are the blessings of those who are members of the church?
-

Scriptural Qualifications for Membership

The first issue that needs to be considered is the scriptural qualifications for membership. When someone seeks visible affiliation with a local church, what standards ought to be demanded? We will try as much as is possible in this section to allow Scripture to speak for itself.

Qualification 1: Committed to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord

Those who had come to Christ and were placed in the invisible

church by union with Him through His Spirit (cf. Rom 8:9-17), were moved together by that same Spirit to form visible bodies called churches. We know of their existence through the writings of the New Testament. The letters of the New Testament, commonly called epistles, were written to believers that made up local churches. Hear the witness of Scripture at this point:

NAS Romans 1:7 To **all who are beloved of God** in Rome, called as **saints**: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NAS 1Corinthians 1:2 To **the church of God** which is at Corinth, to **those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints** by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

NAS 2Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to **the church of God** which is at Corinth with all the **saints** who are throughout Achaia.

NAS Galatians 1:1 Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all **the brethren** who are with me, to **the churches of Galatia**: 3 grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to Whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

NAS Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the **saints** who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

NAS Philippians 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the **saints** in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.

NAS Colossians 1:2 To **the saints and faithful brethren** in Christ who are at Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father.

NAS 1Thessalonians 1:1 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. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.

NAS 2Thessalonians 1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to **the church** of the THESSALONIANS in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, **brethren**, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.

NAS James 1:1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord

Jesus Christ, to **the twelve tribes** who are dispersed abroad, greetings. ² Consider it all joy, **my brethren**, when you encounter various trials.

NAS 1Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to **those who reside as aliens**, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are **chosen** ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

NAS 2Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to **those who have received a faith** of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

NAS Jude 1:1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to **those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ**.

Thus we see very clearly that believers, called saints, beloved of God, the church of God, brethren, and various other designations, came together to form local assemblies. These assemblies were called churches, and the only people identified as belonging, were believers! This moves us to a second qualification for membership. Not only must one have committed their life to Christ, they must visibly profess this by being baptized.

These assemblies were called churches, and the only people identified as belonging, were believers!

Qualification 2: Publically Baptized as a Believer by Immersion

Baptism follows commitment to Christ, but precedes inclusion in a local assembly. At the bottom level, baptism is an issue of obedience. To claim to hold a desire to identify with the body, and not receive the initial rite of identification with the Lord of the body, confuses at best, and at worst, invalidates one's claim of desire.

NAS Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and **make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them** in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

NAS Acts 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ- this Jesus whom you crucified." 37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "brethren, what shall we do?" 38 And Peter said to them, "repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, **those who had received his word were baptized;** and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Physical baptism demonstrates visibly an inner reality.

NAS Romans 6:3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? 4 therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

Qualification 3: Presenting Verification of Good Standing with a Prior Congregation

This was practiced as a precautionary measure for the church and the one seeking affiliation/membership. If someone is coming from another congregation it is essential to know for the protection of the church in which one is seeking membership just what one's standing has been with their prior church. If the reason one left one church and is seeking membership in another is because church discipline had been enacted on the person for a grievous sin, the church in which new membership is being sought needs to know this in order to examine the situation. Furthermore, the church one is leaving needs to know by this "transfer of letter" that they are no longer responsible for this sheep which has come under the shepherding care of other leadership (more will be said of this under the blessings of church membership). Here are some passages where the New Testament addresses the issue of letters of good standing passed from one fellowship to another.

NAS Acts 18:27 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 helped greatly those who had believed through grace.

NAS 2Corinthians 3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?

Not only does the New Testament show this to be a common practice, it even goes so far as to include a few examples of the practice. In the first example, Phoebe, a servant (Lit. a deacon) in the church of Cenchrea is commended to the church in Rome.

NAS Romans 16:1 **I commend to you our sister Phoebe**, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

Another example is found in the book of Philippians where Timothy and Epaphroditus (who probably carried the letter for Paul to the church in Philippi) are commended to the church by way of a letter within a letter.

NAS Philippians 2:19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 **For I have no one else of kindred spirit** who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

22 But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his Father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly. **25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus**, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. **28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly** in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Qualification 4: Fully Understanding of the Requirements of Members

This concept of fully understanding the requirement of a member leads us to what one might call the "fine print" of the issue. Once one becomes a member, what will be required of them? In other words, what are the things that in order for one to remain a member, one must continue to do? In order to maintain the integrity of the body

What are the things that in order for one to remain a member, one must continue to do?

these issues should be discussed openly and honestly and agreed upon, prior to membership in the local assembly.

Requirements of Members

As members of a local church body, it is required of us that several characteristics and habits be manifest in our lives. We are called in Scripture, as members of the church to be confessing, serving, submitting, and assembling. We do not present this as an exhaustive list. In other words membership may require more than, but certainly no less than these four things. If at any time one or more of these cease, one's membership is called into question. For the church to maintain a pure and bright witness to the world for her Lord, these things must be present. When they are not, one must question the commitment one has in regard to the body of Christ, the visible manifestation of His invisible church.

The first requirement of members is that they be confessing. As a member of a local church it is necessary that one maintain his **confession of Christ and of sin**. These are two prevailing characteristics, given clearly in Scripture of a Christian. To abandon one's confession of Christ or of sin is to apostatize the faith and prove oneself to be a pseudo (false) believer. Regarding one's confession of Christ, the Scripture puts forth a true believer as one who confesses Christ's deity/humanity as well as His Lordship. The Apostle John wrote this in regard to one's confession of Christ's deity and humanity:

NAS 1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not

confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. 4 You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

The apostle Paul had these words to say regarding the Christian's confession of Christ's Lordship. . . "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom 10:9-10). This is not just a one time, at the altar confession of Christ as Lord that is being called for here. It is a confession that encompasses all of life itself. If one abandons their confession of Christ as the God-man who is Lord of all, membership must be addressed. Just to make this more visual, imagine one denying Christ yet claiming membership in His church? This cannot be allowed!

This is not just a one time, at the altar confession of Christ as Lord that is being called for here. It is a confession that encompasses all of life itself.

The other issue that must be confessed is personal sin. John further wrote in his first epistle that

NAS 1 John 1:6 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. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess

our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

If sin proves itself to be the master of our lives how can we claim to have fellowship with Him? Much more, how can we expect to still claim a place among those who confess His name? This cannot be! The unrepentant sinner who claims fellowship with the body must be dismissed from the community. This is for his benefit and the benefit of the body itself.

Another area of requirement in regard to membership is that of service. The church is not just a place to come and enjoy the air conditioning or a soft seat. It is a place to serve the great king. A person who wants to come and has no notions of serving the body of Christ is a person who is not ready to come. Peter said that:

A church that fails at service, fails at bringing glory to God. This is to fail at man's chief purpose and highest goal: to bring glory to his God!

as each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to Whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1Pet 4:10-11).

It is for the church to equip her members for the

work of service. Notice here the words of Peter. Peter speaks of gifts in regard to their **distribution, employment, stewardship, and purpose**. They have been **distributed** to every believer and are to be used (**employed** in service) as if they were a "**stewardship**" from God (on loan) for the great **purpose** of bringing God glory in the church. Imagine a church full of people who sit on their gifts like they sit on the pew. This may not be too hard to imagine - it may be by a church you know or have been a part of in the past. This should not, cannot be allowed. A church that fails at service, fails at bringing glory to God. This is to fail at man's chief purpose and highest goal: to bring glory to his God!

A third requirement of members is submission to the authority of the leadership of the church. Concepts of authority and submission do not go over well in today's society or in today's church. The writer of the book of Hebrews states clearly that churches that have problems regarding submission to leadership fail to profit. "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17). The word unprofitable means harmful. Congregations which endure unruly members, in the long run, do themselves great harm.

A fourth and final area in which members have a requirement is in regard to the assembling of the body. The writer of the book of Hebrews encouraged the believers to whom he wrote in this regard saying, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own

Churches that have problems regarding submission to leadership fail to profit!

assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:24-25). The sin of forsaking the assembly, treating the gathering of the body with apathy or neglect, cannot go unchecked in the life of the professing believer. To forsake the assembly literally means "to leave in a lurch." As believers we have made commitments to one another, and to leave one another "hanging" is unconscionable. How can one stimulate others to love and good deeds and so encourage them when they are never there or are there sporadically and so treat the body as if it had little consequence in their lives?

Nine Blessings of Members

Coming to the church, meeting the qualifications for membership and fully understanding the requirements of a member entitles one who presses on into membership to certain blessings. These are blessings which the one who simply attends may experience in the overflow, but not in the stream of faith itself. Many of these have been touched on previously in our study so here they will simply be listed with their supporting Scriptures. For additional comments the reader is referred back to the section in the book which elaborates more fully on each particular item. As a member one is now provided with:

1. Pastoral Care

NAS 1 Peter 5:1 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; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

NAS Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

NAS Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

2. Protection

NAS Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own

blood. 29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified

NAS 1Timothy 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

NAS Titus 1:9 Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

3. Teaching

NAS 1Thessalonians 5:12 But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

NAS 1Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

NAS 1 Timothy 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

NAS 2 Timothy 4:1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

NAS Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.

4. Fellowship

As a fellowship, Scripture commands us to do certain things together (positive commands), as well as to avoid doing certain things to one another (negative commands).

Positive Commands

*Scripture Commands Us to _____ One Another:

Be Devoted To - NAS Romans 12:10a Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Give Preference To - NAS Romans 12:10b Give preference to one another in honor.

Be of the Same Mind As - NAS Romans 12:16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
[See also: Rom 15:15]

Love - NAS Romans 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.
[See also: 1Thes 3:12, 4:9, 2Thes 1:3, 1Pet 1:22, 4:8, 1Joh 3:11,23, 4:7,11,12, 2Joh 5]

Be At Peace With - NAS 1Thessalonians 5:13 Live in peace with one another.

Build Up - NAS Romans 14:19 So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Accept - NAS Romans 15:7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

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

Greet/Welcome - NAS Romans 16:16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

[See also: 2Cor 16:20, 2Cor 13:12, 1Pet 5:14]

Wait For - NAS 1Corinthians 11:33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

Care For - NAS 1Corinthians 12:25 So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Serve - NAS Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Tolerate/Put Up With - NAS Ephesians 4:2 With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.

[See also: Col 3:13]

Speak the Truth To - NAS Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

Be Kind To - NAS Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Be Tender Hearted To - NAS Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

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Forgive - NAS Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Have Spiritual Conversations With - NAS Ephesians 5:19 Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.

Be Subject To - NAS Ephesians 5:21 And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Regard As More Important - NAS Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.

Teach - NAS Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching...one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Comfort - NAS 1Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Encourage - NAS 1Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. [See also: Heb 3:13, 10:25]

Be Good To - NAS 1Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good

for one another and for all people.

Stimulate to Love and Good Deeds - NAS Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

Confess Your Sins To - NAS James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another.

Pray For - NAS James 5:16 Therefore...pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Show Hospitality To - NAS 1Peter 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

Be Humble Toward - NAS 1Peter 5:5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Negative Commands

*Scripture Commands Us Not to _____ One Another:

Judge - NAS Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this ~ not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Sue - NAS 1Corinthians 6:7 Actually, then, it is already a defeat

for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

Divide From - NAS 1 Corinthians 12:25 So that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Bite/Devour/Consume - NAS Galatians 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Challenge - NAS Galatians 5:26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another.”

Envy - NAS Galatians 5:26 Let us not become boastful...envying one another.

Lie To - NAS Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

[See also: Col 3:9]

Speak Against - NAS James 4:11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

Complain With - NAS James 5:9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged;

behold, the judge is standing right at the door.

5. Accountability

NAS Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.

NAS James 5:19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

NAS Jude 1:20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting.

6. Counsel

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

NAS Acts 20:31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to

admonish each one with tears.

7. Financial Assistance

NAS Acts 2:44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

NAS Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.

NAS Galatians 6:6 And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the

household of the faith.

NAS 2 Corinthians 8:13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality~ 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; 15 as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK."

NAS 2 Corinthians 9:6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. 7 Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ABIDES FOREVER." 10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; 11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. 13 Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, 14 while they also, by prayer on

your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. 15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

8. A Place of Service

NAS Romans 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 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. 6 And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

NAS 1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

9. Discipline

NAS Matthew 18:15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

NAS 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

NAS 2 THESSALONIANS 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.

NAS 1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his

Father's wife. 2 And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler- not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

NAS 2 Corinthians 2:5 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree- in order not to

say too much~ to all of you. 6 Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, 7 so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 10 But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

NAS 1 Timothy 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight.

NAS Titus 3:10 Reject a factious man after a first and second warning.



A Little Leaven

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Discipline

In the previous section, listing discipline - biblically confronting sin in one another's lives - as a blessing may sound a little foreign if not just outright

rude to many in the church today. The fact is, the attitude toward dealing with sin in the body of Christ today is deplorable. Declaring boldly in the church that sin is to be confronted is something seldom if ever seen in its

The fact is, the attitude toward dealing with sin in the body of Christ today is deplorable. Declaring boldly today in the church that sin is to be confronted is something seldom if ever seen in its Biblical form.

Biblical form. However, to be Biblical, sin must be confronted! In this section I would like to address several aspects regarding discipline in the church, or rather, confronting sin in the body. To understand the discipline required in the church we will examine three areas. **First**, the priority of confronting sin. Here we must answer the question, "Is it really necessary to deal with sin in the church?" **Second**, we must examine the posture of confronting sin. Here we must look at the Biblical instructions on just how sin is to be confronted. What attitude do I need to have in the whole process? **Last**, we must look at the process of confronting sin in the fellowship. Here we will spend time examining the Biblical instruction of Matthew 18:15-20.

First, let's examine the priority of confronting sin or the necessity of dealing with it in the life of the body. Question: Is it really necessary to confront sin within the church? Answer: (Simply put) Yes! Although an affirmative answer may make perfect sense to many of you reading this book, this affirmation is not shared by the church as a whole today. Recently, there has developed a tendency in the church today to not confront sin at all! This attitude is typified by the statement made by one pastor who said that he preferred to "allow people to grow out of their sinful lifestyles as they become more involved in the church!" This attitude is what he apparently dubs as a "non-confrontation policy!"

Although this non-confrontational approach may become (and is becoming) a dominating trend within the church, it must not remain unchallenged. We must put forth the opposite, that the confrontation of sin is crucial to the well being and health of the church. At least five arguments or rationales can be put forth in defense of this "affirmative"

or confrontational position:

1. Sin is an affront to the holiness of God.

NAS Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

2. Sin is something we are commanded not to tolerate.

NAS 1Corinthians 5:13 But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

3. Sin infects the whole community.

NAS 1Corinthians 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*?

4. Sin is "lawlessness."

NAS 1John 3:4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

5. Sin is by nature progressive.

NAS Psalm 1:1 How blessed is the man who does not **walk** in the counsel of the wicked, nor **stand** in the path of sinners, nor **sit** in the seat of scoffers!

Having examined the above list, the reasons it is necessary to confront sin within the body by this point should be obvious, but how should it be confronted? We live in a time (and the church has always struggled with this) that swings between two extremes in confronting sin. On one hand is the group within the church that is overtly passive. On the other is the militant "take no prisoners" approach. How can we find balance? Just what posture or attitude are we to have in the church in regard to confronting sin and sinners? In answering this question the Scripture gives much guidance. Several attitudes should

characterize our approach. Allow me to suggest a few.

This first quality that should characterize the church in confronting sin within her midst is fearlessness. We must confront and deal with the sin and the sinner fearlessly.

NAS Ezekiel 2:3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 "And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' 5 "As for them, whether they listen or not~ for they are a rebellious house~ they will know that a prophet has been among them. 6 "And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house. 7 "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.

Jesus Himself said in Matt 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." A proper fear of God should move us to confront the sin that is infecting His body. We must have a greater fear of the Creator than of the creature.

Second we must confront sin with an attitude or posture of authority.

A proper fear of God should move us to confront the sin that is infecting His body. We must have a greater fear of the Creator than of the creature.

We must not shy away from the confrontation of wickedness that is corrupting the body of Christ. When sin was creeping into the fellowship for which Titus was responsible, Paul told him that he was to “speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Tit 2:15). This is essential for the church to grasp. In a world where tolerance rules and a church that prefers the back door approach to confrontation, sin must be tackled head on! The word for "disregard" in this passage means to “think around.” Titus, as well as the church today, was not to allow any to get around the commands of God. When it came to sin, intolerance, not its antithesis was to be his stance. It can be no less ours.

A third attitude that must characterize our stance against sin must be impartiality. Being impartial, or not showing favor for one over the other goes against our natural sinful tendencies. Yet having a God that does not show favoritism, tells us we too must be impartial. This is especially true in regard to sin. An example of this is found in 1Tim 5:21 which we have already seen in our study. Here Paul reminds young Timothy in the face of a perverted eldership, that he would have to rebuke some for their sin. Furthermore, he was to carry out this responsibility mindful of the sobering reality that he had been charged with this duty "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels" and that he was to "maintain these principles without bias" and do "nothing in a spirit of partiality."

Sin must further be confronted in the church carefully. In the process of confronting sin there is no place for arrogance or carelessness. The "it could never happen to me" attitude must never be found in the one who goes to his brother. In Galatians 6:1-2 the apostle

Paul reminds the Galatians that "if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." Paul reminds us here that primary in our reason for approaching our brother who is in sin is to be an attitude of care for the sinner. We are seeking to restore our sinning brother. Out of love, we offer our rebuke in order to move him to repentance and restoration. As the proverb says, "better is open rebuke than love that is concealed" (Pro 27:5). Furthermore, we must not only have care for our brother when we go, we must also have care for the self in mind lest we too fall into temptation.

Another attitude we need is that of patience. In 2Timothy 4:2 the apostle Paul instructed Timothy to "preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Note that Timothy's "means" (the preaching of the word) to accomplish the desired "end" (reproving, rebuking, and exhorting) here was not his own personal opinion but the eternal word of God he was called to preach. Here it is shown that a primary function of the word of God is to offer reproof. In 2Timothy 3:16, one of the most definitive of all passages of Scripture dealing with the purpose of Scripture, states that "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." Yet in this reproof or rebuke of error Timothy (and we as well) was to have an attitude of patience. Paul instructed Timothy to have this attitude in dealing with false teachers that were in positions of leadership in the church. In 2Timothy 2:24-26 we read:

24 And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but

be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

In order to maintain this patient spirit when confronting sin we must realize two things about the situation the sinner is in. The first is that repentance is not the work of man, but a sovereign work of God in the heart. Apart from the act of God, man cannot repent in and of himself. In Acts 11:18 we read of the Jews when they realized even the Gentiles could be saved, that they declared "well then, God has granted

Apart from the act of God, man cannot repent in and of himself.

to the Gentiles also **the repentance** that leads to life." A second thing that must be kept in mind in the face of sin in the church in order to maintain a spirit of patience is that the sinner is held captive by an unseen power - namely Satan has him held captive to do his will rather than God's! In Ephesians 2:2-3 we are told more about the sinner's condition, that they are "(walking) according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. . .(living) in the lusts of (their) flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind (being) by nature children of wrath." Now the question that immediately comes to mind when one reads these passages is this: "I thought we were dealing with sinning brothers, but don't these passages deal with the unbeliever?" The point to be made is this. The "sinning one" in the church may be saved or he may be lost. From the lifestyle

of sin that is being confronted two things may be possible. One, he is a brother who has been “duped” if you will or deceived by the power of the enemy. It may also be possible that he is a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.” Either way, patience ought to be maintained any time we are dealing with a sinner. Patience will signify an attitude of humility in a situation where pride has no place.

This approach of patience should not be interpreted to mean we should have a “well, give them time attitude.” Sin must not only be dealt with patiently, it must be dealt with decisively. In the Old Testament book of Numbers we read a fascinating story that vividly portrays the need to deal decisively with sin in the camp.

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A little background at this point will help with the storyline. Israel is on the move to conquer and claim divine right to the land of Canaan from the east. They have conquered the Amorites and the Bashanites. Balak, the king of Moab becomes very concerned about the safety of his own nation. Full of fear, Balak allies himself with the leaders of Midian (5 kings), knowing he could not win by himself if a battle was to come. As a new alliance, they send a delegation to the east (the region of Babylon) to hire Balaam, an infamous prophet, to put a curse on the Hebrew people. Balaam at first refuses, but at the prompting of a larger delegation and more money, Balaam responds positively. Yet, having prayed (ha!), he assures them he can only speak what God tells him to. When Balaam arrives on the scene, instead of cursing the Israelites, he blesses them three times. Balak and his alliance realize this isn’t working: you don’t get paid to bless!!! Balaam,

fears he will miss out on a lucrative opportunity. By the end of Numbers 24 it appears that Balaam has gone home, but somewhere between chapters 24 and 25 Balaam comes up with a plan to bring a curse upon the people by causing them to sin against God, which would then cause God to punish them for their rebellion.

Balaam was an interesting character of whom the Scripture has much to say. Here are just a few scriptural facts about Balaam:

Jos 13:22	He was a diviner.
Num 22:5	He lived in the Mesopotamian region near the river Euphrates.
Num 22:7	He was a diviner for hire.
Num 22:17	He was greedy.
Josh 24:9-10	He sought to curse God's people but God would not allow it.
2 Pet 2:15	He sought wages of unrighteousness.
2 Pet 2:14	He sought the destruction of unstable people.
Rev 2:14	His teaching led people into idolatry and immorality.

In Numbers 25 we read of the amazing judgement of God on the people when they fell into the sin of Balaam.

NAS Numbers 25:1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. 4 And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of

you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor." 6 Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand; 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 9 And those who died by the plague were 24,000. 10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12 "Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel. '"

Here we read of an unheard of immorality among a people promised to one God playing or acting like harlots, bowing down to other gods, and joining themselves to foreign deities. God's wrath is unleashed within the camp due to their rebellious activity, activity that moved them to blatant act of shamelessness even at the place of repentance - **the tent of meeting**. Apart from one man, acting decisively, what would have happened to the people that day? This one who had an uncompromising jealousy for the glory of his God saved his

people from the wrath of the Almighty.

We live in a day of unsurpassed immorality. Evil is called good and good is called evil (cf. Isa 5:20). Sin is excused and men refuse to confront it. **This is true of the world, but to our shame, also true of the church.** How long will we endure the unashamed acts that go on even in the assembly? For Scripture is clear that it is time for judgement to begin with the household of God (cf. 1Pet 4:17). We need an unhindered decision, a Phineas to stand in the midst of the camp with an uncompromising jealousy for the glory of God. We need a remnant of men and women to stand with holy jealousy for the glory and honor of our great God.

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Before we take up the spear, however, a seventh and necessary point must be made. Sin, at least initially for the most part, needs to be handled privately. For this and the next two points regarding the confrontation of sin a text from the gospel of Matthew, the eighteenth chapter will serve as our point of focus.

NAS Matthew 18:15 "And if your brother sins, **go and reprove him in private**; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he

refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

The point to be made here, as seen in vs.15-16, is that in the initial steps of confronting someone in sin the matter needs to be shared with as few people as necessary. You are to keep the matter as private as possible.

However, if this private approach fails, the church needs to be brought in and a public rebuke is called for. This point is illustrated well by an event that occurred in the church of Corinth in the first century.

NAS 1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his Father's wife. 2 And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. 3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided

to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler- not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

The entire process of confronting sin in the church is summed up in a ninth and final characteristic of confrontation. Confronting sin in the church is to finally be done redemptively. The restoration of the fallen brother in 1Corinthians 5 is told of in 2Corinthians 2:5-11.

NAS 2 Corinthians 2:5 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree- in order not to say too much- to all of you. 6 Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, 7 so that on

the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. 9 For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 10 But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

The goal is not punishment, but restoration! As we have seen previously, Paul notes in Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.” **Restore is “a surgical term used of setting bones or joints.”** The doctor doesn't seek to hurt you further, yet sometimes the setting of a broken bone can cause great pain. This is how it is with discipline. It may cause discomfort and sorrow, but it is designed to produce joy in the long run.

In summary, confronting sinners in their sin must be done. Jay Adams, a noted scholar and Biblical counselor, cites three scriptural benefits to "confronting sin" within the body. Adams states that it preserves the honor of God's home, assures the purity of the church, and finally it seeks to reclaim and reconcile the offender. Sin must be dealt with, confronted, and disciplined in the body in a Biblical way or the church is not fully functioning as a church. Dealing with sin in the church is a privilege

Dealing with sin in the church is a privilege and a duty we cannot afford to neglect.

and a duty we cannot afford to neglect.

A third and final issue that must be covered under the heading of discipline, is the process of discipline itself. Being convinced of the priority of confronting sin, as well as understanding the posture one should have in approaching the sin and the sinner, it remains for us to understand just how the process of discipline should be carried out. In other words, just how is confrontation to be done? Once again we turn our attention to the passage in Scripture where the clearest guidance is given to this issue - Matthew 18:15-20.

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NAS Matthew 18:15

"And if your brother

sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. 18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

Several points regarding discipline are brought out in this passage:

1. The church has been given the authority and the responsibility of judging sin.
2. The church as the body of Christ, must keep its members accountable to holiness.
3. The church must treat or deal with the unrepentant redemptively.
4. The church is a court where both justice and mercy are to be found.
5. The church assembled carries the authority of Christ himself.

Though these principles are brought out in the passage, the intent of the passage is to teach us how to recover a brother in sin. These steps are laid out for us in teaching us the "how to's" of recovering a brother who has sinned and is still sinning against Christ. Church discipline is to be handled prayerfully, carefully, and justly. Below are the steps of accountability and discipline that we believe carefully and practically follow the guidelines given in Matthew 18:15-20.

1. First Step: Private Confrontation of a Brother

Arrange a private meeting with the offender. Humbly confront the person with the nature of the offense. If the person repents, the matter is closed (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3). Scripture does not specify the number of times that an offender should be confronted on an individual basis. Scripture is clear that believers should be long-suffering and have an unrelenting desire for that person's repentance (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; 1 Peter 4:8). If there is no repentance and the offense is of the nature categorized above as "Offenses Applicable to Church Discipline" then there is a responsibility to move to the next step in the process.

2. Second Step: Confrontation of a Brother with Witnesses

Set up another private meeting, this time with one or two other witnesses present (Matthew 18:16). This step should never be taken in haste but only after there is prayerful conviction that step one has not availed. If repentance occurs, the offender should seek forgiveness from the circle of offense, and no more.

It is important to understand who qualifies as a witness and what their function is in the disciplinary process. Biblically, a witness is a person who bears testimony of another's wrongdoing based on firsthand knowledge. A person is not constituted a witness who bears testimony based on hearsay, gossip, or secondhand knowledge (Deuteronomy 19:15-19). The Bible condemns false witnesses (Exodus 20:16). Accusations not substantiated by two or three witnesses must be left to the One who knows all things and judges righteously (Numbers 35:30; Psalm 51:3-4).

It is the function of a witness to insure that the offense is clearly and impartially presented and that nothing is left unsaid. The witnesses also keep each others' motivations and actions accountable before God (Matthew 18:20). If there is no repentance, the circle of knowledge must be broadened at this point to include the elders for their deliberation to determine, after thorough investigation and consideration, if step 3 should be taken.

3. Third Step: Confrontation of a Brother by the Whole Church

At this point, the matter must be brought by the elders to the

members of Faith Community Baptist Church in a closed session (Matthew 18:17). The entire membership has a responsibility, as opportunity provides, to call the offender to repentance. An equitable period of time will be established by the Council of Elders in order to optimize the fullest effect of the witness of the entire membership, to allow for the work of the Lord and to provide more than ample time for repentance.

Should there be repentance, the entire body should be quick to respond with forgiveness, grace, and love (2 Corinthians 2:5-8). While repentance and forgiveness are instantaneous, restoration to service will be monitored by the elders for the benefit and development of the person. If there is no repentance, the elders will meet to take action on the final step.

4. Fourth Step: Excommunication of an Unrepentant Brother

As defined in Matthew 18:17, the unrepentant offender will be considered a "pagan or a tax collector." This phrase contains two interrelated aspects. First, the offender is likened to a pagan, which signifies that the person is outside the community of God's blessing and grace. Second, the offender is likened to a tax collector, which signifies that the person is untrustworthy and therefore, is of such character that he is potentially harmful to the body of the church.

By way of application, this constitutes a removal from church membership and fellowship resulting in a recognition that the unrepentant offender is outside the realm of God's blessings (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Common ground for intimate friendship has been

removed. The entire congregation has an ongoing responsibility to act in unison, calling the person to repentance with each contact, so as not to undermine the scriptural process or the severe temporal consequences of the person's obstinate behavior. It is sincerely hoped there will be repentance and reconciliation as a result of the consistent and loving application of this heart-wrenching but Biblical action.

The action of the church in matters of discipline carries the highest conceivable authority and is both final and binding as clearly stated in Matthew 18:18-20. There can be no appeal to any court as a result of this action (1 Corinthians 6:1-2) and a member may not resign his/her membership in order to avoid church discipline.

No one “likes” the subject of church discipline. But the reader is encouraged before we leave this subject to recall to mind our starting point for sobering subject: Discipline is a blessing of Christ to his church. Within each of our hearts, even as the redeemed children of God, is a “prone to wander, Lord I feel it” kind of reality. We need in this fallen world, with our less than fully renewed minds and affections, the discipline of the Father, mediated and applied, through his children, our brothers and sisters. This is a blessing - for his glory - and for our joy.



No Other Name

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Mission

The glorious and necessary nature of the mission of the church is stated by the Apostle to the nations himself, the Apostle Paul, in his gospel letter, the letter to the Romans. He writes powerfully and pointedly in Romans 10:9-17 the following unmistakable statement:

(ESV) If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you

will be saved. (10) For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (11) For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. (13) For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (14) How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (15) And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" (17) So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Herein Paul states the treasure of the good news: everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved! This is good news indeed. The church throughout the ages has rejoiced in it, been comforted by it, and taken charge in it - that she must take up the banner and call of the Apostle himself, and trumpet that good news to all the nations.

However, in recent years the commitment of the church to the necessity of proclaiming the gospel's announcement of redemption for the nations

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found in the calling of men upon Christ has been and continues to be challenged from within the ranks of the church herself. Do people really need to call on Christ to be saved? Do people really need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be delivered from the wrath to come? Do people really need to trust Christ in order to gain access to the glories of the Father? Must one in fact know Christ in order to know God? The answers to these questions may seem obvious to many—especially if one is to read again the words of the Apostle Paul to the Roman believers stated above. But surprisingly, they are being challenged from within the closest ranks of even the “evangelical” community itself.

In fact, consider the following data: One-third of the evangelicals recently surveyed said they believed that “all good people will go to heaven, whether they have embraced Jesus Christ or not.” Another 11% weren't sure. “Surprisingly,” writes George Barna, who authored the study, “little difference on this matter surfaced in the views of those who attend church services and those who do not.”

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University of Virginia sociologist James D. Hunter has marked this “megashift” among even conservative

Bible colleges and seminaries, where respondents said things like:

Maybe God saves them a different way, maybe he gives them a chance after they die depending on how they've lived their lives.

Another student, who identified herself as an Independent Fundamentalist, replied:

What is important in their case is that they have conformed to the law of God as they know it in their hearts.

One Bible student, identifying himself as an Evangelical, remarked regarding the fate of the Hindu leader Gandhi:

I hope the Lord would judge his heart and if he was a good man and he knew to live an honest life and was generous and loving, maybe the Lord would take him.

Another student remarked:

I can't imagine a loving God being so cruel forever and ever. It is an awfully long time for someone to be unhappy.

Hunter aptly concluded from this study:

Intellectually grasping the soteriological demands of orthodox Christianity is one matter; emotionally accepting them is quite another.

Many students may not be able to articulate the theology of this “megashift.” The backdrop to it all in scholarly circles, where many heresies in fact begin, is known among the Evangelical elite as the “wider-mercy” view of the love of God. Not to be confused with the Evangelical hymn *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*, which points people

to Christ and his cross for saving mercy, this viewpoint, though it does not discount the historicity of the cross event, denies that one must actually know of it and believe in it to find the mercy of God given in Christ. In fact, one does not even have to know about Christ at all to receive the mercy of God.

Consider the teaching of the well known Clarke Pinnock. Pinnock, who years ago was a Reformed Calvinist, and card-carrying inerrantist, is now a full fledged Open Arminian, who questions the veracity of Scripture and has embraced a view of God known as open theism - where God doesn't know the future because we have yet to make it happen. Time does not permit us to go into open theism here,

but suffice it to say it is a rank heresy infiltrating the Evangelical church. Pinnock's views on the mercy of God need to concern us here. For Pinnock the difference between Christianity and say, Buddhism becomes one merely of degree, not kind. The former, Christianity, provides us with "full-strength salvation," which is presumably better than a weaker-strength salvation that one would find in Buddhism.

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In other words, traditional approaches focus on the object rather than the experience of religion. Instead of arguing with Muslims about Christ and salvation, we ought to share our common experiences about "God, prayer, healing and the like. What God really cares about (according to Pinnock) is faith and not theology, trust and not orthodoxy." In other words, the essence of true religion is merely

(for Pinnock) "at the level of heart religion" irrespective of its object. This puts the wider-mercy view on a level consistent with the sentimentalism of the modern relativistic age, where we find all roads leading into one. As one writer commented in light of Pinnock's reasoning: Its like the bumper sticker, "You've gotta believe in something; I believe I'll have another beer." Therefore, Pinnock argues, Christians ought to become:

more spiritually Buddha-like...For in the kingdom of God there will be no Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, but only the triune God and the redeemed community. How can one fail to appreciate the noble aspects of the Buddha, whose ethical direction, compassion, and concern for others is so moving that it appears God is at work in his life? Gautama (the supreme Buddha of our age) resembles the sort of "righteous man" whom Jesus told his disciples to receive (Mt. 10:41)...But how does one come away after encountering Buddhism and deny it is in touch with God in its way?

This reminds me of an interview with Norman Vincent Peale on the "Phil Donahue Show", when he said that he found eternal peace one day in a Shinto temple in Japan.

How do we respond. Briefly let us state: These are simply the effects of the image of God in all people, "the fall notwithstanding"(Calvin), but they are not the fruit of the Spirit, since the Buddha was not part of the fruit-bearing Vine. The only righteousness God accepts is his own - a perfect, unspotted righteousness, which the believer wears like a robe over his or her own

nakedness.

Pinnock's statements ought to be shocking the system of the modern Evangelical. The consequences of his view-point are catastrophic to the mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Luke tells us of the words of Peter in Acts 4:8-12

(ESV) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, (9) if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, (10) let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-by him this man is standing before you well. (11) This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. (12) And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

But compare this with the following words of Pinnock:

When we approach the man of faith other than our own, it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find out how God has been speaking to him, and what new understanding of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes, the place we are approaching is holy. Else we find ourselves treading on men's dreams, more we may forget that God was here before our

arrival.

But what does the Apostle Paul say when encountering the pagans of the world, even the religious ones, like those he found in Acts 17?

Act 17:22-34 (ESV) So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. (23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown God.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." (29) Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to

all by raising him from the dead." (32) Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." (33) So Paul went out from their midst. (34) But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The Apostle calls these people to repent, turn from their erroneous paganism and believe on Christ in order to be saved from the judgement of God! This is fully in keeping with what God in fact said his mission would be:

Act 26:16-18 (ESV) But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, (17) delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles--to whom I am sending you (18) to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Could it be any clearer: salvation is found only in Christ! But here is the rub - the wider-mercy folks would agree! What? Yes, you heard me right, the proponents of wider-mercy thinking agree with us that salvation is through Christ alone! Men just don't have to believe on Christ to be saved! Let's hear it from them:

Raymond Hanikin, in his work [The Unknown Christ of](#)

Hinduism writes the following:

The good and bonafide Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism, but it is through the sacraments of Hinduism, through the message of morality, and the good life, through the mysticism that comes down to him through Hinduism that Christ saves the Hindu.

Notice Hanikin's reasoning: Christ saves - but he does it through the "sacraments" (grace obtaining rituals) of a pagan and Christless religion. Confused? Hear more. This time from the well known Christian writer C. S. Lewis. Lewis, the dearly loved writer and often sound defender of the faith, clearly puts himself in the wider-mercy camp in his work God in the Dock. Lewis once speculated that both Socrates and Confucius would be in God's Kingdom. He had this to say in his essay called 'Christian Apologetics' (taken from God in the Dock):

Of course it should be pointed out that, though all salvation is through Jesus, we need not conclude that He cannot save those who have not explicitly accepted Him in this life. And it should (at least in my judgement - contra the judgement of Scripture) be made clear that we are not pronouncing all other religions to be totally false, but rather saying that in Christ whatever is true in all religions is consummated and perfected.

So Lewis does not see other religions as "totally false." Recall the words of Jesus to the Apostle Paul - Paul was to go and turn men from darkness to light, from Satan to God. "Darkness!" "Satan!" These

terms make other religions sound “totally false” to me!

This has been the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic church for ages. Hear the following from Pope John Paul II:

All who live a just life will be saved, even if they do not believe in Jesus Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. The Gospel teaches us that those who live in accordance with the Beatitudes - poor in spirit, pure of heart, those who bear lovingly the sufferings of life will enter God's kingdom.

But the word of Scripture is clear:

Rom 3:8-20 (ESV) And why not do evil that good may come?~ as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. (9) What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, (10) as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (11) no one understands; no one seeks for God. (12) All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (13) "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." (14) "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." (15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16) in their paths are ruin and misery, (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (19) Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to

God. (20) For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

It is easy to hear even these comments that stand so dramatically opposed to Scripture and still come away feeling safe, like the Christian mission isn't really in danger at all. With that in mind we leave for the readers solemn consideration, the transcript of an interview done by Robert Schuller with the evangelist Billy Graham:

Schuller: Tell me, what do you think is the future of Christianity?

Graham: Well, Christianity and being a true believer—you know, I think there's the Body of Christ. This comes from all the Christian groups around the world, outside the Christian groups. I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they're conscious of it or not, they're members of the Body of Christ. And I don't think that we're going to see a great sweeping revival, that will turn the whole world to Christ at any time. I think James answered that, the Apostle James in the first council in Jerusalem, when he said that God's purpose for this age is to call out a people for His name. And that's what God is doing today, He's calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they've been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't

have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven.

Schuller: What, what I hear you saying that it's possible for Jesus Christ to come into human hearts and soul and life, even if they've been born in darkness and have never had exposure to the Bible. Is that a correct interpretation of what you're saying?

Graham: Yes, it is, because I believe that. I've met people in various parts of the world in tribal situations, that they have never seen a Bible or heard about a Bible, and never heard of Jesus, but they've believed in their hearts that there was a God, and they've tried to live a life that was quite apart from the surrounding community in which they lived.

Schuller: [R. S. trips over his tongue for a moment, his face beaming, then says] I'm so thrilled to hear you say this. There's a wideness in God's mercy.

Graham: There is. There definitely is.

Let the reader decide how endangered the mission of the Christian church is, if Graham's beliefs are embraced in our behavior.



At Your Right Hand

Rediscovering a Biblical View of Church Purpose

Man is, at heart, a being designed for worship. This is not to man's natural credit in any way shape or form. This natural design has been put there by the Designer - God himself. The Scripture states that God has placed eternity in the hearts of men, that He has given them a conscience - His law written within them, and that He has so clearly revealed Himself to men in the created order that they are rendered inexcusable when they refuse to worship Him. The Apostle Paul stated it this way in Romans 1:18-23

NAB Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Thus, due to the refusal of men to confess as truth what the Word of God says they clearly know, they have been given over by Almighty God to a reprobate mind and the result is a world filled with perversions of worship of every kind. As the Apostle Paul goes on to state: “Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (NAB Rom 1:22-23).

This would be bad enough if it were only the lost who are engaged in perversions of the worship of God. But sadly, this is not the case. Believers too, (having hearts still filled with sin and minds that have not been fully renewed by the truth of God) are prone to wander from the path of true, God-centered worship. Worship that would be characterized as true worship is rare indeed. In fact, it is so rare that the following quotation seems almost prophetic. A. W. Tozer, beloved pastor from the early 20th century, stated the following regarding the

state of worship in the church of his day and could rightly be applied to our day as well.

I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the program. This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us...**Worship is the missing...jewel in evangelical Christianity.**

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This statement by Tozer was predicated by almost 100 years when we consider the following statement by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Baptist minister of London, made in the 19th century from his work Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats:

An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross in its impudence, that the most short-sighted can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal

rate, even for evil. It has worked like leaven until the whole lump ferments. The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the Church that

Worship is the missing...jewel in evangelical Christianity

part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view of winning them. From speaking out as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses.

My first contention is that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in the Scriptures as a function of the Church. If it is a Christian work, why did not Christ speak of it? "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". That is clear enough. So it would have been if he had added, "and provide amusement for those who do not relish the gospel". No such words, however, are to be found. It did not seem to occur to Him. Then again, "He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry." Where do entertainers come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them. Were the prophets persecuted because they amused the people or because they refused? The concert has no martyr roll.

Again, providing amusement is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all His apostles. What was the attitude of the Church to the world? "Ye are the salt", not the sugar candy - something the world will spit out, not swallow. Short and sharp was the utterance. "let the dead bury their dead". He was in awful earnestness! Let us be faithful: "Preach the Word."

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This jewel must be rediscovered. The tool we will use to dig for it once again? The all-sufficient word of God. In John's gospel, the fourth chapter, we find a good place to start and rest for a while. In this chapter of Holy writ we encounter a brief dialogue between a sinful woman of Samaria and our blessed Lord Jesus. This text, specifically vs.20-26, will serve the purpose of providing a home base or touchstone for us as we search the Scriptures for information on this most important of all subjects: worship.

Listen for a moment to the interchange between the adulteress and the Savior:

NAB John 4:20 "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 " You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

We must save for a later time the full examination of this text, for now we simply seek to lay out its importance by highlighting some

basic principles concerning worship through which we can grasp more clearly what worship is. If the Father seeks it, and it's clear from a cursory reading of the text that he does, it would benefit us greatly if we knew what it was! To help us in rediscovering the meaning of true worship that our Lord declared is sought by the Father, we will make our way through several principles of worship over the course of this work. Here at the outset let us see the principles in brief:

Principle 1: True Worship Gives God the Honor That Is Due to Him Alone.

It ought to be the heart cry of every true believer to engage in true worship. True worship doesn't just happen. There are some fundamental principles of worship that must be embraced and pursued, or true worship will never occur.

We desire to stress right up front that the nature of true worship is guided by the fundamental principle of giving to God what He alone is due - honor. In worship we are declaring the fundamental worth, value of God as supreme above all things. It is not as if man is "giving" God anything He does not already possess. However, in worship the exceeding value of God is recognized, and having this supreme value, God is therefore praised for it. This ensures that worship at its foundation is God-centered.

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Furthermore, man is called upon to give this worship to God as

God has revealed Himself in the Scripture. In other words, man is not simply called on to respond to his own conception of God or to father a “God” of his own making. Man must respond to God as God has revealed Himself in His word.

Moreover, man must respond to this self-revealing God in the manner in which God has prescribed. Man is not free to approach God in any manner he chooses. God has regulated His worship by His word. Thus, not only does Scripture define the “who” of worship, but the “how” of worship as well.

Finally, this self-revealing God must be worshiped with a right heart attitude. One not only must worship the right God, in the right way, but must also approach Him with a right heart. Without this right heart, worship will be vain and therefore not true worship.

Principle 2: True Worship Is a Sovereignly Initiated Event in Which God Moves His People to Respond Appropriately to His Self-revelation.

True worship is a dialogical interchange - in which God initiates all true worship by revealing Himself and commanding men to respond. This interchange continues throughout all of life with God in control and man being moved by God in humble response.

What we are seeking to build here is a paradigm for worship. How we understand worship will impact how we seek to engage in worship, from week to week and from day to day. Consider the following paradigms for worship that are prevalent in the church today

(#1 & #2) and then we will respond with one that we believe to be more Biblical and God-honoring for worship (#3).

#1: Congregation - Audience Leaders - Actors God - Prompter

Here worship is a program provided for the entertainment of those who come. This paradigm more than all the others is man-centered in its focus and goal. Everything exists and revolves around the people. The events of worship are designed with the worshipers in mind.

#2: Congregation - Actors Leaders - Prompters God - Audience

Here worship does indeed take on a more sacred flavor. Yet in the end, the direction of the entertainment has simply been reversed. The people, rather than seeking to be entertained are putting on the show for God. And we fear God is not amused!

#3: Congregation - Support God - Star Actor Leaders - Prompters

In this approach one writer has noted that worship is seen as “a divine drama in which both God and His people are involved in Holy action, which is involved in glorifying, magnifying, and extolling the Lord who is Himself the Center of attention and the principle subject of worship.” In this paradigm for worship there is a “divine drama” that occurs. God and man interact and respond to one another in a divine dialogue. God initiates His own worship, moving His people to respond appropriately to His self-revelation.

Principle 3: True Worship Is Not to Be Bound by Place.

Muslims go to Mecca. Hindus go to the Ganges. Buddhists go to Buddha Gaya. Catholics go to Rome. The list could go on. Each of these is an example of a religious group and their central sites of pilgrimage. These places and others of religious pilgrimage are sought for their spiritual value and the attainment they accomplish for the worshiper in their pursuit of their God. Now before we turn our spiritual noses up toward these and others being so foolish as to tie their worship to a place - remember, every Sunday morning, many of us “go to church!” You say, “Well this is different!” Perhaps. But it carries the same built in danger for every would-be worshiper. True worship is not to be bound by place.

True worship, that which the Father seeks, is not to be bound by a place, but rather by a person - specifically the person of Jesus Christ. True worship is to be grounded by and focused on the person of Christ and none other. This may seem like the proverbial “no-brainer,” but unless our brains are fully understanding of and focused on this “person” in worship, our minds will become easily distracted and deeply tied to the place of worship, rather than the person who alone is worthy of that worship that we have come to offer. Many in the past have sincerely started out on the path of acceptable worship only to be distracted by the outer accouterments of worship’s surroundings thinking that in them or by them worship becomes authentic (or at the very least more so) before God.

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In the Gospel of John, the fourth chapter, Jesus encounters the “woman at the well” Among other things in their dialogue, Jesus exposes the guilt of the Samaritans for engaging in ignorant worship (worship in spirit but not in truth), and of the Jews for their informed worship (worship in truth but not in spirit). Furthermore, we find in the narrative, that both groups over time, had allowed their worship, that originated in all sincerity and passion, gradually to grow “attached” to the place of worship and subsequently “detached” from the person of the true God.

Are you in danger of this as well? The place of worship is a secondary issue at most! The central issue of true worship is, was, and always will be the person of Jesus Christ.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who
i s t h e
beginning,
the firstborn
from the
dead, that in
all things He may have the preeminence (NKJ Colossians 1:15-18).

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Principle 4: True Worship Must Take Place in Both Spirit and Truth.

Drama. . .acting. . .the play. . .has had a long and elaborate history. At the time of the New Testament the Greeks had become masters at playing the part on the stage. They had developed an elaborate system of costume and props to enable them to convince the audience that what they were watching was real. Central to their system was the mask, which scholars tell us was so central to life on the stage that over time it came “to symbolize the concept of drama itself.”

The relevance of the Greek mask to our present principle of worship? Simply put, we, like the Greeks, have developed an elaborate system which we use to convince ourselves and one another, not to mention the very God before whom we have convened, that what is being witnessed is indeed real. But is it? We, too, have made central in our elaborate system of worship - the art of mask wearing! In the words of Chuck Swindoll, “There is just one major difficulty in the mask-wearing game - it isn’t real! At its heart, the issue here is one of hypocrisy. The root of the word “hypocrisy” literally means “to act under a mask” - pretending to be something or someone you in fact are not! Stephen Charnock, the Puritan divine, stated in this regard, “Without the heart it is not worship: it is a stage play - an acting a part without being that person - a hypocrite; in the notion of the word, he is a stage player.”

In worship, God literally puts Himself on display before the world that He has made by

Without the heart it is not worship: it is a stage play - an acting a part without being that person - a hypocrite; in the notion of the word, he is a stage player.

way of the praise of His people. He does this as a demonstration of His personal worth and inestimable glory. He does this for all the world to see as His church boldly declares His inestimable excellencies. The church, filled with worshipers, reflects back to God and out to the world the worth that is God alone. As the Apostle Peter pointedly stated:

you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY (NAB 1 Peter 2:9-10).

Calvin himself made comments in this regard that:

The church is a distinguished theater on which the divine glory is displayed...The church...God has selected as the great theater where his fatherly care may be manifested...The state or kingdom of the church constitutes the principal and august theater where God presents and displays the tokens of his wonderful power, wisdom, and righteousness...The world is a theater for the display of the goodness, wisdom, justice, and power, but the church is the orchestra. . .the most conspicuous part of it.

Here, in the divine drama of worship, God is the star actor, we are the supporting actors, the leaders are the prompters for worship,

and the world is the audience before whom the drama of redemption is to unfold in glorious fashion. In this sense Michael Horton notes, “It is the presence of the Spirit through his ordained means (of grace - Word and Sacrament) that makes the worship service (become) a theater of grace in which Christ and all his benefits are communicated to those who were once ‘not a people.’” Thus, in this principle of worshipping God in spirit and in truth, let the drama unfold. Let us put God and His redeeming grace on display for a watching world to see; let the masks come off; let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ and worship him in spirit and in truth.

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Principle 5: True Worship Is Eternal in its Operation.

In 1647 the Westminster Assembly penned the Shorter Catechism to be used as a tool to instruct the faithful in the doctrines espoused in the Westminster Confession of Faith. The first question of that catechism has been broadly affirmed throughout the history of the church, even though many would not know the source from which it is derived. The question it puts forth - What is the chief end of man? The answer it supplies - Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. John Piper, in his work, Desiring God, has taken this same question, and with great insight applied the question to God himself. Piper asks - What is the chief end of God? His answer - To glorify God and enjoy Himself forever! God’s glory has always been the

uppermost passion in His affections.

Surely if this is God's chief end, it should be ours as well! Thus God has been forever engaged with the creation He designed and brought into being, in the activity of Self-promotion - putting His own glory on display for all to behold and for His own enjoyment. God, in this sense, is the most God-centered being in existence! In all of these events God is making a name for Himself. Bringing glory to His name before all peoples. As he states through the prophet Isaiah, "Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made" (NAB Isaiah 43:7). This is a glory that is His alone and a glory of which He is very jealous. "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images" (NAB Isaiah 42:8). God will in no way

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share the praise that is His with something (a graven image) or someone (you or I) that is less than Him. This would in the end make Him the idolater! This glory is

something God will not share, it is something He believes rightfully belongs to Him alone. This has been His desire from before the beginning of time.

In the exploration of this principle of worship, we seek to stress the reality that it is God's delight in His glory that is THE CENTRAL EVENT in all of eternity - before the ages, in this age, and in the age to come. Furthermore, when man engages in the true worship of this all

glorious God, he engages in an activity that existed before history, goes on throughout all history and spills over into eternity. When man enters into true worship he enters into the focal activity of all the ages, both now and forevermore. Worship is no passing enterprise, it is as eternal as God Himself, and will therefore, never come to an end. Join today your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, with highest thought and deepest affection, in the theme of the ages, the joyous worship of the all-glorious God!

Principle 6: True Worship Is Effective.

Finally, we would briefly stress that we believe that true worship is effective in relation to God, the believer, and the lost. True worship exalts the name of God and displays His awesome glory. It edifies the believer and leaves him forever changed. And finally, it effectively evangelizes the lost, confronting them with the reality of God.



AFTERWORD

We trust by this time our opening premise is clear:

TIME MARCHES ON. . .
HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF.

The church - owned by Christ, grown by Christ, ruled by His word, lead by His shepherds, served by His ministers of mercy, consisting of the redeemed that make up His body, disciplined by His corporate authority, and designed for His praise - stands today in desperate need of attention. As the Reformers noted, the church must always be reforming. There is no time for complacency, apathy or just simple indifference. It may sound rather quaint, but it is time for the church to be the church. She must rediscover a Biblical view of herself. In short, she must recover her true identity!

4 Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 7 BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen. 8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." 12 And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; 13 and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle. 14 And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; 15 and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to

glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. 16 And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. 3:22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches' " (Rev 1:4-8,12-18, 3:22).

Appendix 1

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS:
An Unregenerate Denomination
Jim Eliff

Jim Eliff is the resident consultant for the Midwestern Center for Biblical Revival at **Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary**, and is president of Christian Communicators Worldwide. He speaks to conferences in the States and overseas, and often leads churches and pastors in the subject addressed above. For additional free booklets on this subject, write Christian Communicators Worldwide, 5001 N. Oak Trfy., Kansas City, MO 64118.

"How are you doing?"

"Pretty well, under the circumstances."

"What are the circumstances?"

"Well, I have a very effective arm. It moves with quite a bit of animation.

But then I have my bad leg."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I guess it's paralyzed. At least it doesn't do much except twitch once a week or so, but that's nothing compared with the rest of me."

"What's the problem?"

"From all appearances, the rest is dead. At least it stinks and bits of flesh are always falling off. I keep it well covered. About all that's left beyond that is my mouth, which fortunately works just fine. How about you?"

Like the unfortunate person above, the Southern Baptist Convention has a name that it is alive, but is in fact, mostly dead (Rev. 3:1). Regardless of the wonderful advances in our commitment to the Bible, a closer look reveals a denomination that is more like a corpse than a fit athlete prepared for the run of his life. In an unusual way, understanding this awful reality provides the most exciting prospects for the future if we act decisively.

THE FACTS:

Out of Southern Baptist's nearly 15.9 million members, only 5.2 million, or 32.8%, even bother to show up on a given Sunday morning, according to the Strategic Information and Planning department of the Sunday School Board (1997). If your church is anything like normal, and is not brand new, your statistics are probably similar. In the average church, one can cut that 32.8% by about two-thirds to find those interested in any additional aspect of church life, such as a Sunday evening service. In other words, only about a third of the 32.8% or slightly more than a tenth of the whole (12.3% in churches with evening services in 1996, the last year for which statistics are available) show more interest in the things of God than Sunday morning

attenders in the liberal church down the street where the gospel is not even preached. These figures suggest that nearly 90% of Southern Baptist church members appear to be little different from the "cultural Christians" who populate mainline denominations.

Let me illustrate in rounded figures by looking at some of the churches I have preached in recently. Each could be any Baptist church in any city. In one church there were an amazing 2000 in attendance on Sunday morning; but 7000 on the roll and a mere 600 on Sunday evenings. Take out the guests and this represents less than 10% of the membership. Another church had 2100 on the roll, with 725 coming on Sunday morning. Remove guests and non-member children and that figure drops to 600. Only about a third of those members come out on Sunday evening. Representing less than 10% of the membership.

Another church has 310 on the roll with nearly 100 who attend on Sunday morning. Only 30, or approximately 10%, come to the evening worship services. These are all considered fine churches, and have an extremely competent level of leadership and vision. Some shut-ins and those who are sick or out of town, slightly affect the figures, but not enough to change the bleak picture, especially when we remember that these numbers represent the people who have been baptized. What do these figures, general as they are, suggest?

MISSING CHRISTIANS ARE NO CHRISTIANS:

First, these figures reveal that most of the people on our rolls give little evidence that they love the brethren, a clear sign of being unregenerate (1 Jn. 3:14). It is impossible to believe that anything like

real familial love exists in the hearts of people who do not come or only nominally check in as a cultural exercise. Love is the greatest mark of a genuine believer (1 Jn. 3: 14).

Second, these numbers suggest that those who do not come or only come as morning attenders, are more interested in themselves than God. To put it in Paul's words, they are "fleshly-minded" and not "spiritually-minded" (Rom 8:5). The atmosphere that most pleases them is that of the world and not God. They can stand as much of God as makes them feel better about themselves. But beyond that, they will politely refuse to get involved. For some that is an Easter service now and then; for others it is a Pharisaical and sterile trip to church every Sunday morning. Though these people have "prayed the prayer" and "walked the aisle," and been told they are Christians, old things have not really passed away, and new things have not come. They are not new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). In too many cases obvious signs of an unregenerate heart can be found, such as long-term adultery, fornication, greed, divisiveness. These are "professing believers" which the Bible says are deceived. (See 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19; 6:7; Eph. 5:5; Titus 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:4,10) Jesus indicated that there is a good soil which is receptive to the gospel seed so as to produce a fruit-bearing plant, but that the rocky ground believer only appears to be saved. The latter shows immediate joy, but then withers away (Mt. 13:6, 21). This temporary kind of faith (which is not saving faith) is rampant among Southern Baptists. But Baptists believe that saving faith is persistent to the end. We believe in the preservation and perseverance of the saints (once saved, always persevering). If a man's faith does not persevere then what he possesses is something less than saving faith. In John 2:23 Jesus was the center-piece for what turned out to be a mass evangelism

experience in which a large number of people believed in Him. Yet he did not entrust Himself to even one of them because "he knew their hearts." Is it possible that we have taken in millions of such "unrepentant believers" whose hearts have not been changed? I say that we have. Our denomination, as much as we may love it, is on the main unregenerate. If you double, triple or quadruple my assessment of how many are true believers, we still have a gigantic problem. It is naive to believe otherwise. There are those who would say that such people are "carnal Christians" and don't deserve to be thought of as unregenerate. It is true that the Corinthian believers (about whom this phrase was used, see 1 Cor. 3:13) acted "like mere men" in their party spirit. Christians can commit any sin short of that which is unpardonable. Undoubtedly, however, Paul did suspect that some of the Corinthians were unbelievers, for he later warns them about such a possibility in 2 Cor 12:20. A long-term and unrepentant state of carnality, is, after all the very description of the unregenerate (Rom. 8:5, 1 Jn. 3:4). In calling some people "carnal" Paul did not mean to imply that he was accepting as Christian a lifestyle that he clearly describes as unbelieving in other passages. He wrote in the same book: "Do you now know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived" (1 Cor. 6: 9-11, etc.). Apparently there were some, even then who were deceived into thinking that an unrighteous man or woman who professes faith in Christ could really be a Christian!

Is Follow-up the Problem? A great mistake is made by blaming the problem on poor follow-up. In many churches there is every intention and effort given to follow-up and still the numbers persist. One church followed up "by the book" the people who had been told they were new converts from a crusade of an internationally-known

evangelist. The report of the pastor in charge was that none of them wanted to talk about how to grow as a Christian. He said, "They ran from us!" I have known some churches to go to extreme efforts to disciple new believers. I applaud that, but, like the others, they generally have marginal success. They have learned to accept the fact that people who profess to become Christians often have to be talked into going further, and that many, if not most, simply will not bother. Authentic new believers can be followed up because they have the Spirit by which they cry, "Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). But you cannot follow-up on a spiritually dead person. It was the preaching of regeneration, with an explanation of its discernible marks, that was the heart of the Great Awakening. J. C. Ryle, in writing of the eighteenth century revival preachers said that they never for a moment believed that there was any true conversion if it was not accompanied with personal holiness. Such content was the staple of the greatest of awakening preaching throughout the history of revival. Only such a powerful cannon blast could rock the bed of those asleep in Zion.

FACING THE DILEMMA:

What must be done? I suggest five responses. First we must preach and teach on the subject. Every author in the New Testament writes of the nature of deception. Some books give major consideration to the subject. Jesus Himself, spoke profusely about true and false conversion, giving significant attention to the fruit found in true believers (Jn. 10:26,27; Mt. 7:21; Mt. 25:1). If this creates doubt in people, you should not see this negatively. One friend told me, "Doubts never sent anyone to hell, but deception always does." They will work through their doubts if we continue to preach the truth. All doubts are

not of the devil, contrary to popular opinion. Speak truthfully the whole counsel of God. You cannot "unsave" true believers. It is true that there will be those who are overly scrupulous and overwhelmed by such examination, but most are too self-confident and have based their assurances on such foolish platforms as that of praying a perfectly worded "sinner's prayer." Patient teaching and care will help them to overcome doubt if they are truly regenerate. Never forget, however, that quiet, sensitive people can be deceived also.

Second, we must address the issue of persistent sin among our members, including the sin of failure to attend the stated meetings of the church. This must be done by reestablishing the forgotten practice of church discipline. Each church should have by-laws which state just what will happen when a member falls into sin, including the sin of non-attendance or very nominal attendance. Everyone in the church, including new members, should be very familiar with the Biblical steps of church discipline. Jesus said that a person who was lovingly, but firmly, disciplined by the church, and yet failed to repent, should be thought of as "a heathen and a tax collector" (See Mt. 18: 15-17). Though David committed atrocious sins, he was a repentant at heart (see 2 Sam. 12:13; Psalm 51). Every Christian is a life-long repentant and church discipline brings this out. We must also get into the homes of all our church members, seeking either to bring them to Christ, or to reluctantly release them to the world which they love more than Christ. This is basic pastoral labor. We are never to pluck the supposed tares from the wheat (Mt. 13:24;36), as if we had absolute knowledge. We might be mistaken. However, loving church discipline is a careful process by which the sinner in essence removes himself by his resistance to correction. The church is made up of repenting saints, not rebelling

sinners.

Third, we should be more careful on the front end of church membership. In my estimation, the public altar call (a modern invention) often reaps people prematurely. We have used it because of our genuine zeal to see the lost converted. Though sacrosanct to Baptists, careful study should be done related to the use of it evangelistically. For eighteen hundred years the church did not use such a method until its principle originator Charles Finney promoted his "new measures." Instead, they were intent on letting conviction play a greater part in conversion. They needed no props for the gospel, but put their confidence in the preached Word and the Holy Spirit. Baptist giant, C. H. Spurgeon, for instance, saw thousands converted without its use. His message was his invitation. We don't need better methods to get people down to the front, but more unction in our preaching. You cannot beat sinners away from Christ when God is bringing them in. (See Jn. 6:37) When as many as 70% of those responding are giving little if any evidence of being saved beyond their first weeks or months of emotional excitement, then questions should be asked. Forget the fact, if you must, that there is no clear Biblical precedent; merely look at this issue pragmatically. It is not helping us. Also, more careful counsel should be taken with those entering in as members of other churches. The foolish practice of receiving new members immediately after they walk the aisle should be abandoned. And much deeper thinking must be done concerning childhood conversion. A very large percentage of childhood professions wash out later in the teen and college years (the more independent, the more they live out their true nature).

Fourth, we must stop giving immediate verbal assurance to people who have hopefully been converted. It is the Holy Spirit's job to give assurance. We are to give the basis upon which assurance can be had, not the assurance itself. Study 1 John in this respect. What things were written so that they might know they have eternal life (1 Jn. 5: 13)? Answer: The tests given in the book.

Finally, we must restore sound doctrine. Revival, I am finding as I study its history, is largely about the recovery of the gospel. The three great doctrines which have so often shown up in revival are God's sovereignty in salvation, justification by grace through faith alone, and regeneration with discernible fruit. Revival is God showing up, but the blessing of the presence of God is directly affected by our beliefs. God most often comes in the context of the great doctrines preached with the unction of the Holy Spirit, penetratingly and faithfully. As an illustration of our doctrinal reductionism, repentance is often forgotten completely in gospel presentations, or else it is understood only to mean "admitting that you are a sinner." "Inviting Christ into the heart," a phrase never found in the Bible (study the context of Jn. 1:12 and Rev. 3:20, the only verses used for this), has taken the place of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. The doctrine of God's judgment is rarely preached with any carefulness, and the cross, as a comprehensive study, is seldom heard. Merely looking over the titles of the sermons awakening preachers preached in the past would surprise most modern pastors.

BE HEALTHY OR BE ASHAMED:

Which army would you rather have? Gideon's first army or his

last? No church, and no denomination, should call itself healthy if there are not more people coming to the stated meetings than are on the rolls. This is a standard kept by most of the world and by our great-grandparents as well. We would be closer to the revival we desire if we would admit our failures as churches and as a denomination, humbly hang our heads, and seek to rectify this awful hindrance to God's blessing. We are bragging about our shame. The next time someone asks how your church and your denomination are doing, tell the truth. We have a new confidence in the inerrant Bible, seminaries that promote orthodoxy, and new evangelistic fervor among the true believers (we have a lot to be excited about) but when considered as a whole, Southern Baptists need raising from the dead.

Appendix 2

The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

April 20, 1996

Evangelical churches today are increasingly dominated by the spirit of this age rather than by the Spirit of Christ. As evangelicals, we call ourselves to repent of this sin and to recover the historic Christian faith.

In the course of history words change. In our day this has happened to the word "evangelical." In the past it served as a bond of unity between Christians from a wide diversity of church traditions. Historic evangelicalism was confessional. It embraced the essential truths of Christianity as those were defined by the great ecumenical councils of the church. In addition, evangelicals also shared a common heritage in the "solas" of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed. The consequence is that the word "evangelical" has become so inclusive as

to have lost its meaning. We face the peril of losing the unity it has taken centuries to achieve. Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, His gospel and His church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism. These truths we affirm not because of their role in our traditions, but because we believe that they are central to the Bible.

Sola Scriptura: The Erosion of Authority

Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God. Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of the music. As Biblical authority has been abandoned in practice, as its truths have faded from Christian consciousness, and as its doctrines have lost their saliency, the church has been increasingly emptied of its integrity, moral authority and direction. Rather than adapting Christian faith to satisfy the felt needs of consumers, we must proclaim the law as the only measure of true righteousness and the gospel as the only announcement of saving truth. Biblical truth is indispensable to the church's understanding, nurture and discipline. Scripture must take us beyond our perceived needs to our real needs and liberate us from seeing ourselves through the seductive images, cliches, promises and priorities of mass culture. It is only in the light of God's truth that we understand ourselves aright and see God's provision for our need. The Bible, therefore, must be taught

and preached in the church. Sermons must be expositions of the Bible and its teachings, not expressions of the preacher's opinions or the ideas of the age. We must settle for nothing less than what God has given. The work of the Holy Spirit in personal experience cannot be disengaged from Scripture. The Spirit does not speak in ways that are independent of Scripture. Apart from Scripture we would never have known of God's grace in Christ. The Biblical Word, rather than spiritual experience, is the test of truth.

THESIS ONE: SOLA SCRIPTURA

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured.

We deny that any creed, council or individual may bind a Christian's conscience, that the Holy Spirit speaks independently of or contrary to what is set forth in the Bible, or that personal spiritual experience can ever be a vehicle of revelation.

Solus Christus: The Erosion of Christ-Centered Faith

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture. The result is a loss of absolute values, permissive individualism, and a substitution of wholeness for holiness, recovery for repentance, intuition for truth, feeling for belief, chance for

providence, and immediate gratification for enduring hope. Christ and his cross have moved from the center of our vision.

THESIS TWO: SOLUS CHRISTUS

We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

We deny that the gospel is preached if Christ's substitutionary work is not declared and faith in Christ and His work is not solicited.

Sola Gratia: The Erosion of The Gospel

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world; from the self-esteem gospel, to the health and wealth gospel, from those who have transformed the gospel into a product to be sold and sinners into consumers who want to buy, to others who treat Christian faith as being true simply because it works. This silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches. God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace.

THESIS THREE: SOLA GRATIA

We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God's wrath by his grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

We deny that salvation is in any sense a human work. Human methods, techniques or strategies by themselves cannot accomplish this transformation. Faith is not produced by our unregenerated human nature.

Sola Fide: The Erosion of The Chief Article

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied by leaders, scholars and pastors who claim to be evangelical. Although fallen human nature has always recoiled from recognizing its need for Christ's imputed righteousness, modernity greatly fuels the fires of this discontent with the Biblical Gospel. We have allowed this discontent to dictate the nature of our ministry and what it is we are preaching. Many in the church growth movement believe that sociological understanding of those in the pew is as important to the success of the gospel as is the Biblical truth which is proclaimed. As a result, theological convictions are frequently divorced from the work of the ministry. The marketing orientation in many churches takes this even further, erasing the distinction between the Biblical Word and the world, robbing Christ's cross of its offense, and reducing Christian faith to the principles and

methods which bring success to secular corporations.

While the theology of the cross may be believed, these movements are actually emptying it of its meaning. There is no gospel except that of Christ's substitution in our place whereby God imputed to Him our sin and imputed to us His righteousness. Because He bore our judgment, we now walk in His grace as those who are forever pardoned, accepted and adopted as God's children. There is no basis for our acceptance before God except in Christ's saving work, not in our patriotism, churchly devotion or moral decency. The gospel declares what God has done for us in Christ. It is not about what we can do to reach Him.

THESIS FOUR: SOLA FIDE

We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

We deny that justification rests on any merit to be found in us, or upon the grounds of an infusion of Christ's righteousness in us, or that an institution claiming to be a church that denies or condemns sola fide can be recognized as a legitimate church.

Soli Deo Gloria: The Erosion of God-Centered Worship

Wherever in the church Biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced

God's and we are doing His work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

God does not exist to satisfy human ambitions, cravings, the appetite for consumption, or our own private spiritual interests. We must focus on God in our worship, rather than the satisfaction of our personal needs. God is sovereign in worship; we are not. Our concern must be for God's kingdom, not our own empires, popularity or success.

THESIS FIVE: SOLI DEO GLORIA

We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God's glory and that we must glorify Him always. We must live our entire lives before the face of God, under the authority of God and for His glory alone.

We deny that we can properly glorify God if our worship is confused with entertainment, if we neglect either Law or Gospel in our preaching, or if self-improvement, self-esteem or self-fulfillment are allowed to become alternatives to the gospel.

A Call To Repentance & Reformation

The faithfulness of the evangelical church in the past contrasts sharply

with its unfaithfulness in the present. Earlier in this century, evangelical churches sustained a remarkable missionary endeavor, and built many religious institutions to serve the cause of Biblical truth and Christ's kingdom. That was a time when Christian behavior and expectations were markedly different from those in the culture. Today they often are not. The evangelical world today is losing its Biblical fidelity, moral compass and missionary zeal.

We repent of our worldliness. We have been influenced by the "gospels" of our secular culture, which are no gospels. We have weakened the church by our own lack of serious repentance, our blindness to the sins in ourselves which we see so clearly in others, and our inexcusable failure to adequately tell others about God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

We also earnestly call back erring professing evangelicals who have deviated from God's word in the matters discussed in this Declaration. This includes those who declare that there is hope of eternal life apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ, who claim that those who reject Christ in this life will be annihilated rather than endure the just judgment of God through eternal suffering, or who claim that evangelicals and Roman Catholics are one in Jesus Christ even where the Biblical doctrine of justification is not believed.

The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals asks all Christians to give consideration to implementing this Declaration in the church's worship, ministry, policies, life and evangelism.

For Christ's sake. Amen. §

Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals Executive Council (1996)

Dr. John Armstrong
The Rev. Alistair Begg
Dr. James M. Boice
Dr. W. Robert Godfrey
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Appendix 3

The Women in 1Tim 3:11

Three Options Available:

1. Wives of the Deacons/Deacons' Wives
2. Women Deacons/Deaconesses/Female Deacons
3. Women Who Assist the Deacons/Women Helpers

I. Option #1: Wives of the Deacons

Arguments in Favor of Option #1:

- 1) context and placement
- 2) word is the standard Greek term for wives
- 3) wives fit flow of thought as another in a list of qualifications for the man under consideration

Arguments Against Option #1:

- 1) context and placement do not necessitate wives
- 2) word is also the standard Greek word for women
- 3) why list a qualification for deacon's wives...
 1. when it is the men who are to be examined
 2. not list a similar list of qualifications for the overseer's wives
- 4) word "their" is not in the Greek but is rather supplied
- 5) the use of the word "likewise" indicates Paul is referring to a group distinct from the deacons, not just one more qualification in a list
- 6) if reference was being made to the deacon's wives it would more logically be listed after v.12 where he has referred to the home of the deacon

II. Option #2: Women Deacons

Arguments in Favor of Option #2:

- 1) similarity in qualifications

<u>Men:</u>	<u>Women:</u>
Dignified_____	Dignified
Not double tongued	Not malicious gossips
Not addicted to much wine	Temperate
Not fond of sordid gain	Faithful in all things...
Holding to the mystery of the faith...	

- 2) use of “likewise” again indicating a new group
- 3) use of “deacon” in Rom 16:1 for Phoebe - a female in the church at Cenchrea
- 4) there was no Greek word for Paul to use for “deaconess”
- 5) support of church history

Arguments Against Option #2:

- 1) only men referred to as deacons in 1Tim 3:8, 12
- 2) the phrase “must be” indicates that deacons are to be men only
- 3) the use of the imperative “let” in v.12 shows that a deacon is to be a “one woman man”/by nature of gender this rules out women!
- 4) if Acts 6 is properly our paradigm for deacon ministry...all the seven selected were men

III. Option #3: Women Who Assist the Deacons

Arguments in Favor of Option #3:

- 1) all the favorable ideas listed in option #2
- 2) it doesn't carry the negative potholes of the others
- 3) here they can be distinct yet not fully separate from the deacons/working in submission to them primarily with women (church history supports this as well)
- 4) solves many practical/pragmatic issues that would face an all male diaconate

Arguments Against Option #3:

*Arguments against option 3 are put forth by those who favor option 1 or 2. Therefore, the arguments in favor of 1 and 2 can be seen as arguments against 3.

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