



Church Principles of the New Testament

As Practiced by
Early Brethren

Vol. I

B.P. Harris

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Early Brethren

Volume I

Church Foundations – Church Governance
Church and the Work

B.P. Harris

Assembly Bookshelf
Sacramento

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Table of Contents

Preface	7
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I Church Foundations

Beginnings	10
Why Paul?	21
The Administration of the Mystery	29
A Wise Masterbuilder	46
Christ—Bedrock, Foundation and Chief Cornerstone	49
Bedrock	49
Foundation	79
The Chief Cornerstone	86
The Foundation of the Faith	95
What's in a Name?	
The Problem of Denominating Churches	106
The Importance of His Name	126
The Locality and Autonomy of the Churches	143
Meaning of Ekklesia (Church)	143
Boundaries of the Ekklesia (Church)	153
House Churches: Grammatical Structure of the Greek Phrase Κατ'Οἴκων	158
Historical Background of the City of Rome	163
The Existing Jewish Synagogues of Rome	168
House Churches of Rome	176
House Churches in Colossae	199
House Church and the Church of Laodicea	201
Autonomy of the Churches	219
Church of the Laodiceans: Col. 4:16	226
Preserving Liberty: II Cor. 1:24	228
Seven Churches of Asia: Rev. 2-3	230
Espoused to One Husband: II Cor. 11:2	231
Freedom from Hegemony: Gal. 2:11-14	232

Boundaries of Oversight: Acts 20:27-30	236
Allotments: I Peter 5:2-3	237
The Council in Jerusalem: Acts 15:1-21	241

II Church Governance

Church Governance and Divine Order	264
The Basis of Governance	267
Social Mindset of a Greek Citizen	270
The Practice of Governance	281
The Unfolding of Governance	289
Elders	296
Additional Designations as Bishops and Pastors	296
The Plurality of Their Governance	299
The Means by which Elders are Established	302
Acts 20:28	302
Titus 1:5-9	304
Acts 14:21-23	313
I Timothy 3:1-10	324
I Thessalonians 5:12	363
Questions Regarding the Proving or Recognizing of Elders Today	391
Characteristic of a Man Made an Elder by the Holy Spirit	402
Historical Change of Governance in the Church	413

III Church and the Work

The Work of an Apostle	452
The Work and the Local Church	470
A Failure to Recognize This Distinction	479
The Circulating Work and the Local Church Today	501
Scriptural Index	512

Preface

Ecclesiology is important because the study of the Church is a study of God's new creation (Eph. 2:13-16) and everything that God creates in its original condition is perfect and is expressive of who He is. Our God is a revelatory God. Every object God creates bespeaks His very nature, character and purpose as manifested in His Son. It can be no other way for all that the Father does, glorifies the Son and all that the Son does, glorifies the Father, and all that the Spirit does, glorifies the Eternal Son.

The new creation, that will be the new heaven and the new earth, will forever speak forth the glories of Christ Jesus. Christian men and women, when fully glorified in Christ Jesus, will also speak forth the glories of the Son. Everything created and designed by God is meant to lift up and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

As such, when God ordered the creation of the Tabernacle out of such things as wood, skins, linen, gold, silver and brass it was ordered in such a way to manifest something of Christ. When the pattern was followed, the Son was glorified, but when man, from his sin nature, changed the pattern, the truth bespeaking the Son was marred. As an example, when Nadab and Abihu changed the order of service designed by God, they marred the picture of Christ's sacrifice and so were punished by God because they approached God's presence, not with fire from the altar, which foreshadowed the sweet smelling savour of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, but they approached God with a fire of their own making which represented man's attempt to approach God by his own goodness and good works, by his own religious nature (Lev. 10:1-2). They marred the beauties of the Christ and His sacrifice for us by their presumption to change the pattern given by God.

In the old creation, every object, pattern, type, and figure in Scripture will always bear witness to the glories of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit if they are not altered in any way. The same is true with God's new creation—the Church. The Church was created by God to be expressive of certain truths about the Godhead. It was created to be a visible representation of the Body of Christ upon the earth. All that the Son is, the Church was meant to show forth, for the Church, indeed, is bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). However, when Christians alter the pattern and plan of God in regard to her structure, governance and ordering, they are altering the intended expression of God's Son upon the earth.

This is a serious mistake, for who are we to think we can improve upon the plan of the Creator. Who are we to think that we have a better way to express the glories and truth of the Only-Begotten Son of God, than that which was designed by the Father Himself? If Moses was “warned” to keep the pattern revealed to him on the mount (Heb. 8:5), if he was warned by God to not change the structure and ordering of the Tabernacle upon earth which bespoke Christ in all His glories, how much more should we be careful to keep to the pattern of the Tabernacle or Temple of God in this dispensation—the Church, which was meant to bespeak the Eternal Son of God, as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit through the apostles of Christ in the Word of God?

Moses was warned to not change the pattern, for any change would detract something from the glories of the Son; it would be an utter act of presumption to change the plan of the Divine architect. In the same way, we are warned not to change the pattern given to us by the apostles concerning the Church, for any change detracts something from the glories of Christ Jesus; and as with Moses, it would be an utter act of presumption on our part to change the plan of the Divine architect. I know I am repeating myself, but I do so for this is such an important principle to understand before we start this study on the Church Principles of the New Testament.

We should never fear repetition, for the concept of repetition is rooted in the very Word of God, and in the very Creation of God. In his Gospel, the apostle John, time after time uses repetition of certain words and phrases; such repetition brings blessing to the soul that listens. In the Creation of God, a new sunrise is repeated day after day, bringing forth fresh declarations of the glory of God to those souls willing to look up and see (Ps. 19). How wonderful is repetition when it is used by God to solidify His truth within our hearts.

And so, please forgive me if sometimes I repeat myself in this book; but please realize the intent of this repetition is to solidify these important Church principles into our hearts, unto the glory of God the Son, by the witness of the Blessed Holy Spirit.

And so we see that God ordered the building of the Tabernacle through Moses, and He ordered the building of the Temple in Jerusalem through King David (which also was given according to a pattern as was the Tabernacle—I Chron. 28:11-12; Heb. 8:5). And, in the same way, God

ordered through His apostles the building of the Temple of God in this dispensation that is the Church (I Cor. 3:16-17).

May we ever be faithful to follow the pattern given to us by God, so as to not detract from the honour and glory that is due to our Great God and Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Blessed Holy Spirit. Amen.

BPH
Sacramento, CA

I Church Foundations

Beginnings

Our study begins with the first usage of the word “Church” that is found in the New Testament—Matt. 16:13-18.

Matt.16:13-18 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, 'Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?' ¹⁴ And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. ¹⁵ He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV

We see two fundamental truths in this portion of Scripture. First, we see that names are important to God for they are revelatory of the thing or person that is named. This portion of Scripture states that Jesus, the Son of Man, is more than just a mere man; he is John the Baptist, nor Elijah, nor Jeremiah, nor one of the prophets. Jesus was the “Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Secondly, we see that the Church, the Temple of God for this dispensation, had not yet been brought into existence. And, it is this second truth we would now like to look at in detail. The importance of names we will look at later, but suffice it to say at this time, this portion of Scripture is the very foundation of Church principles. This portion of Scripture will be the first Scripture we will look at and will become the basis of our study.

We see from Matthew 16:18 that the Church was not yet in existence when the Lord was upon the earth; we know this for He says “I will build My Church.” Yet this verse does give us an important clue as to when His Church will begin. The verse reads as follows in the Greek and in English—

Matt. 16:18 Καὶ ἐπεὶ εἶπεν ταῦτα, ἔειπεν ἡ πέτρα οἰκοδομησῶ μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι Ἰερουσαλὴμ οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτήν.

Matt. 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. NKJV

The important clue is found in the phrase οικοδομήσω (I will build) μου (my) τὴν (the) ἐκκλησίαν (Church). In English, the word for word translation in the same Greek word order would be “I will build “my” the Church.” The little word μου is the word “my.” It is the genitive case form of the Greek pronoun—ἐγώ (I)—commonly called the “genitive of possession.”

However, the Greek word order of this genitive of possession is not the usual order used in Matthew. Normally, this genitive of possession—μου—follows the noun in Matthew, as can be seen in these few examples.

Matt. 8:9 Καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν, ἔχων ὑπ’ ἐμαυτὸν στρατιώτας· καὶ λέγω τούτῳ, Πορεύθητι, καὶ πορεύεται· καὶ ἄλλω, Ἔρχου, καὶ ἔρχεται· καὶ τῷ δούλῳ μου, Ποίησον τοῦτο, καὶ ποιεῖ.

Matt. 8:9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to **my servant**, Do this, and he doeth it. KJV

Matt. 11:29 Ἄρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πρᾶός εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ· καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν.

Matt. 11:29 Take **my yoke** upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. KJV

Matt. 12:44 Τότε λέγει, Ἐπιστρέψω εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον· καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐρίσκει σχολάζοντα, σεσαρωμένον, καὶ κεκοσμημένον.

Matt. 12:44 Then he saith, I will return into **my house** from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth *it* empty, swept, and garnished. KJV

Matthew usually writes the pronoun μου after the object modified, not before. Therefore, when Matthew places it before the noun we should pause and ask ourselves why? There must be a reason. The answer, I believe, is that he was emphasizing the pronoun.

Fronting a word is one of the ways a writer in Greek would give emphasis to a particular word in his language. We also use fronting techniques in English to sometimes provide emphasis. For example, if one wanted to emphasize that the apostle Peter followed the Lord with all

his heart, we might change the sentence, “Peter, with all his heart, followed the Lord,” to, “With all his heart, Peter followed the Lord.” The emphasis would then be on fullness of Peter’s love and commitment. And so, in the verse before us, I believe Matthew is fronting the word because he is emphasizing, not only the possessive nature of the pronoun, but he is also emphasizing the basal function of the genitive case. In other words, he is not just using it as a genitive of possession but is also using it by what some might call the “genitive of source.”

The Greek scholar, Thomas Kerchever Arnold, once said this about this basal function of the genitive—

“The Genitive may be called the *whence-case*. Its primary meaning is that of *proceeding from*. Hence notions of the *source* or *origin* from which anything *proceeds, is derived, taken*, or the like, are placed in the *genitive*. The use of this case is extended to denote the *person* or *object* that *possesses* anything (which proceeds, as it were, from his *sphere, possessions*, or the like), and the *cause* from which any *feeling* or *emotion* proceeds.”¹

This fronting of the pronoun by Matthew for emphasis and source is also found in Matt. 7:24.

Matt. 7:24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς, ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν·

Matt. 7:24 "Therefore, every one who doth hear **of me** these words, and doth do them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon the rock; (Young's Literal Translation)

Matthew writes μου before the noun τοὺς λόγους (the words). Why? Because the Holy Spirit is emphasizing that the words or sayings of Jesus were not just any words. They were not sayings that Jesus learned from the Rabbis before Him. The Holy Spirit was emphasizing that they were words “μου” “of,” or “from” Jesus Himself. They were His own words or sayings. They “issued out” or “proceeded from” Him and no other. They were not from other men. They were His own Divine words!

This is why a few verses later Matthew concludes with this observation.

¹ Thomas Kerchever Arnold, *Arnold's Elementary Greek Grammar* (Francis & John Rivington, London, 1848) pg. 168

Matt. 7:28-29 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. KJV

It was a common and expected practice that when men taught in Israel, they would appeal to those who went before them so that they would say in their teaching, “Rabbi so and so said this.” In other words, the authority to teach depended on the Rabbis before them. Such was not the case with Jesus. He never appealed to someone else. The words were His own and not from men. He spoke differently than other teachers and with complete authority, so much so that the Jewish leaders asked Jesus the following in Matt. 21:23—

“And when he was come into the Temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?’”

They were incredulous that He spoke with such authority, not appealing to other Rabbis, but spoke His own sayings. This is why I believe the pronoun was fronted in Matt. 7:24. Matthew was giving emphasis to this truth.

Another example of this fronting by Matthew for emphasis is also found in Matt. 17:15.

Matthew 17:15 καὶ λέγων, Κύριε, ἐλέησόν μου τὸν υἱόν, ὅτι σεληνιάζεται καὶ κακῶς πάσχει· πολλάκις γὰρ πίπτει εἰς τὸ πῦρ, καὶ πολλάκις εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ.

Matthew 17:15 "Lord, have mercy on **my son**, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. NASB

However, in this verse we do not know why this was done until Luke wrote his Gospel. Matthew fronts the pronoun and so we know that something was meant to be emphasized, but we do not know what it really is; but in Luke 9:38 we find out that it was because his son was his “only-begotten” (Lit. μονογενής ἐστίν μοί —he is my only-begotten) Matthew was emphasizing how dear his son was to him by fronting the pronoun. He was emphasizing the basal function of the genitive, the genitive of source. He was emphasizing that his dear son was “of him,” one who issued out of him, his only-begotten, and so, one that was very dear to him for he came from his very own body and he had no other children. Matthew, or should I say the Holy Spirit, emphasizes this aspect by fronting the pronoun.

And so when we come back to Matthew 16:18, we now see a reason why Matthew may have fronted the pronoun. Matthew is also emphasizing the basal function of the genitive of possession, showing that possession results from procession. He is emphasizing the fact that Jesus is declaring that the Church will be My Church, for it will be “of Me,” “out of Me,” that it will proceed from Me.

As such, this also gives us a clue as to when the Church began. The Church never began until it was considered to be “of him.” And the Holy Spirit explains to us this wonderful truth by telling us in Eph. 5:30 that the Church is “of Him,” because the Church is “of his flesh and of his bones.”

Eph. 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. KJV

Literally, Paul says: ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὀστέων αὐτοῦ (out of the flesh of him, and out of the bones of him). He uses a preposition that bespeaks movement out of, and separation from, a source. Why?

More than likely, because Paul was making an allusion to Eve in the book of Genesis. Eve was “of” the flesh and bones of Adam, because she was “out of Adam,” that is, from his side or rib. She was a picture of the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Church that the Lord Jesus Christ will build will be out of Him and will, thus, be a part of Him. Christ is the head and we are his body. We are from Him, as Eve was from Adam, (who was a type of Christ - Rom. 5:14). This is why the baptism of the Spirit, whereby we are placed into the Body of Christ, accompanies salvation. We cannot be a part of the Body of Christ, the Church, unless we are first baptized into Christ, being made members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. We are baptized into the Body of Christ, the humanity of Christ by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13), so that we can be “of Him,” and by His side.

Therefore, we should realize that Scripture says that the Church never existed while the Lord was still on the earth, because the Church would have to be “of him,” and that could not occur till after the Lord's death, burial and resurrection. However, when the Lord does begin to build the Church, the one clue that is given to us by the Lord is that that Church will be intimately joined to Him, by being “of Him,” and so, becoming His own unique possession—He says “I will build My church.”

This was never true of Israel even though Israel is also called the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). The word “church” was not being used of Israel in the same way. The nation of Israel was not His body and was not “out of Him” for the nation of Israel was never baptized “into” Him, for he had no flesh or body (Human Nature) into which they could be baptized before His incarnation. Israel was never the Body of Christ. When someone became a part of Israel through birth or otherwise, they never were intimately joined to the Lord. There was no union with Christ. They were not “of his flesh, and of his bones.”

This is what distinguishes Israel from the Church. The nation Israel in the Old Testament was not intimately joined to Christ. The Church, on the other hand, is intimately joined to Christ.

So when did the Church, which the Lord said He would build, first begin? It began after the first ones were baptized into Christ, into His body, into His Human Nature. His Church could only exist by first being “in Christ,” by being joined “to Him,” so as to be “of Him.” So when did this baptism occur? It occurred in the books of Acts. The first occurrence of the word “Church” in the New Testament, after the Lord refers to its future existence in Matthew's Gospel, is found in Acts 2:47—

Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. KJV

All of a sudden we have a Church in existence! Where did it come from? It was not in chapter one of Acts, but now, all of a sudden, we find it in chapter two. Why? What happened between chapter one and chapter two? Of course, we know it was the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus said would come in a few days after He ascended back into heaven.

Acts 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. KJV

Here is our answer! In Matt. 16:18 we know that Jesus said that the Church, which He came to build, would be “of Him”—that it would come into existence out of Him (as Eve one day came into existence, by being brought out of the side of Adam). As Eve was the bride of Adam, being “of him,” so too, the Church is the bride of Christ, being “of Him.” And because we are “of Him,” we are one with Him!

And since the Church had to first be “of Him,” the baptism of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13) had to first occur before the Church could come into existence! This baptism of the Spirit that Jesus spoke about in Acts 1:5, of course, happened on the Day of Pentecost. The baptism of the Spirit brought the Church into existence!

And so we see that the baptism of the Spirit was a magnificent occurrence in time. The Church which was known by God from all of eternity suddenly came into existence because the baptism of the Spirit, which Jesus said would happen, happened! The Holy Spirit of God the Father baptized believers into the body of His dear Son. This was one of the goals of the incarnation! The Son took upon himself Human Nature so that we might be baptized into Him, being made members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones, and so we might be forever in Him—joined by the Spirit with Him!²

The Church began on the Day of Pentecost because believers were baptized by the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit brought us into intimate communion with the Lord. This had never occurred before in all of human history. We became “added to the Lord” through baptism of the Spirit. This never happened to Israel. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were never joined to the Lord. They were never baptized into Him. Moses was never joined to the Lord. David was never joined to the Lord. The nation

² Of course, man can never be a part of the Godhead. The finite can never be a part of the infinite. Only the Father, Son and Holy Spirit possess the one and same Divine Substance. The Son and the Holy Spirit are consubstantial with the Father. We can never be. But praise God, the Son was made flesh and dwelt among us, coming in the likeness of sinful flesh to die upon the cross for our sins. He shed His blood upon the cross so that we might be cleansed from all unrighteousness. His Human Nature was unionized with His Divine Nature in One Person, without division, without separation, without confusion and without change so that those who put their faith in Him and His work upon the cross might be baptized into Him, being made members of His body. And since we are in Him and His Human Nature is forever unionized with His Divine Nature in One Person, how can we ever be separated from Him. We will forever be “of His flesh and of His bones.” Hallelujah! This is part of our guarantee of eternal salvation! Our Saviour will never divide Himself from that with which He has allowed to be joined unto Him. Once joined to the Lord by the Spirit, thereby being made members of His body, we can never lose our salvation for we will always, forever, be joined to Him; we will forever be safe in the arms of Jesus, having forever been made partakers of the Divine Nature or Being by our being made members of His body, and then being brought forth as His bride (II Pet. 1:4). Indeed, this mystery is great as Paul says in Eph. 5:32.

Israel was never joined to the Lord, but the Church has been joined to the Lord! Hallelujah!

This fact is carefully confirmed for us by the Holy Spirit by comparing Acts 2:47 with Acts 5:14.

Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved. KJV

Acts 5:14 And believers were the more **added to the Lord**, multitudes both of men and women. KKV

We see that Acts 2:47 says that people were “added to the church.” However, in Acts 5:14 the Holy Spirit uses the same Greek word “added” and says the believers were “added to the Lord.”

Now it is admitted this verse in and of itself is not indicating that believers are *added* to the Lord by being baptized into Christ. The same Greek word, προστίθημι, translated *added*, is used in the LXX of Israel cleaving to the Lord in Deuteronomy 13:5.

Deut. 13:4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave (LXX—προστεθήσεσθε) unto him. KJV

But within the fuller context of the New Testament we see that, indeed, the Church, unlike Israel is *added* to the Lord by being baptized by the Spirit into Him. The nation of Israel in the Old Testament could never be added to the Lord in this way. The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was never “baptized into Christ” by the Holy Spirit. They were never unionized with Christ. These verses, taken within the greater context of the New Testament show that *adding to the Church* was the same as *adding to the Lord* because the two were intimately connected by the baptism of the Spirit. Our cleaving to the Lord carries a more intimate connotation than that used of the nation Israel. These verses show that this Church is something different than the nation of Israel. This Church was of His flesh and of His bones. This Church was the Body of Christ, that mysterious unionization between Christ and His Church that came about by us being baptized into Him. We are now “in Christ” by the baptism of the Spirit. There is no other way to be “in Christ” except by the baptism of the Spirit. The nation of Israel was never “in Christ,” nor could they be because it takes a Divine act of the Spirit of God to be so.

Paul confirms this intimate connection, for he states in Gal. 1:13 that he persecuted the church of God.

Gal. 1:13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute **the church of God** beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; NASB

That church, which he persecuted so harshly, was scattered by his persecution throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Yet in Gal. 1:22 he states that those same churches were “in Christ.”

Gal. 1:22 And I was still unknown by sight to **the churches of Judea which were in Christ.** NASB

In other words, in Paul's estimation, those churches of Judaea (which existed before Peter ever went to Cornelius in Acts 10 and so were churches comprised only of Jews), were “in Christ” and were thus the Church. They were members of His Body, for they were “in Christ.” Thus, the Scripture shows us that the churches in Judea, which existed before Paul was converted (cf. Acts 2:47; 8:1; 9:31), were considered the Body of Christ, having been baptized into Him by the Spirit.

Scripture shows this again when Paul says that those same churches of God in Judea, which obviously existed before Paul was converted, were churches in Christ Jesus in I Thess. 2:14.

I Thess. 2:14 For ye, brethren, became followers of **the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus:** for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews. KJV

Finally, Paul confirms this once again when he calls the Church he persecuted before his conversion “the Church of God.”

I Cor. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted **the church of God.** KJV

This phrase is used only in eight times in Scripture (sing.—Acts 20:28; I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:32; 15:9; II Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; I Tim. 3:5; plural—I Cor. 11:16; I Thess. 2:14; II Thess. 1:4), so that, within the context of the New Testament, he is identifying the church he persecuted as being the one and the same “church of God,” which he says in Acts 20:28 is the “church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

So, here we have the witness by Scripture as to when the Church began. It was in existence by Acts 18 when Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians. According to Paul's confession in Galatians 1:22, one of his earliest epistles, it was in existence by Acts 9 when he was saved. By the witness of Acts 5:14, which says that believers were "added to the Lord," we know it was in existence at the time of Acts 5. And, finally, by a comparison of Acts 2:47 with Acts 2:1, Acts 1:5 and Matt. 16:18, we know it came into existence on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples were baptized by the Holy Spirit of God!

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the clue as to when the Church came into existence, when the Lord began to build His Church, when that mysterious unionization between Christ and his Church first came about (Eph. 5:31-32). Both Jew and Gentiles are now "in Christ" by the baptism of the Spirit. There is no other way for Jew or Gentile to be "in Christ" except by the baptism of the Spirit. The nation of Israel was never unionized with Christ Jesus in this way, nor could the nation ever be, for it took a Divine act of the Holy Spirit of God to baptize believers into the Messiah, and that could never occur until after the incarnation and the death, burial and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Without the Human Nature of the Son of God how could man be joined to the Lord? The finite can never be joined to the infinite. Man cannot coinhere in the Divine. Only the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit can coinhere in each other. So, the Son, in His great mercy, came in the likeness of sinful flesh, in which His Human Nature was unionized with His Divine Nature, in One Person, without division, without separation, without change and without confusion, so that we might be joined to Him by being baptized into His body, becoming "of His flesh, and of His bone," so that we might be His bride, brought out of His side unto eternity, to be with our Saviour and Lord both now and forever more—the Church of God which He purchased with His precious blood. Amen and Hallelujah!

And so we see some wonderful verses concerning the origin of the Church, that great mystery which was hidden for so long but was made known to the saints by the apostles and prophets in Spirit, and lastly, by the apostle Paul himself as related in his epistle to the Ephesians.

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made

known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.”
Ephesians 3:1-9 NASB

The question before us now is, “Why Paul?” Why was it given to him to make known the administration of the mystery of the Church? It is to that question we would now like to turn our attention.

Why Paul?

Eph. 3:8-9 “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.” NASB

The Lord Jesus took the time during His sojourn on earth to raise up Twelve disciples who could bear witness to His work, disciples who could go into all the world, making disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things He had commanded them. With that being the case, we have to ask ourselves as to why Paul is more prominent in recorded Scripture in the revealing of Church principles than any of the Twelve Apostles.

Some, in modern times, have affirmed the century old argument that Paul taught different things than the Twelve taught, and in so doing usurped their rightful place. This line of thinking is not new, for even in the time of Paul, those claiming to follow Christ presented themselves as rightful representatives of the Lord Jesus (cf. Gal. 1 and 2; II Cor. 11 and 12). However, such thinking today is as wrong as it was in those early days, and, if one accepts the inspiration of Scripture, such thinking becomes untenable as Peter himself bears witness to the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry as do the other apostles (cf. Gal. 2:1-10; II Pet.3:15-16). So the question remains, “Why did the Lord spend so much time with the Twelve but then raise up Paul to be the primary writer and witness of the Divine Pattern for the Church?”

I believe the reason is because our Lord had two works to accomplish. The responsibility to bear witness to the first work was primarily given to the Twelve. The responsibility to bear witness to the second work was primarily given to Paul. The first work has been accomplished for all time. The second work continues to this day. The first work was accomplished by our Lord while He was sojourning upon the earth. The second work is being accomplished by our Lord as He sits in heaven, waiting until His enemies are being made a footstool for His feet. The first work the Lord addressed in John 17:4.

John 17:4 I have glorified thee on the earth: **I have finished the work** which thou gavest me to do. KJV ³

The second work, that is ongoing to this day, the Lord addressed in Matt. 16:18.

Matt. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this **rock I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV

The first work began in a manger. The second began on a throne. The first became manifested with the baptism of John. The second became manifested with the baptism of the Spirit. The first work was finished on that dark day of Calvary. The second work began on that bright day of fire called Pentecost. The first work we are referring to was, obviously, the incarnation of our Lord culminating in His work of redemption. The second work, that is ongoing to this day, is the work of building the Church culminating with His Second Coming. As such, the Lord prepared apostles for both works.

The Twelve primarily bore witness to our Lord's incarnation and redemption, bearing witness to His Divine and Human nature unionized in One Person. We see this in the following verses.

Matt. 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. KJV

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. KJV

³ Depending on the variant, the verb or participle is referring to the work, as being brought to the end, i.e. brought to its fullness. The Lord had already said the goal or end of His work had come, that the whole purpose of His incarnation was finally upon Him in John 13:1. He said in that verse that "his hour had come." This is what He means when he says He has "finished the work" in Jn. 17:4. In other words, he is saying that the last chapter has come, not that the last sentence has been written. In that sense, the last sentence was written when he bowed his head upon the cross, and said, "It is finished." Our Lord in this prayer is speaking of the fact that the work God had given to Him has reached its goal. The time for the shedding of His blood as the Lamb of God was upon Him. The time for His sacrifice for our sins upon the cross was now here. The hour had come. Thus, with that knowledge, throughout His high priestly prayer, He speaks as if everything had already occurred (cf. John 17:11-12).

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. KJV

I John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. KJV

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. KJV

Then, they bore witness to His ministry and His atoning death upon the cross, teaching future disciples to observe all He commanded them.

Matthew 28:19-20 “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.” NASB

Acts 10:38-39 “*You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.³⁹ “We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.” NASB (also cf. Acts 2:22-23)

And, finally, they bore witness to His resurrection out from dead and His ascension back to heaven.

Acts 2:24-36 “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.²⁵ For David says of Him, ‘I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.²⁶ Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope;²⁷ Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.²⁸ Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.’²⁹ “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.³⁰ “And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat *one* of his descendants upon his throne,³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.³² This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.³³ Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.³⁴ For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’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." NASB

Acts 10: 40-42 "God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, *that is*, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead." NASB

This was their primary ministry for which they were called. Now, obviously, they were also prepared to bear witness to our Lord's work of building His Church; we are not saying they were not, but it is clear that Paul was the chosen apostle, apart from the Twelve, who was called to *primarily* bear witness to the Lord's second work of building the Church, as can be seen through the writing of Scripture.

Paul was the one chosen to leave for us more details regarding the character and pattern of the Church in Sacred Scripture than any other apostle. This was Paul's ministry as a wise masterbuilder. Nowhere in Scripture are any of the Twelve called wise "masterbuilders," but Paul is called a wise masterbuilder. Now, of course, that does not mean that the Twelve were not also wise "masterbuilders." They also laid the foundation for the Church in many different parts of the world. But the fact remains that only Paul is chosen by the Holy Spirit to actually be called a wise masterbuilder in Scripture, and he is the one divinely chosen to compose the largest portion of the New Testament (outside the gospels).

Therefore, we see that Paul had a unique ministry as the Twelve had their unique ministry. The Lord disciplined the Twelve for three years while He was upon the earth and the Lord disciplined Paul for three years after He returned to Heaven. The Twelve were able to bear witness to things that Paul was never able to bear witness to, and Paul bore witness to some things that the Twelve were never able to bear witness to.

After Paul's salvation (except for the apostle John and, perhaps, Peter) Paul is the only one in Scripture to whom the Lord, after His ascension back into Heaven, directly appears to from His throne. And, apart from the two mentioned above, Paul is also the only one to whom (as recorded for us in Scripture) the Lord directly converses with after His ascension back into Heaven.

Now, of course, just as the Twelve also bore witness to the building of the Church, so too, Paul, after the fact, also bore witness to our Lord's resurrection and ascension. We are not saying that each's others witness did not overlap, but what we are saying is that just as Paul could not bear witness to some things that the Twelve could bear witness to (because Paul was not present), so too the Twelve, apparently, could not bear witness to some things Paul bore witness to in his epistles, because the Lord did not specially appear to them for that purpose as he did with Paul.

We see this beginning on the Damascus' road when the Lord appeared to Paul saying,

Acts 26:14-18 "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'¹⁵ "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'¹⁶ 'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, **to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;**¹⁷ delivering you from the *Jewish* 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 dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' NASB

In verse 16 that our Lord specifically tells Paul that not only would he bear witness to the things he had seen, but also to the things the Lord *would show to him in the future*. Paul speaks about one of these appearances in Acts 22:17-21 and in Acts 23:11.

Acts 22:17-21 "And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the Temple, that I fell into a trance,¹⁸ and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'¹⁹ And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee.'²⁰ 'And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.'²¹ And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" NASB

Acts 23:11 But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also." NASB

Perhaps the Lord, at those times, also spoke to Paul concerning those things that he, Paul, would later reveal to us concerning the Body of Christ which is His Church. If not at that time, we still have Paul's testimony that he had multiple visions and revelations from the Lord.

II Cor. 12:1 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: NKJV

In fact, one of these visions or revelations was so great that Paul could not even speak about it to others.

II Cor. 12:3-4 And I know how such a man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows--⁴ was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. NASB

Yet, some of those things from other visions and revelations of the Lord, he was permitted to speak about, indeed, he was commanded to speak about it, since he was commanded to write it down for us in Scripture. It is these things which the apostle Peter said are some things hard to understand.

II Pet. 3:15-16 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. NASB

So, we see that Paul was given a special role in the building of the Lord's church through the visions and revelations he received from the Lord. He was chosen by God to reveal to the saints the administration of the mystery of Christ. He speaks to this in Ephesians 3:3-11.

Eph. 3:3-11 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.⁴ And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,⁷ of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.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;¹⁰ in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be

made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ *This* was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

Now, this particular revelation of mystery, itself, Paul says was also given to the Twelve (vs. 5), but the “administration” of that mystery, Paul says, was given specially to him to reveal to others; it was given to him to bring to light for all the administration of that mystery. It does not mean that the Twelve were not also given this task, but, in Scripture, it was primarily given to Paul to reveal this truth. Out of all the books of the New Testament, he wrote more than any other. He wrote thirteen epistles (fourteen if you count Hebrews), while the apostle Peter only wrote two epistles, and the apostle John wrote only five and the apostle Matthew wrote only one—his Gospel. None of the other nine apostles wrote any books of the New Testament.

And then, if we break this down further, we find that Paul wrote one hundred chapters (if we include Hebrews), while Peter wrote only eight chapters and John wrote only twenty-nine chapters (and another twenty-two if we include the book of Revelation). If we count verses using the same parameters, Paul wrote two thousand three hundred and thirty-five verses,⁴ while Peter only wrote one hundred and sixty-six verses and John wrote one hundred and thirty-two verses (five hundred and thirty-six if we count the book of Revelation).⁵

So one can see the special place that was given to the apostle Paul in bearing witness to that second work of our Saviour that is still ongoing to this day—the building up of His Church. And because of this, it is Paul’s epistles that we will primarily look unto (and the book of Acts written by his co-worker Luke) when considering the principles of the Early Church.

And so, this answers the question of “Why Paul?” Paul was chosen by God to be the primary apostle to bear witness in Scripture to the second work of our Saviour—the building up and the administration of the Church of Christ in this age of grace. Paul was not usurping or contradicting the Twelve apostles (as some claim). On the contrary—he was chosen and given a special place by the Lord in reveling to

⁴ Sourced in part from: Arthur Cayley Headlam, ed., *The Church Quarterly Review*, Vol. 6 (Spottiswoode & Co., London, 1878) pg. 28

⁵ Of course, we are using modern parameters, as Scripture was never written with chapters and verses!

Christians the order, governance, and ministry of the Church of God in this present dispensation of grace. To reject the admonitions of Paul is wrong; we would be wise to follow his admonitions, for Paul, himself, declares that his admonitions are the commandments of the Lord.

I Cor. 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. KJV

The Administration of the Mystery

Alfred Edersheim in the late 19th century wrote a book entitled *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ*. He wrote about the Temple that Israel was commanded to build wherein God would dwell (Deut. 12:11; II Chron. 5:7; II Kings 19:15). In one sense, part of this title could also apply to the Church today, for Paul tells us in I Cor. 3:16-17 the following about the Church in this dispensation—

“Do you not know that you are a Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the Temple of God, God will destroy him, **for the Temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.**” NASB

The Church is the Temple of God in the New Testament. Therefore, we could have entitled this book: *The Church, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of the Early Church*. As the Temple of old was the dwelling of God in the Old Testament, the Church of God is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit of God in the New Testament. It is His dwelling place, not ours; it is His Temple, not ours. As such, He retains the right to construct His Temple in any manner He desires. He is the architect, the Creator; it is His decision alone as to how His dwelling place should be constructed or made.

A Temple is the place where He dwells upon earth, and where He communes with man. He constructs it in such a way as to teach us eternal truths about Himself. He builds it in such a way in order to reveal certain aspects of who He is, and to instruct us in the way He is to be approached. As such, an earthly Temple, as God’s dwelling is very revelatory. This has always been the case with God’s dwelling place upon the earth. The very first dwelling place of God upon earth, where He would meet with man, and where man would meet with Him, was none other than the Garden of Eden.

Gen. 2:8, 24 declares:

Gen. 2:8, 24 And the LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. ²⁴ So He drove the man out; and **at the east of the garden of Eden** He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.
NASB

Notice that it is God who designs this Garden, not Adam. God constructs the Garden. God plants the Garden, not man. The Hebrew word for garden, *gan*, carries the sense of “enclosure.” Gardens in the east were always surrounded by some type of enclosure, sometimes by hedges, sometimes by stone.

Song of Solomon 4:12 A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Darby Version

Thus, the use of the Hebrew word, *gan*, indicates that God constructed the Garden of Eden to be an “enclosure” that was to be entered only by the East (as is seen in verse 24 above). Moreover, this enclosure contained the Tree of Life in the midst, symbolizing God’s presence, and (after the Fall) was a garden or enclosure guarded by cherubim. All this, of course, reminds us of the Tabernacle and/or the Temple of God in the Old Testament, which was entered into from the East, which also contained the presence of God and which was decorated with cherubim (See Ex. 25: 8,30; 26:1; I Kings 6:33-35; Ex. 27 and cf. Eze. 10:19).

This was the layout of the Garden of Eden in the very beginning. And into this Garden we are told that God placed Adam to cultivate it and keep it.

Gen. 2:15 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to **cultivate** it and **keep** it. NASB

The Hebrew words “cultivate” and “keep” are “*abad*” and “*shamar*” respectively. In other contexts, *abad* carries the idea of “service” or “work,” and *shamar* carries the idea of “keeping” or “observing.” Both words were used in reference to the Tabernacle and Temple of God.

Num. 4:37 These *were* the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might **serve** (*abad*) in the Tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. NKJV

Num. 3:28 In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, *were* eight thousand and six hundred, **keeping** (*shamar*) the charge of the sanctuary. KJV

In fact, what is interesting is that the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel paraphrases Gen. 2:15 this way:

“And the Lord God took the man, and made him dwell in the garden of Eden; and set him **to do service in the law, and to keep it.**”⁶

From the earliest times the Garden of Eden was recognized as a type of the coming Temple, and, as such, it was recognized that God was its architect and that man was the one responsible for maintaining its service and its order. And so, when we come to the actual Tabernacle and Temple designed by God we can understand why Moses was warned by God to follow its pattern, and, later, with regard to the Temple in Jerusalem, the priests and Levites were told to keep its charge.

Heb. 8:4-5 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. KJV

II Chron. 13:10-11 “But as for us, the LORD is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the LORD as priests, and the Levites attend to their work. 11 “And every morning and evening they burn to the LORD burnt offerings and fragrant incense, and the showbread is set on the clean table, and the golden lampstand with its lamps is ready to light every evening; for we keep the charge of the LORD our God, but you have forsaken Him. NASB

Indeed, regarding this later Temple in Jerusalem, we are specifically told that David was not its architect. He would never presume such a thing. Rather, he states that he was given the pattern, the blueprints, by God Himself, both as to its construction and to its order of service.

I Chron. 28:11-13, 19 And David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of its houses, and of its treasuries, and of its upper chambers, and of its inner chambers, and of the house of the mercy-seat;¹² **and the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit**, of the courts of the house of Jehovah, and of all the chambers round about, for the treasuries of the house of God, and for the treasuries of the dedicated things;¹³ and for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of Jehovah, and for all the instruments of service in the house of Jehovah:¹⁹ **All this said David, in writing, by Jehovah's hand upon me, instructing as to all the works of the pattern.** Darby Version

⁶ Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel, J. W. Etheridge, tr., *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee* (Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, London 1862) Pg. 163

And so we see from the beginning of time, and thereafter, God has always ordered the manner in which His dwelling place is constructed and the manner in which He is approached—from the beginning in the Garden in Eden unto the Temple which David’s son, Solomon, built within Jerusalem. Whenever men ignored this order it resulted in dire consequences, for the pattern of His Temple and the manner of approach bespeaks the holiness of who God is. Any deviation of the pattern or the manner of approach reveals a lack of understanding of the things of God, an ignorance of God’s nature, character, and purpose, and a total lack of faith that God has provided all things necessary to us in His Word regarding our life and godliness. When one alters the pattern one alters the revelation of God, and that is such a presumptuous sin, as if man knows better as to how God should be revealed and how God should dwell among us, and as to how God should be approached. He is the potter, we are the clay! He is the King, we are the subjects! He is our Creator, we are the creatures! May God forgive us of a mindset that thinks we have the right to alter the pattern of God’s dwelling place upon earth and the protocol of His Royal Court.

And so, when we come to the New Testament and we are told that the Church is now the Temple of God upon the earth, the dwelling place of God in the midst of sinners, how much more should we be circumspect to follow the pattern given to us by God and to keep its charge?!

I Cor. 3:16-17 Do ye not know that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any one corrupt the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, and such are ye. Darby’s Version

Eph. 2:20-22 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,) 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy Temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. NASB

As with the Temple in Jerusalem, whose pattern was revealed to David for Israel, the pattern of the Temple of God in this age of grace, was revealed to Paul for the Church. Paul very clearly reveals this fact for us in Eph. 3:4-11. He refers to it as the “administration of the mystery.”

Eph. 3:4-11 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the **mystery of Christ**,⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus

through the gospel, ⁷ **of which I was made a minister**, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 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;**¹⁰ in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. NASB

We see two major points in these verses: 1) Paul was chosen by God to bring to light what is the “administration” of the “mystery,” which mystery of Christ is identified earlier in his epistle as being the Church, in which are both Jews and Gentiles joined to Christ as a body is joined to a Head, and which, later in his epistle, is seen as a bride joined to her husband. And, 2) the purpose for following the pattern of this “administration” is so the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the Church to rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Let us first look at the first point.

In order to understand the full import of this first point, and how it relates to the pattern revealed by God, we have to understand the meaning of the word translated “mystery,” as used in verse 4-6, and how it relates to his use of the word in the other chapters of the epistle, and then we must understand the meaning of the word “administration.”

Besides the portion before us, Paul uses the word “mystery” four other times in his epistle to Ephesians.

Eph. 1:9 He made known to us the **mystery of His will**, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him. NASB

Eph. 3:3-4 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ⁴ And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the **mystery of Christ**. NASB

Eph. 5:32 This **mystery is great**; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. NASB

Eph. 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**. NASB

The word “mystery” carries the idea of something that heretofore has been hidden, has been kept secret, but now is made manifest. The same word is used in Scripture for many things. For example, in the gospels it is used of the “mystery” of the kingdom (Matt. 13:11). In First Corinthians it is used of the “mystery” of the rapture and our glorification (I Cor. 15:51). In Paul’s first epistle to Timothy it is used for the “mystery” of godliness—the incarnation (I Tim 3:16). And in the verse before us in Ephesians it is used of the “mystery” of the church in relation to Christ. The meaning of the word can be seen from the following Greek Lexicons, as well as from W. E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words,

“Μυστήριον, ἰου, τό (μύστης, μύεω) a mystery, i.e. something into which one must be *initiated*, instructed, before it can be known, something of itself not obvious and above human insight. In N. T. spoken of facts, doctrines, principles, etc. not fully revealed, but only obscurely or symbolically set forth.”⁷

“Μυστήριον, υ, τὸ (from next) a mystery, somewhat hidden or secret, until revealed; a spiritual truth couched under an external representation or *similitude*, and *concealed* or *hidden* thereby, unless some explanation be given.”⁸

“MUSTĒRION (μυστήριον), primarily that which is known to the *mustes*, “the initiated” (from mueō, “to initiate into the mysteries;” cp. Phil. 4:12, *mueomai*, ‘I have learned the secret,’ RV). In the NT it denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by Divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit. In the ordinary sense a “mystery” implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed. Hence the terms especially associated with the subject are “made known,” “manifested,” “revealed,” “preached,” “understand,” “dispensation.”⁹

The first instance of the word in Ephesians is in chapter one verse nine where Paul speaks of the *mystery of His will*, i.e. God’s will from all of eternity. The salvation of all men, regardless of whether they were Jew or Greek, was always the intention of God’s will throughout the ages.

⁷ Edward Robinson, et al., *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1838) pg. 511

⁸ Greville Ewing, *A Greek Grammar and Greek and English Scripture Lexicon* (James Hedderwick & Co., Glasgow, 1812) pg. 265

⁹ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 97 (vol. 3)

Their salvation, by being placed into Christ Jesus through faith was predestinated from eternity, but was now being revealed in the fullness of times whereby all things were being summed up in Christ. This reveals to us that the *mystery of His will*, which is manifested in the Church, which is His body, was hidden from mankind until the fullness of times. It was hinted at from the very beginning with the picture of Eve being taken out of the side of Adam. It was foreshadowed by the designation of Abraham being a father of many nations by his exercise of faith, and it was hinted at with the imagery of Jehovah having a bride. But it was never revealed; it remained a secret. No one knew the significance of these hints in Scripture. It was only by hindsight, as the result of revelation, that these hints could be understood. The Church was never revealed in the Old Testament. The second instance of the word “mystery” in Ephesians confirms this fact.

In Paul’s second usage of “mystery” in Ephesians, we see Paul state that the only way he knew of this “mystery” was because it was made known to him by the revelation of the Spirit (Eph. 3:3). He explains further the full import of the mystery he briefly mentioned in chapter one. He unequivocally states that it was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, but that it was now made known to him and to all the other apostles and prophets in Spirit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs of salvation, of the same body, being of the Body of Christ, the Church. This proves the Church was unknown in the Old Testament, and clearly indicates that God made it known by an unveiling of His eternal counsel and will.

With the third instance of the usage of mystery (apart from the portion we are dealing with in Eph. 3:4-11), Paul speaks about the outworking of the *mystery of His will* which He purposed in His Son (Eph. 5:32). He uses the imagery of marriage, showing the union between Christ and the Church.

And finally, in the final instance of its usage, we see the *mystery of His will* being proclaimed as good news. The mystery of the gospel is the declaration of the *mystery of His will* (the declaration that God has provided salvation in His Son) whereby those who believed, whether Jew or Gentile, are joined to Him forever and ever (Eph. 6:19).

And so we see in his epistle to the Ephesians that Paul declares that the mystery of the Church is the full outworking of the *mystery of His will*, which was forever rooted in the eternal council of God. We see that it

was hidden from all mankind until that fullness of times, wherein it was now revealed to Paul and to the holy apostles and prophets in Spirit, and that it specifically reveals that the Gentiles are also a part of that Church. We see that the Church is not only made up of believing Jews, but also of believing Gentiles. We see that the purpose of that inclusion of the Gentiles into the Church with believing Jews was to show Christ's love for all mankind, being demonstrated by His perfect union with His Church, as a head to a body and a husband to a wife. And, finally, we see that this tremendous revelation should be declared to all mankind as a message of hope, a wonderful announcement of good news!

Now let us look to the second word we must understand in the phrase "administration of the mystery"—the word translated "administration"

The Greek word that Paul uses in this portion of Scripture is translated "fellowship" in the King James Version. But I believe it is better translated "administration," as is done in the New American Standard Bible and in Darby's version. Darby translates the word as follows—

Eph. 3:9 and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things.

The Greek word Paul uses is οἰκονομία; it is made from a combination of two Greek words οἶκος (house or household) and νόμος (law or rule). Edward Robinson in his Greek Lexicon of the New Testament defines it as follows: "Οἰκονομία, ας, ἡ (οἰκονομέω ,) *economy*, pp. *management of a household* or of household affairs."¹⁰ Louw and Nida define it as— "οἰκονομία^a, ας f: a task involving management and organization..."¹¹ And W. E. Vine says this regarding the word: "OIKONOMIA (οἰκονομία), primarily signifies the management of a household or of household affairs (*oikos*, a house, *nomos*, a law); then the management or administration of the property of others..."¹²

Its cognate word in the Bible is οἰκονόμος, which bespeaks a steward, an administrator, or one who manages a household. Our Lord uses the word

¹⁰ Edward Robinson, et al., *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1838) pg. 541

¹¹ J. P. Louw, E. A. Nida, Eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, New York, 1989) p.513 (Be wary, though, of their unfortunate dynamic equivalence view of translation.)

¹² W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 320

with this sense of “steward” or “administrator” in Luke 12:42. The word is also used in Rom. 16:23, being translated by Darby as “steward,” but in the King James Version, it is translated as “chamberlain,” which was a well-known word in seventeenth century. An English reader at that time would readily understand the word since it was used of an official office to the king. The office was held by the 1st Earl of Suffolk, Thomas Howard who was an officer in the royal court who managed the household of the king.

And so, we see in Eph. 3:9 the word bespeaks the “administration” of the mystery, or the “household management” of the mystery. In other words, Paul is saying that it was uniquely given to him to reveal how the mystery (which we have seen refers to the fact that the Gentiles are joint-heirs and fellow members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church) should be “managed” in this age of grace. Paul says it was uniquely given to him, as an apostle chosen by God, to let all know how the household of God (I Tim.3:15), which is the Church, should be managed.

(It was not given to later Christians. It was not given to one like Ignatius, nor to some future Christian called an Archbishop, nor to one who takes upon himself the name of Pope and Vicar of Christ. Neither was it given to a reformer like Martin Luther, nor to one like John Calvin, nor to one like J. N. Darby or Anthony Norris Groves. Scripture is clear; it says it was given to Paul, the apostle of Christ!)

This parallels the example of King David, who left instructions for Solomon to follow, as to how God’s Temple should be constructed and its service ordered. In the same way, Paul leaves instructions to us all, as to how God’s Temple in this dispensation, the Church, should be constructed and its service so ordered and managed. And, just as it was with king David, we have to look at the end result in order to fully understand what that pattern was that was given to him by the Spirit. In the same way, we have to look at the end result of those churches founded by Paul, in order for us to fully understand the pattern that was given to him by the revelation of the Spirit.

In other words, since we did not have detailed instructions of the pattern that was given by God to King David for the Temple (unlike that of Moses and the Tabernacle), we had to look at the finished product built by Solomon in order to understand what that pattern was that was given to David. In the same way, we have to look at what Paul built in order to

fully understand the pattern that was given to him by God for the Temple of God in this dispensation, that is, the Church.

Therefore, if one wants to fully understand God's pattern for the Church in this dispensation, one has to look at the various churches established by Paul in Scripture since we know that Paul was completely faithful to the pattern given to him by the revelation of God as to how the mystery of the Church should be administered and/or managed.

With this in mind, we can now see how the book of Acts is more than just a history book of the early church; it becomes a manual as to how God desires His Church, His Temple, to be constructed and so ordered, just as the book of Kings in the Old Testament became a manual as to how God desired the Temple of God in Jerusalem to be constructed and so ordered. The book of Acts reveals the pattern that was given to Paul as the book of Kings reveals the pattern that was given to David.

And this brings us to the second point—the purpose for revealing this administration of the Church is so the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the Church to rulers and authorities in heavenly places. We must understand that God is all wise. He is the wise architect and Paul was the wise masterbuilder, building the Temple of God, according to the pattern that was revealed to him by God. The reason for following any pattern of God is because everything that God orders, by definition, is perfect and is revelatory of Christ Jesus, His eternal and beloved Son. If we do not follow the pattern, we are nullifying something of the revelation of Christ Jesus. What a terrible thing to do.

Dear brethren, the Tabernacle erected by Moses was constructed, not by the whim of man, not according to the popular constructions of the day, but according to the mind of God, for everything in the Tabernacle was revelatory, speaking of the glories of our Lord. The pattern of the Temple that was given to King David was constructed, not by the whim of man, not according to the popular constructions of the day, but according to the mind of God, for everything in that Temple was revelatory, speaking of the glories of our Lord. Even in the future, during the millennium, when the millennial Temple will be built, we are told that everything in it, and even the manner of the worship within its precincts, will be built according to the mind and design of God.

Eze. 43:10-11 “Son of man, describe the Temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern.”¹¹ “And if

they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the **design** of the Temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire **design** and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write *it* down in their sight, so that they may keep its **whole design** and all its ordinances, and perform them. NKJV

And the King James Version reads this way.

Eze. 43:10-11 Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.¹¹ And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the **form** of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the **forms** thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write *it* in their sight, that they may keep the **whole form** thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

And so, when we come to the present age of grace, we find the same is true of the Temple of this dispensation, the Church. The pattern of the Church (Temple), that was given to Paul, was constructed or formed, not by the whim of man, nor according to the popular organizations of the day, but according to the mind of God, for everything in the Church is revelatory, speaking of the glories of our Lord.

Paul did not labor and build the church according to his own wisdom; he did not pattern it after the popular associations, clubs or assemblies of the day. No, he patterned it according to the pattern, to the design, to the form given to him by revelation from God. And, as with all things from God, it was given to lift up and glorify the Eternal Son of God. Indeed, everything that has been created in this universe has been created for the glory of the Son (see the phrase "...for Him," Col. 1:16 NASB). The Church as a new creation is constructed the way it was in the New Testament, because everything about its pattern and construction, and service bespoke something of the Son. If we change the pattern, we change the revelation, and if we change the revelation, we destroy something of the glory that is due to Christ Jesus our Lord. This is why it is so important to follow the pattern as given to us in the New Testament.

God ordered that His Church should be built on one foundation—His Son, Jesus Christ, and not on a man, like Peter, or a man, let's say, like Martin Luther, nor on a particular doctrine, let's say, like Baptism, nor upon a certain theological system like Calvinism. He ordered it to be built upon His Son so His Son is seen as the beginning and the end, the first in all things, the Alpha and the Omega, the One Foundation, yet also

the Chief Cornerstone. When one establishes churches according to any other foundation, or name, or doctrine or theological system, one detracts from the glory that is due Christ. That is why the whole structure of denominations is contrary to the pattern of God. It builds upon a different foundation, whether in name or in doctrine or in theology. If God does not allow denominations in heaven, we should not condone denominations on earth. Our prayer must always reflect the desire and will of God—“Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

When we build on the One Foundation, we teach the angels that Christ is preeminent in our hearts—preeminent over all else—even over our admiration for an apostle like Peter, or an apostle like Paul, even over our admiration for one like Martin Luther, or one like John Calvin, or one like John Gill, J N. Darby, or Anthony Norris Groves.. As such we do not call ourselves after men, but only after Christ. We hold fast to the pattern left by Paul in I Cor. 1: 12. We cringe at the thought that we would call ourselves a Peterite, or a Paulite, or a Lutheran, or a Calvinist, or a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or Plymouth Brethren, or any other name other than the name given to us by the Lord.

Or consider another example, the pattern ordered by God through Paul that His Church should be overseen by a plurality of men known as elders, bishops or pastors. When we alter this pattern of governance and elevate one elder to be the Bishop over the others elders or bishops, we detract from the glory that is due to the only Bishop of our souls—Christ Jesus. When we alter the plan and make one elder a Senior Pastor, or a lead Pastor, or the first (chief) among equals, we detract from the glory that is only due to the Chief or Senior Pastor of the Church—Christ Jesus our Lord. No one should usurp that position of the Saviour. He never relinquished the role as Chief Shepherd. Perhaps, this truth has been obscured from the minds of most because our English Bibles have not been consistent in the way they have translated the Greek word, ποιμήν. They translate the word as “pastors” in Eph. 4:11 when used of men, but when the word is used of our Lord, they translate it as “Shepherd,” as in I Pet. 2:25, and “Chief Shepherd,” as in I Pet. 5:4. If they had been consistent in their translations and had translated it of Christ in I Pet. 2:25 as “Pastor and Bishop of our souls,” or as “Chief Pastor” or “Senior Pastor” in I Pet. 5:4,¹³ perhaps there would have been less confusion in

¹³ In some translations, certain Greek components derived from ἄρχω and/or ἀρχός are translated as “senior.” For example, the New Jerusalem Bible translates ἀρχιτελώνης, in Luke 19:2, as “senior tax collector,” and the New English Translation renders χιλιάρχους, in Act 25:23, as “senior military

regard to this matter. When we follow this pattern we show forth to the angels in heaven the beauties of our Saviour and the wisdom of the Father in making Christ Jesus “first” in all things. It makes known to the angels the wisdom of God seen by our humility because we refuse to elevate ourselves into a place of preeminence over fellow elders. It makes known to the angels the wisdom of God in the faith he bestows by the fruit of the Spirit, when we believe in the real presence of the Son of God in His Church as Chief Shepherd. If the Lord Jesus is really present in his churches, and we acknowledge Him as the Chief Shepherd, the Senior Pastor, our Lead Pastor, if we really believe He is in our midst doing the Chief Shepherding, how could we ever take to ourselves that title of honour that He possesses?

If He is the Bishop of our souls, and He is truly in our midst, how could anyone call themselves the **Arch**bishop, taking a title above His? Do we really think it is fine to see the Son, standing in the midst of the assembly, known by all as the Bishop of our souls, to call someone else the **Arch**bishop? Or do we really think it is fine to see the Son leading our praise to the Father, standing in our midst of our assembly, known by all as the Senior Pastor, to also call someone else the Senior Pastor, or Chief Shepherd? If any do not see the significance of this, they might ask themselves, knowing that the Son is in our presence as our **High** Priest, if it would be all right, being His priests, to call someone else our **High** Priest? If we would not usurp His title of High Priest, why would we usurp some of His other titles? So we see that the wisdom of God is made known to the angels when we humble ourselves, being careful not to take to ourselves any titles which belong solely to our Lord.

Another example—God ordered that His Church should break bread and remember the Lord every Sunday. When we alter this plan and relegate Holy Communion to once a month, we detract from the glory due to the Lord Jesus Christ and relegate the praise, thanksgiving and glory, which are given to the Son by our partaking of the bread and the wine, from

officers.” Therefore, while “chief” is probably still the best rendering for ἀρχι in ἀρχιεπίσκοπον (I Pet. 5:4), if one wishes to make present day application, “senior” can also be an acceptable translation for the prefix. This is why we suggested the rendering “Senior Pastor.” Christ Jesus, indeed, is our Chief Pastor—our Senior Pastor—and, as such, that title should be reserved solely for Him. He has allowed us to adopt such titles of His as “pastor,” “bishop,” and “priest,” but titles such as “Chief or Senior Pastor,” Chief or High Priest, “Rabbi” and/or “Master” are reserved solely for Him, as indicated for us by the words chosen by the Holy Spirit in the Word of God.

every Lord's Day to only one day a month. God intended every week to begin with the Holy Remembrance of His beloved Son in the bread and the wine. He intended the proclamation of His death in the elements be made every Lord's Day. When this pattern of worship is altered we rob Christ of some of the glory and honour that is due Him every Sunday in the month. We must remember; our gathering is for His pleasure, not for our pleasure. The beauty of this aspect of the wisdom of God in giving His Son as our sacrifice for sin is lost to angels when we do not break bread every Lord's day.

Any change from the pattern of the Church that was laid out by Paul detracts from the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord, just as any change from the pattern that was given to Moses for the Tabernacle would have detracted from the glory due to the Eternal Son.

William Kelly has a wonderful comment regarding this truth.

“Let us consider what a wonderful place this is—that God is now making known a new kind of wisdom to the angels above by His dealings with us; and, by us, I mean all the saints of God now on earth. For let them be called by whatsoever name, every saint of God is a member of the body of Christ. All belong truly and equally to the Church of God. One cannot but sorrow that so few understand or care what the Church of God is, and to act upon it. We ought to know what God intends, and how He intends His Church to walk. Christ is equally possessed by all; but all do not equally understand **what the will of God** about His Church is; how He would have us to worship Him, and to act upon His word together; how to help one another to carry out this glorious truth—God is manifesting by the Church His varied wisdom. **Are we walking so according to the will of God for His Church that He can point to us as a lesson to the angels of God?** Such, and no less than this, is God's intention. You cannot, surely, get rid of the responsibility connected with it, by refusing to act according to it! It is not by and by, when we reach heaven, that God will manifest by the Church His manifold wisdom to the heavenly hosts; but now on earth while the members of the Church are being called. “That now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.

Does not this bring in serious considerations? It is not a question of what men think about us, and whether we are loved or disliked here below. Very sure I am, that if we are walking according to Christ, we never can be anything but hated by the world; and it shows that we value the world if we wish otherwise. It is a most painful thing to feel that so it must be; but if I believe Christ, I must believe this, and I ought to rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer in the least degree. But besides this, **the Church is called to be the lesson-book for the angels of God.** When we think that God is overlooking with the angels that surround Him; that He is occupied with such objects as we are; that He sees in

them the dearest objects of His affections; that He has given them Christ to be their life; and sent down the Holy Ghost, that blessed person of the Trinity, **to take up His dwelling-place in them, and make them to be His Temple, while they are in this world, what a calling it is! If an angel wants to know where His great love is, he must look down into this world and see it thus.** You cannot sever Christ from the Church.”

“...Nothing can cloud this. Weakness may for a time dishonour the Lord, and destroy our own comfort, and help on the delusion of the world. All that may be; but the purpose of God, it shall stand; what God has spoken must be accomplished. Our weakness may be manifested, but God in His mighty love will complete His purpose. **And this is the way in which He is teaching the principalities and powers in heavenly places a new kind of wisdom, that never was seen before in this world...**”¹⁴

This is a most solemn responsibility. Are we wiser than our Teacher? Do we think we can plan a *lesson-book* better than He (using the terminology of brother Kelly)? When we alter the plan and pattern of the Church as given to Paul we not only detract from the glory due to Christ Jesus, we also destroy the *lesson* intended for angels. We lessen their education; we shorten their school year, so to speak. We close the classroom to their learning.

Are we wiser than our Creator? Do we think we can improve upon His model? Are we better engineers for the designing of His Temple? God forbid! He is the Teacher and architect. He is the chief engineer, if you will. He knows what is best for all involved, of both men and angels. May we realize the sacred duty we have to follow the pattern given to us by God for His Temple—the Church. May we be faithful to the pattern given to us by Paul, as Solomon was faithful to the pattern given to him by his father David, and as Bezalel and Oholiab were faithful to the pattern given to them by Moses, May the only Temple of God that exists upon the earth on earth during this dispensation—the Church—be built according to His wishes and desires so that each and every Church, in each and every locality, may show forth the glories God the Son, unto the dwelling of God the Father, by the blessed working of God the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22).

And so we can now understand why it is important to hold fast to the pattern given to us by Paul in the New Testament concerning the order of the Church and its structure, for when we follow the pattern, we become

¹⁴ William Kelly, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle to the Ephesians* (G. Morrish, London) pg. 124-126

not only a lesson book for the angels, but we also become a Temple that reveals the wonders and glories of Christ Jesus our Lord. Those who are yet carnal, immature, or babes in Christ will not understand the importance of this truth; they will not think it is important to remain faithful to God's pattern. They think there are better ways to build the Church. They do not concern themselves with what the form or pattern a church follows. They think such things do not matter to God. They rather think it is more important to be pragmatic in the things of a Church, forming and marketing it in such a manner to please men and women, all to attract large crowds. But, dear brethren, this betrays a carnal and soulical mindset for the Temple of God is not just for man, it is not just for us, it is not for large crowds, but it is for God the Father, and for His Son, and for the Blessed Holy Spirit of God. It is the Lord's House, a King's palace, if you will, and, as such, it is His prerogative and His alone, to design the palace. How selfish and shortsighted is it for man to change His pattern and design into a creation that is more pragmatic, more to our liking and more comfortable for our own dwelling, rather than being a place where the King of kings is comfortable to dwell in.

I Chronicles 29:1 reads in the New King James Version as follows—

Furthermore King David said to all the assembly: "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced; and the work is great, **because the Temple is not for man but for the LORD God.**

David was speaking of the Temple of God in Jerusalem that Solomon would build, but David actually uses the Hebrew word for *palace* in this verse and not the word Temple (unlike the NKJV translation). This explains the older King James Version's translation of the same verse—

Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great: **for the palace is not for man, but for the LORD God.**

Is this not instructive for us? The Temple was actually called a *palace* in this verse because it is the prerogative of a king to design his own *palace*, not the prerogative of his subjects. A subject of the king would never be so disrespectful or presumptuous to alter the plan given by the king to the builders. Neither should we; the Church is His House, His Temple, His own Palace.

So with that in mind, let us now proceed with our study, speaking first of the Church's foundation and then looking to the rest. We will follow the

same order of instructions that David first gave to Solomon—first a plan for the Temple proper, and then the functions or divisions of the priests within that Temple.

I Chron. 28:10-13 “Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act.”¹¹ **Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the Temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms, and the room for the mercy seat;**¹² and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the LORD, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God, and for the storehouses of the dedicated things;¹³ **also for the divisions of the priests and the Levites and for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD** and for all the utensils of service in the house of the LORD. NASB

A Wise Masterbuilder

I Cor. 3:10-11 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a **wise masterbuilder**, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. KJV

The Holy Spirit tells us that Paul was a “wise masterbuilder.” The Greek word masterbuilder is ἀρχιτέκτων (architekton) from which we get our English word *architect*. However, the biblical word had a wider and narrower meaning than our modern English word. It was wider in that it meant the one overseeing all aspects of a building project. In other words, using today’s nomenclature, we might say the “ἀρχιτέκτων” also functioned as the general contractor and actual builder. But the word was narrower than our modern word in that it did not necessarily refer to the one designing the building; it could refer to the one simply drafting and facilitating the plans of the building designed by another. Today, we might call such a person a *draftsman*. This is the way Paul was using the word and the way Josephus used it in his description of the building of the Tabernacle under Moses by the “masterbuilders” Bezaleel and Aholiab. (The translation of William Whiston translates the word as “architects,” but “masterbuilders” better reflects the word in English since Bezaleel and Aholiab did not design the Tabernacle or the things of the Tabernacle.)

In Scripture we are told that these two masterbuilders (ἀρχιτέκτονας), as Josephus calls them, were skilled in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all kinds of craftsmanship, being filled with the Spirit of God.

Ex. 35:30-33; 36:1-2 And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, the LORD hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah;³¹ And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship;³² And to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass,³³ And in the cutting of stones, to set *them*, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work.³⁴ And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, *both* he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.³⁵ Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, *even* of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work.**36:1** Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whom the LORD put wisdom and understanding to know how

to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, **according to all that the LORD had commanded.**² And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, *even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it.* KJV

Scripture also clearly says that they were not the ones designing the Tabernacle or the things of the Tabernacle, as a modern day architect might do, but, rather were the ones “devising” or “facilitating” the designs of the Tabernacle given to them by Moses, which Scripture clearly says was given to him by the command of the LORD. The things of the Tabernacle were not designed or created by the imaginations of man, but were designed and created by God Himself unto the glory of His Beloved Son.

Heb. 8:5 “who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the Tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.” NASB

In the same way, Paul, another wise “masterbuilder (ἀρχιτέκτων), facilitated the building of the Temple of this age—the Church, not according to his own imaginations, design or pragmatic creations of his own mind, but according to the pattern that was revealed to him by Divine revelation.

And just as the workers of old were faithful to that pattern, given by a command of the LORD (Ex. 39:42-43), so too, we are exhorted to remain faithful to the pattern given by the command of the Lord (cf. I Cor. 14:36-37), being ever so careful to build upon the one foundation already laid by that wise masterbuilder, Paul the apostle.

I Cor. 3:10-17 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, **as a wise masterbuilder**, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. **But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.**¹¹ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.¹² Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;¹³ Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.¹⁴ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.¹⁵ If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.¹⁶ Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?¹⁷ If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are. KJV

But alas, we have not always been as faithful as all the workers of old were faithful to the pattern given to them by God. We have not always followed the exhortation of the wise masterbuilder of this age—Paul the apostle. We have not always obeyed his admonition to take heed, to be careful as to how we build upon the one foundation. We have not always been careful to follow the pattern for the Temple of today, but rather, over the centuries, we have added, subtracted and altered the pattern left for us, creating new designs which we consider more efficient, introducing new methods which we revere as being so much better than the methods of old. Why?—because they seemingly yield success. Successful?—perhaps so, but we must not forget, Moses was successful in bringing water out of the rock struck twice by his rod, but completely unsuccessful in preserving the picture it was meant to convey by speaking to it, rather than striking it (Num. 20:8,12). He completely destroyed the picture of Christ by his disobedience. He ruined the revelation of the Son, and so detracted from the glory intended for the Lord.

When we change the pattern given to us by God, we may find success, like Moses of old with the rock struck twice, but we dishonour the Son of God. May He forgive our rashness and presumption to think we have the wisdom and/or authority to change the pattern given to us by God Himself, thinking that we, as mere men, can improve upon our Lord's design.

So with this recognition and, hopefully, with the sorrow that comes from repentance in our heart, let's go back to the beginning and look at the pattern laid out for us by the masterbuilder, looking first to the location chosen for the Temple, i.e. the bedrock upon which we are told to build, then to the foundation and cornerstone that are necessary for the integrity of the whole.

Christ—the Bedrock, Foundation and Chief Cornerstone

When we come to Scripture we find that Christ is designated not only as the Bedrock of the Church, but He is also called the Foundation of the Church and the Chief Cornerstone of the Church. Why does the Holy Spirit use all three designations when speaking of Christ? In what way, is Christ the Bedrock of the Church and the Foundation? Are not these two designations the same, or are they different? It is to this we would now like to turn our attention. We will first start with the designation of Bedrock.

Bedrock

A masterbuilder not only reveals the plan of the building to be erected, but he also reveals the place where it is to stand. As such, it should not surprise us that Scripture reveals to us the place where God chose to erect His Sanctuary. We are told that God chose Mt. Zion as the place where His Temple should stand.

Ps. 78:67-69 Moreover he refused the Tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: ⁶⁸ **But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved.** ⁶⁹ And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established forever. KJV

Not only that, we are also told that God actually chose the very spot upon Mt. Zion where it should be built. He chose the threshing floor of Ornan.

I Chron. 21:18, 26-30; 22:1-2 “Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD **in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.** ²⁶ And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. ²⁷ And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.²⁸ At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.²⁹ For the Tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, *were* at that season in the high place at Gibeon.³⁰ But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD. **22:1** Then David said, ‘**This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel.**’ ² And David commanded to gather together the strangers that *were* in

the land of Israel; and he set masons to hew wrought stones to build the house of God.” KJV

This is significant, as we will presently see, for in many places upon Mt. Zion the bedrock actually breaks the surface. And, as with the threshing floor of Ornan, it was in those areas of exposed bedrock that many times threshing floors would be located. Additionally, such locations, on top of hills, or on the top of mountains, were also sought after, because one could better catch the slightest breeze to blow the chaff away, as is mentioned in the quote below.

“The threshing-floor (Heb. goren, Arab, jurn) was a fixed site (Gen.50.10; 2Sam.24.18); no doubt, as now, a flat rock-surface in the hills, or a clay floor in the plains, outside the village, usually to the W. to catch the breeze.”¹⁵

Therefore, we see that the Temple of God was built upon the very bedrock of Mount Zion, which was also known as Mount Moriah, in the place called the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (II Chron. 3:1).

II Chronicles 3:1 Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where *the LORD* appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. KJV

God has always been in control of the place where His Temple should be placed. He was the One who chose Eden as the place to plant His Garden (a forerunner or type of the Temple), and He was the One who chose the bedrock upon Mount Moriah to build His Temple in Jerusalem.

So, with that in mind let’s go back and consider the Temple of this dispensation—the Church. Has God also chosen the place where it should be built? To find that answer we must go back to the very first Gospel—the Gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says, “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” (NASB). As many know, there is interplay between the name of **Peter**, and the **Rock** on which the Church is built. In the Greek it reads as follows—

¹⁵ William Coleman Piercy, ed. *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (E. P. Dutton and Co., New York 1908) pg. 19

Matt. 16:18 Καὶ ἐγὼ δέ σοι λέγω, ὅτι σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρῳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι Ἅδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.

A very wooden and literal rendering of the Greek would elicit the following translation: “And I also say to you, that you are Peter, and upon this, **the** Rock, I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” As one can see πέτρα is articular (meaning it has a definite article). The significance of this will be seen later, but there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is making a contrast between πέτρος (Peter) and τῇ πέτρῳ “the” Rock.

Now, before we proceed, perhaps it might be helpful to mention that some discount this contrast between πέτρος and πέτρῳ because it is affirmed that Christ spoke in Aramaic where no such distinction exists. But it really makes no difference for us today whether Jesus spoke in Aramaic or in Hebrew in this exchange. Why? Simply because no one knows the exact Aramaic or Hebrew words that were used by our Lord in this discourse. Yes, if the Lord was speaking in Aramaic there may have been no difference between the two words He might have used for rock. But that would not necessarily make a difference because, as we will see later, the Lord could still communicate with body language a distinction, even between the two exact Aramaic words. (Some conjecture He used the Aramaic word *kepha*.) That this may have indeed been the case is demonstrated by the two different words chosen by the Holy Spirit when inscribing this conversation in Greek. In other words, let us assume the Lord spoke in Aramaic (or Hebrew) and used the exact same word for “rock” in that conversation. He still could have made a distinction between each usage of the word by including body language (e.g. pointing to Peter when using the first instance of the word, and then pointing to Himself when using the second instance of the word). Thus, the Holy Spirit may have chosen two different words in Greek to show this distinction of body language. There simply is no way to come to a definitive conclusion regarding the meaning of the text when one appeals to a different language used by our Lord on that day—for we do not have a record of that language. If we had the actual language recorded for us, then, of course, one could justify a particular interpretation, but the fact is, we do not have a record of the words actually used, i.e. unless one wants to postulate (which some do) that Greek was the language spoken on that occasion.

Thus, as we said before, what we do have is the fact that the Holy Spirit chose two distinct Greek words to forever record for us in Scripture this

conversation; this, in itself, proves that Jesus was making some type of distinction between the two usages of the word in His conversation with Peter, for the mind of the Lord and the mind of the Holy Spirit are always one. If Jesus originally spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew, the Holy Spirit has communicated to us our Lord's exact intended meaning for us in the Greek language. In other words, the Holy Spirit is authoritatively interpreting for us the meaning of our Lord (if, indeed, He spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew) by the Greek words He inspires Matthew to record. So with that in mind, let's examine this distinction that the Holy Spirit reveals to us.

In the Greek language, the Rock (πέτρα) is in the feminine gender, and Peter (πέτρος), i.e. his name, is in the masculine gender. They are two different words, yet they are certainly similar. However, there is a nuanced difference which I believe was intended by the Holy Spirit. **The Rock, *petra* (πέτρα), is only used of bedrock, or the fractured rock arising out of bedrock, or the rock or stone hewn out of bedrock. On the other hand, *petros* (πέτρος) is never used of the bedrock, itself, it is only used of rock arising out of bedrock, and/or the rock hewn out of bedrock; it never is used of the bedrock proper. Thus *petros* is never used of a bedrock base suitable for building upon. This fine nuance can be seen in the Septuagint translation of Isa. 2:21 where both words are used in one verse. (Some might discount this since the LXX is translation Greek, but I still think this example is significant and helpful, since the translators had to choose two specific words to communicate what they thought, whether correctly or not, was the meaning of the Hebrew text.)**

Isa. 2:21 τοῦ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὰς τρώγλας τῆς στερεᾶς πέτρας [*petra*] καὶ εἰς τὰς σχισμὰς τῶν πετρῶν [*petros*] ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ φόβου κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ ὅταν ἀναστῇ θραῦσαι τὴν γῆν (LXX)¹⁶

Isa. 2:21 To enter into the caverns **of the solid** (στερεᾶς) **rock** (*petra*), and into the **clefts of the rocks** (*petros*), for fear of the Lord, and by reason of the glory of his might, when he shall arise to strike terribly the earth. (Brenton's Version)

Isa. 2:21 To go into the **clefts** of the **rocks**, And into the **crags** of the **rugged rocks**, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. (NKJV)

We can see that the LXX use of *petra* is distinguished from *petros* by the added Greek adjective στερεᾶς. The Greek word στερεᾶς brings forth the added description of "solidness" or "firmness" to the Greek word *petra*,

¹⁶ Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1985)

showing that *petra*, in this context, is not being used of rock arising out of bedrock or of stones hewn out of bedrock, but of the bedrock itself. The same adjective is used in II Tim. 2:19 bespeaking the “firm” foundation of God, showing the cohesiveness of a solid foundation.

The LXX translators also chose τρώγλας to speak of the hole or the cavern within the solid rock. Caverns are usually located below ground formed out of solid rock. The Greek word τρώγλας literally means a hole. It is the Greek word where we get the English word, troglodyte. The New American Standard Bible confirms this understanding by translating the Hebrew word, *naqarah*, as “cavern.”

On the other hand, in the same verse, *petros* is used of the *rugged rocks* that protrude up (crag) from the bedrock (*petra*) of the earth. The word translated “cleft” or “crag” is the Greek word σχισμὰς in the LXX. It refers to rock that has been fissured or broken away from the main body of rock. Its cognate word, σχίσματα, is used in I Cor. 1:10 of the fractures or divisive groups within the church in Corinth.

This Greek word σχισμὰς translates the Hebrew word *saiph*, which, in other contexts, is also used of the branches of a tree, showing distinction between the branches and the trunk and root of the tree itself. In other words, a branch is similar to a trunk or root (also being wood) but it is only a part of the tree arising away and up from the trunk and/or root. In the same way, *petros* is like unto bedrock (also being rock), but it is only a part of the bedrock arising away and up from the earth like branches of a tree. In other translations, *saiph* is translated as “top.”

Isa. 2:21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the **tops** (*saiph*) of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. KJV

Thus, *petros*, in which is a crag, is rock that protrudes, arises, or breaks away from the bedrock of the earth. It is usually found, not below the earth, but above the earth.

Another indication that this is the meaning intended for both words is found in the immediate context of the previous verse—verse 20. There it speaks of men casting their false idols, first to the moles, and then to the bats. The order continues in verse 21. Moles are underground, paralleling the *petra* of the ground, which is mentioned first, whereas bats fly above ground, paralleling the *petros*, in which are the crags or the clefts that

protrude up above ground from the bedrock, which is mentioned second. Moles live below ground and bats many times live above ground in the clefts and caves of rocks. (Of course, we are speaking very broadly. We know that bats also live underground in caverns and caves.)

Thus, what we see in this verse is that out from the *petra* (bedrock) of the earth arise the *petros* (surface rocks). This is most instructive when we realize the context in which Jesus uses these two words.

We have already seen that the Church is understood to be the Temple of God in this dispensation. This is the underlying imagery used by our Lord when He talks about the building of the Church in Matt. 16:18. And He uses imagery familiar to every Israelite in regard to its construction. The reference of the building of the Church in Matt. 16:18 cannot be divorced from the imagery of the building of the Temple of God. It is important to remember that the rebuilding the Temple begun by King Herod, was still going on when our Lord spoke these words (Jn. 2:20). This construction was in the forefront of every Jewish mind. Its grandeur was admired by many (Mk. 13:1). As such, it would not be surprising that every Israelite knew the manner of its construction. It must have been the topic of many a conversation. Every Jewish boy probably heard from his grandfather the magnificent manner of its rebuilding, no doubt being told of the great trenches that were dug down to the bedrock (in some places to 80 ft.) to provide a firm and solid foundation for the Temple and the walls surrounding the Temple mount.

In regard to this construction, let me provide some information.

“The stones used in the great Herodian Temple walls were huge rocks carved into blocks, called ashlar. Most weighed between 2 and 5 tons. However, many weighed 10 tons, some 50, and one in particular weighed almost 400 tons.... The wall, because of its tremendous weight, would exert great pressure on the earth below it. To prevent the earth from moving and shifting, causing the wall to collapse, **Herod had the wall begin at solid bedrock. Sometimes the bedrock was eighty feet below street level, and it was from here the great wall began its mighty ascent...**”¹⁷

And—

¹⁷ Rabbi, Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited* (Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, London, 1993) pg. 16, 18

“It is necessary to state, before proceeding further, that the Holy City is built upon a series of rocky spurs close to the watershed or backbone of Palestine; and it appears to be quite certain, from the nature of the surrounding country, that in early times the site of Jerusalem was a series of rocky slopes, the ledges covered here and there with a few feet of red earth. When, therefore, we get down to the surface of the rock at the present day (provided it has not been cut), we get down to that surface which presented itself to view in olden times, before the first inhabitants built their city... Now this being the case, it is only necessary to throw away all the debris forming the vast plateau of the Sanctuary, and we get a view of the rock of Moriah, as it would have appeared to the eyes of King David: although this is of course impracticable on the ground itself, we have been able to do so on paper, and on a model: for, having obtained the height of the surface of rock in all the tanks of the Sanctuary, where rock was to be found, and having obtained the height of the rock along the wall, we have been able to produce a very approximate contoured plan of the rock over all this area; and on some part of this area the Temple of Solomon once stood.”¹⁸

What we see in these two accounts is this. While bedrock was near the surface in many areas, it was far beneath the surface in other areas, and so, in order to sustain the great weight of the Temple proper (*hekhal*), and in order to sustain the great weight of the walls surrounding the Temple mount itself, they would dig down till they found bedrock and upon the bedrock great foundation stones that had been hewn were laid down. In some places, because of the great depth of the sloping bedrock, arches were built up from the bedrock in levels over each other to provide a flat and even platform for the surrounding courts of the Temple. Nevertheless, whether close to the surface or far beneath the surface, the hewn foundation stones were laid directly upon bedrock.

It is interesting to note that part of this bedrock was discovered near the surface in the northern portion of the Temple mount, as it exists today. This bedrock is believed to be the bedrock upon which the northern wall of the *hekhal* (the House, the Temple proper) rested during our Lord's day. Asher Kaufman in his book on the Temple has this to say of this bedrock.

“Now the outermost northern wall of the House was 5 cubits wide (*Middot* 4, 7). The coincidence lends credence to the idea that the rock ledge (41) formed the rock base to the masonry of that northern wall (Fig. 38). If that is the case, a

¹⁸ Sir Charles William Wilson, Sir Charles Warren, *The Recovery of Jerusalem: A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land* (Richard Bentley and Sons, London, 1871) pg. 314

method employed by the Temple masons of shaping the bedrock to match the masonry has been revealed.”¹⁹

And, in his Fig. 38 he referenced above, he gives this caption below the diagram of that proposed method—

“The proposed method of laying the masonry of the northern outer wall of the House (*Hekhal*) **on the existing bedrock.**”²⁰

So we see that because of the greatness of the building, the immense foundation stones had to be laid directly upon the very bedrock of the mount. This is the imagery behind the use of *petros* and *petra* by our Lord. It is as if He was saying the following to Peter—

“And I also say to you, that you are Peter (a hewn foundation stone), and upon this, the Rock (the very bedrock), I will build My Church (the Temple), and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”

This same manner of construction was even used in the building of an everyday house in Israel as can be seen in the Complete Jewish Bible.

Luke 6:48 he is like someone building a house who dug deep **and laid the foundation on bedrock (πέτρα)**. When a flood came, the torrent beat against that house but couldn't shake it, because it was constructed well. CJB (Please see footnote 28, on page 69 below, regarding the use of some Modern Versions.)

Notice that the man dug down deep until bedrock was found in order to insure the quality and firmness of his house. If such construction was utilized for one's own house, how much more would it be utilized for the House of the Lord, the Temple upon Mt. Moriah?

The Lord was not saying that He would build His Church upon Peter. Indeed, such a great building as a Temple could not be built upon one foundation stone, even if it was a stone as great a size like unto what is called the “Western Stone” recently uncovered in Jerusalem along the Western Wall. It lies a few courses up from the bedrock (being placed higher up apparently to stabilize the wall). Yet it certainly could have been used in the first course if desired. It is the largest stone found upon the Temple mount being approximately 45 feet long, 10 feet high and 13

¹⁹ Asher Selig Kaufman, *The Temple Mount: Where Is The Holy of Holies?* (Har Yérah Press, Jerusalem, 2004) pg. 71

²⁰ Ibid.

feet wide, weighing almost 525 tons. As great a stone as it is, the Temple could not be built upon it. But it certainly could have been used as one of many foundation stones used in the construction of a Temple. Today, engineers marvel and wonder how such a great stone as the Western Stone could ever have been transported, maneuvered, and placed into position by builders of that day. Apparently, even modern day cranes could not have handled such an immense stone. It is one of the largest, if not the largest stone ever maneuvered by human beings. Most assuredly, it must have been the topic of every Israelite, as it was such a feat unrivaled in the ancient world. Yet the House of the Lord, as any house solidly built (see Lu. 6:18 above), could not have been built simply upon one stone; it surely would have to rest upon solid bedrock, no matter how deep workers might have to dig to find it, for Herod, and Solomon before him, desired that the Temple of God stand unto the centuries. It could not be erected upon one foundation stone, but was erected upon many foundation stones that had first been laid upon **solid bedrock**.

Josephus has this to say about this building project by King Herod and this layer of multiple foundation stones—

“And now Herod, in the eighteenth year of his reign, and after the acts already mentioned, undertook a very great work, that is, to build of himself the Temple of God, and make it larger in compass, and to raise it to a most magnificent altitude, as esteeming it to be' the most glorious of all his actions, as it really was, to bring it to perfection; and that this would be sufficient for an everlasting memorial of him...”

“...And as he promised them this beforehand, so he did not break his word with them, but got ready a thousand wag-gone, that were to bring stones for the building, and chose out ten thousand of the most skillful workmen, and bought a thousand sacerdotal garments for as many ~ of the priests, and had some of them taught the arts of stone-cutters, and others of carpenters, and then began to build; but this not till everything was well prepared for the work.

“**So Herod took away the old foundations, and laid others**, and erected the Temple upon them, being in length a hundred cubits, and in height twenty additional cubits...Now the Temple was built of stones that were white and strong, and each of their length was twenty-five cubits, their height was eight, and their breadth about twelve; and the whole structure, as also the structure of the royal Cloister, was on each side much lower, but the middle was much higher, till they were visible to those that dwelt in the country for a great many furlongs, but chiefly to such as lived over against them, and those that approached to them.”²¹

²¹ William Whiston, Tr., *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (George Virtue, London, 1841) pg. 471-473

These foundation stones, used in the construction of the Temple, also remind us of the description given to the New Jerusalem, which rest upon twelve great foundation stones.

Rev. 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them *were* the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. NASB

This is the background imagery used by our Lord. The Rock, upon which the Church will be built is not built simply upon Peter, simply upon one mere foundation stone, not even if Peter was a “great” foundation stone, as great as the “Western Stone” found in Jerusalem, or even if he was a greater stone than all the other eleven apostles as foundation stones. Peter is still just one mere foundation stone and one foundation stone cannot support the entire Temple of God. Only bedrock can support the entire Temple. A foundation stone may help to support that which is above it, but it is the bedrock beneath that foundation stone that support it and everything else above it. And, in our Lord’s discourse, that bedrock is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now that we have shown the distinction between *petros* and *petra* and the distinct manner in which a Temple was built, perhaps, it might now aid us in understanding what occurred in Matt. 16:18 by imagining the body language that may have occurred with the words spoken by our Lord to Peter. If we imagine the gestures the Lord may have made when speaking those words to Peter, perhaps it might help crystalize the truth within our mind. (Of course, this use of body language is mere speculation, but Scripture does show that body language was utilized for emphasis in those days, just as it is used in our days. Cf. Luke 18:13; Jn. 11:41; Acts 26:1.)

Upon hearing Peter’s confession, maybe our Lord slowly walked toward Peter, with His arms stretched upward to heaven, and with the approbation upon His lips, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Then, taking another step closer to Peter, maybe He reached forward with His two hands now firmly grasping Peter by both shoulders and, looking directly into his eyes, said to him, “And I say to you” (in response to what Peter had just said to the Lord), “Thou art Peter (*a Foundation Stone*).” Then, perhaps, after releasing His hands from Peter’s shoulders, and taking a step backward, He then turned to His other disciples and said to them, “And upon this, the Bedrock,”—

perhaps, placing His own hand over His own breast in order to emphasize His own Person in contradistinction to the person of Peter—"I will build my Church."

Here, by having the very same words spoken, but with the added communication of body language, we see that a completely different message is communicated than those who wish to assert that Peter was the one upon which the Lord was saying He would build the Church.

Jesus is making a direct response to Peter's confession to Christ and is reaffirming to him that his new name is Peter. It must be remembered that Peter had already received this name many months before. He received the name when he first met the Lord after the Lord's baptism and before the Lord returned to Galilee.

Jn. 1:42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas, (which in Greek is Peter). NASB

So what our Lord is doing, is now giving Simon Peter context for his new name. He is telling Peter that because of his confession of faith, he will be a part of the Temple which Christ will now build as the Son of the Living God. He tells Peter that he is a rock (*petros*), a foundation stone, and that He, the Christ, is the Bedrock (*petra*) upon which Peter will be laid.

A Christian in the 19th century had this to say regarding this truth—

"Again, the distinctive significations of *πετρος* and *πετρα* are most precisely marked in Mat. xvi. 18: 'συ ει πετρος και επι ταυτη τη πετρα οικοδομησω μου την εκκλησιαν. Here *πετρος*, a stone, stands alone, without even the definite article; whereas *πετρας*, rock, is preceded both by the definite article and demonstrative pronoun, 'ταυτη τη πετρα,' this the rock, or, this very rock. "Thou art a stone, (*πετρος*) and upon this the rock I will build my Church." Supplying the obvious ellipsis, the meaning of our Lord's words may be thus correctly rendered,—'I say unto thee, that thou art Petros, a stone, (i.e. a lively stone, 1 Pet. ii. 5,) and upon this very rock (on which thou art building) I will build my Church.'"

"The omission of the definite article before *πετρος* in this passage must be noticed. Had our Lord intended to point out Peter, or Peter's faith, as the rock on which He would build His Church, it is manifest that He would have addressed him by the usual personal denominative, ο Πετρος, which is much more definite and emphatic than simply *πετρος*. Nothing can be more plain than that our Lord

intended by this *unusual* omission of the article to fix the attention of His disciples not on Peter, but on Himself, under the appropriate corresponding metaphor, the “Rock,” placed in juxtaposition with a “stone,” and rendered most distinctive and emphatic by the definite article and demonstrative pronoun, και επι ταυτη τη πετρα κ.τ.λ., “and upon this very rock I will build my Church.” Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that our Lord really intended to found His Church upon Peter, or Peter’s faith! Then, it is manifest He would have addressed Peter by his *usual* and emphatic name, ο Πετρος, and would have also used the same word in the second member of the sentence, to indicate the identity of the foundation of His Church with Peter. The meaning, under the present supposition, would then be clear and definite, ‘συ ει Πετρος και επι ταυτο τω πετρω οικοδομησω κ.τ.λ.

The force of the omission of the article before Πετρος in ver. 18, is rendered still more obvious by the recurrence of the usual personal denominative only four verses below, viz. in ver. 22: “And Peter (ο Πετρος) taking him,” &c. And in ver. 23 our Lord addresses him personally and emphatically by the same name: “And turning round, he said unto Peter, (τῷ Πέτρῳ) get thee behind me, Satan!”²²

Now, it is true, as our brother shared above, the anarthrous use is quite noticeable in the narrative before us. However, it should also be mentioned that some simply explain the absence of the article because πετρος is considered salient within the direct statement of Jesus. Both explanations have their merit.

It, indeed, is common for a proper name to be anarthrous upon its first usage and then articular in every subsequent usage. For instance, the first solitary usage of Peter is anarthrous in Matt. 8:14 and every other occurrence of his name in the gospel (minus this passage in question) is articular. Yet this is not a hard and fast rule; the opposite is true in the book of Acts. After an initial anarthrous use in Acts (not counting the initial use in the apostolic list of names) Peter’s name sometimes appears articular (i.e. Acts 2:14, 37) and sometimes anarthrous (e.g. Acts 2:38; 3:4).

And, as far as the other viewpoint, those who consider it anarthrous simply because it is salient, that, too, sometimes is not true. For example, the name of Paul is sometimes used in a salient manner in the book of Acts, yet remains articular (e.g. Acts 19:15; 23:20 Byz). And, if we widen our corpus to include extra-biblical literature we sometimes find

²² J. Tomlin, “The Pope’s Arrogant Claim to Supremacy,” *The Christian Guardian and Churchman’s Magazine* (J. H. Jackson, London, 1851) 129-30

proper names both anarthrous and articular in places where the name would normally be considered salient. Consider the following examples.

In the Test. of Sol. 8:3 a list of articular names are introduced to Solomon. Then in subsequent conversations with Solomon, most names revert to anarthrous usage, but one of the names continues to be articular even though it is salient (cf. Test. of Sol. 8:6, 7-11).

We can also see an exception in the Apocalypse of Moses where the article is used with the name of Eve.

Apocalypse of Moses 17:2 “And I bent over the wall, and saw him, like an angel. But he saith to me: 'Art thou Eve (τὸ εἶ ἡ[Eύα)?' And I said to him: 'I am.' 'What art thou doing in paradise?’”²³

And, another exception occurs with the name of Adam in Tobit 8:6 and with the name of Balak in Judges 11:25 in the LXX. In Tobit, certainly the name of Adam is salient since Tobias would presume that God knew the name of Adam, being his Creator, yet the name appears articular. It should be noted, however, that in Rahlfs's LXX edition it does, indeed, appear anarthrous, but in Codex Sinaiticus it appears articular.

Tobit 8:6 Thou madest [the] Adam, and gavest him Eve his wife for an helper and stay: of them came mankind: thou hast said, It is not good that man should be alone; let us make unto him an aid like unto himself.

The same thing, as with Tobit, occurs with this passage in Judges. In the LXX of Codex Vaticanus, Balak is anarthrous, but in the LXX of the Codex Alexandrinus it appears articular.

Judges 11:25 And now art thou any better than Balac (τοῦ Βαλακ) son of Sepphor, king of Moab? did he indeed fight with Israel, or indeed make war with him. Brenton's LXX

So both viewpoints have their merit; the anarthrous use of *petros* may be significant indicating the use of *petros* as a proper noun and not as a proper name, or the anarthrous use of *petros* may not be significant, simply being a case of saliency, and so it should continue to be understood as a proper name. I do not believe one viewpoint can be

²³ Robert Henry Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English: With Introductions and Critical and Explanatory Notes to the Several Books: Ed., in Conjunction with Many Scholars, Volume 2* (At the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1913) pg. 146

dogmatically asserted above the other. But equally so, I do not believe one, necessarily, negates the other. In other words, *πετρος* can be understood both as a proper noun and as a proper name without ever diminishing the emphasis on the rock-like character of the person. Simon is called Peter because he is firm as rock and as such he will be a foundation stone within the Temple of God. Either way the context points to him as being a stone within the Temple of God being built upon the Bedrock that is Christ.

This is all the more confirmed when we look at the greater context of that declaration. Let's read the entire declaration below.

Matt. 16:13-20 "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?'¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.'¹⁵ He saith unto them, 'But whom say ye that I am?'¹⁶ And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'¹⁷ And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.'¹⁸ And I say also unto thee, 'That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'¹⁹ And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'²⁰ Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." NKJV

The whole context focuses on the fact that Jesus is more than a mere man, more than the man named John, more than the man named Elijah, more than a man named Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Jesus had asked His disciples as to whom the people were saying the Son of Man was, and the disciples responded with the conjectures listed above, but Peter says that Jesus was the Christ (the Anointed One), the Son of the Living God. The focus is on a name of Jesus, reflecting the truth of who He is. He is named the "Christ" because He has been anointed by God. He is the Son of the Living God because He was eternally begotten of Him. He is being understood with an additional *name* or *title* based upon a truth of His Person in the same way Peter received a new name or title based upon a truth of his person.

This becomes all the more significant when we remember that Matthew uses "Christ" not only as a title in his gospel, but also as a proper name. And like most uses of proper names in Greek writings, its first occurrence is anarthrous, and its subsequent occurrences are articular.

It seems to be used as a proper name in the following verses: Matt. 1:1, 16, 18; 11:2; (16:16?); 24: 5, 23; 26:68; 27:17, 22. And it seems he presents it as a title in the following verses: Matt. 1:17; 2:4; (16:16?); 22:42; 23:10; 26:63. That means he uses it as a proper name ten times and uses it six times as a title. In fact, our Lord specifically calls it a name in Matt. 24:5 and what is interesting is that Peter, himself, calls “Christ” a name in his own epistle (I Pet. 4:14).

So, the context of the passage is relevant to us in that the Father makes known to Peter our Lord’s true character and the name or title He prophetically received by God (cf. Ps. 2:2). He is telling Peter that the additional name of Jesus is—Christ, and that *name* or *title* is revelatory of who He is!²⁴

So, when we get to our Lord’s affirmation to Peter, we see the Lord is making a comparison—as the Father revealed to you a name that bespeaks a truth about Me, I have revealed a name to you that bespeaks a truth about you. You declared that I am Christ, “Anointed.” Indeed, I have declared to you that you are Peter, a “rock,” “a foundation stone.” There is a marked contrast being made in this context.

Equally, we see that both pronouncements are made known by Divine revelation. Jesus’ name—Christ—was made known by the revelation of God the Father to Peter. And Simon’s name—Peter—was made known by the revelation of God the Son to Peter. And, if we take Peter’s declaration to be a declaration, not only about Jesus, that He was the Son of the Living God, but also that His name is Christ because He is anointed of God, then we should be consistent and see that Jesus is making a similar type of declaration about Simon. In other words, Jesus is saying that Simon is the son of Jona; and Peter is saying that Jesus is the Son of God. Simon’s additional name of Peter is affirmed by Jesus; and Jesus’ additional name of Christ is affirmed by Peter. Simon is also called Peter because it signifies an aspect of his work as an apostle and disciple of the Lord—it bespeaks the fact that he will be a rock unto his brethren, becoming a foundation stone of the Temple God; and Jesus is also called the Christ because it signifies an aspect of His work as one sent by God—it bespeaks the fact that Jesus is the anointed one, anointed

²⁴ Some Bible translations translate Christ as a name, rather than a title in Matt. 16:16. For example, Tyndale’s Bible and the Bishop’s Bible (both preceding the King James Version) translate it thus.

by God as a prophet, priest and king, destined to rule as King of kings over all the earth as the Son of the Living God.

Moreover, to any Israelite this name or title is all the more significant because it was the Christ, the Messiah, who was specifically designated by God to be the one to build the Temple of God.

Zech. 6:12-13 And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, **Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the Temple of the LORD:** ¹³ Even he shall build the Temple of the LORD; **and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne:** and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. KJV

This, of course, will be literally fulfilled in the millennium according to Zechariah, but spiritually it referred to the Temple of the Lord's body, which rose on the third day, and into which we are joined, being bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. This is what was behind our Lord's pronouncement in John 2:19, a statement that the Jews did not understand.

John 2:15-21 "And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the Temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; ¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, 'Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise.' ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Thy house will consume me.' ¹⁸ The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?' ¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, '**Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**' ²⁰ The Jews therefore said, 'It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' ²¹ But He was speaking of the Temple of His body." NASB

The resurrection of the Lord was the first step in the building of the Temple of the living God in the dispensation of grace (in that He was the rejected stone that became the Chief Cornerstone, which bespeaks a different aspect as we will shortly see). No one understood this at that time, but all Jews most certainly believed the Christ would somehow be involved in the building of the Temple. Therefore, most certainly this would have been in the mind of Peter when Jesus (whom Peter had just called the Christ) declared to Peter the following declaration—"And upon this, the Bedrock, I will build My Church," i.e. the Temple.

Many times in the Bible, a person receives a new name when they are about to begin a new chapter in their life that has to do with the main purpose of their life. For example, Abram became Abraham when the time came for him to beget with Sarah her only-begotten son—Isaac. When that time came, God revealed to him his new name reflecting some truth about him. He was now to be called Abraham because God designated him a father of many nations (Gen. 17:5). Jacob was renamed Israel because he was considered one who had striven with God and prevailed when the time came for him to reenter the land of his sojourning (Gen. 32:28). So when such persons were subsequently called by their new name, the characteristic that was behind the new name would be in the forefront of everyone’s mind. Thus, in Peter’s mind, the affirmation of Jesus as the Christ, made known to him by the revelation of God the Father from heaven, would make Peter think some new undertaking was about to begin for Jesus. Peter falsely believed it would be the setting up of the throne of the Messiah within Israel; Peter, obviously, did not understand it would rather be the Messiah’s death upon the cross.

Therefore, knowing the distinction of the two Greek words, *petros* and *petra*, and knowing the intended focus upon the meaning behind the proper noun and proper name of Peter (*petros*), and knowing that the Christ was prophetically called to build the Temple, and knowing that the imagery of the first century construction of the Temple was in the forefront of every Jewish mind, no one would have thought that our Lord was saying that He was going to build the Church upon Peter or that such an edifice could ever be constructed upon one foundation stone. It simply does not make any sense when the Scriptural, grammatical, and historical contexts are taken into account.

Yes, indeed, no doubt, our Lord was honouring Peter, and, yes, indeed, He was saying that Peter was going to play a large role in the building of the Church, perhaps greater than any other of the eleven apostles (being the first one to be given the keys of the kingdom), but the Church was going to be built first upon the LORD Jesus Christ, Himself, as the Bedrock of the Church, being the promised Rock of Israel, who we know is none other than Jehovah Himself.

This distinction is further emphasized by the inclusion of the demonstrative pronoun *ταύτη* in the declaration. If the Lord was declaring that Peter was the one upon whom He would build His Church one would have expected the repetition of personal pronoun *σύ*, not the

inclusion of the demonstrative pronoun “this” (ταύτη), which points to our Lord. Thus it would have been written as follows—Κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω, ὅτι σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ σοι, τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κ. τ. λ.—“And I say to you, that you are Peter, and upon **you**, the rock, I will build my Church,” etc.

Or He could have simply dropped the second reference to “rock” and simply said—Κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω, ὅτι σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ σοι οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κ. τ. λ.—“And I say to you, that you are Peter and upon **you** I will build my Church,” etc.

Or, if He wanted to communicate that Peter was the rock, and wanted to emphasize this by still repeating the word, the Holy Spirit could have used *petros* again (inflected accordingly), showing He meant Peter, in which case He would have said—Κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω, ὅτι σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ πέτρῳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κ. τ. λ.—“And I say to you, that you are **Peter** and upon this **rock**, I will build my Church,” etc.

The fact that Matthew did not use any of these alternative readings also shows us that Peter was not the one upon whom the Lord was saying the Church was to be built.

Charles Wordsworth also addresses this demonstrative use in his commentary on this verse. He says—

“But, it may be asked,—Can ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ be rightly interpreted as equivalent to ἐπ’ ἐμαυτῷ, i.e. on Myself? Certainly it can. We have a reply to this question in the Baptist’s words concerning himself: and also in our Lord’s own words concerning Himself...”

“The Baptist says, Matt. 3:3, οὗτος ἐστίν,—he is there speaking of himself. Our Lord says, ‘Destroy this Temple,’ τοῦτον τὸν ναὸν (Joh 2:19); this He said of Himself. ‘Whoso falleth on this stone’ (Matt. 21:44), τοῦτον τὸν λίθον,—this He said of Himself. ‘If any one eats of this bread,’ τοῦτον τὸν ἄρτον (Joh 6:51),—this also He said of Himself (see also v. 58). So in the present sentence,—on this Rock, ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ,—He is speaking of Himself. On the demonstrative pronouns ὃδε, οὗτος, used by a speaker for himself, see Matt. Gr. Gr. §§ 470, 471...”²⁵

²⁵ Christopher Wordsworth (bp. of Lincoln), *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour in the Original Greek: with Notes and Introductions by C. Wordsworth, The Four Gospels* (Rivingtons, London 1881) pg. 58

Additionally, in English, we generally translate τούτη as a direct modifier, but in a very real sense it is placed within an appositional structure with τῆ πέτρα (with the demonstrative pointing to the main person in the narrative—Christ, the Son of the Living God who is the Rock). This use of the demonstrative is similar to how the other demonstrative pronoun ἐκεῖνος is used with τὸ πνεῦμα in John 16:13 (of course, with obvious differences). There the demonstrative is located indirectly with the substantive, whereas here it is located directly with the substantive, yet most recognize that ἐκεῖνος (whose antecedent is παράκλητος) and πνεῦμα are placed in an appositional structure.

William Henry Simcox has this to say regarding this appositional use of the demonstrative pronoun—

“Οὗτος and ἐκεῖνος are used much as in earlier Greek, except in the greater relative frequency of what may be called their expegetical use—where they stand in app.[apposition] to a foregoing noun, or more frequently to a participial or equivalent cause, accentuating and calling attention to the thing designated by that word or clause as the subject, or less often the object, of the sentence. We have real instances of this construction in classical writers, beginning with οἱ προῖκα εὖ πεπονθότες, οὗτοι ἀεὶ ἠδέως ὑπηρετοῦσι τῷ εὐεργέτῃ, Id. Symp. viii. 33, and we have approximations to it still earlier: but it is never so common in pure Greek as in the N. T. To show its frequency there, we can only refer to the passages marked * * (or in some oblique cases * * *) in Bruder.s Concordance, s.vv. οὗτος and ἐκεῖνος; instead of enumerating these, we can only call attention to John xii. 48, Rom. vii. 10 (prob.), where the preceding word is a subst.; Matt xiii. 38, (John xvi. 13), where it is a subst. different in gender and number from the pron.; John xiv. 26, Acts ii. 22-3, vii. 35, where it is a group of substantives already in app., and relative clauses; Acts iv. 10, 1 Cor. vii. 20, where it is a subst. depending on a prep., which is repeated with the pron.; Rom. ix. 6, Gal. iii. 7, where there is no ptcp., and it is hardly necessary to supply one; and 1 Cor. viii. 3, 2 Thess. iii. 14, James iii. 2, where εἶ τις c. indic, takes the place of the prep. with art. This last is hardly distinguishable from conditional sentences like John ix. 31, or relative ones like Matt. v. 19, where οὗτος is no longer expegetical, but stands naturally in the apodosis.”²⁶

(For examples of the substantive following the demonstrative compare Jn. 12:34; Matt.12:32, 20:14, 26:29; Mk. 7:29, Acts 10:30, 19:25; II Cor. 8:7, 11:17; II Pet. 1:13.)

²⁶ William Henry Simcox, *The Language of the New Testament*, (Thomas Whittaker, New York, 1890) pg. 65-66

And so, for all these reasons, we see that Jesus is affirming the truth of Peter's confession by declaring that He, the Christ, is the Bedrock upon which the Church was to be built. He is not telling Peter that he (i.e. Peter) is the bedrock of the Church; He is telling Peter that he is a foundation stone upon that bedrock. In fact, Peter, himself, many years later, identifies Christ as the "Πέτρα," the "Bedrock" in his very own epistle, which further affirms this truth as we will now see.

I Pet. 2:8 καὶ λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ **πέτρα** σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

I Pet. 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a **rock of offence**, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. KJV

In this verse, of course, Peter is referring to Jesus when he calls Him a "rock (πέτρα) of offense." He is taking a quote from Isaiah 8:14 which reads—

Isa. 8:14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a **rock of offence** to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. KJV

However, it is unfortunate that the KJV translates this Greek and Hebrew phrase as "rock of offense, not only in I Pet. 2:8, but also in Isa.8:14. The translation "offense" causes one to miss out on the wonderful declaration that Peter is making by calling Jesus a Rock, or Bedrock in this verse. Notice that the New American Standard Bible translates the phrase from Isaiah as, "a rock to stumble over."

Isa. 8:14 Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a **rock to stumble over**, *And* a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. NASB

This, I believe, gets closer to the truth of Peter's declaration, for reasons we will presently see. However, unfortunately, even though their translation gets closer, the New American Standard Bible still was not consistent when they translate from the Greek this same prophecy from Isaiah in I Pet. 2:8. They end up translating the phrase just as the KJV, "a rock of offence."

Yet, it is important to note that the KJV chose to translate this same Hebrew word as "offence" only twice in Old Testament, once in Isa. 8:14

and once in I Sam. 25:31. In the majority of the other places they translated it as “stumblingblock.”

For example, they translate it as “stumblingblock” in Lev. 19:4, which reads: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.” Obviously, it does not carry the sense of offence in this verse. Another example is Jer. 6:21 which reads: “Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will lay stumblingblocks before this people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish.” In the same way, the word does not carry the idea of offence in this verse. The same, I believe, should apply to Isa. 8:14; the word in the context should convey the idea of stumbling.

When we come to the New Testament, the Greek word used in I Pet. 2:8 (σκάνδαλον) occurs 13 times in the New Testament. The New American Standard Bible translates the word as “stumbling block” or “stumbling” 10 times out of the 13. For example, they translate it as “stumbling block” in Rom. 14:13 which reads: “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.” And in I John 2:10 they translate it as “stumbling”—“The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.”

So it is most unfortunate that when we come to I Pet. 2:8 the word is not also translated as “stumbling,” for if they had translated it as “stumbling,” they would have provided, I believe, the full import of what Peter was saying (and what our Lord was saying in Matt. 16:18).

Fortunately, we have some versions in English which are consistent for the reader, both in Isa. 8:14 and in I Pet. 2:8. For example, the Revised Standard Version provides a consistent translation for the reader.²⁷

Now, it is true that they translate I Pet. 2:8 as “a rock that will make them fall,” but they maintain the sense of stumbling in both places, as does this

²⁷ Perhaps, I should mention here, in the beginning of this book, that I would not recommend such modern English versions of the Bible as the RSV, HCSB, NLT, NET, ESV, NIV, as well as some others, for any study in regard to the Historic Christian Faith as they have weakened key aspects of that Faith by their faulty translation of certain key verses regarding the essential doctrine of the eternal generation of the eternal Son of God from God the Father. The NASB, NKJV, Darby, and, of course, the KJV are all sound in regard to this issue.

other modern version. (Please see previous footnote regarding this version and other modern versions.)

Isa. 8:14 He will become a sanctuary, but a stone that makes a person trip, and a **rock that makes one stumble**— to the two houses of Israel. He will become a trap and a snare to the residents of Jerusalem. NET

1 Pet. 2:8 and a stumbling-stone and a **rock to trip over**. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. NET

So we can see that these two translations emphasize that Peter not only identifies Christ as the *petra* in his epistle, he also identifies Christ as the “the rock to stumble over” that is referred to by Isaiah in his prophecy in Isa. 8:14. Now, let us put this all together in order to see the wonderful significance of it all.

In the LXX version of Isaiah 8:14, the Greek word for “rock” is the same Greek word used by Peter in I Pet. 2:8. As we have said, in both places it is used of something that causes one to trip or to stumble over. With this being the case, I would like to suggest one more nuance of translation. I believe that in both Isa. 8:14, and in I Pet. 2:8 it would be better to translate “Rock” as “Bedrock.” Thus, if we adopt, let’s say, the NET translation, it would convey this idea—“Bedrock to trip over.” One might ask why refine the translation even more? The reason is, as we have already mentioned, *petra* is never used of small rocks; it is either used of bedrock, large boulders, or of rocky crags. Now since one cannot stumble or trip over a boulder or a crag, the only usage left within the context of the verse is that *petra* is bespeaking the bedrock of an area that is barely breaking the surface of the soil, thus causing a person walking along the surface to suddenly trip over the slight protrusion of the bedrock. One does not trip over a boulder or crag; one might walk into a boulder or crag, but one does not trip over such a large object!

And so Isaiah and Peter must be referring to a slight protrusion of bedrock, which might appear as a small piece of rock on the surface, perhaps only rising an inch or so above the dirt surface, but in reality, if one were to dig down, one would find it was not a small piece of rock but was in reality the top of a massive outcropping of bedrock below the surface. The idea in the verse is that it was something unexpected; it was stumbled over because it was not seen, being only a slight protrusion of rock over an otherwise level surface. The last phrase of the verse also lends credence to this thought since it also speaks of something unexpected, something not seen—a “snare” and “trap.”

Thus, if we put all of this together, we see that Isaiah is saying that many in Israel will not notice the true nature of Jesus. They will miss the fact of His Divinity, that He is really the Rock of Israel, the Bedrock that is unseen. To them He appears as a slight rise, a small protrusion of rock, certainly not massive bedrock of the mountain, and so, because they are not paying close attention, being distracted by the things around them, they trip over the *petra*, who is none other than the LORD God Himself. This is why Jesus refers to Himself as the Bedrock that can only be known by Divine Revelation. Many in Israel do not see it, but Peter does and is blessed by Jesus. And, so, in his own epistle, Peter reaffirms his understanding that the *petra* is none other than Jesus, the Bedrock to stumble over to so many in Israel, because they did not see His true nature, but to us who have seen, He is the LORD Jesus Christ, very God of very God.

This assertion of Isaiah and of Peter regarding Jesus as the *petra* is so significant. It shows that our Lord's true Divine nature can only be known by revelation. Men see only a slight protrusion out of the ground. To them they simply see a small rock in the ground like so many other rocks. They cannot see what is under the ground. It is hidden from their view. But underground, that slight protrusion is in reality that mighty Bedrock of the mountain. And with Jesus claiming to be that mighty Bedrock, He is claiming to be the Rock of Israel! Any Israelite would know that someone who claims to be a strong Rock (Bedrock and not just a small stone) would be making a claim to Divinity, for the Scriptures indicates that the Rock of Israel was none other than Jehovah, YHWH, the LORD God Himself.

Psalm 18:2 The LORD is **my Rock** and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, **my Rock**, in whom I take refuge; My shield and **the Horn of my salvation**, my stronghold. (NASB—capitalization of Rock and Horn is mine)

II Sam. 22:2 And he said, The LORD *is* **my Rock**, and my fortress, and my deliverer; (KJV—capitalization of Rock is mine)

Isa. 30:29 You will have songs as in the night when you keep the festival; And gladness of heart as when one marches to the sound of the flute, To go to the mountain of the LORD, to the **Rock of Israel**. NASB

As one can see, Ps. 18:2 specifically calls Jehovah a Rock. It also calls God a Rock and not only that, but also the Horn of salvation, which in the New Testament is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke 1:69—

“And hath raised up an **Horn of salvation** for us in the house of his servant David (KJV—capitalization mine).

This Hebrew word for Rock in Ps. 18:2 (*Sela*) is also used in II Sam. 22:2 where it is translated in the LXX by the very same Greek word used in Matt. 16:18—*petra*—which, as we have seen, bespeaks the Lord Jesus Christ as the Bedrock on which the Church would be built. And in Isaiah 30:29 (see NASB) the Hebrew word translated Rock is *Tsur*, the same word used in Isaiah 8:14, which was used of Bedrock bespeaking our Lord Jesus Christ (also cf. Deut. 32:4; Ps. 92:15 and Isa. 30:29). This shows that Jesus is none other than Jehovah, the Rock of Israel (the *Sela* and the *Tsur*), the Bedrock (the *Petra*), the One who firmly supports the Church, which is the Temple of God in this age of grace. And it shows Him to be the strong support of those who put their trust in Him and the only One who will bring them salvation.

The Church’s very existence and stability depends on the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ! Without His Divine Nature we would still be in our sins, for only He, who is very God of very God, is able to deliver us from all evil. The Deity of the Messiah is the basis of our entire salvation from sin and hell, and it is the basis of the Church itself. This means if a “church” does not confess the Deity of Jesus Christ, it is not His Church! It is not built upon the Bedrock of God’s choosing!

As we said before, God chose the bedrock upon Mt. Moriah as the place where His Temple would be built. The Israelites would have been wrong to choose any other location, or to choose the bedrock of a different mountain. God said the Temple must only be built upon the bedrock of Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. This gives us a present day application. If any so-called “church” simply views Jesus as a “good man,” or a great philosopher (as many in do in “liberal Christianity”) they are built upon different bedrock, upon a different mountain, upon a high place of their own choosing (Deut. 12: 2-5). They cannot be a true Church. A Church must only be built upon the Bedrock of God’s choosing, which is none other than the Deity of Christ Jesus the Lord—He who is the Everlasting LORD, God’s Only-Begotten Son, very God of very God.

Any cult or heretical group that denies the Deity of Christ Jesus is not the Lord’s church. Any “church” that does not confess that Jesus is YHWH, that He is Jehovah, that He is the Rock of Israel, that church is not a true church. This, of course, would include Jehovah Witnesses, who deny that Jesus is Jehovah, and Mormons who also deny that Jesus is Jehovah (not

in the same sense that Jehovah Witnesses deny it, but in the sense that they deny that Jesus is the Everlasting Jehovah or LORD without beginning and without end, cf. Gen. 21:33; Ps. 93:1-2; Hab. 1:12, believing that the second Person of the Blessed Trinity was begotten in time subsequent to God the Father); these two are not real churches. Only those who affirm and rest upon the Orthodox doctrine regarding the Deity of Jesus Christ are a true Church of God. Only those who hold to the Historic Christian Faith can be considered to be the Church that is built upon the Bedrock of Christ Himself. How wonderful was the confession of Simon Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” the wonderful confession that was given to him by the Father above, being forever recorded for us by the Blessed Holy Spirit!

Paul also affirms the Deity of Christ Jesus—that Christ is the *petra*, the Bedrock that will cause men to stumble. He tells us this in Rom. 9:33. (I will again use the NET version, since it is consistent with the translation of σκάνδαλον in the verse as something that causes people to stumble or trip over, and then will provide the standard NASB version.)

Rom. 9:33 just as it is written, "Look, I am laying in Zion a stone that will cause people to stumble and a **rock that will make them fall**, yet the one who believes in him will not be put to shame." NET

Rom. 9:33 just as it is written, ‘Behold, **I lay in Zion** a stone of stumbling and a **rock of offense**, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed. NASB

Now, at first glance, Paul’s use of *petra* might seem to undermine the whole concept of the word meaning *bedrock*, for it seems on the surface that Paul is saying that the following is what is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a *petra* (rock) of offence.” Even if we change “offence” to “trip over,” it still appears as if Paul is still saying the Lord is not only going to lay in Zion, a stone of stumbling, but also a rock to trip over. If that was the case, then, most certainly, the rock (*petra*) could not be the bedrock, for bedrock cannot be laid down! (Of course, unless one thinks that the Lord “laid down” the bedrock on the day of creation when He made the heaven and the earth, then one could say the bedrock was laid down in Zion on the day of creation. That certainly would be consistent with what the Lord does. He created Adam to be a type of Christ from the beginning, and He created lambs and lions from the very beginning to be types of Christ, so most certainly He could have created or “laid down,” so to speak, from the very beginning, the bedrock on Mt. Zion to be a type of Christ as well). But that is not what I believe Paul is saying. Let me explain.

Search as one may, one will not find a verse from the Old Testament that says, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” The reason for this is because Paul is not quoting from one verse in the Old Testament, but from two verses—Isa. 8:14 and Isa. 28:16—which he then strings together. Perhaps this format might better illustrate these different verses.

“**Just as it is written**, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling, **and**, a rock of offence, **and**, he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’”

Paul is not saying that what is written is, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” He is saying, “It is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling, and, [*it is also written*] a rock of offence, and, [*it is also written*] he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” And by stringing these portions together he is following a common Jewish practice called *Charaz*.

Alfred Edersheim mentions this practice in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*.

“A favourite method was that which derived its name from the stringing together of pearls (*Charaz*), when a preacher, having quoted a passage or section from the Pentateuch, strung on to it another and like-sounding, or really similar, from the Prophets and the Hagiographa.”²⁸

Paul follows this same practice earlier in his epistle to Romans in Rom. 3:10-18. The passage runs as follows using the NASB translation. (I will first quote the portion from the epistle to the Romans and then put in parenthesis the verse from the Old Testament from which the phrase, in bold type, is then lifted out to be used like a string of pearls.)

Verse 10—as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS,

(I Samuel 2:2 For there is none holy as the Lord, and **there is none righteous** as our God; there is none holy besides thee.—Brenton’s LXX)

NOT EVEN ONE

(Psalm 14:3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, **not even one**.)

²⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Volume 1 (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1884) pg. 449

Verse 11—THERE IS NONE

(Ps. 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They have corrupted themselves, and become abominable in their devices; **there is none** that does goodness, there is not even so much as one.—Brenton’s LXX)

WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD.

(Ps. 14:2 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any **who understand, Who seek after God.** NASB)

Verse 12-18—ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”¹³ “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;¹⁴ “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;¹⁵ “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”¹⁸ “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

(Ps. 14:3 **They are all gone out of the way, they are together become good for nothing, there is none that does good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes.**—Brenton’s LXX)²⁹

This stringing together of various portions of Scripture, as one would string together a number of pearls together was a common Jewish practice which Paul, being a Jew, continued to practice (and in Paul’s case, it was done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit). So, returning to our passage in Rom. 9:33, we see that Paul is simply stringing different portions of text together. I will use the American Standard Version to illustrate.

²⁹ Verses 12-18 are taken directly out of the LXX version of the Hebrew Old Testament in Psalm 14:3 (13:3). We know from Paul’s quote that in this case, at least, the LXX preserves the original Hebrew text that was unfortunately dropped from the Masoretic text. Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and his phraseology “it is written,” refers to that which is taken from the Old Testament Scripture. And, his quote from verse 12 to 18 is taken verbatim in Greek from the Septuagint version of Psalms 14:3.

Rom. 9:33 Even as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: And he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame. ASV

Verse 33—even as it is written, BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION

(Isa.28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, **Behold, I lay in Zion** for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. KJV)

A STONE OF STUMBLING

(Isa. 8:14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for **a stone of stumbling** and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. KJV)

A ROCK OF OFFENCE (BEDROCK OF TRIPPING)

(Isa. 8:14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for **a rock of offence (bedrock to trip over)** to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. KJV)

AND HE THAT BELIEVETH ON HIM SHALL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME

(Isa. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord, even the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Zion a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious stone, for its foundations; **and he that believes on him shall by no means be ashamed.**—Brenton's LXX).

Therefore, this verse written by Paul is not contradicting this very first church principle mentioned by our Saviour regarding the fact that He is the Bedrock upon which the Church is to be built. In fact, as we will now demonstrate, Paul is not only confirming this precious truth, he is revealing to us another wonderful revelation.

By stringing together “a stone of stumbling” from Isa. 8:14, with the first part of the phrase from Isa. 28:16, “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation,” he is telling us that the stone of stumbling that will be laid in Zion will be “for a foundation.” And by stringing together “rock of offence,” which would be better translated “bedrock of tripping or bedrock to trip over,” with the foundation stone laid in Zion, he is also telling us that this One in Zion will also be Jehovah, the Rock of Israel, the Bedrock of the Church. Thus, Paul is providing for us, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a beautiful picture of our Lord’s Divine and Human Nature.

The verse that Paul partially quotes in Isa. 28:16 says the following in the King James Version—

Isa. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

The LXX version that Paul uses says this (as translated by Brenton):

Isa. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord, *even* the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Sion a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious *stone*, for its foundations; and he that believes *on him* shall by no means be ashamed.

Isaiah says that the “stone of stumbling” (not the rock of offence or bedrock of tripping) is actually a foundation stone. And it is laid for a foundation. And he also says it is the cornerstone, which Peter calls the Chief Cornerstone. This now introduces us to Christ as a foundation and Christ as the Chief Cornerstone. So Scripture strings together three things: a foundational stone (of stumbling), a rock of offence (bedrock to trip over), and the chief cornerstone (which we will see the significance of later).

Also in this verse, we see that the stone of stumbling is a “tried stone,” a “tested stone.” Thus, this bespeaks our Lord’s Human Nature. Christ as the Bedrock bespeaks our Saviour’s Divine Nature; Christ as a foundation stone bespeaks our Saviour’s Human Nature.

Christ, as a stone used for a foundation, was “tried.” Oh how our Lord suffered and was tried by the evil of men’s hearts. He was constantly challenged, ridiculed, and contradicted by sinners.

Mark 12:15 “Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “**Why are you testing Me?** Bring Me a denarius to look at.” NASB

Luke 10:25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up **and put Him to the test**, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” NASB

John 8:6 **They were saying this, testing Him**, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. NASB

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, **but One who has been tempted (tested) in all things as we are,** yet without sin. NASB

Not only that, we are told that Satan, himself, came to try our Saviour when He was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Yet, Christ as the Bedrock, as very God, could never have been tested by Satan. Our Lord told Satan, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” (Luke 4:12; cf. James 1:13). The finite should never “try,” or to test, the infinite! Our God is majestic and infinite in all His ways and the infinite cannot be measured or tried by man!

Rom. 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! KJV

Job 11:7-8 “Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?” ⁸ “*They are* high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know? NASB

Job 37:23 *Touching* the Almighty, we cannot find him out: *he is* excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. KJV

Yet, in His humanity, our Lord allowed Himself to be challenged and to be tested in all points as are we (Heb. 4:15). In His humanity, He hungered (Matt. 21:18), yet, certainly not in His Deity. In His humanity He grew weary (Jn. 4:6), yet certainly not in His Deity. He was tried by evil men in His humanity, yet His Deity could never be tried or measured. In His humanity our Lord was a tried stone, shown to be perfect in every way, tested like us in all things, yet without sin.

Thus, Christ seen as a foundation stone bespeaks our Lord’s Human nature that He took upon Himself for the salvation of our souls. Apart from the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin, and so our wonderful Saviour, the Bedrock of the Church, took upon Himself, the likeness of sinful flesh, so He could come and die for us upon the cross. What a wonderful Saviour we have—very Man of very Man and very God of very God. Paul strung these two together in his epistle to the Romans. Christ is the stone of stumbling that was tried and tested (the Human nature) and the rock of offence, or the Bedrock to trip over (the Divine nature), unionized in one Person, without division, without separation, without change and without confusion, all for our eternal salvation! So with this in mind, let us now look at Christ as our foundation in contrast with Christ as our Bedrock.

Foundation

We now come to the second designation of our Lord in regard to the Church, which is the Temple of the Living God (II Cor. 6:16). Not only is the Lord called the Bedrock of the Church, He also is called the Foundation of the Church.

Paul tells us in I Cor. 3:9-11 that Christ is also the foundation of the Church.

I Cor. 3:9-11 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.¹⁰ According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.¹¹ **For other foundation (Θεμέλιον—sing.) can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**
KJV

Now let me paraphrase verse 11 to bring out some of the meanings here. “For no man has the power to lay another foundation *of the same kind*, alongside the one which is being laid, which *foundation* is Jesus Christ.”

Paul changes the verbal tense in this verse. In verse 10 he stated that he had already laid down the foundation in Corinth. He uses the perfect tense of the verb τίθημι. (It should be noted that some manuscripts have an aorist variant of the verb; but since it is in the indicative, it still refers to that which is past.) But in verse 11 he switches to the present tense when he says no one “has the power to lay another foundation, than the one which is being laid, which is Christ Jesus.” He uses the present tense (δύναται) in that no one is receiving the power or ability to lay another foundation alongside the foundation already laid (by Paul), and he also uses a present passive participle (κείμενον)³⁰ when stating that God is the One laying the foundation on which all should build.

³⁰ Many take this present passive participle, as a perfect participle. Indeed, this present participle is used as a perfect passive in the New Testament (e.g. Lu. 2:16; Jn. 20:6, 7). However, sometimes in the Greek language of the time, it was used with its present sense (e.g. Jos. Ant. of the Jews 7:299; Sir. 22:18). I prefer to take it as a present passive participle showing how God is laying the foundation of the Church throughout the earth through His apostles who are sent forth as “wise masterbuilders.” I take it this way for a couple of reasons. First, Paul already uses the present participle αὐξάνων three verses earlier of God actively doing the present work of “causing growth” (verse 7). Thus the context already indicated the present working of God. Secondly, in Paul’s epistle to the Romans, he uses the present tense τίθημι in Rom. 9:33 when quoting Isaiah’s

It is as if he is saying that God has laid, and continues to lay, the foundation of the Church through the entire world, having already laid it through Paul in Corinth. And because of that, Paul is telling them to build upon that foundation, because there is only one foundation and that one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord, laid down by God the Father through those chosen by the Holy Spirit to do such a work (i.e. the apostles, now sent out unto unevangelized localities).

So what Paul is saying, is that the foundation (singular) of the Church is Christ Jesus, and God is laying it throughout the world by the Holy Spirit through His chosen vessels. And, as He lays it in different areas, He exhorts us to build upon that foundation that has been laid. He says we cannot lay another foundation of the same kind by ourselves; we must build upon the one foundation. It reminds me of the Scripture that says, “Except the Lord, build the house, they labor in vain who build it.” Perhaps I could paraphrase that thought to get at the idea of what Paul is saying— “Except the Lord lays the foundation, they labor in vain who lay it.”

prophecy that God would lay a foundation in Zion (Isa. 28:16). Since Paul is not quoting the LXX Greek text verbatim (which uses the future ἐμβαλῶ--I will lay), he must have understood that this laying of a foundation was the present work of God in this dispensation. Otherwise, if he thought Isaiah was referring to the laying down of a foundation of the Church as a whole at the beginning of the dispensation of grace, more than likely, he would have used the aorist tense of τίθημι, symbolically representing the fact that God already laid the foundation of the Church for all time when He began the Church in Jerusalem. Thus, it seems that Paul is referring to the fact that God is actively laying down a foundation of the church in each unevangelized locality in the world. Nevertheless, if one prefers to understand it as a perfect passive, it still demonstrates that we are called to build upon the one foundation laid that was laid by God through His apostles, since, I believe, the context indicates that Paul is referring to the church in a local sense. As such, Paul would still be referring back to the fact (vs. 10) that he already laid the foundation of the Church in Corinth and, as such all must build upon it and not seek to lay another foundation in competition with the Church he founded. Or, if one prefers to believe that Paul is referring to the Church in a universal sense, i.e. to the beginning of the Church at Pentecost when God laid down the one foundation of His Church for all time and eternity, it would still show the same—that one cannot build on any other foundation than the one foundation of Christ that was laid down by God. (See also the NET translation of this verse, which treats it as a present participle.)

It has to be God (by the Holy Spirit working through us) that lays the foundation of the church. And the foundation that God, through the Holy Spirit, will lay will be none other than Jesus Christ Himself. He will not lay any other foundation. It's the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasizes this by using a present passive participle. It was not Paul doing the laying by himself; it was the Lord Jesus building His Church upon the foundation laid through Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we see that the Holy Spirit is ever laying the foundation for the Church to be built upon and we are called to find, and to respect, that sacred foundation.

But why does the Holy Spirit designate Christ as the foundation? Is not Christ the Bedrock? A foundation is laid upon the bedrock, so how could He also be the foundation? Are not the apostles called the foundation of the Church? Is not Peter, as a foundation stone, placed upon the Bedrock of Christ? To answer these questions let's first look at some verses.

Eph. 2:20 And are built upon the foundation (θεμελίω--singular) of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone/ KJV

Ezra 5:16 Then that Sabanazar came, and laid the foundations (θεμελίους—plural) of the house of God in Jerusalem: and from that time even until now it has been building, and has not been finished. Brenton's LXX

I Kings 5:17 Then the king commanded, and they quarried great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation (LXX— θεμέλιον—singular) of the house with cut stones. NASB

What we see by comparing these verses is that the Greek word, θεμέλιος, can be used in the singular bespeaking a foundation as a whole, or in the plural, bespeaking the multiple foundation stones that make up the one foundation of a structure. Thus, a Temple can be viewed as being built upon one foundation or it can be viewed as being built upon a number of foundation stones making up that one foundation. It is a matter of one's perspective. (It should be noted, however, this singular perspective is never used of Peter, in and of himself. It is used of all the apostles together, but never of one by themselves. This singular perspective, together with a singular person, is only ever used of our Lord Jesus. Peter, nor any other apostle, is ever spoken as being a foundation of the Church from the singular perspective. Only our Lord is thus spoken.)

In the Old Testament sometimes the foundation of the Temple was seen as one continuous whole, and at other times it is seen by the individual

foundation stones that made up the one foundation. Paul, in I Cor. 3:11, is using the former perspective. He is viewing the foundation as one solid undergirding. It does not mean that Paul is contradicting himself between I Cor. 3:11 and Eph. 2:20, but is simply speaking of the Temple and the foundation from different perspectives to emphasize different truths.

This helps us understand how Christ is also seen as the foundation of the Church. The one common denominator between these two perspectives is that the foundation is made up of ones who were first “sent.” The disciples were sent by our Lord, being called apostles of God. This helps explain why they are the foundations stones in the Temple. Christ Jesus was also sent by God His Father, and so was called an apostle.

Heb. 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider **the Apostle** and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; KJV

In this verse, Jesus is clearly identified as an Apostle, and in John 17:18 He clearly identifies Himself as “one sent” by God, as He clearly identifies the apostles as ones sent out by Him. (We know an apostle means “a sent one.”)

John 17:18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. KJV

This will help explain why Christ can be seen as the one foundation of the Church (and from another perspective how the apostles can be seen as the foundation of the Church). When a new movement is started or a new organization is begun, obviously the first one or ones starting the movement become the foundation of the organization, but they are also considered to be a part of the organization. In Scripture, because the apostles were the first ones of the Church, they were known as the “foundational stones” of the Church, yet, at the same time, they were also known simply as saints within the Church (as was every believer).

One finds the same principle used within the world. Let me use the example of our own nation. Those who first formed the democratic principles of the United States became known as the “founding fathers” of our country. Yet, they were also known as citizens of the country. Now, of course, we would never, never call the apostles our “founding fathers,” for so many reasons, but they were certainly known by Paul as foundational stones within the Church. And, since the Lord Jesus Christ was the very first Apostle (so to speak), He was not only known as “the”

foundation of the Church, he was also known as one within the Church singing unto God the Father (Heb. 2:12).

In other words, just as the apostles were seen as a foundation, yet at the same time as simple saints within the Church, so too Christ is not only seen as the foundation of the Church, He is also seen as One within the Church (which will lead us into our final designation of Christ as the Chief Cornerstone).

God had to first send His Son into the world, born of a woman, born under the Law, to save the world before the apostles could ever be sent out (Jn. 3:17; Gal. 4:4-5). He is given first place in all things. But there is more to learn from this. In order to save us (and, thus, be the foundation of the Church) Christ, as our Apostle and High Priest, had to be made like unto us in all ways. As the writer to the Hebrews states—

Heb. 2:11, 14-17 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹⁴ Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; ¹⁵ And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For verily he took not on *him the nature of* angels; but he took on *him* the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be **made like unto his brethren**, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. KJV

This gives us added revelation as to why our Lord can also be called a foundation of the Church (as were the apostles) and not just the Bedrock below the Church. The reason is because He was **made like unto His brethren** in all ways, having been sent out by God as “the” Apostle. He was made like unto His brethren (which include the apostles as foundation stones) in all things. He was very God of very God, and so was the Bedrock (*Petra*) on which the Church was built, and He was very Man of very Man, and so was seen as the “Foundation” of the Church. He was worshipped as Christ, the Son of the Living God, by the Church, and so was considered the Bedrock of the Church. And, He was worshipped as the Son of Man, as one made like His brethren, and so was considered the Foundation of the Church. (And, as we will see next, since He sang praise to His Father along with His brethren in the Church, He is worshipped as the Chief Cornerstone of the Church.)

Heb. 2:11-12 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹² Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, **in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.** KJV

Finally, how wonderful it is to know that in a structure, the foundation, (while being distinct from the Bedrock upon which it was laid) is intimately united with the Bedrock, fitting its contours, and in some places even interlocked with the Bedrock itself.

This presents us with another representation, as we briefly touched upon above. If the Bedrock bespeaks the Deity of the Messiah, then the Foundation would bespeak the Humanity of the Messiah—two natures unionized in one Person, without division, without separation, without change and without confusion. These adverbs, adopted by the Church during the council at Chalcedon, acknowledged Lord Jesus Christ, who tabernacled in our midst, to be “two natures inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably” united in One Person.³¹

Now, of course, the imagery between a foundation and bedrock is not a perfect picture in all ways, and if analyzed to minutely might lead one to wrongful conclusions. For example, a foundation stone is sometimes hewed out of “bedrock,” but our Lord’s human nature was not hewn out of Divinity! No, no, no! A foundation stone is of a similar substance to bedrock, but our Lord’s human nature is not of similar substance to His Divine Nature! And I am sure one could come up with other examples, because this is true of all types and figures used of Christ in Scripture. They were never meant to be scrutinized down to the minutest detail, but were given to us as “symbols,” “hints” and “shadows” of certain truths about our Lord. The same is true of this imagery. It cannot be scrutinized too closely; but if it is taken only in a very general sense, in line with Scripture, it bespeaks the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ was very God of very God and very Man of very Man.

And so, if we look at this imagery as a shadow and hint, what a wonderful picture it is that Christ was not only the Eternal Son of God, as to His Deity, but was also the Son of Man, as to His humanity. Christ is called the Foundation of the Church because He was made like unto His brethren in all things.³² As such, since they were seen as a

³¹ Schaff, Philip, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes, vol. II* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 1993) pg. 62

³² Yet without sin, of course (Rom. 8:3; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:22; Heb. 7:26-27)

foundation, He was seen as the foundation. Yet, unlike them, He was also the Bedrock of the Church because He was the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten before all time, very God of very God.

And finally, just as we saw that if certain ones did not hold to the Deity of Christ Jesus (represented by the Bedrock), they could not be a true Church of God, so also if certain ones do not hold to the truth represented by the Foundation, the tried stone, i.e. bespeaking the humanity of the Lord Jesus, they cannot be a true Church of God. Not only are we called to confess Jesus as “our Lord and our God,” like the apostle Thomas (Jn. 20:28), we also are called to confess Christ Jesus as the One who came in the flesh, as declared by the apostle John.

I John 4:2-3 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that **Jesus Christ is come in the flesh** is of God: ³ And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. KJV

As an early Christian once succinctly said (with my own modification), “God became Man that man might become godly!” May we all confess with Paul the apostle—

I Tim. 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifest in the flesh**, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. KJV

And so we have seen why Christ is called the Bedrock of the Church, and the Foundation of the Church, let us now see why He is called the Chief Cornerstone of the Church. Amen.

The Chief Cornerstone

Like the designation of Christ as the Foundation, this designation also refers to our Lord's incarnation. This time, however, He is not seen from the perspective of the Foundation as a whole, but is seen as one of many foundation stones making up the base of the structure; however, of all these foundation stones, He is seen as the most important foundation stone, the first foundation stone laid, the Chief Cornerstone.

Isa. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord, *even* the Lord, Behold, I lay for the foundations of Sion **a costly stone, a choice, a corner-stone, a precious stone**, for its foundations; and he that believes *on him* shall by no means be ashamed. (Brenton's LXX)

Eph. 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the **chief corner stone**. KJV

A cornerstone was a stone of greater weight and size that was fitted into the corner of the structure in order to create a perfectly square corner that would guarantee a square structure; it also was important because it tied the two adjacent walls together. If the *Chief Cornerstone* was not cut to a perfect right angle, one would not be able to square the three other corners, which would mean the building would be out of kilter because it did not begin with the proper alignment of the Cornerstone. The Chief Cornerstone had to be perfect in every way. How appropriate that Jesus is also called the Chief Cornerstone.

Not only was our Lord perfect in His Deity (as the Bedrock), not only was He perfect in His humanity (as the Foundation), our Lord was perfect in His work (as the Chief Cornerstone). Yes, the Chief Cornerstone also represents His humanity, but it has the added emphasis of His work. He was perfect in all His work given to Him by the Father.

Being shown forth as the Foundation bespoke the sinlessness of our Lord's Human Nature. It did not have any taint of a sin nature; our Lord came in the likeness of sinful flesh, not in sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3). Being shown forth as the Chief Cornerstone bespoke the fact that the one who was sinless, who was born without a sin nature, also, never once sinned in all of His living and in all of His dealings with men (1 Pet. 2:22). No one could convict Him of sin!

Scripture tells us that the Son was obedient to the Father in all things. He perfectly fulfilled the Law of Moses in every way. No one else could ever completely fulfill the Law. He never broke any part of the Law, down to its tiniest jot and tittle. No one else in all of human history could ever claim that they never broke any part of the Law of God.

Rom. 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: KJV

Rom. 10:4 For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. KJV

Matt. 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. KJV

Gal. 4:4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. NASB

He was perfect in every way, being sinless and living sinless.

John 18:23 Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? KJV

I Pet. 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. KJV

Heb. 7:26 For such a high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens. KJV

Yet, we see in Scripture, the builders could not see His worth. They rejected Him. They did not know that the Builder of all things, the Creator of the whole universe, chose Him to be the Cornerstone for His Temple.

I Pet. 2:6-7 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” ⁷Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, “**The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,**” NKJV

And so, even though He was innocent, perfect in every way, even though He never sinned, the Chief Priests and leaders could not see Him as chosen of God, but rather saw Him as one unfit and unattractive.

Isa. 53:1-5 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; **He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.** ³ **He was despised and forsaken of men,** A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

In all their testing they found nothing in Him whereby they might accuse Him. Yet, because they did not understand their own sinfulness, because they did not understand that the Law could never make one perfect, and because they did not understand that the Messiah needed to shed His blood upon the cross, dying for their sins and for the sins of the whole world, they felt justified in rejecting Christ as the Chief Cornerstone. After all, they must have thought that God also rejected Him, for God never would have allowed the Romans to hang the Messiah upon a tree, especially since the one who hangs on a cross is cursed by God (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). Perhaps, that is why they insisted He die by crucifixion (Jn. 19:5-7); perhaps, from their point of view, if God allowed Him to die upon a cross, they could justify their actions and mollify their consciences.

Deut. 21:23 his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. NASB

Gal. 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree. KJV

When they saw Christ upon the cross, they must have felt smug in the righteousness of their judgment, seeing Him as cursed by God. They did not understand that His death upon the cross was the culmination of the Messiah's perfect work. The Messiah's last act of obedience was, as Paul says, to die upon a cross.

Phil. 2:5-8 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, **and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.**

This was the perfect work of the Messiah. He needed to die upon the cross, becoming accursed of God, not because of anything He did, nor because of anything in or of Himself, but because of everything within us! Who else could ever accomplish this perfect work? There is no one else, because no one else ever in all of human history was perfect and sinless. Nor was there anyone else in all of human history who could justly offer Himself for the sins of the entire world. In doing this our Saviour accomplished a perfect redemption, becoming a curse in our stead so that we would not remain cursed ourselves. As Paul said, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law being made a curse for us. This was the perfect work of Christ, accomplishing all the Father gave Him to do, up to and including the shedding of His blood and His death upon the cross.

John 4:34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. NASB

John 17:4 "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. NASB

John 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit. NASB

Heb. 10:1-14 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. ³ But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year. ⁴ **For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.** ⁵ Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, **Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me:** ⁶ **In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.** ⁷ **Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.** ⁸ Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldst not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; ⁹ Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. ¹⁰ By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of

Jesus Christ once *for all*.¹¹ And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:¹² **But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;**¹³ **From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.**¹⁴ **For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.** KJV

Oh, how this should teach us to not trust the judgment of man. How this should teach us to not trust in the discernment of the world, and in some cases, the discernment of so-called religious leaders. Our trust must always be in the Lord, and our vision must always be the result of the revelation of God our Father through the illumination of the Holy Spirit within our hearts, always in accordance with the eternal Word of God.

And so we see that Scripture tells us that there was only one Person in the entire universe who was so qualified to accomplish the perfect work of redemption and so be the Chief Cornerstone, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ, because only He was perfect in every way, sinless, having no sin nature. All other men, all other religious leaders, could not meet that standard. Neither an Abraham, nor a Moses, nor an Elijah, nor any other individual, could ever fulfill the requirements needed to be the Chief Cornerstone. Abraham, despite his great faith, could not fulfill the requirements of a perfect work, for his faith failed him in Egypt and also in the story of Hagar. Nor could Moses fulfill the requirements of a perfect work, for he disobeyed God at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh. And, finally, Elijah could not fulfill the requirements of a perfect work, for his trust and courage failed him in his dealings with Jezebel.

Only one Man in the world could meet the precise requirements—the Man Christ Jesus. He was perfect in His Deity, as God could only be. He was perfect in His humanity, sinless in every way. And He was perfect in His work, never lacking faith in God’s provision, never sinning or disobeying any of His commands, nor did He ever lack courage in the face of death, even the death upon the cross. If one tries to substitute any other man, no matter how religious or spiritual he might seem, he will be imperfect and as a result, be an imperfect cornerstone that will cause the building to be out of plumb, out of kilter, not fit to be the Temple of God, the dwelling of the most Blessed Holy Spirit.

And this leads us to our final point regarding the Chief Cornerstone. Since Christ is perfect, the corners will be square and true, holding tight together both the wall of the Temple that is Jewish, and the wall of the

Temple that is Gentile. He makes them into one building. By Him, as the Chief Cornerstone, we are kept whole and one.

Paul speaks to this truth in his epistles when he says—

Col. 3:11 Where is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free: but Christ is all in all things. TYNDALE

Eph. 2:10-15, 19-21 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. ¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision “ by the so-called “Circumcision,” *which is performed in the flesh by human hands--* ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ **But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, **who made both groups into one** and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances,* ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,** ²¹ **in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord.** NASB

Gal. 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. NASB

Because the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Chief Cornerstone, is perfect in every way, He is able to save all of mankind, whether Jew or Gentile, having cut them out from the quarries of the world, have cleansed them by His precious blood, and then, having formed and polished them into living stones fitly framed into the sacred Temple of the Holy Spirit—which is the Church, the Body of Christ.

Acts 4:10-12 “let it be known to you all, 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 stands here before you whole.” ¹¹ “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.” ¹² **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** NKJV

Are you a living stone? If anyone does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, such a one cannot be saved. If anyone rejects Christ, that one will be rejected by God. If anyone does not hold to the work of Christ upon

the cross wherein He died for our sins, if anyone does not trust in the finished work of the cross, that one cannot be saved. Such a one can never be a part of the Church. May we pray for the salvation of every soul so that we may all be built into a spiritual house offering up spiritual sacrifices of praise to our Great God and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:4-9 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, **as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.** ⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.” ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve, “**The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone,**” ⁸ and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. ⁹ But 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; NASB

Therefore, we can now see why the Lord Jesus Christ is presented in Scripture as the Bedrock, the Foundation, and the Chief Cornerstone, and why each designation is important to the Temple of God upon this earth in this dispensation of grace.

First, the Bedrock bespeaks Jesus as the LORD, YHWH, Jehovah, the Word of God. It speaks of His Deity as the Eternal Son of God, the Only Begotten of God the Father, Very God of Very God. Second, the Foundation bespeaks Jesus in His humanity. It speaks of Him as being made like unto His brethren in all points, yet without sin. It bespeaks of Him as one born of a virgin, being made in the likeness of sinful flesh very Man of very Man, all so He could save us from sin and death. And, finally, the Chief Cornerstone bespeaks Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, as the one perfect in every way, obedient to the Father in all things, never committing any sin, fulfilling every aspect of the Law, accomplishing a perfect work of redemption, dying for the sins of the world, shedding His blood to cleanse those who trust in Him, thereby bringing them into the Temple of God by joining them to Himself in perfection, by the imputed righteousness of His Person, all in order to form them into a holy and spiritual house for God in Spirit. “Oh, how wonderful, oh how marvelous is our Saviour’s love for *you and me!*”

All three are necessary for salvation. We must believe in the LORD Jesus Christ. We must believe that He is LORD. We must believe that

He is Jesus, the One who came in the flesh, God manifested in the flesh, being made like unto His brethren in all things, yet without sin. And we must believe that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the One who delivers all those from sin who put their trust in Him, the One who secures our salvation by His precious work upon the cross as the Christ, who shed His blood, becoming a curse for us that we might live unto Him. In a real sense, we should write the name of the Son of God as the LORD Jesus Christ. He is our Lord, because He is the LORD.³³ May His Church so recognize Him and rest upon Him as the Bedrock, secure with Him as the Foundation, and joined tightly together with Him as the Chief Cornerstone.

And so, in conclusion, we should ask ourselves why it is important for a church to recognize these aspects of the LORD Jesus Christ. The answer is that, as it was with Moses and as it was with the children of Israel, we are called to make all things according to the pattern. And the very first pattern given to us in regard to the Church as the Temple of the Living God is that it must always rest upon the Faith regarding the Person and work of the LORD Jesus Christ. To be a church that is pleasing to the Lord, it must not deviate from the Historic Christian Faith, the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints that is seen in such confessions as the Nicene Creed, the London Confession of Faith, the Westminster Confession of Faith, or many other accurate Statements of Faith today.

The Nicene Creed is really nothing but Scripture put into summary form (see Fig. 1 in next chapter). The first responsibility of every church is to be sure that it holds to the Faith delivered to the Church by the apostles. What good would it do if a church follows the right pattern, but not the right Faith? Such a church would end up having a form of godliness, but not the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many today are departing from the Faith in regard to the doctrine of the Only Begotten Son of God, i.e. the doctrine of Eternal Generation of the Son of God. Such churches are simply falling away from the Faith. How sad it is to see some churches who still hold to the Faith, but have

³³ LORD, of course, is the King James Version's designation for Jehovah in the Old Testament, bespeaking His Deity. When a first century Christian said "Jesus is Lord," he or she was not saying Jesus is my Master, although He certainly is that, but he or she was saying, "Jesus is LORD," "Jesus is Jehovah," Jesus is the YHVH of the Old Testament. So, the reason why Jesus is Lord (meaning Master) is because Jesus is my LORD and my God Almighty!

departed from the pattern of the early Church, but equally sad, is those churches who hold to the pattern of the early Church, but have departed from the Faith given to the early Church. The Faith is inviolate. It was delivered once and for all to the saints. It is our responsibility as a Church to contend earnestly for it, and to build ourselves upon it (Jude 1:20), for the Faith is none other than those truths concerning our LORD Jesus Christ. So with that in mind, let's conclude this section with a look at that Faith, which reflects the truths we have seen in Christ as the Bedrock, the Foundation and the Chief Cornerstone of the Church. It is a necessary ingredient for a true Church of God.

The Foundation of the Faith

The Faith is none other than what the apostles of our Lord revealed to the Church beginning with Peter's declaration, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." How wonderful are such declarations of Faith for they are blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ, being revealed to us by God the Father through the witness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, along with the apostles of Christ, as His Church, we confess the following—

This we believe –

We confess with the apostle, Simon Peter, that we believe (Jn. 6:69)! With the apostle Paul we confess that there is one God, the Father (I Cor. 8:6) who the Psalmist says is the Maker of heaven and earth (Ps. 115:15), and who Paul says created all things visible and invisible (Col. 1:16). For us, as with Paul, there is but one Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 8:6). We believe with the apostle, John, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Only-Begotten Son of God (Jn 3:16, 18) and that, it is He who is begotten of God that will keeps us (I Jn. 5:18 ERV, TYN). We confess with John that He existed before the world was (Jn. 17:5) and with the prophet Micah that He is from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

We declare with John that God is light (I Jn. 1:5) and that Jesus is the Light of the world (Jn. 8:12). We also believe, along with the writer of Hebrews, that He is God (Heb. 1:8)—being, as John affirmed in his epistle, true God of Him, who is God (I Jn. 5:20).

With Paul, we confess that the Son is the first begotten of every creature (Col. 1:15 Geneva Bible) who was not made Himself because all things that were made were made by Him (Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3). With John we confess that He and the Father are one (Jn. 10:30) existing, as Paul says, in the form of God, and who did not regard His equality with God a thing to be grasped (Phil. 2:6), as he always possessed the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9)

We hold dear the truth, with John, that He came down from heaven for our salvation (Jn. 3:13), as also Paul tells us (Titus 2:11). With John we confess that the Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14) and as Paul says, that He was made in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7), or, as the writer of Hebrews says, was "made a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:9).

As Luke tells us, we believe that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing that she would conceive and bring forth a Son whom she would call Jesus; and with Mary we treasure her words, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” We praise God for the testimony of Luke regarding the answer to her question—“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:26-35).

With sorrow in our hearts, we believe the testimony of the apostle, Matthew, that He was delivered to Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:2), and with Mark, that Pilate delivered Him to be crucified (Mk. 15:15).

We witness together with Peter that Jesus suffered (I Pet. 2:21), and with Paul, that he died and was buried and was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3-4).

Then, with Mark, we affirm that He was received up into heaven, and sat down on the right hand of God (Mk. 16:19) all the while, rejoicing with John that He will come again (Jn. 14:3) and with Matthew and Paul, that when He comes, He will come with glory (Matt. 25:31) judging the quick and the dead (II Tim. 4:1). We believe, like Luke, that of His kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:33).

Then, with Peter, we believe that He received the promise of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:33) who, as Paul says, is the Lord the Spirit (II Cor. 3:17), the Spirit who gives life (II Cor. 3:6).

With John, we affirm that the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father (Jn. 15:26) even like the river of water of life that proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). With Matthew, we worship and glorify, along with the Father, both the Son, and the Holy Spirit, honoring that One glorious Name—the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). And we believe with Peter that the prophets spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21).

We rejoice with Paul, that there is one body (Rom. 12:5), the Church, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). And we believe with Paul that this Church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:19-20). We also take comfort with Matthew that our Lord, the Head of the Church, is in our midst, whenever, and wherever two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20)! Amen.

How wonderful are these declarations of the apostles and prophets. With them all we say, Amen.

These verses encapsulate the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). They bespeak that which was with us from the beginning (I Jn. 2:24). These verses reflect the truth of Christ as our Bedrock, our Foundation and our Chief Cornerstone.

In regards to these foundational truths, Paul tells us through Timothy the following—

II Tim. 1:13 Have an **outline of sound words**, which words thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (Darby)

Darby's translation best reflects the meaning of the underlying Greek text. The first word in the verse is the Greek word ὑποτύπωσις. Moulton and Milligan define it as a "sketch in outline," a "summary account."³⁴

And W. E. Vine says this—

"...hupotuposis (ὑποτύπωσις): *an outline, sketch* (akin to hupotupoo, "to delineate," hupo, 'under,' and No. 3), is used metaphorically to denote *a pattern, example, 'form,'* in 2 Tim. 1:13, *of sound words* (RV, pattern); in 1 Tim. 1:16, 'pattern' and 'ensample.'³⁵

Thus we can see that Darby better captures the nuance of the word Paul uses in II Tim. 1:13. Paul wants us to have a "summary account" of what we believe. The Church has always tried to obey this admonition of the apostle Paul. This verse is the basis for all Creeds, Confessions, and/or Statements of Faith. The earliest summary, or Statement of Faith that we have, apart from Scripture, is that called the "Apostle's Creed."

Later, after Satan attempted to dilute and alter the Faith, the Church further clarified the Historic Faith, as seen in the Apostle's Creed, into what is now known as the Nicene Creed. This wonderful "Statement of Faith" became the basis for all other statements or confessions. The

³⁴ James Hope Moulton, George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1976) pg. 661

³⁵ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 1248 (Vol. 2)

Church simply took the truths of God’s Word, as seen in the apostles declarations above, and strung them together into an outline or sketch. If one looks closely at the Nicene Creed, one can see the beauty of Scripture. It is really nothing else but the verses we have already referenced above—under the sub-heading “This we believe”— now put together in “summary form” (See Fig. 1).

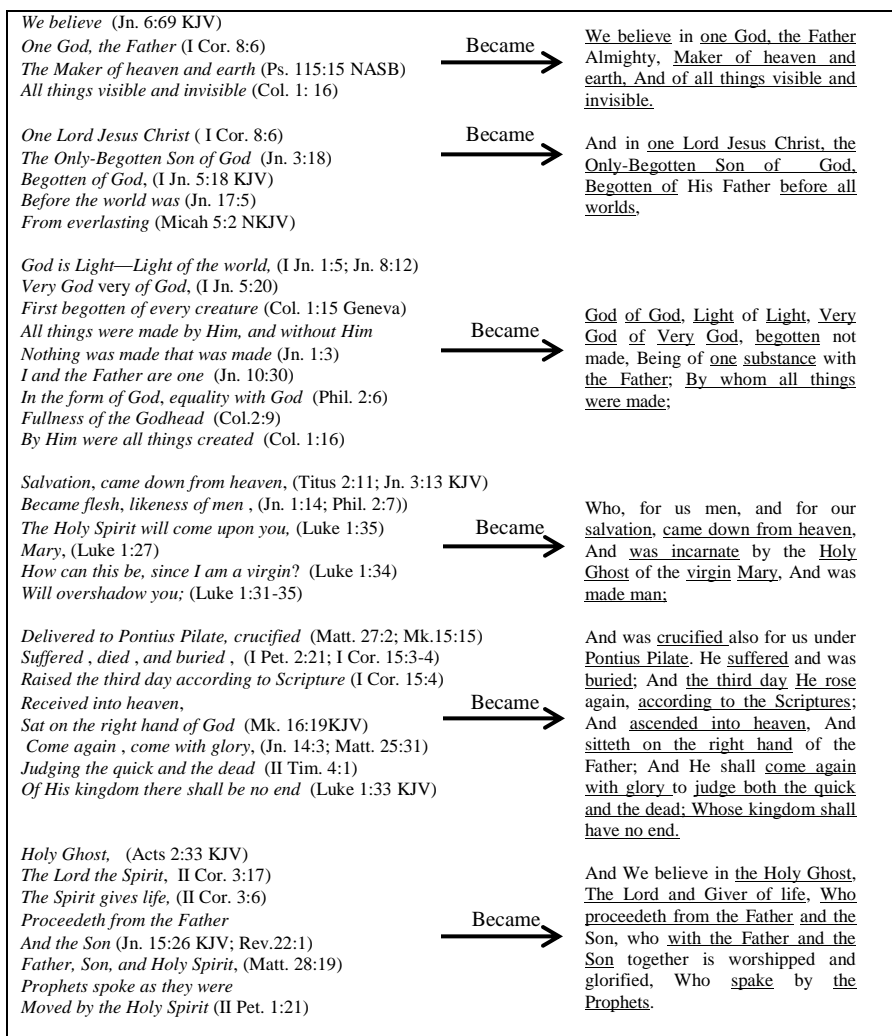


Fig. 1 Stringing together God’s Word to form the Nicene Creed

How wonderful is this portion of the Nicene Creed for it simply takes certain phrases from many different verses of God’s Word and puts them

together into a concise declaration of faith. It follows the practice of the apostle Paul, who often would string together portions of God's Word into a unified whole as we saw above in Rom. 3:10-18 and in Rom. 9:33. It is the method that Alfred Edersheim called *Charaz*, the stringing together of pearls.³⁶

The Nicene Creed is the testimony of a Church under siege by the fiery darts of the wicked one. And even though the Church by that time had succumbed to the wiles of the devil in other areas of Church practice (as we will presently see), it remained firm in its confession of the Faith as Scripture even foretold (Rev. 2:13). It neither added to the Faith, nor detracted from the Faith, but held firm to the Faith, declaring it openly.

The Historic Christian Faith

The Nicene Creed as taken from Scripture 325 A.D.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God,
Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of Very God, begotten not made,
Being of one substance with the Father;
By whom all things were made;
Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
And was made man;
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried;
And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the
dead;
Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And We believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,

³⁶³⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *Op. Cit.*, pg. 449

Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified,
Who spake by the Prophets.

We believe

And **we believe** and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”
(John 6:69 KJV)

In one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.

But to us there is but **one God, the Father**, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1Cor. 8:6 KJV)

May you be blessed of the LORD, **Maker of heaven and earth**. (Ps. 115:15 NASB)

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, **visible and invisible**, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (Col. 1:16 KJV)

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and **one Lord Jesus Christ**, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1Cor. 8:6 KJV)

The Only-Begotten Son of God,

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the **Only Begotten Son of God**. (John 3: 18 KJV)

Begotten of His Father before all worlds,

No man hath seen God at any time; the only **begotten Son**, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:18 KJV)

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only **begotten Son** into the world, that we might live through him.(1John 4:9 KJV)

We know that whosoever is begotten of God sinneth not; but **he that was begotten of God** keepeth him, and the evil one toucheth him not. (1John 5:18 ERV)

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee **before the world was**. (John 17:5 KJV)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, **From everlasting**. (Micah 5:2 NKJ)

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up **from everlasting**, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I **brought forth**: (Prov. 8:22-25 KJV)

God of God, Light of Light, Very (true) God of Very God,

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, **O God**, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. (Heb. 1:8 KJV)

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that **God is light**, and in him is no darkness at all. (1John 1:5 KJV)

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “**I am the Light** of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.” (John 8:12 NASB)

And He is the **radiance of His glory** and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3 NASB)

We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us a mind to know **him (God) which is true**; and we are in him that is true, through his **Son Jesus Christ**. This same is **very God**, and eternal life. (1John 5:20 Bishops Bible)

Begotten not made

Who is the image of the invisible God, the first **begotten** of every creature. For **by him were all things created**, which are in heaven, and which are in earth, things visible and invisible: whether they be Thrones or Dominions, or

Principalities, or Powers, all things were created by him, and for him, (Col. 1: 15-16 Geneva Bible)

All things were **made through Him**, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (Joh 1:3 NKJV)

Being of one substance with the Father;

I and my Father are one. (John 10:30 KJV)

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (Phil. 2:6 NASB)

By whom all things were made;

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (Col. 1:16 KJV)

Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven,

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11 KJV)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, (Titus 2:11 NASB)

And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that **came down from heaven**, even the Son of man which is in heaven. (John 3:13 KJV)

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51 KJV)

And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, And was made man;

And the **Word became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NKJV)

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you

shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:30-35 NASB)

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: (Phil. 2:7 KJV)

And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.

And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. (Matt. 27:2 KJV)

And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. (Mark 15:15 KJV)

He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures;

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1Cor. 15:1-4 NASB)

And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father;

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. (Mark 16:19 KJV)

And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead;

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Luke 21:27 KJV)

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; (II Tim. 4:1 KJV)

Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his **kingdom there shall be no end.** (Luke 1:33 KJV)

And We believe in the Holy Ghost,

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the **Holy Ghost**, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. (Acts 2:33 KJV)

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the **Spirit** by the works of the law, or by the hearing **of faith**? (Gal. 3:2 KJV)

The Lord and Giver of life,

Now the **Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (II Cor. 3:17 NASB)

For the law of the **Spirit of life** in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:2 KJV)

Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the **Spirit gives life**. (II Cor. 3:6 NASB)

Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which **proceedeth from the Father**, he shall testify of me: (John 15:26 KJV)

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, **proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb**. (Rev. 22:1 KJV)

Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spake by the Prophets.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**. (Matt. 28:19 NKJV)

For the **prophecy** came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God **spake** as they were **moved by the Holy Ghost**. (II Pet. 1:21 KJV)

The first responsibility of every true New Testament assembly or Church is to hold to the Faith regarding our precious LORD Jesus Christ. If we desire to follow the pattern, we must first follow this.

May we, in humility, always seek to be faithful to the revelation regarding the Person of the Only-Begotten Son of God—Christ Jesus our LORD—for such revelation of His Person is the testimony of Scripture and of the apostles, and is the faithful testimony of the early Church. To this witness of the apostles, we are admonished to always be mindful, as Peter, the apostle of our Lord reminds us. “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: **That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before** by the holy prophets, and of the commandment **of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour**” (II Pet. 3:2 KJV).

The Historic Christian Faith is the *form of sound words*, or as Darby says, the *outline of sound words*, which is found in God’s Word. It is the firm foundation of the Church. It is those truths concerning our Lord’s Deity in relation to God the Father as represented by Christ as the Bedrock of the Church. It is those truths regarding our Lord’s humanity as represented by Christ as our foundation, and it is those truths regarding Christ’s work of redemption upon the cross through the shedding of His blood as represented by Christ as the Chief Cornerstone. May we never fall away or dilute it in any way.

And so, in closing, may we always build upon the Bedrock that is Christ, the Foundation that is our Saviour, never forgetting that we are joined closely together with Christ who is our Chief Cornerstone, “for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11 NASB). Amen and Amen!

What's in a Name? The Problem of Denominating Churches

What's in a name? Is it alright for Christians to denominate themselves? Is it all right to name ourselves Plymouth Brethren, or to name ourselves Baptists, Methodists, or Lutherans? Does it really make a difference? If we are to conform ourselves to Scripture, then the answer to such a question must be, "Yes, it does make a difference"— we never find any of the apostles allowing Christians to denominate themselves in the early church. In fact, Paul censures such a practice when Christians in Corinth began to think along those lines (I Cor. 1:12; 3:4). If we truly claim to be a people of the Book, then we must ask ourselves if it is right to adopt a practice which is not found in the Book, a practice that did not come from any apostle, from any prophet, but, rather, a practice that came from ordinary men, in some cases, centuries after the time of the early church? And so, it is to this question we would now like to address ourselves.

When our Lord said to Peter in Matt. 16:18, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," He did not say I will build my Plymouth Brethren Church. Nor did He say I will build my Baptist Church, nor my Episcopal Church, nor any other denominational name one might wish to use. He simply said I will build my Church. "Church" was the simple name the Holy Spirit adopted to bespeak those who would meet together in His name.

Many today view the word "church" as a common noun, as one might view the word "family," or the word "nation," so that it makes no difference if another name is added to it. After all, do we not need to distinguish each church from another as we distinguish one "family" from another? Is not adding a name to the word "church" a simple way to do this? By adding another name to a noun we can turn a common noun into a proper noun, and give it distinction so it can be distinguished. But, dear brethren, the word "Church" already is a "proper noun" when used of God's people (using English terminology). It does not need further distinction, in and of itself.

(Of course, we are using English terminologies, since Greek does not normally use such designations as a *common noun* and *proper noun*. I am using these two English terminologies to demonstrate a spiritual point, a spiritual point that is, indeed, found in the Greek in the New Testament,

whether it is designated as such or not. And that spiritual point is this—the word ἐκκλησία is already used as a *proper noun* by the Holy Spirit in and of itself. Denominating designations are never added to the Greek word in order to give distinguishability of one set of churches from other sets of churches. Such distinguishability is accomplished by the identity of their locations as we will see later.)³⁷

An early American Grammar of the English language once said this about the difference between a *proper* and a *common noun* which might help our thought process—

“A noun is the earliest part of speech introduced into any systematic language: as soon as things were discovered, and mankind wished to distinguish one class from another, they were obliged to invent a general name appropriated to one of that class, which should be common to all others of the same class. Thus, to distinguish a class of objects in creation from other classes, they gave to it the name of *tree*, to another class the name of *beast*, to another class the name of *mineral*, and to another, the name of *man*. Now, though tree is the name of an individual substance, yet, as the same name extends to all other individual substances of the same nature, *tree* is a general name or a *common noun*. This is the origin of the *common noun*. But as men advanced farther in the refinements of society, they wished to distinguish between individuals of the same class or species. For this purpose, they were compelled to invent a particular name for each individual, which peculiarly belonged to that individual, while others of the same class had their particular names. [For example, the common noun, *tree*, becomes a proper noun by adding the designation *Silver Maple* to the word, so that the common noun, *tree*, becomes the proper noun, *Silver Maple tree*.] Each considered his particular name, as his own exclusive right and property, and to which no one else had a title or a claim. This is the origin of the *proper noun*.

There are but few things in Nature which are distinguished by proper nouns. Every man in every nation has his own *proper* name. Certain rivers, mountains, lakes, promontories, islands, continents, &c. are distinguished by *proper nouns*; but it would be an endless task to give them all proper names. Some nouns are sometimes proper and sometimes common; the sense must determine the name; thus, *Earth* is a proper noun, when by it we mean the name of one of the planets; but when we mean a sort or kind of earth, such as sand, clay, or loam, &c. it is a common noun. *Nature* is a proper noun when it signifies the Universe, but when it signifies the quality or property of anything, it is a common noun. *Universe* and *Eternity* are proper nouns, because they are particular names which exclusively belong to them. *Heaven* is a proper noun, when it denotes the place

³⁷ These distinctions in Greek were usually guided by the use of the Greek article, but not always, as sometimes a word could be anarthrous, yet still be considered to be, what we would call in English, a “proper noun.”

of the blest; but when it means the upper regions of sky and clouds, it is a common noun.

The reason why we distinguish between proper and common nouns is that proper nouns always begin with a capital letter in composition; but common nouns do not generally begin with a capital, and only when they begin a sentence, or a line in poetry.”³⁸

Now, we do not dispute the fact that the noun “church” was once used as a common noun. It was so used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible and was sometimes used as such in the New Testament. But the noun was used by our Lord as a *proper noun* in Matt. 18:17 (at least, according to the interpretation of the Holy Spirit by the Greek text). And, it was used as a *proper noun* by the Holy Spirit of those who were being persecuted for His name (Acts 12:1), of those who were the Body of Christ, and of those who were the Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-32). What could be more particular or proper than that!

And so we see, the Holy Spirit uses the word “Church” as a “proper noun” in Matt. 16:18 and 18:17; and the Holy Spirit uses it as a proper noun in Acts and throughout the epistles of Paul (e.g. Phil. 3:6; Phm. 1:2). The “Church” was the name God gave to His people who were chosen out from among both Jews and Gentiles. This is the name God chose for His children who were baptized into His Son by the Holy Spirit. For the Christian, the name *Church* was no longer just a *common noun*; it became a *proper noun* (again using English terminology) as is amply demonstrated by Paul’s usage of the noun in Eph. 5:32.

Eph. 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and **the church**. KJV

Now, yes, one might notice that, in the King James Version above, the word “Church” appears in the lower case, as it is so many times does in our many modern English Bibles. Until writing this book, I never gave it much thought. In fact, in previous books I have routinely used “church” in the lower case. Indeed, up to this point, I have used “church” many times in the lower case in this very book, but I think from this point on, I will use it in the upper case, to emphasize what may have been forgotten—that the Holy Spirit uses it as a *proper noun* when referring to God’s people. I do not wish to make a legalism out of this for sometimes

³⁸ L. F. Hamlin, English Grammar in Lectures (Peck, Steen and Company, Brattleboro, 1832) pg. 9-10

a noun in the lower case can still be a proper noun. Even in English, sometimes we follow this practice. For example, from the earliest time of our nation (for egalitarian purposes I suppose) the noun “president” when referring to the President of the United States has sometimes been capitalized in print and sometimes it has been left in lower case in print, yet it still remains a proper noun whether capitalized or not, i.e. when referring to the President of the United States.

And so, getting back to the fact that the word “Church” sometimes appears without capitalization, does not mean it should be considered common noun when used of God’s Church. It still is a proper noun in and of itself. Consider the Geneva Bible of 1599 (which preceded the King James Version of 1611) wherein the word “Church” is always capitalized without fail. Perhaps, we would be wise to follow the mindset of our brothers who produced the Geneva Bible; perhaps, it would be wise to once again always capitalize this “proper noun” when used of the Lord’s people. Unfortunately, its lack of being capitalized may have laid the basis for the wide-spread proclivity of Christians to denominate the word “church.”

So, with that in mind, let us once more ask the question, “What’s in a name?” A name is a revelatory expression of some object or thing. It is an element of language, which was created by God for the communication of thoughts regarding the true nature of those things which exist. It is a means whereby one thing can be distinguished from another. The very first use of a name in Scripture occurs in Gen. 1:1. “In the beginning God...” The name of God is revealed to us as *Elohim*. As such, it is a revelatory expression of who God is. It communicates to us the truth about our Creator and how He exists.

As one continues to read in the first chapter of the Bible, one is then introduced with the name assigned to that which above the earth, the heavens, and that which is below the heavens, the earth. It then gives designations to the many things created by God and ultimately to the one who was made in the image of God—Man or Adam.

God is the One who names. It is His prerogative, not ours. Once God gives forth a name it should be respected and honoured. When we accept a name given by God we are submitting ourselves to His sovereign right to name. When we refuse a name given by God we are challenging His sovereign right. When one accepts a name given by God one accepts the sufficiency of its revelation—that everything it was meant to

communicate is communicated—no more and no less. Its acceptance gives honour to the ability of God to sufficiently communicate that which He wishes to communicate through the words He chooses. However, when one adds to a name given by God, one is saying God was insufficient in His choice of nomenclatures, for the name He has given does not communicate enough information (i.e. in our eyes). We are saying that God could not foresee our present circumstances and so was not able to see that one day the name He chose would become insufficient and so would have to be changed or given additional words in order to make it more perfect. Dear brethren, is not such thinking presumptuous? Certain names given by God should remain inviolate, never being added to with names of our own choosing or altered in any way.

And so we see that the originator of language and, therefore, the originator of names is God. Later on, however, God does allow man to name certain things. Adam is given the authority to name all the animals. Then Adam and Eve are allowed to give a name to their first child, Cain; and, as each generation proceeded, every child received a name from their parents. This too, is significant, for it shows man the principle that it is the greater who names the lesser.

However, in the course of man's interaction with God, we find that God the Father of all human beings (in its most general sense, being the Father of spirits) sometimes chose to change the name that was given to an individual by their parent. This showed that God was greater than man and had the wisdom, foresight, and sovereignty to change a name once given by man. God retains this right; we do not. God has the right to change our nomenclatures, but we do not have the right to change God's nomenclatures since we are not greater than He.

This change of a name by God usually occurred as the result of a spiritual progression of faith in the life of the person. Thus, Abram was renamed Abraham by God because of Abraham's faith in the promises of God (Gen.17:5). And Jacob was renamed Israel, because of Jacob's faith in the God of his fathers and his faith in God's power of blessing and protection (Gen. 32:28). In these instances it is God who gives the name; and man, out of humility of faith, accepts the name (cf. Gen. 49:2). This not only honours the One who gave them the new name, but also allows a new unity to be created, because everyone associated with the new name became bound together by the new name (cf. I Chron. 17:21-22).

We see this same truth in the modern use of surnames. A surname unifies the members of a family. And even those who may not possess that name by birth, but adopt it out of love and honour, they also enter into the unity of the family (cf. Isa. 44:5 KJV with Ruth 1:16). Thus, as in the case of Ruth, who was a Moabitess, she became an Israelite out of love and honour for Naomi. But what would have happened if she refused to take on the name of Naomi's people. What if she said, "I respect the name of the patriarch Israel and the nation named after him, but I am a Moabite, named after Moab, and my children will not be known simply as Israelites, they will be known as Moabite Israelites." Wouldn't that have introduced confusion into the nation and sown discord among the people, for some would have begun to call themselves Moabite Israelites. If such a practice would have been accepted, then David, the foremost king of Israel in the Old Testament, would have been known, not as an Israelite king, but a Moabite Israelite king!

Or, let's consider another example. What if the nation of Israel had said, "We do not like the unifying name God gave us? We feel we are better identified by our viewpoint regarding the importance of the Law, so we will call ourselves, not the nation of Israel, but the nation of Sinainianians (creating a name from Mt. Sinai)." Or what if some felt strongly on the type of government Israel should have, so they said we will be known as Monarchians. Or perhaps, some loved the patriarchs, or maybe one of the prophets, so that they decided they would be called Elijahites. Or what if those in Jerusalem, wishing to emphasize the necessity of preserving the importance of the "one place" where God chose to build His Temple, decided to call themselves "Jerusalem Israelites," rather than just Israelites? Or, what if another group of Israelites simply wanted to call themselves, "Shiloh Israelites," in order to distinguish their particular form of worship that was based upon Scripture, because Shiloh represented the simplicity of worship first found in the Tabernacle? What would we say if those in the nation of Israel decided to follow that course? Would we not think they were being presumptuous and dishonouring to God since it was He who named them the nation of Israel, and it was He who said, "You shall be called Israel?"

Now, I know these might be silly examples, but in one sense, is this not what has happened to us in the Church under the New Testament? The Holy Spirit gave us in Scripture the unifying name of Christian, which was named after Christ, but some in the Church of Corinth, instead, said they were of Cephas (Peter), in other words, they were Cephites, not simply Christians. Or, for example, some said they were of Paul; in other

words, Paulites. Or, to bring us up to modern times, what if some said (like our fictitious example of Ruth above), “I respect the name of Christian, but I also was blessed by Martin Luther, so I am also a Lutheran—I am a Lutheran Christian.” How is this any different than someone saying, “I am a Moabite Israelite in order to honor Moab?” Or, how about those who believe in the importance of certain doctrines and so say, “I am a Baptist Christian.” Would that be any different than an Israelite, who believed in the importance of certain doctrines and so said, “I am a Sinainanian Israelite?” Or, how about one who believed in a particular form of Church government, calling themselves Presbyterian Christians. Would that be any different than the nation of Israel preferring the name Monarchian Israelite, instead of the simple designation, Israelite? Or, how about those who say, “I am not a Lutheran, nor a Baptist or Presbyterian; I am a Roman Catholic Christian.” How is that any different than those in Jerusalem calling themselves “Jerusalem Israelites?” Or, how about those who say I am a Plymouth Brethren Christian? Would that be any different than those Israelites who preferred to call themselves a “Shiloh Israelite?”

Remember, names are revelatory and God is the One who has named His people. Why do we presume to change a name which God has given us, or why do we presume to add to the name He has given us? Is it honouring to God to say, “The name you gave me is not enough; I need to add to it.” Do we know better than God?

If God's people would go back to God's Word and realize the importance of names (rooted in the fact that every Name of God is revelatory) and if they would be willing to conform themselves and their Churches to His Word, they would once again bear witness to the truth of those names given to us by God. God has given His people certain names and it is not up to us to change, add, or subtract from those nomenclatures.

For instance, let's use an example of a large family of twelve with the surname of Smith. What if some of the young children came to the mother and father and said, “Mother, Father, we don't like the surname you have given us and so we all are going to choose another name to add to our surname. We'll each choose our own unique name to add to our name of Smith.” Would that not be presumptuous and dishonouring to the mother and father? Would it not bring about confusion to those from without, if they are asked, “Who are the members of your family?” And would it not destroy the oneness and harmony of the family from within? Would it not bear witness to a deep problem within the hearts of those

within the family? Is it any different with God's family?

A. P. Gibbs once said:

"Many believers excuse their denominational affiliation by saying: "What's in a name? We're all out for the same thing. We'll all go to the same place!" These same believers would change their tune if someone forged their name to a check for a large amount and cashed it at their bank! What would be the reaction ... if their wives suddenly decide to change their names and take another more suited to their poetic fancy? These husbands would rightly argue: "I gave you my name at our marriage, and you cannot change that name to suit yourself!" Why, then, should we alter the name that Christ has given to His own blood-bought people [His bride], and substitute for it another of our own making?"³⁹

And in another place he said—

"We shall search our Bibles in vain to discover the "Baptist" denomination, or the "Presbyterian" or the "Episcopalian" or the "Congregational" or the "Methodist," or a host of others we might name. Within each of these denominations there are very many genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, we love them and gladly own them as members of the body of Christ; but we cannot love or own these denominations, for they are unscriptural in their formation, excluding as they do, many people of God. Is every believer in Christ a Baptist? An Episcopalian? A Lutheran? A Methodist? A Presbyterian? A Congregationalist? Of course not. These man-formed divisions separate the people of God into various distinct companies. With some, it is an ordinance that distinguishes them, as with the "Baptist;" with others it is a form of Church government, as "Presbyterian," or of that particular sect, as "Lutherans" and "Wesleyans," but all such divisions are unscriptural.

When we open the pages of the New Testament we find that the people of God are called "Christians," "disciples," "saints," "believers," "brethren," etc. Are these titles true of all believers? Yes. Every child of God is a "Christian," a "saint," a "believer," a "disciple," and one of the "brethren." "One is your Master, even Christ and all ye are brethren" said the Lord Jesus (Matt. 23:8). By the term "brethren" [as well as disciple, Christian, saint, etc.], therefore, every true believer in Christ is included, and so with each of the other Scriptural titles of God's people."⁴⁰

But, in light of the above quote, is every true believer included in the name "Plymouth Brethren," "Baptist," "Lutheran," etc.? For example,

³⁹ Ibid., pg. 13-14

⁴⁰ Alfred P. Gibbs, *Scriptural Principles of Gathering* (Walterick Publishers, Kansas City, Kansas) Pg. 12

within the term of “Lutheran,” would a believing Roman Catholic be included? Or within the name of “Lutheran” would a believing “Plymouth Brethren” be included? No, of course not—only when we use God’s names or designations would every true believer be included, and that is what pleases the Father’s heart who gave us those names. When we adopt other names we outwardly divide other believers from us unless they also adopt our own particular name. A Lutheran is not a Baptist, nor is a Baptist a Presbyterian, because they are making a division based upon personality and/or doctrine. A Lutheran is not a Baptist any more than the one who said, “I am of Paul,” was the same one as one who said, “I am of Cephas.”

Upon this unfortunate dividing of ourselves by certain names, J. Vernon McGee once said this—

“We understand that there are about three hundred sects in America today. My, how the Church is divided...! Were the Scriptural relationships observed and obeyed, the narrow and limited conception of the Church would not prevail as it does in this hour. These relationships, as we find them in God’s Word, enable believers to see beyond the limited border or confines of the Church or little group to which they belong. The Church needs a full-orbed view today—it desperately needs a 20-20 vision to see what the real Church of the living Christ is and always has been...Let me state this kindly, but as far as His Church is concerned, it is one flock today. How tragic it is, and has been, to have the Baptist sheep over here, and the Presbyterian sheep over there, and the Methodist sheep in still another area. After all, Sheep are sheep and those who are in His flock are one. There is one flock and one Shepherd...”⁴¹

Was not the Church’s unity the heartfelt desire of our Lord as found in His prayer recorded for us in John 17:11?

John 17:11 And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. **Holy Father**, keep them in **Thy name**, the name which Thou hast given Me, **that they may be one, even as We are.**” KJV

This heartfelt desire of our Lord should not be so lightly esteemed. This is the holy desire of the Son of God. Is it our desire? Or do we not care anymore? Dear brethren, if we claim to honour the Son, then should not everything that is upon His heart be upon our heart?

He prays that His disciples may be kept one by a name. Which name is

⁴¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Christ, His Cross, His Church* (Thru the Bible Radio, Los Angeles, 1971) pg. 5-6,11

He referring to? He prays, “keep them in Thy name,” but then adds that it is a name that was given to Him. So what is that name? We know it could not be the name of “Jesus,” and it could not be the name, or title of “Christ,” because those names never belonged to the Father. (He prayed, “Keep them in “Thy” name.”) So to what name is He referring? He is referring to the name—”Father.”⁴² In other words, Jesus is saying that the name of “Father” was given to the Son in order that He might make it known to the disciples. (This does not mean He gave the name to the Son as His own name, but, rather, He gave the name to the Son, so that the Son could then make that name known to others.)

John 17:6 “I manifested **Thy name** to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. KJV

He is referring to a name that was God’s, but was given, by God, to the Son, in order that He might give it out to the world, so that all people might know who God really is.

Some time ago, I wrote about the number of times the name “Father” appeared in the Bible. This was done before the advent of Biblical Software Programs (or, at least, before I had such a program), and I was woefully off on my numbers. Nevertheless, now with a Bible Software program (assuming I did my search correctly) I found that in the Old Testament, in the New American Standard Version, the word “father” appears 1060 times regardless of whether it was capitalized or not. Then when I searched for all the times in the Old Testament where the capitalized name “Father” was used (which was reserved, as far as I can surmise, only for God the Father), I found it only 5 times. It was used twice in Isaiah (Isa. 63:16; 64:8); it was used once in Psalms (Ps. 89:26); and it was used twice in Jeremiah (Jer. 3:4, 16). Only 5 times was God referred to by the name of “Father” in the entire Old Testament!

But then I looked in the New Testament, and guess how many times the word Father was used for God in the New Testament? It was used approximately 232 times. So in the Old Testament it was used only 5 times to refer to God; in the New Testament, it was used 232 times!

This was the name of God that was given by God to His Son, in order for

⁴² The Greek word πατήρ (Father) is repeatedly referred to as a name of God (cf. Matt. 6:9; Jn. 5:43; 10:25; 12:28; 17:5-6). Indeed, it is also a part of the name of the Blessed Trinity (see Matt. 28:19).

Him to manifest that name to His disciples. Jesus came, not just to show God as the covenant God, not just to show Him as the Creator, the great awe-inspiring God, Elohim; He came to emphasize that God is the “Father!” And what does that bespeak of God? In what way is that revelatory of who God is? It bespeaks relationships, and reveals that God the Father has been in an eternal relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit in perfect harmony and oneness.

Therefore, when Jesus prays that believers may be one, and when He prays that we be kept in this oneness by that name, what is He telling us? He is telling us that our oneness results from having a common source, just as the Son and the Holy Spirit are one because they both eternally proceed from a common source—the Father. The Son is eternally begotten of God the Father and the Holy Spirit is eternally spirated of God the Father, in which eternal processions they all eternally possess the one and same substance.

Thus, what Jesus is saying, is that we are one because we are “related” to the same Father. He is saying our oneness is based upon having a common source—we are all sons and daughters of God the Father by the new birth. And in our own temporal begetting from God the Father by the workings of the Holy Spirit, we also possess a common substance which brings about our oneness (just as the Blessed Trinity’s oneness is eternally brought about by the possession of one and the same substance). But our common substance is not the same as the one substance of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Our common substance is none other than the Son of God, Himself, who dwells within our hearts! Our common substance is the life of Christ within us. It is just as the apostle John says in I John 5:12, “He that has the Son has life!” We all receive that common life which unifies us by our being begotten of God our Father, by our being born again of the Holy Spirit, by our having received from God the Father that common life that is found in God the Son, indeed, that is God the Son (Jn. 1:4; Col. 3:4; I Jn. 5:11).

Jesus prays that we may be kept in oneness by that name of God—the Father—because that name bespeaks our common life received from God the Father, in the Person of the Son, by our being born again of the Spirit.

How could we ever be divided from another Christian, when that Christian has the same life of God within them? He or she is our brother or our sister. It’s awful when there are divisions within a physical

family, but in most cases, a family usually stays together. We all know the common phrase – “Blood is thicker than water.” Why?—because they share a common life, they have a common ancestor. It binds them together, and so they love one another, and they try not to argue or be divided.

Well, how much more should it be so because we have the same Father in heaven? We are to be one, because we are all related, because we have the same life in Christ, and we have the same Father. He begets us all to a new and living hope, as John says in the first chapter of his Gospel. He says—

“But as many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12,13 NASB

God is our Father. Christ, who is our Life, is in our hearts. The Holy Spirit indwells each one of us individually. That is why we need to be one. It's a shame that the Church is so divided today. It's a shame that as we look throughout the earth there are all these many different denominations, all adding another name to their “surname,” so to speak, all bickering with one another, and all meeting under their own particular nomenclatures, based upon their own particular interpretations of Scripture, or based upon a love for certain Christian leaders from the past. How we need to remember that we are related by a common bond, by the life of God and the Holy Spirit within us, and the Lord Jesus dwelling in our hearts. Do you think that God wants His children to be divided, adopting different names?

You know, it breaks one's heart when problems are experienced in earthly families. How much more does it break the heart of our heavenly Father when His children are not unified? Why do we, named by others as Plymouth Brethren, meet the way we do?—because we want to have a Father that is happy that His children are walking together in a harmony and in oneness. Why do we seek to not divide from others?—because we want our heavenly Father to be happy with His children. (This is all the more reason why those called “Plymouth Brethren” by others, fall so woefully short of our desires, because those known as Plymouth Brethren by others, have hypocritically been more divided than those whom we admonish. May God forgive us and may such knowledge humble the spiritual pride found in so many.) We want to be in a right relationship with Him and with each other. So we see the importance of

oneness. Oneness gives us expression to our common bond, and to our common life—the life that we have from God the Father reminds and keeps us one.

As Christians, we must remember, we have something that no other world religion has, the very life from God our Father in the Person of His Son by the sanctifying indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. The very Creator of the Universe indwells the heart of every believer. Of all the religions of the world, Christianity should be able to show forth the beauties of that Life. God is one. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have dwelt in perfect oneness and unity from all of eternity. We have His life in us. And His life is not selfish. His life is not divisive. His life is not filled with pride. So if we find ourselves divided from our brethren, it cannot be from His Life!

Man, in his carnal nature is divisive and selfish. James identifies this weakness within Christians with this statement of fact—

Jam. 4:1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? NASB

Quarrels and divisions do not come from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Blessed Trinity has never been divided and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have never quarreled. Man's flesh is what drives such divisions between believers, and when those divisions result in a separation, the new division becomes known by a denominational name. Such a division does not reflect the life of God, but rather the life of man.

Christians are supposed to be lights to the world, but when we denominate ourselves we betray the same carnal mindset that thrives within the unsaved people of the world. Christianity, which is supposed to reflect the true nature and character of the true God, showing forth the oneness of the Blessed Trinity, being the only true religion in the world (Jam. 1:27), has become no different than any other religion. Every man-made religion in the world has denominations. Islam's four major groupings or denominations are Sunni, Shiite, Ahmadiyya, and Druze. Buddhism's has the Mahayana, Theravada, and Lamaism. Hinduism is divided into the Vaishnavites, Shaivites, Smartism, and the Veerashaivas. Why? Why are these religions, who all claim to be the one true religion, become so denominated? Because man's carnal nature can do no other. Are they divided because their so-called god has led them into their own particular denomination in opposition to the others? No, they all claim to

have their god's smile upon them (we know they do not know the one true God). And so, what is the source of their denominations? Is it not their own carnal nature and their own view of what they think pleases their so-called god (according to their own understandings and interpretations)?

For example, in Islam, does not their denominating of themselves according to religious persons, and/or different interpretations of the Koran come from their own carnal nature? Yes, of course it does. It cannot come from the one true God, for the true God is not a part of their religion. In Hinduism, is not their denominating of themselves according to their different interpretations of the Hindu Panoply the result of their carnal nature? Yes, of course it is. They do not believe in the one true God. The three major denominations of Buddhism, arising from different interpretations regarding the way of enlightenment, certainly come from a carnal mindset, does it not? Yes, of course, for they do not even believe in the one true God. Why do they not embrace one interpretation? Is it not because they have no common and unifying life of God within them which can overcome their differences?

And, yet, when it comes to Christianity, which does, indeed, possess the life of God, where does our denominating mindset come from? We too are divided into three major denominational groupings: the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox and the Protestant. (Should we not be different from other world religions?) And within the Protestant grouping, we find it is divided up into hundreds of different denominational mindsets! Shame on us! Is this reflecting the Life of God the Father within our hearts? Does this come from the desire of the Lord Jesus Christ within our hearts? Is this the result of the leading of the Holy Spirit? Christianity should be a light to every other religion, because we are the only religion possessing the common life of the true God, our Father, yet in many ways we are more divided than they are! Something is wrong. Where does this denominational mindset come from?

We know where it comes from in regard to the three major religions of the world; we know why they are all divided into different denominations. It comes because they do not have the unifying life of the Creator of the world residing in their heart, and so they are left to their own human nature, which is not capable of maintaining the love, patience, humility, and truth that is necessary for oneness. And so the carnal nature of their heart is manifested in division. But should not Christianity be different, being a light to the other religions? We have the

life of God in our hearts. Should not that Life override the carnal nature that creates such denominational mindsets? Should we not be different?

God never condones denominations because denominations are not a manifestation of the life of God. If the denominational mindset is pure, holy and righteous, coming from the Spirit of God, then it would exist in heaven, for everything God does is eternal and good, and everything that is really from God, the gold, silver and precious stones will never be burnt like the wood, hay and stubble. The fact that there will not be a Plymouth Brethren Church, a Roman Catholic Church, a Methodist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or a Baptist Church in heaven shows that such mindsets are not of the gold, silver or precious stones. Now every true Christian within a Presbyterian Church will certainly be in heaven; a true Christian, who might remain within the Roman Catholic Church will also be in heaven; and, indeed, a true Christian within any other denomination will be in heaven, showing, indeed, they are of God, and so are part of the gold, silver and precious stones. But those denominational nomenclatures, by which they set themselves apart on earth, will not be in heaven!

No one will call themselves a Baptist in heaven; no one will call themselves Plymouth Brethren in heaven; no one will call themselves a Lutheran in heaven; and no one will call themselves Roman Catholic in heaven. So, if we will not call ourselves by those names in heaven, why should call ourselves by those name on earth? Does not the Lord Jesus teach us to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”? Does this not mean that the mindset that is true in heaven should also be true on earth?

As I said before, everything God does is eternal and good, and so, even though those denominational names will not be in heaven, those true believers within those denominations will certainly be with Him in heaven. Everything else that did not arise from God will be burnt away.

I Cor. 3:3, 11-15 ³ For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? ¹¹ For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ¹³ Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. ¹⁵ If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. KJV

Therefore, what is the conclusion of the matter in regard to the name of our Church? When we look closely at Scripture, we see that Christians simply called themselves the “Church.” They did not add to that name because that was the name that was given to them by the Lord (Matt. 16:18). They never adopted different denominational names. Again the question must be asked, “Why?” One cannot say it was because there were no differences of opinions in those days like that we have today. They did. They could have said such things like, “We believe, like Paul, in grace, in contradistinction to those who pretend to come from James who emphasize the Law, so we are going to call ourselves the “Free Grace Church in Antioch.” Or others could say, we believe like those Christians, who purportedly come from James in Jerusalem, who emphasize the Law, therefore, we will call ourselves the “Mosaic Law Christian Church in Antioch.” Why didn’t they do such things? Because, by God’s grace, the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing the utter carnality of such a mindset, forbid such divisive moves, knowing it was contrary to the unified oneness of God’s nature and contrary to the purpose of our Lord’s salvation.

The apostles knew the name “Church” encompassed every believer within a gathered boundary, whether they believed like Paul, or like those who wished to emphasize the Law. They understood that the macrocosm of the Church should be reflected in the microcosm of the local Church. If the Church as a whole included every believer regardless of their specific opinions or emphasis of certain doctrines, then the local Church must reflect the same, including every believer regardless of their specific opinions or emphasis on certain doctrines. If our Lord had called the Church as a whole, the “Free Grace Church,” then, indeed, every local Church should have then been called the “Free Grace Church,” but since the Church as a whole is simply called the “Church,” so every local Church should be called just that, the “Church,” distinguished simply by the place or locality of their gathering as permitted by the Holy Spirit (as we will see in the chapter on locality).

As we said before, many today view the word “Church” as a common noun, as one might view the word “family,” or the word “nation,” so that it makes no difference if we add to the name. But, dear brethren, the word “Church” in Scripture became a “proper noun” for the Christian. The Lord turned it into a “proper noun” in Matt. 16:18 and the Holy Spirit used it as a proper noun throughout the epistles of Paul. That is the name God gave to His people who were chosen out from among both Jews and Gentiles. That is the name God chose for His children who

were baptized into His Son by the Holy Spirit. For the Christian, the name Church was no longer a common noun as we mentioned before; it was a proper noun as we showed by Paul's usage in Eph. 5:32.

Eph. 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and **the Church**. KJV (capitalization mine)

The word "Church" is the name God chose to show to the world the fruit of the Son's labour. It was given to show that we are "called out" of the world. It is a unifying name. But when we add to the name, rather than showing that we are called out of the world, we show we are "called out" from the midst of other Christians. If we add to our Church the name, "Wesleyan," we are asking Christians to further identify themselves as those not only "called out" from the world, but also those "called out" from other Christians who might not admire John Wesley as we do. If we add to our Church the name, "Brethren," as in the "Brethren Church," we are asking Christians to further identify themselves as those not only "called out" from the world, but also those "called out" from other Christians who do not meet the way we do. If we add to our Church the name, "Baptist" we are asking Christians to further identify themselves as those not only "called out" from the world, but also those "called out" from other Christians who do not hold to certain Baptist distinctives.

God has never sanctioned such thinking. How awful is this denominational mindset! It makes us no different than other world religions. This innate desire to divide does not come from God. And, even among ourselves, those of us who are called Plymouth Brethren by others—we who have sought to leave behind this denominational mindset—we have not succeeded either. We also have been influenced by our own carnal nature. We, too, have failed to maintain this lofty goal that was the original desire of those early brethren in the 19th century who sought to be one with every child of God. But just because we have failed does not excuse us from still trying by God's grace. *To just give up would be an even greater sin.*

Anthony Norris Groves once spoke of this in a letter written to J. N. Darby—

"I always understood our principle of fellowship to be this—the possession of the common life, found in the common cleansing of the blood of Christ (for the life is in the blood); these were our early thoughts, these were our first principles, and they still are to me. I have not abandoned them as I have matured in my Christian life.

However, this transformation, which has occurred in those little bodies (assemblies) who follow you, who witness against all that they judge as error rather than witness for the glorious truth I just mentioned, has caused your witness, in my humble opinion, to fall from that of our glorious standing found in heaven to one of the earth.

What I mean is this: back at the beginning, we were all concerned about how we, ourselves, might effectively manifest forth the common life we had received from Jesus, knowing that only his life could speak and minister to those who shared that same life. And when we found that life in others, and when we were persuaded it was genuine, we invited them, on the basis of that Divine life, to come and share with us in the fellowship of the common Spirit—all in order to worship our common head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, since Christ had received them, we also received them to the glory of God the Father (whether their thoughts on other matters of the Church were narrow or enlarged). And not only that, we ourselves were free, within the limits of the truth, to fellowship with them in part, even though we knew we could never do so in all—we knew we could not share or fellowship with them in all their ways or services.

In fact, as we received them for their possession of that common life of Jesus, we never rejected them because of any denominational association, nor did we ever refuse to recognize certain parts of their religious system, simply because we disallowed much within that same religious system.

We did this because we felt that if this intercommunion or fellowship could be established, we might effect our original purposes. We felt it would be upheld by God, as the Christ-like means of witnessing against any darkness that might be found, all according to the example of the Lord given to us in John 3:19: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil, neither will they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved.” We felt that, as we walked in such light, this desire of Christ would come to fruition. Granted, this openness of ministry might be the more difficult means of witness (than one of simply of preaching against error with words, or keeping oneself separated from others), but it possesses more power over the hearts of men and provides a better opportunity to bless them. I know, dear brother, you know this, because of your own experiences in this type of witness.

However, the moment we abandon this principle of receiving all who Christ receives because of our possession of the common life of Jesus, and rather, adopt a position of separating ourselves from other brethren, with a mindset that only preaches against their errors with words (that is, errors or doctrines that have nothing to do with the essential doctrines of the Faith), then, at that moment, every Christian, or every group of Christians, will become suspect. The first thought in our mind will become, “What needs to be set straight in our brother’s life, or what false interpretation needs to be corrected.” No longer will

it be enough to examine whether or not they are Christians, rather a standard will be set up where all their conduct and principles will first have to be examined and approved before they can be received. This mindset will inevitably lead to the most bigoted and narrow-minded in our midst becoming the judges of all. Why?—because it's not in the nature of a bigoted and narrow-minded conscience to yield. Thus, those among us with an open and enlarged heart will find themselves forced to yield to the strictures of narrow-minded consciences.”⁴³

So, we see we should be kept one in the name of God the Father, which shows that we are all begotten of God. We should never abandon the unifying truth of the name of God our Father. Nor should we ever add to it because of our doctrinal leanings. When Christians adopt denominational names, adding them to the proper noun, the “Church,” they are adding, so to speak, to the surname that God gave them. It is no different than if a child named Johnny Smith, and a twin brother named Jimmy Smith (using the example of the Smith family again), one day told their parents, “We do not like the surname “Smith.” I have a friend at school whose surname is Jones, so I am now going to call myself, Smith-Jones. I will tell my teacher at school that I am no longer Johnny Smith. I am now Johnny Smith-Jones. And my twin brother, Jimmy, has a different friend with the surname of Henry, so he decided to change his name to Jimmy Smith-Henry. So, from now on, I will be Johnny *Smith-Jones*, and Jimmy will be Jimmy *Smith-Henry*. We do not want to be known as Johnny and Jimmy Smith any longer, so we are just going to change our names, and all our other brothers and sisters can do so also if they wish, but do not worry, Mommy and Daddy, we will still all love each other!”

Dear brethren, Christians are called to a higher calling. Christians should be different than the world which constantly bickers and quarrels betwixt themselves; we should be different than Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists or any other religion that denominates itself. We should honour the Father who named us by not changing or adding to our name. We should not be like the world or other religions, because we are Christians. And it is that nomenclature—Christian—that leads us to another name in Scripture that keeps us one, and it is to that name, the Name we are to gather in, that we would now like to direct our attention as we continue

⁴³ B. P. Harris, *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version) Including Some Excerpts from his Journal* (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento 2014) pg. 10-12

to pursue the question, “What’s in a Name.”

The Importance of His Name

In the last chapter, the emphasis was upon the commonality of the source of our new life, and that “commonality of source” was found in the Name of “Father.” In this chapter, we would like to look, not at the Name that bespeaks that source of life,” but at the Name that bespeaks the manifestation of that life, and that Name is none other than the Name we are called to gather in—the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we begin this chapter, let me once again say that the Names, by which God has revealed Himself, are very important. By those Names we understand who our God is. We understand His character. When God says He is Jehovah, we understand that He is the one “who was, who is, and who is to come,” the Eternal One, the covenant God. Names give a picture, an expression of who God is, and, in the same way, the Names that are given to us by God, give us a picture, an expression of who we should be, or should I say, of who we are!

So, if names are important to God and He tells us to gather in a certain Name, and He tells us to call ourselves by certain names, then we should certainly pay attention, for the numerous names He has given us are revelatory of who we are. He has given us the name “believers;” He has given us the name “saints;” he has given us the name “Christians;” he has given us the name “disciples;” and He has given us the name “brethren” (without a capital “B”). He has given us different names to use because names are important to God. We know this because, in His kindness, He has revealed to us His Names in which we are to gather. But let me ask you this, and forgive me for my irreverence, but I am doing it to illustrate a point. What would you think if some Christian told God the following?

“You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire your servant **Waneb**. I really admired **Waneb**, and I agree with everything he taught. And because I admired him so much, and because I agree with the doctrines he taught, I am now going to call those, whom you named Christians, **Wanebians** instead? Or maybe I will call them **Wanebian** Christians and still retain the name you gave us also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves **Wanebians**, we will also name ourselves the **Wanebian** Church, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on your servant **Waneb** and the things he taught.”

Now, what would you think if a Christian did that? I know, again, it's a silly and ridiculous illustration, but wouldn't we think that Christian is being awfully presumptuous? Presumptuous for him being a tiny little creature telling the very Creator of the universe, "I like a different name than the name You revealed to us." We would say that is silly, and we would say that it is just as silly to call ourselves "Wanebians."

But in order to bring it closer to reality and away from the silliness of it all, let's substitute the name of the apostle Paul.

"You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire your servant **Paul**. I really admired **Paul**, and I agree with everything he taught. And because I admired him so much, and because I agree with the doctrines he taught, I am now going to call those, whom you named Christians, **Paulinians** instead? Or maybe I will call them **Paulinian** Christians and still retain the name you gave us also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves **Paulinians**, we will also name ourselves the **Paulinian** Church, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on your servant **Paul** and the things he taught."

Now some may say, "We would never do this, for Paul specifically told us that such a mindset is most carnal." He told us it was wrong to name ourselves after any man, saying, "...When one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" He also said, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one." He said that a Christian should never boast in men, for even the greatest of men is but foolish and weak in the Lord's sight; if one wishes to boast let such a one boast in the Lord (see 1Cor. 1-3).

But, dear brethren, if this is true and you would never do that, then why have Christians done that exact thing throughout the ages, albeit with other men than Paul or Apollos. Consider the following. We will repeat the paragraph above but substitute another name.

"You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire your servant **Martin Luther**. I really admired **Luther**, and I agree with everything he taught. And because I admired him so much, and because I agree with the doctrines he taught, I am now going to call those, whom you named Christians, **Lutherans** instead? Or maybe I will call them **Lutheran** Christians and still retain the name

you gave us also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves **Lutherans**, we will also name ourselves the **Lutheran** Church, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on your servant **Martin Luther** and the things he taught.”

Now I chose the name Martin Luther, because I could follow with a quote indicating his aversion to such a mindset. He understood the importance of honouring only the name of the Saviour as can be seen in this introduction prefixed to his discourses written by John Gottlieb Burckhardt.

“ECCIUS, Luther's inveterate antagonist, was the first who used the name Lutherans, to denote the followers of that great Reformer; and though he meant to express with it a refractory sect and party, separating from the established Church, in the progress of time it is become honorable and characteristic. It must be remembered, however, that Luther was always averse to introduce his own, or any other name into the Church, which could give rise to distinctions, equally injurious to the bonds of brotherly love, and repugnant to the spirit of religion. **He would have his disciples call themselves Christians; for, said he, our only master is Christ, and no man upon earth.** He was neither so narrow-minded nor illiberal, as to keep up a partition-wall between brethren; with whom, if he could not agree entirely about indifferent principles, he heartily joined in love.”⁴⁴

Of course, we could substitute other names in the aforementioned paragraph. The same thing happened to John Wesley when those who followed him eventually adopted his name for their Church. And it should be mentioned that both John and Charles Wesley were opposed to creating such a Church that laid the basis for this eventually happening. The following has been said regarding their thoughts on the matter.

“This ardent desire in his preachers to separate from the communion of the Church, seems to have been one of the greatest troubles that Wesley himself experienced; for he had a keener perception of its consequences than his followers in general; and probably, also, a deeper feeling of its positive sinfulness. We find him setting forth *Reasons against a separation from the Church of England*, wherein, mostly on the very lowest ground of expediency, yet such, in all likelihood, as he knew to be best adapted to those for whom he wrote, he deprecates any such step.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, Joseph Kerby, ed., Captain Henry Bell, tr., *The Familiar Discourses of Dr. Martin Luther* (John Baxter, London, 1818) xxviii

⁴⁵ *The Christian Remembrancer, Monthly Magazine and Review, Volume 3* (James Burns, London, 1842) pg. 298

And then, in regard to this viewpoint of his brother, Charles Wesley said the following:

“I think myself bound in duty, to add my testimony to my brother's. His twelve reasons against our ever separating from the Church of England, are mine also. I subscribe to them with all my heart. Only with regard to the first, I am quite clear, that it is neither expedient nor **LAWFUL** for me to separate. And I never had the least inclination or temptation so to do—**CHARLES WESLEY**”⁴⁶

Nor does it matter if one substitutes doctrinal distinctives in place of personal names. Such nomenclatures also detract from the glory of God, for it takes the focus off the name of the Lord, and puts it rather upon certain doctrinal viewpoints. It still gives rise to “distinctions, equally injurious to the bonds of brotherly love.”⁴⁷ For example, if we modified the paragraph we used above, substituting instead the name **Plymouth Brethren**, it still would be injurious and wrong.

“You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire the teaching of those **Christians from Plymouth**. I really like the doctrinal distinctives they taught. And because I like those doctrinal distinctives so much, I'm also going to call those, whom you named Christians, by those doctrinal distinctives as well so they will be known as **Plymouth Brethren** instead? Or maybe I will call them **Plymouth Brethren Christians** and maintain the name you gave them also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves **Plymouth Brethren**, we will also name ourselves the **Plymouth Brethren Church**, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on **Plymouth Brethren** distinctives.”

Or what if we substitute another name, the name **Baptist**, speaking of **Baptist** distinctives. It would then read:

“You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire the teaching of those in **Baptized Churches**. I really like the doctrinal distinctives they taught. And because I like those doctrinal distinctives so much, I'm also going to call those, whom you named Christians, by those doctrinal distinctives as well so they will be known as **Baptists** instead? Or maybe I will call them **Baptist Christians** and maintain the name you gave them also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves **Baptists**, we will also

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, Op. Cit., xxviii

name ourselves the **Baptist Church**, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on **Baptist** distinctives.”

Beloved, if we can see the utter futility of it all on those levels above, why can't we see that it is the same thing whenever we substitute any other denominational name? It matters not whether it is the Plymouth Brethren Church, or the Baptist Church, or the Presbyterian Church, or the Methodist Church, Lutheran Church, Wesleyan Church, Roman Catholic Church, or any other name; they all are equally injurious to the honour of His Name. We could use the same paragraph with blanks and let the reader include any name he wishes and the result would be the same.

“You know, dear God, I prefer another name. I know your Son is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit says we are Christian, but I want to call myself by a different name. I admire your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but I really admire the teaching of _____. I really like the doctrinal distinctives they taught. And because I like those doctrinal distinctives so much, I'm also going to call those whom you named Christians, by those doctrinal distinctives as well so they will be known as _____ instead? Or maybe I will call them _____ Christians and maintain the name you gave them also out of deference to You. But, if it is alright with You, since we now call ourselves _____, we will also name ourselves the _____ Church, and we will, therefore, gather in the name of your Son, but with the special emphasis on _____ distinctives.”

God never gave us any additional names in Scripture besides the name Christian, believer, brethren, disciple, saint, etc.? Aren't we being presumptuous, to say to God—

“I'm sorry but I don't believe You named us very well; the name Christian is not enough today. Some people will get confused for without an additional name they will not know what kind of Christian we are. We must add to the name Christian, so they can then find believers who believe like they do, so they can find those who believe the same way they believe about worship, baptism, or about church government, or about sacramental theology. Therefore, we're going to come up with a better name. It just is not informative enough to just be called “Christian,” “believer,” “brethren,” “disciple,” or “saint” today. That was fine for the early Church, but not for today. We're going to call ourselves “Plymouth Brethren,” “Baptist,” “Presbyterian.” Those are really good names, Lord. We like those names.”

Is not such thinking just as presumptuous as deciding to call ourselves “Wanebians?” God, the greater, has already named us, the lesser. Who are we to change or add to His names?!

When we understand how important names are to God, and that, the greater names the lesser, when we understand that the eternal purpose of God is to express his nature and character in His children, when we understand that He gives us names to give expression to who we, to who His children are—then, and only then, can we see the utter presumption of it all.

We are called “brethren” by God. Why?—because we have a common Father. We are called “Christians” by the Holy Spirit. Why?—because we are anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, and we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Anointed One. We are called “saints.” Why?—because God has separated us from the world. We are called “disciples.” Why?—because we are called to learn and become like our one Rabbi, our one Disciple, our Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. We are given these names because each of the above names is true of every child of God born of the Spirit. But the same cannot be true of denominational names; such names, by definition, apply only to those who are in agreement with the name, and not to every child of God. For example, a Particular Baptist cannot be a General Baptist. A Wesleyan Methodist cannot be a Presbyterian. A Roman Catholic, obviously, will exclude almost half of Christendom by the name they have adopted. All the names by definition exclude other children of God.

And, even with a name God did give us—brethren—God forbid that we turn the name brethren from a small “b” into a capital “B” and call ourselves the “Brethren.” Then we do the same thing. The word “brethren” has to do with all of God's children, not a portion of God's children within the great family of God. We are small “b's” not big “B's.” If we change our name to “the Brethren” we are separating ourselves from those who hold to the Faith, but hold to different interpretations on doctrines not essential to our salvation. That is why we should not call ourselves Plymouth Brethren, Baptists, Methodists, or Catholics, Lutheran, or any other name other than the one given to us by God. How sad it is that some brothers think we should come out and say we are the Plymouth Brethren denomination. They simply do not understand the principles and the honour involved.

So with this understanding of the importance of names reiterated, let us look at what Jesus said in Matthew 18:20 regarding whose Name we are to gather unto.

Matt. 18:20 “For where two or three are gathered together (συνηγμένοι) in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” NKJV

In this verse we see a periphrastic participle, *συνηγμένοι*, (gathered) a middle/passive participial form of the verb *συνάγω*. *Συνάγω* was formed by the combination of *συν* (with—in this case having the idea of together) and *άγω* (to bring or lead). I believe within the context of Matthew 18 the participle is being used in the passive sense, so Jesus is saying, “wherever two or three **have been brought or gathered together.**” It carries the sense that the disciples of Christ are led by someone other than themselves (which, of course, we believe is the Holy Spirit) to come to a place where they meet with each other. (In the immediate context, this has to do with gathering together in His Name for prayer, but the basic principle applies to all Church meetings.) If we were to give a very literal and wooden translation of the verse it would read:

Οὗ γάρ **εἰσιν** δύο ἢ τρεῖς **συνηγμένοι** εἰς τὸ **ἐμὸν ὄνομα**, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν.

“For where two or three **are—having been gathered** together unto **the Name—MINE—I am** there in the midst of them.”

I know this is a poor use of English, but it shows us a few things in the Greek which are hard to convey in English. First, the verb *εἰσιν* is a stative verb; it is the Greek verb “to be.” It bespeaks a state of being or existence, in this case the existence of meeting of disciples physically gathered together in one place. That is why I placed the verb last in the first phrase. It points to the ongoing existence of two or three disciples meeting together in one place.

Secondly, the voice of the verbal participle is passive, showing that the subjects are the recipients of the action. In other words, the disciples were led to meet together in one place by someone other than themselves. This, of course, would be the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit directs our spirits unto worship and our hearts into truth (Jn. 4:23-24; 16:13; Rom. 8:14; I Cor. 12:7-13; Eph. 4:3-4; Rev. 3:12-13; 22:17) and in Eph. 2:22 Paul specifically says that we are built “by” the Holy Spirit into a habitation of God.

Eph. 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through (ἐν-by) the Spirit. KJV

The Holy Spirit draws us together to gather unto a certain name, the

Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the adjective ἐμὸν (my) is being used as a possessive pronoun. In Greek it is placed after the article, τὸ (the), in the first attributive position with ὄνομα (name) to make it emphatic (cf. I Cor. 1:15 KJV). In English the article does not need to be translated for the verse to make sense to us (thus, it is usually translated simply as “in My Name”) but that is English, in Greek the article would be understood as giving definiteness to ὄνομα (name). In other words, Jesus is emphasizing a specific Name to the disciples, not just any name. And by placing the pronoun before the noun and after the article it shows that emphasis should be placed on the possessive adjective itself.⁴⁸ That is why in English I placed it after the noun in Upper Case as a possessive pronoun, rather than before the noun as a possessive adjective. It simply would not make sense in English to translate it as “the My Name.” However, in the Greek, Jesus is emphasizing the fact that the Name you are gathered into is “the Name,” the Name which is MINE. He is referring to His Name, with all its significance, not to a “denominational name” that emphasizes a certain viewpoint. They are gathered together only in one Name—His, and no one else’s. And, within the recent memory of the disciples, that Name had much significance because Jesus was proclaimed a short time before as being the Christ the Son of the Living God, and shortly after that declaration the Father proclaimed Him His Beloved Son.

Now granted, before the resurrection of our Lord, the disciples did not fully understand the full revelation of who Jesus was and so may have not fully understood the significance of this declaration of our Lord concerning their gathering unto His Name. But, that is ok, because much of what Jesus taught and said was for their future understanding (cf. John 2:22) and, there is no doubt that the disciples later on understood that Jesus’ full Name was none other than the LORD Jesus Christ.

They knew and understood Him as the LORD, Jehovah, YHVH (Jn. 20:28; Acts 2:21; 10:36; Rev. 19:16 with Deut. 10:17). They knew Him as “Jesus”—their Saviour, the Son of Man (Acts 2:21-39, II Pet. 1:1). And, of course, they knew Him as the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16). The Holy Spirit does not draw us to gather together in a name of our own choosing, or in another name along with His Name. He

⁴⁸ “*The Normal Position of the Adjective...is between the article and the substantive, as in τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα (Jas. 2:7), ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος (Mt. 12:35), τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα (18:20).* In this normal attributive type the adjective receives greater emphasis than the substantive.” (Robertson, 776)

draws to gather only in His Name.

And, then, finally, in the very last phrase of the verse, the verb “to be” is used once more emphasizing the real existence or presence of the LORD Jesus Christ in the middle of the meeting of even just two or three disciples gathered together in one place.

This declaration is significant because Jesus was changing a tradition of the Jews, and was revealing the minimum amount required for the existence of a Church. The Jewish tradition at that time was that a minimum of ten people were required to form a synagogue or congregation. Jesus, on the other hand, tells His disciples it is two or three.

J.B. Lightfoot refers to this existing Jewish tradition in his commentary on Matthew—

“Every place, where there are ten men of Israel, there it is requisite to build a house, whither they may resort to prayer at every time of prayer: and this place is called a synagogue; and the men of the city are to urge one another to build a synagogue, and to buy them a book of the law, prophets, and Hagiographa...**The Divine Majesty dwelleth not among less than ten.**” Nay, R. Jonathan saith, that “when the holy blessed God cometh into the synagogue, and findeth not ten there, he is presently angry; as it is said, Wherefore came I and there was no man?”

“But whence ground they this opinion, that a congregation consisteth of ten, and must not be less? This is the Talmud's question in Sanhedrim, cap. 1. 6, and they give there this answer...Because it is said, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation (Num. xiv. 27)?... Take Joshua and Caleb out, and there remained but ten; namely, the rest of the spies, which caused the people to murmur; for of them only they understand these words to be spoken.”

“The words of our Saviour, in Matt, 18: 17-20, seem to **have reference to this opinion...**that is not ten, or many, as they held; **but ‘when two or three are gathered together in my name,’** if no more may be had.”

The Lord Jesus states, however, if but two or three are gathered together in His Name, He will be in the very midst of them with all His love, protection and care. Christopher Wordsworth has a wonderful observation on this verse and this particular phrase “gathered together into My Name.”

“...συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἑμὸν ὄνομα] *gathered together into My Name*: not

collecting themselves promiscuously in their own name...much less in a spirit of strife and division; but with yearnings of love to Me and of union with Me; in the manner appointed by Me in the unity of My Church, and in obedience to My law, and for the furtherance of My glory...Observe the passive participle συνηγμένοι, and the preposition εἰς, and the accusative τὸ ὄνομα (stronger than ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι) containing the idea of love to, and of incorporation into, by the agency of Christ Himself.”⁴⁹

Why is this promise and this declaration of gathering together in His Name so important?—because our Lord has sovereignly chosen the Name unto which we should be gathered, and the Name by which He has promised to be in our midst in a special way. When we meet in that Name we show honour and deference to Him. In the Old Testament Manoah once said to the Lord, “What is your name, so that when your words come to pass, we may honour you” (Jud. 13:17 NASB).

In the Bible, names are important, and a person is honoured by the name he bears, consequently, when we change or add to Name given to us by the Lord in which to meet in, we detract from the honour that is due that Name.

We saw in earlier chapters how the Church is called the Temple of God, and we saw how the Tabernacle that was revealed to Moses, and the Temple that was revealed to Solomon, were to be types of the Temple of God that he would raise up in this dispensation of grace. We also saw how God determined how and where that Temple was to be built. We saw that He was the One who designed its form, since the Temple was also spoken of as being the House in which He dwelt. As such, we understood, it was His House, not our own, and as His House, it should bespeak something about Him.

When we were children we might be inclined to say something like, “I am going over to Johnnie’s house to play,” or “I am going over to Suzie’s house to play.” The house was identified by the one who lived there. We would not tell our parents, “I am going over to Peter’s house to play,” if Peter did not live in that house. It would be confusing and misleading. The same was true of the House of the Lord. It was to be a place where He would dwell and, thus, a place **where His Name and His Name only would be honoured.**

⁴⁹ Christopher Wordsworth, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ in the Original Greek: with Notes and Introductions, the Four Gospels* (Rivingtons, London, 1881) pg. 65

Deut. 12:5 “But you shall seek *the* Lord at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, **to establish His name there for His dwelling**, and there you shall come. NASB

Is this not our Lord’s prerogative? He is the Builder of all things. He is the architect of His own Dwelling, and He is the Master of the House. The Temple, which was a type of the Church, was the place where God’s Name and only God’s Name was to be magnified, not the name of other men, or the name of a particular opinion put forth for emphasis by other men, or even the name of some holy angel as some Churches are wont to do. It was a place where only the Lord’s Name should be magnified.

Moses understood this divine prerogative and so said the following—

Deut. 16:11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, **in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name.** NASB

King Solomon also understood this divine principle and so said—

I Kings 8:18 “But the LORD said to my father David, ‘Because it was in your heart **to build a house for My name**, you did well that it was in your heart. NASB

But the question must be asked, “Do we understand this divine principle today?”

Is it not interesting that today we often hear Christians say Solomon’s Temple, or maybe, the Tabernacle of Moses. (This, unfortunately, it is so easy to do; I have also done this, unfortunately.) But the truth of the matter is this—neither Solomon, nor Moses, would ever dream of calling the Temple of God, by their own name, the name of mere creatures? Why?—because they understood that honour belonged only to God, and not to man. They had a sacred mindset that many Christians lack today. They understood the sacredness of the Name of the LORD and knew, for that very purpose, the Temple was built so that there would be a place on earth where one’s focus would be on God, not on man or on some particular viewpoint or mindset. The Temple was specifically built so the revelatory Name of the Lord could be manifested and honoured upon the earth by men.

I Kings 3:2 Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, **because there was no house built for the name of the LORD** until those days. NKJV

When the children of Israel came unto the Temple of God, they would come to honour the Name of the LORD God, they would bring an offering unto His courts in order to give glory and honour to His Name and none else.

Ps. 96:6-9 Honour and majesty *are* before him: strength and beauty *are* in his sanctuary. ⁷ Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. ⁸ Give unto the LORD the **glory due unto his name**: bring an offering, and come into his courts. ⁹ O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth. KJV

The apostle Paul, being a Hebrew of Hebrews, also understood this principle and so was abhorred that Christians in a Church, which was considered God's Temple, would name themselves after men and not after the Lord Jesus Christ whose Temple they were.

I Cor. 3:4-5 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal? ⁵ Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? KJV

I Cor. 1:11-13 For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. ¹³ Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized **in the name of Paul**? KJV

Paul was aghast that they would name themselves after other Christians. He was aghast that a believer would even consider themselves a Paulite, or an Apolloite. He called such a mindset most carnal. Paul understood that the Church of God was to be a place where only the Name of the Lord was magnified, as it was in the Temple of old in Jerusalem. It was the Name of the Lord that was to be held in importance, not a man or some doctrine or interpretation of man. He reminded them that it is Christ Jesus the Lord who is to be glorified and honoured.

I Cor. 1:30-31 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: ³¹ That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, **let him glory in the Lord**. KJV

Paul understood that our Lord desires a dwelling on earth where His Name is one and His Name is manifested and magnified. (God forbid

that we rob Him of this honour by adding another Christian's name to His Church, or the name of our own particular interpretation of a biblical doctrine, thereby excluding those who might have a different interpretation.) He understood the true Temple was the Body of Christ and the things spoken of in the Old Testament were simply shadows of the reality in Christ Jesus. He understood the importance of the Old Testament declaring that the Temple was to be a place where the LORD God would choose to establish His Name. He understood that was simply a shadow the true Temple of God wherein our Lord's Name was to be established forever, and that those who did not know God would be led to God because the Temple of God was known by the Name of God.

Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, continued to teach the truth of His Name as taught by our Lord in Matt. 16:13-18. He reminded those in Corinth, that they were a Temple of God (I Cor. 3:16). And he reminded them that when they are gathered together, they are gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 5:4a).

We see this in I Cor. 5:4 when we take into account Paul's participial usage of the genitive absolute, construed, I believe, with the Name of the Lord, and his understanding of how the Name of the Lord is associated with the Church, which he understood to be the Temple of the Living God, and, in that light, taking into account his understanding based upon the Old Testament example of the Temple of God and how the Name of the Lord was associated not only with the Temple but also the Tabernacle. As such, I believe a more accurate rendering of the Greek in I Cor. 5:3-5 would be as follows: "For I, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already have (as if I was present) judged the one so doing this thing, *namely*— with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ (**when you have been gathered together in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, you and my spirit *together*) deliver such a one to Satan, unto the destruction of the flesh, in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord."

Or, perhaps it might be rendered as follows: "For I, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already have (as if I was present) judged to deliver such a one, the one so doing this thing (when, **in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ you have been gathered together**, you and my spirit together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ) *to deliver such a one* to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord"

This was the mindset of Paul and the humility of his spirit. He believed that the Church, the Temple of God, was to be the place where His Name was to be honored, because we gathered together in that specific Name! Do we have his mindset today? Do we realize the sacredness of our gathering and the sacredness of His Name? Do we remember upon whom we are built? Do we remember whose House it is we meet in, whose Temple it is? That it is none other than God's Temple!

If we would never dream of calling the Temple of God, the *Plymouth Brethren Temple of God*, or the *Baptist Temple of God*, or the *Lutheran Temple of God*, why would we call His Church the *Plymouth Brethren Church*, or the *Baptist Church*, or the *Lutheran Church*, for Paul clearly says the Church is the Temple of "God." Does not Paul begin his first Epistle to the Corinthians with..."Paul"...then in verse two he says..."to the Church of God"...then in I Cor. 3:16 he says, "Do you not know that you are the Temple of God?" If we string them together it would read: "Paul...to the church of God which is at Corinth... 'Do you not know that you are the Temple of God?'" If we feel it is presumptuous to name the Temple of God by certain doctrinal distinctives, or by ordinances, or by the names of certain servants of His, should we not equally feel it is presumptuous to call His Church by the names of certain doctrinal distinctives, or ordinances, or by the names of certain servants of His? The Church and the Temple of God are one and the same.

When we invite someone to fellowship with us on a Sunday, do we say such a thing as, "Look for the Plymouth Brethren Church on the hill," or, "Look for the Lutheran Church down the street," or, "Look for the First Baptist Church in the center of town," or, "Look for the sign that says, St. Mary's?" Paul warns us to flee from such denominational mindsets that detract from the Name of the Lord and the name given to His people. The Church should be a place where His Name is magnified; we are called to be a people of that Name. We are Christians. But, alas, how the opposite is true so many times. Ask yourself how many times you hear someone say—"I am a Catholic," or, "I am a Calvinist," or "I am a Lutheran." Is that any different than one saying—"I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollo," or, "I am of Cephas"? Should not that be censored just as much as the apostle Paul censored the Corinthian believers for so doing? Should it not elicit in our mind the same charge of carnal thinking as it did in Paul's mind? Should not our focus remain upon the Name that we are to gather in—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Even that faithful servant, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who called himself a Baptist, recognized the importance of His Name in contradistinction to the name

Baptist. He once said in one of his sermons, entitled, *The Eternal Name*, given at Exeter Hall, Strand,⁵⁰ the following:

“I am not particularly anxious about my own name, whether that shall endure forever or not, provided it is recorded in my Master's book. George Whitfield, when asked whether he would found a denomination, said, “**No...let my name perish; let Christ's name last forever.**” **Amen to that! Let my name perish; but let Christ's name last forever... I say of the Baptist name, let it perish, but let Christ's name last forever.** I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living. I hope they will soon be gone. You will say, Why? Because when everybody else sees baptism by immersion, we shall be immersed into all sects, and our sect will be gone. Once give us the predominance, and we are not a sect any longer. A man may be a Churchman, or a Wesleyan, or an Independent, and yet be a Baptist. So that I say, I hope the Baptist name will soon perish; but let Christ's name last forever.”⁵¹

In the beginning this was the mindset of many Christians who now call themselves Baptists. They simply preferred the name “Christian.” It was other Christians who wished to label them otherwise, labeling them at first as Anabaptists, a name they refused to accept. However, unfortunately, over time this mindset began to slowly change, as William H. Whitsett, a Baptist from the 19th century, relates—

“The name *Baptist*, as applied to this body of Christian people, first appear[ed] in literature in the year 1654 in a volume composed by Rev. William Britten, of

⁵⁰ Exeter Hall, Strand was a public building used for secular uses. In many ways one could compare it to Paul meeting in the School of Tyrannus. Christians met in Exeter Hall while work was being done in the building they were formerly meeting in called, “New Park Street Chapel.” Perhaps, some do not know that many churches in the 19th century never named their buildings by their denominations, for which they should be commended. Thus, many at that time called their meeting places “chapels,” or “halls,” or they simply identified it by the location where they met. By such a practice the denominational mindset was minimized for they were not naming the church, but the building where they met. This follows the example of Scripture which identified the church by its locality—thus, for example, the church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla. It would have communicated a completely different thought, however, if they had called themselves the “New Park Street Baptist Church.” That would have not followed the Biblical model. How wonderful it would be if churches once more began to follow the Biblical model and began using such names as “chapel,” or “hall” for their meeting places rather than their denominational nomenclature attached to the word Church. It would be a first step.

⁵¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Sermons of the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon* (Sheldon, Blakeman and Company, New York, 1857) pg. 167-168

Northamptonshire, entitled *The Moderate Baptist*. Prior to that date they were without a name, and commonly designated themselves as ‘those who are unjustly called Anabaptists.’”⁵²

However, over time, he continues, their defensive attitude toward such denominational designations weakened and soon they began to adopt the designation “baptized churches,” which “by degrees...was contracted to *Baptist churches*.”⁵³ Apparently, the pressure created from other Christians continually calling them by a denominational name eventually weakened their resolve and soon they simply acquiesced to the name given to them by others. This same phenomenon has occurred today among those Christians called by others as *Plymouth Brethren*—a name they too have steadfastly refused to use because of its unbiblical and carnal nature, as well for the fact that it would detract from the glory of the Lord. But, as happened with those Christians from long ago, who now call themselves Baptists, some brethren in our midst are beginning to weaken in their resolve, wondering if it might simply be more practical to accept the designation of *Plymouth Brethren* and be done with it.

Dear brethren, it might seem more pragmatic to just go along with this penchant by other Christians for denominational naming. It might seem convenient to not always have to explain ourselves to others as to who we are and as to why we do not adopt any denominational nomenclatures. It might reduce time spent in disputations with brethren who disagree with our doctrinal distinctives. In some cases, it might provide us with the necessary credibility and prestige in carrying out the Lord’s work. In fact, it might even provide us with greater financial resources in doing the work of the Lord. All these things might be true, but it is not a matter of pragmatism, convenience, credibility, prestige or money. It is a matter of honour! It is a matter of faith and trust in the wisdom of God to name the things He created, in our case the things of the new creation! It is a matter of acknowledging the sovereign right and authority of God, the Greater, to name the church, the lesser. It is a matter of bearing witness to truth! It is a matter of exalting the Name of the Lord!

We should all, by God’s grace, seek to return to the oneness so desired by God our Father and so desired by our Lord Jesus Christ and so desired

⁵²Charles Kendall Adams, ed., *Johnson's Universal Cyclopaedia: A New Edition*, Vol. 1 (A. J. Johnson Company, New York, 1893) pg. 489

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pg. 489

by the Holy Spirit. We should drop the denominational naming of ourselves and be content with the name given to us by our Father in heaven—the Church, and the only Name we are to gather in—the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we get to heaven and the apostle Paul comes up to us and asks us, “Who are you?” Are we going to tell him, “Oh, I am a Plymouth Brethren” or, “Oh, I am a Baptist,” or, “Oh, I am a Lutheran?” Will we not rather say, “I am a Christian, a follower of Christ?!” Or, if he asks us to which Church we belonged, do we really think we will say, “Oh, the Plymouth Brethren Church, or the First Baptist Church, or the Lutheran Church.” Rather, I hope we say, “The Church, which is the Body of Christ, being gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit; we met in the city of _____, or on the street of _____, or in a building called the _____ chapel, or in the School of _____, or in the house of _____.”

Beloved, in closing, we are not so naïve to think all the Churches in the world are going to drop their denominational names and conform themselves to the Word of God, being content with only His nomenclatures. But we do hope that all Churches who seek to gather in His Name would remember why they meet the way they meet. It took centuries and many generations for the Church to get so far removed from the Word of God. May our prayer be not to let history repeat itself in relation to the assemblies and others of like-mindedness who wish to honour only His Name. May the new generation of believers in such assemblies continue to conform themselves to the Word of God, and, indeed, to the very nature and character of the Blessed Trinity. We may not be able to effect much change in the Christian world at large, but we can remain faithful to what God has already revealed to us and be a Church which expresses, not an admiration for a Christian servant from long ago, or a certain doctrinal distinctive or a certain ordinance, or a particular nationality, or form of Church government, but, rather, a Church which expresses the Name of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

“A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’” **Malachi 1:6 NKJV**

The Locality and Autonomy of the Churches

In our last chapter we spoke about the revelatory nature of names. In this chapter we would like to look deeper into the significance of the particular name chosen by God to bespeak those people who are gathered together in the Name of His Son, the name given to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the name “ἐκκλησία (ekklesia)—the Church. This name was the same name used whether one was found in one end of the Roman Empire or in the other end of the empire. It was the same name used by all, a name given to us by the Holy Spirit. And what a precious name it was and still is when held in its purity.

We will first look at the meaning of the word in and of itself, and then how the word was used with locality in its varied usages in Scripture. Then we will look first as to how the word itself was understood from a Gentile (Hellenistic) perspective and then we will look at how it was understood from a Jewish perspective. Then we will see how each local Church was autonomous in the adoption of that name.

Meaning of Ekklesia (Church)

Originally, Hellenists (Gentiles) used the word *ekklesia*, the church, as a technical term to indicate a gathering of citizens, locally called together to transact some type of business, whether it was the business of a guild, or the political business of the city (*polis*). These regular meetings were referred to as the ἐκκλησία (assembly) of the city. In the New Testament, when used of Christians, the word is usually translated as “church.” But the word, “assembly,” better reflects the original meeting of the word. We can see the use of *ekklesia* as a secular assembly in Acts 19: 29-41.

“And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.³⁰ And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.³¹ And certain of the chief of Asia, which

were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. ³² Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for **the assembly** was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore **they were come together**.³³ And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. ³⁴ But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. ³⁵ And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, *Ye* men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? ³⁶ Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. ³⁷ For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸ Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. ³⁹ But if ye enquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful **assembly**. ⁴⁰ For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. ⁴¹ And when he had thus spoken, **he dismissed the assembly**". KJV

When we look closer to this passage, we also see that the same Greek word "come together" used of this secular assembly (vs. 32) is also used in I Cor. 11: 17-18 of the Christian assembly. This helps us see the prerequisite of a people in an assembly. They had to meet together for some purpose. They "came together" in one place to form the assembly. As such, they would not be considered an assembly until they came together. Only then would they be considered an assembly.

This is what was in the mind of the ordinary Gentile or Greek Christian. That is why in Acts 19:39 we are told that the city clerk dismissed the assembly and encouraged them to come together again in a "lawful assembly," at its proper time and place.

A similar distinction like this is even used in our own English language. When we speak of the Congress of the United States we all know what is meant—all our elected Senators and Representatives in government. However, unless those officials are gathered together in their respected chambers, Congress is not considered to be in session. But when they gather together in session, at their appointed times, they are known simply known as

being “in Congress.” This distinction can be seen in the following example from the early records of our Country.

“By the United States assembled **in Congress**, Jan. 1st 1783. Resolved, That the Secretary for Foreign Affairs inform the French Minister, that although Congress cannot view, without regret, the departure of an army, to whose valour and conduct they are so greatly indebted for the reduction of the enemy's forces...”⁵⁴

And so, returning to the Biblical usage before us, when Paul used the Greek word “ekklesia” for the gathering of Christians in one place, they understood it to mean they were to come together “**in assembly.**”

Of course, those early Christians understood that they were more than just an assembly of earthly citizens coming together to transact some business of the city or of some guild; they now understood they were now an assembly of heavenly citizens coming together to transact the business of the Lord! And since each of the aforementioned secular groups would have an appointed time when they would all come together in one place as a “lawful assembly”(Acts 19:39), so too the Christians had an appointed time when they would all come together in one place as an assembly, and that usual time for gathering was on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

This would have been the meeting Paul was referring to when he wrote:

I Cor. 11: 18-20 For first, when ye come together **in assembly**, I hear there exist divisions among you, and I partly give credit *to it*. For there must also be sects among you, that the approved may become manifest among you. **When ye come therefore together into one place, it is not to eat *the* Lord's supper.**
Darby

And so, by understanding the root meaning of the word we realize that in the mind of the first century Gentile Christian, the word *church* or *assembly*, for the most part, always carried the

⁵⁴ *The Register of Pennsylvania, Volume 6, July 1830 to January* (Wm. F. Geddes, Philadelphia 1831) Pg. 249 164

connotation of an *actual gathering of people*, and not of a group of people not gathered together. However, with today's understanding, when we speak of the Church, we usually mean a group of people who constitute the Lord's body on earth whether they are gathered together on Sunday or not, but in the mind of the first century Gentile Christian, the opposite would be true. The word *ekklesia* would *primarily* be understood as referring to the actual physical meeting occurring on the Lord's Day, a meeting that was considered their assembly like the citizens of the city had their assembly. (See the next chapter on the autonomy of the Church for a fuller treatment of this aspect of the word.)

Today, when we think in those same terms we usually don't use the word "church" but rather use a phrase like "gathered together." We would say something like "we gathered together on the Lord's day," not, "we had our church or assembly on the Lord's day." Nevertheless, we should realize that to a Gentile Christian the word "church" carried the same connotation as the word "gathering" does today, so that the statement "we had our church on Sunday morning," or, "we had our assembly on Sunday morning," would make total sense to them; it would not seem unusual or foreign way to say it at all.

In fact, this distinction is one of the reasons why the early brothers in the 19th century started using the word *assembly* as opposed to the word *church*. They were trying to recover the grand simplicity of the word. Henry Craik states in his book *New Testament Church Order*,

Such expressions as Church of Rome, Church of England, Church of Scotland, are not in accordance with the Scriptural signification of the term. The generic meaning of the word corresponds to the English words - "assembly," or "congregation." It is distinctively applied in the New Testament **to an assembly of Christians meeting together in some particular locality**, as the Church in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Corinth, or at Cenchrea."⁵⁵

In another place he refers to this assembly in a locality as a

⁵⁵ Henry Craik, *New Testament Church Order. Five Lectures* (J. Snow, London, 1863) pg. 48

physically gathered assembly shown by his use of the word “public.” He says regarding the diversities of gifts:

“Again, there may be some who are qualified for conversing with others in private, and helping on those who are very little instructed, who would be quite incompetent for exhortation or exposition of Scripture in the public assembly.”⁵⁶

And so, we see the early brethren of the 19th century recognized the common Hellenistic use of the word “ekklesia” which referred to the actual gathering of people together.

However, it should be noted that the word “ekklesia” had a slightly different connotation among Jewish Christians. Let’s now look at their understanding of the word.

The Jewish Christian understanding of “ekklesia” was generally broader than the Gentile (Hellenists) Christian understanding of the word. In the mind of a Jewish Christian there was not the more localized meaning of the word as there was in the mind of a Gentile Christian for they did not grow up in the midst of citizenry regularly meeting together “in assembly” (at least, from the mindset of the Jewish community in Israel) but rather took its meaning from its use in the Septuagint. In the mind of a Jewish Christian, the word *was not wholly restricted to the actual local gathering* (although it was still rooted in an actual gathering together of people, but it was seen from a larger or different perspective).

In the Jewish translation of Scripture, called the Septuagint, the word church was used of the people of Israel *whether they were publically gathered together or not in a specific assembly*. And so, someone like Stephen, could use this word when referring to Israel as the “church in the wilderness,” even though Israel was not “in assembly,” per se (Acts 7:38). Or, if we look at the example in the book of Acts from those early days in Jerusalem, it could be said the Lord added to the “Church” such as would be saved without, necessarily, referring to an actual gathered assembly (Acts 2:47).

⁵⁶ Ibid., pg. 41-42

Obviously, in these cases the Jewish usage of the word carried a broader sense and did not refer just to the actual localized gathering, *although even in those cases the broader meaning was still based upon an actual physical gathering that occurred at some time or the other.*

In other words, even from the Jewish perspective the Israelites in the wilderness were still “called out” of Egypt and were “physically gathered together around the Tabernacle,” so to speak, by their encampment together with him in the wilderness.⁵⁷ The early Church in Jerusalem consisted of thousands of souls, but they still were all “called out” from unbelieving Israel, “physically meeting together” in one place in the Temple courts (Acts 2:46).

The main difference from the Gentile usage is that once that first criterion was met, i.e. being able to actually meet together in some place, they still were referred to as the Church after that gathering or assembly came to an end. This Jewish usage is what some might call the “invisible Church,” and is the basis for the understanding of what later came to be known as the “universal Church.” This was not based upon the Gentile usage per se.

And so this was the common Jewish understanding of the word, but since Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles he repeatedly uses the Gentile usage, wherein the word is restricted to an actual physical gathering.

J. N. Darby somewhat addresses these two aspects.

“The first general idea, that of which we are to speak, is the Church. The word, however, I shall at once drop, and employ the literal rendering of the Greek word so translated...I shall speak, therefore of *the Assembly*, the real meaning of the word. Only this is God's Assembly. Take the passage which I have referred to, and see the effect of this. If a brother trespassed against another, he was to tell it to him alone; if that were useless, to take two or three more; if that failed, to tell it to the Assembly. What has not been made out of this passage? And how

⁵⁷ It should be kept in mind that although the word church is used for Israel, Stephen was not confusing the Church, which the Lord would build, with the nation of Israel. The Church and Israel are distinct. Stephen was simply using the common Greek word for a called out people.

many delusions are dispelled by its plain and simple language, when it is taken as it stands? It is related, that King James forbade the translators of the Bible into English to change this word Church, which, in the previous Geneva translation, had been dropped. The bearing of such a prohibition is evident enough.”

“The word *Assembly* is one known to Old Testament language and thought. Yet it had there a very different character and foundation. Two words are there employed, which, it seems to me, give somewhat different ideas, *HEDAH* and *KAHAL*. The former seems to me, to present rather **the corporate unity of the congregation**; the latter, **the actual gathering**; pretty much the difference which we might understand, between an *Assembly* and an *Assemblage*.”⁵⁸

As one can see, Darby is transferring the concept of the Hebrew *HEDAH* and *KAHAL* to the Greek word ἐκκλησία which he explains by a reference to its use in Matt. 18:17. He sees *ekklesia* from a twofold perspective—the corporate unity, which would be analogous to what I am calling the Jewish perspective, and the “actual gathering,” which would be analogous to what I am calling the Gentile or Hellenistic perspective. He further identifies these two aspects by “assembly” and “assemblage.” *Assemblage* is a somewhat archaic word, but the word means (according to Webster’s) “the state of being assembled.”⁵⁹ This would be the common Hellenistic understanding of the word, which is all but forgotten today. Many Christians today do not understand what Paul understood—that an assembly has a beginning and an ending, and the time in between is referred to by him as when the saints are “in assembly.” This becomes significant when we look at verses regarding how we meet.

Paul’s statements in I Cor. 11:22 and 14:6, 18-19 also confirm this important distinction. Paul says—

What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise **the church** of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*. I Cor. 11:22 NKJV

Paul was not comparing buildings in this verse. He was not

⁵⁸ J. N. Darby, “The House of God.”—“The Body of Christ.”—“The Baptism of the Holy Ghost.” *The Present Testimony, and Original Christian Witness Revived, Vol. X* (R. Groombridge & Sons, London, 1859) pg. 41-43 (vol. XI)

⁵⁹ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (J. P. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1857) pg. 65

referring to a building called the “church,” in contradistinction to a building called a “house,” nor was he using the Jewish understanding of the word. When Paul said, “do you despise the Church,” he was referring *to the actual physical gathering of the saints together in assembly in Corinth.*

Paul is chastising the Corinthian Christians because they would physically come together in assembly (the actual public gathering of the saints, not the building) to gorge themselves with their own food and drink, not waiting to share it with the poorer brethren. They were despising the “assembly” (ekklesia) that was called together by the Holy Spirit by their actions. Thus, Paul told them eat and drink in another venue—their private houses.

Nor could Paul be using the broader Jewish definition of the Greek word *ekklesia*, for if he meant the Church, in the Jewish sense, the despising of the Church would still occur whether the Church was publicly gathered or not! But by giving them the option of doing what they were doing in the privacy of their homes, he is stating that he is referring to the actual physically gathered assembly (Gentile usage) that met at a specified place and time with a beginning and an end. That physically gathered assembly was being dishonored and despised by their action, and so Paul did not praise them. However, since the public assembly would be dismissed and come to an end, what they did in the privacy of their own homes was their own business.

But if Paul meant the Church, whether gathered or not, then, obviously, Paul would not tell them it was alright for them to do in their houses, what he forbade them to do “in church,” because they still would be sinning, despising the Church, by those same actions whether in their private houses or not. So we see that Paul was using the common Gentile understanding of the word.

And as we look further in this portion of the Scripture in Corinthians we see Paul continues to use this common understanding of the word. We see this in chapter fourteen in the following verses.

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; nevertheless, **in church** I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. I Cor. 14:18-19 RSV

Paul was referring to the actual physical gathering of the saints on the Lord's Day when they were in their public assembly, and "into" which he could physically walk and speak his five words.

Nevertheless, in spite of this truth, a true biblical mindset would take both usages into account. It would be wrong to forget about the common Jewish understanding and limit ourselves to the common Gentile or Hellenistic usage. But it would be equally wrong to forget about the usual Gentile or Hellenistic understanding and limit ourselves to the common Jewish usage. This, unfortunately, however, is exactly what is being done in some parts of Christendom today.

The Gentile understanding of the word, as seen in its usage in I Cor. 11-14, is hardly understood or used today. Many Christians do not understand that a biblical assembly, as demonstrated to us in I Cor. 11-14, is a *physical gathering that comes together* to form an *assembly* to pray, break bread, and minister to each other through the exercise of spiritual gifts, *and which is then dismissed by the Holy Spirit, thereby ceasing to be the appointed assembly (ekklesia)* of those saints on that day.

I guess a true biblical understanding of the word, which includes the common Jewish and Gentile usages, could be demonstrated in the following fictitious example: "The *Church* of God which sojourns at Corinth (Jewish usage) has their weekly public *church* (Gentile usage) on the first day of the week, at which time, they will pray and remember the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread, and, at which time, they will also minister to one another in love." This brings both usages together.

The reason, however, we have been talking more about the Gentile usage is because that is the least understood today. However, as we said before, a proper biblical attitude would always use both understandings. Paul regularly does this even though he was

addressing a mostly Gentile audience. He also educates them as to the use of the word by the Holy Spirit within the Jewish circles of fellowship. He uses the common Jewish understanding in I Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 12:28; and 15:9. And then he uses the common Gentile understanding of the word in I Cor. 4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 11:16,18; 11:22; 14:4.5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35 and 16:1, 19. Both are given to us by the Holy Spirit to help us grow into full maturity.

But what is important to realize is that there is one common factor between both the Jewish and Gentile usages, and it is that the Holy Spirit still simply refers to them as the “Church,” whether gathered (Hellenistic usage) or not gathered (Jewish usage). Whether it was Luke writing in Acts about the “Church” in Jerusalem, or Paul writing in his epistle to the Ephesians about Christ and the Church, they both simply referred to saints as “the Church.”

Acts 18:22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted **the church**, he went down to Antioch. KJV

Eph. 5:29-30 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord **the church**: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. KJV

Eph. 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and **the church**. KJV

In other words, there was only one designation of saints gathered together in unity—the Church. A local Church, whether gathered (Hellenistic usage) or not gathered (Jewish usage) was simply a manifestation of that one invisible universal Church (Jewish usage) that was gathered together by the baptism of the Holy Spirit into Christ Jesus being made members of his flesh and of his bones. Therefore whatever was true of the universal Church was to be true of the local church, whether gathered or not.

For example, Luke did not say that they landed and went up and saluted the Plymouth Brethren Church, or they landed and went up and saluted the Methodist Church. Why? Simply because the universal Church was not a Plymouth Brethren Church or a Methodist Church, but was simply the “Church” and what was true of the universal Church was to be true of the local Church. Because the “Church” was known only by that name, all he needed to say is they landed and went up and saluted “the Church,”

and everybody knew what Luke was talking about, for the *ekklesia*, the *Church*, was the common designation chosen by the Holy Spirit for Christians gathered together in one place.

So we can see how Scripture uses both nuances of the Greek word *ekklesia*. But what would one do when one was referring to more than one local Church? How does Scripture distinguish one local Church from another? When one searches Scripture, one finds that the Holy Spirit distinguishes such Churches by their location, not by a change of designation, or by doctrinal distinctives added to their name, nor by names of respected Christians. Every Church was, indeed, simply known as “the Church,” showing not only their commonality, but also showing that they were “localizations” of the one universal Church; but they were also identified by where it met (and in some cases by the One of whom they were, i.e. God, Christ, or, if they were being contrasted to Churches made up only of Jews, by the word Gentile). This allowed the distinguishing of Churches. The one name, *Church*, showed their “sameness,” and the name of the locality of their assembly showed their “distinguishability.”

Boundaries of the Ekklesia (Church)

In Scripture, the Holy Spirit distinguishes such local Churches by the city where they met (assuming all the Christians in that city met together in one place), by the province in which the cities were located, and, finally, when there was more than one Church in a city, by the house or building in which they gathered. These all constitute the boundaries of the Church. Let us look at each of these local boundaries and designations.

Church in a City

In these verses we see Churches identified by the city in which they met—

I Cor. 1:2 Unto the **church of God which is at Corinth**, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. KJV

Rev. 2:1 Unto the angel of **the church of Ephesus** write; These things saith he

that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. KJV

Rev. 2:8 And unto the angel of **the church in Smyrna** write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. KJV

Rev. 2:12 And to the angel of **the church in Pergamos** write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges. KJV

Churches in a Province

If the geographical designation was so large they could not physically gather together in one place, into one assembly, then the plural “Churches” was used referring to all Churches in that province. In the Roman Empire Macedonia, Galatia, Judea, and Asia all were provinces encompassing a large area. Today we might call them countries.

II Cor. 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the **churches of Macedonia**:NKJV

Gal. 1:2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto **the churches of Galatia**. KJV

Gal. 1:22 And was unknown by face unto **the churches of Judaea** which were in Christ. KJV

Rev. 1:4 John to **the seven churches which are in Asia**: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne. KJV

Church according to a House

Finally, if a city was so large that all Christians could not gather together in one place, or a Church was so large it had no meeting place big enough to accommodate every Christian in the city, each Church was then identified by the house in which they met.

Rom. 16:3-5a Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: ⁴Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet **the church that is in their house**. KJV

I Cor. 16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with **the church that is in their house**. KJV

Col. 4:15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and **the church which is in his house.** KJV

Phm. 1:2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and **to the church in thy house:** KJV

In the first two examples, we notice that the widest jurisdiction of such Churches was the boundary of the city wherein they met. In other words, the boundary of the Church never extended beyond the place where it met together. The Holy Spirit never said the “Church of Asia,” or the “Church of Judea” for that provincial boundary would then be greater than the actual physical gathering of the Church. In other words, it was not physically possible for all those Christians in the province to travel to one place and have their “ekklesia” on the Lord’s Day; so Scripture refers to the “Churches” (plural) in that province. Thus, when one uses a geographical boundary greater than the extent that is possible with an actual physical gathering, the writer always switches to the “Churches” (plural) in the province.⁶⁰

This shows us that the word “ekklesia” is never used of a place wider than the boundary of its physical gathering or locality. Since Christians in Galatia or Judea were never were able to gather together in one place, they could not constitute a physical assembly, or “Church of Galatia,” or “Church of Judea,” etc. Now, if all the Christians in those provinces could somehow miraculously meet together in one place, then, indeed, it

⁶⁰ The one exception might be Acts 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase (NASB). It might be an exception, that is, if one accepts this variant ἐκκλησία (singular) found in the Alexandrian text type. For myself, I believe the true reading is that found in the Byzantine text type, but even if one accepts this variant as correct, one could still understand Luke as saying the church (singular) of Jerusalem, taken from Acts 8:1, which began this section of Scripture, which said—“And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (NASB)—was now enjoying peace, etc. In other words, he could be saying the one church in Jerusalem that is no more, having been scattered throughout the region because of persecution, enjoyed peace, being built up, etc. Of course, if this is true, it then would subsequently become known as the “churches (plural) of Judea” (because of the truths mentioned above) which, indeed, we find is the case when we look at Galatians 1:22, “And I was still unknown by **sight to the churches of Judea** which were in Christ” (NASB)

could be called the “Church of Galatia,” or the “Church of Judea.” So we see in Scripture that the Church is always bounded by the locality wherein it had its actual physical meeting.

(Of course, Paul can speak of the universal Church, singular, referring to all believers regardless of time or space, as we said before, simply because every Christian is, indeed, miraculously gathered together into one place by the baptism of the Spirit, i.e. by being baptized into the Body of Christ. Every Christian is “seated” in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, thus, we all meet together in one place “in Christ Jesus.” So, even when the word is used, of what some call the universal Church, the word is still identified and bounded by the place of its location or gathering.)

Henry Craik said it this way—

“Inasmuch as considerable misapprehension has arisen from the misapplication of Scripture language by the adherents of post-Apostolic systems of church polity, I must request your attention to some brief expositions of the force of certain New Testament terms used by the inspired writers in meanings sometimes very different from those which they bear in modern English. The term “Church” is very generally applied, in conversation and in writing, to a building set apart for the worship of God. There is no evidence that the corresponding Greek term, so rendered in our English Bible, is ever so employed in the New Testament. Such expressions as Church of Rome, Church of England, Church of Scotland, are not in accordance with the Scriptural signification of the term. The generic meaning of the word corresponds to the English words— “assembly,” or “congregation.” **It is distinctively applied in the New Testament to an assembly of Christians meeting together in some particular locality, as the Church in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Corinth, or at Cenchrea.** Thus in Matthew 18:17, the term church is clearly employed to designate the particular Christian assembly with which the parties may happen to be connected. **When a particular locality is spoken of, the term is used in the singular; but when the reference is to an extensive district, including many Christian assemblies, we find it almost invariably used in the plural.** Thus we find the Church of the Thessalonians, but the Churches of Galatia—the Churches of Macedonia—the Churches of Asia. The gathered believers in any given town or village constituted the Church in that place; such several communities, distinct yet united, constituted the Churches throughout any given province, district, or kingdom. It appears to me that the simplicity of the New Testament Church order most admirably contrasts with the cumbrous and complex arrangements of post-Apostolic organizations, and that its very simplicity rendered it adapted alike for edification and enlargement.”⁶¹

⁶¹ Henry Craik, *New Testament Church Order. Five Lectures* (J. Snow, London, 1863) pg. 47-48

So we can now see how the first two designations of locality are self-evident, depending on one's geographical perspective.

Let us now, therefore, turn our attention to the last designation we mentioned, i.e. the designation which was used when a city was so large that all Christians could not gather together in one place, or when a city did not have a large enough meeting place for all Christians to gather together into one place—the Church according to someone's house.

We see this designation first demonstrated for us in the epistle to the Romans. Paul's addresses this Epistle to the saints in Rome not to the Church in Rome. Why didn't the Holy Spirit have Paul address it as the Church in Rome like he addressed the Church in Corinth? Is the Holy Spirit trying to teach us something? I think He is. I also believe there's a principle in this designation; there's a pattern.

We have different patterns shown to us in regard to Churches in God's Word. We have a pattern with the Church in a city; we have a pattern with the multiple Churches in a province like Galatia or Judea, but we also have a pattern with an example of a Church according to a house, as here in Rome. If we remember that a Church is identified by a city only when there is an actual gathering of all Christians together in that city, then we can understand why Paul did not address his epistle to the Church in Rome. The simple reason was because there was not an "ekklesia" (using the Gentile or Hellenistic perspective) of all Christians meeting together in Rome. Simply stated, Christians in Rome did not all meet together in one place. There was no citywide gathering as there was in Corinth, or in Thessalonica, and so Paul knowing this, simply addresses it to all the saints in Rome. This again shows that in Scripture the Church is only as wide as the physical gathering of the Christians gathered. Only if there was a place where all Romans gathered together in one place, could it then be called the Church in Rome. Only if there was a city-wide *ekklesia*, could it then be known as the assembly of Rome.

However, in Rom. 16:5 we do find that there was a Church in someone's house in Rome – the house of Aquila and Priscilla.

Rom. 16:3-5a Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: ⁴Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Likewise greet **the church that is in their**

house (καὶ τὴν **κατ’ οἶκον** αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν). KJV

So what pattern does this portion of Scripture show us? To answer this question, we must first look to the Greek grammatical structure of the text, then to the historical background of the city, and, finally, to the existing Jewish synagogues scattered throughout the various Roman districts or neighborhoods. So with that in mind, let’s proceed.

House Churches: Grammatical Structure of the Greek Phrase Κατ’Οἶκον

Rom. 16:5a—Likewise greet **the church that is in their house** (καὶ τὴν **κατ’ οἶκον** αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν). KJV

In all other cases, without fail, when a Church is identified by a city, the Holy Spirit uses a little preposition ἐν (in) in the Greek. However, whenever the Holy Spirit talks about the Church being identified with someone’s house, he doesn’t use the preposition ἐν at all, rather, He uses the Greek preposition κατά.

The preposition κατά carries many meanings in Greek. For example, in the KJV, depending on whether the genitive or accusative case is used, the preposition is translated as “according to” 107 times, “after” 61 times, “against” 58 times, “in” 36 times, and “by” 27 times. So the meaning of the preposition must always be determined by the immediate and greater context (as well as by the specific case).

In the context before us, I believe Paul is using the preposition in its distributive sense indicating the presence of more than one Church in the city of Rome. We do not have the words “according to” in our English Bibles, but those words would be a translation that would bring out this meaning of the preposition in this context. In other words, Paul is saying, “Greet the Church which is according to their house.”

Liddell and Scott refer to this ancient distributive sense of κατά in their *Greek-English Lexicon*.

“**B.** WITH Accus...II. *distributively*, of a whole divided into parts, κατὰ φύλα, κατὰ φρήτρας *by tribes, by clans*, ll. 2. 362 ... and so in Prose, κατὰ κόμας κατφκῆσθαι *to live in separate villages*, Hdt. 1. 96 ; κατ' ἑαυτοῦς ἕκαστοι ἐτράποντο *each to his own home*.”⁶²

For example, one can observe a distributive usage of this preposition by Luke in Acts 15:21—

Acts 15:21 Μωϋσῆς γὰρ ἐκ γενεῶν ἀρχαίων **κατὰ πόλιν** τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν ἔχει, ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς κατὰ πᾶν σάββατον ἀναγινωσκόμενος.

Acts 15:21 For Moses, from generations of old, has **in every city** those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath.—Darby

Luke records in Greek that James is implying that there were many cities where Moses was preached in the synagogues. Even though he uses the singular, “city,” he is implying there was more than one city in which a synagogue existed. This was presupposed by the preposition and the context. He did not need to use the plural (κατὰ πόλεις) to say this.

Therefore, quite literally, one might translate the verse as follows (construing the prepositional phrase ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς (in the synagogues) with the participle κηρύσσοντας (being preached) rather than with the participle ἀναγινωσκόμενος (being read) as in Darby’s translation above)—

“For Moses, from ancient generations, has those preaching him in the synagogues **according to every city**, being read every Sabbath day.”

The *New Living Translation* construes the prepositional phrase this way also.

Acts 15:21 For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations.” NLT

The main point being communicated is that there were many synagogues in various cities where Moses was being preached. A Greek reader would understand this whether Luke decided to use a singular phrase κατὰ πόλιν or whether he decided to use a plural phrase κατὰ πόλεις .

⁶² Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Seventh Edition* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 749

For example, compare Luke usage in Luke 8:1 where he uses the singular phrase *κατὰ πόλιν*, with Luke 13:22, where he uses the plural phrase *κατὰ πόλεις*.

Luke 8:1 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ καθεξῆς, καὶ αὐτὸς διώδευεν **κατὰ πόλιν** καὶ κώμην, κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ οἱ δώδεκα σὺν αὐτῷ.

Luke 8:1 And it came about soon afterwards, that He began going about **from one city** and village **to another**, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him. NASB

Luke 13:22 Καὶ διεπορεύετο **κατὰ πόλεις** καὶ κώμας διδάσκων, καὶ πορείαν ποιούμενος εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ.

Luke 13:22 And He was passing through **from one city** and village **to another**, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem. NASB

Notice in Greek the first is singular and the other is plural, yet in both places he is speaking of multiple cities. Both phrases presupposed many cities and villages. That is why the NASB translated both phrases the same. The preposition *κατά* conveys this distributive sense.

We can also see this sense in Mark 6:34-44 where Jesus fed the 5000. In verse 39 He told His disciples to have the people sit “according to” groups consisting of 50 and 100. In describing this scene the Holy Spirit uses the same preposition “*κατά*.”

Mark 6:39-40 καὶ ἐπέταξεν αὐτοῖς ἀνακλῖναι πάντα συμπόσια συμπόσια ἐπὶ τῷ ἡλωρῷ χόρτῳ. καὶ ἀνέπεσαν πρασιαὶ πρασιαὶ **κατὰ** ἑκατὸν καὶ **κατὰ** πενήκοντα. NA27

Mark 6:39-40 And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, **by** hundreds, and **by** fifties. KJV

The larger group of 5000 is broken into smaller companies, companies “according to” hundreds and “according to” fifties. The preposition *κατά* in this case is also conveying a distributive sense.

Therefore, when we understand this distributive usage, we can see how Paul’s usage of *κατ’ οἶκον* in the epistle to the Romans can convey the fact that “all the saints” in Rome (the larger group) were broken down into smaller groups – the “house Churches.” By using the preposition

“κατά” in this context, the phrase presupposes that there were other small Churches (groups) in other houses in the city of Rome.

Now, it should be mentioned before we move on that κατά does also carry a sense of “in”—e.g., consider this verse in Acts 24:12 NASB.

Acts 24:12 καὶ οὔτε ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ εὗρόν με πρὸς τινα διαλεγόμενον ἢ ἐπισύστασιν ποιοῦντα ὄχλου, οὔτε ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς, οὔτε **κατὰ τὴν πόλιν**.

Acts 24:12 And neither **in** the temple, nor **in** the synagogues, nor **in the city itself** did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

Obviously, Paul was “in” the *city* of Jerusalem when he was arrested in the temple, yet Luke still uses the preposition κατά to explain this fact, rather than the preposition ἐν (as he uses with the temple and with the synagogues). This verse demonstrates the sense of “in” with the preposition. But the context makes this perfectly clear and there is no reason to understand a sense of “according to” in the preposition, that is, unless Paul is referring to his entire stay in Israel. Then, I suppose, it could carry a distributive sense, in that he was saying that no one found him carrying on a discussion or causing a riot, neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor according to any other city of Israel. In other words, he was saying he did not engage in any dispute when he was in the city of Caesarea, nor in any other city or village he may have passed through on his way to Jerusalem. In that case, then I suppose one could understand the distributive sense of “according to”—as Luke would then be using the phrase as he used it in his gospel in Luke 8:1. But, all that being said, if we take the verse in context, it seems the normal sense of the phrase, is that Paul was referring only to the city of Jerusalem, thus showing that, indeed, the preposition can carry non-distributive sense in the accusative.

But if context helps determine the sense of the preposition, the question must be asked, “Does the context of Rom. 16:5 indicate a non-distributive sense like the verse in Acts 24:12?” I think, when the entire context is considered, the answer to that question would be have to be no. Paul is referring to many gatherings in Rome and so, because of that, it seems he is specifically using the preposition κατά, rather than ἐν, to affirm this nuance.

Additionally, another possible reason we might understand this distributive sense in Rom. 16:5 (and other verses where κατ’ οἶκον is used) in contradistinction to the example in Acts 24:12, is that the noun

in the prepositional phrase in Rom. 16:5 is anarthrous, whereas it is articular in Acts 24:12.

I say this because that great Greek scholar, John Albert Bengel, makes this observation, in regard to the syntax of the phrase κατὰ τὴν πόλιν in Acts 24:12—

“κατὰ, when followed by the article, has not the distributive force (city by city).”⁶³

As such, if this observation holds up (for which I am not sure, for it seems we find the preposition being used with a distributive sense with an articular noun in such verses as Luke 9:6 and Acts 22:19) we then have another affirmation as to why Paul, in using anarthrous phraseology when speaking of a Church “κατ’ οἴκον;” is conveying a distributive sense in the phrase found in Rom. 16:5⁶⁴

Frédéric Godet also sees this distributive sense. In his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, he says the following.

“The expression: *the church that is in their house*, may have three meanings. Either it denotes the entire assembly of the servants and work-people residing and working with them; or it applies to that *portion* of the church which had its usual place of meeting in their house; or finally, the words apply to the whole church of the capital, which held its plenary meetings at their house; comp. 1 Cor. xiv. 23. **This last sense is incompatible with the preposition κατὰ, the meaning of which is distributive, and supposes other places of worship** (vv. 14 and 15). The first is improbable, for the term ἐκκλησία, *church*, would not suit a purely private gathering. The second is therefore the only possible one.”⁶⁵

Consequently, if Paul is, indeed, using this distributive sense of κατὰ, thereby implying that there were many house Churches in Rome and not just one Church for the whole city (as was in Corinth), the question must be asked, “Why would that be?” “Why would there not be one Church for the entire city like in Corinth?” I think one of the main reasons would be the greatness of the city of Rome. One must remember that Rome was

⁶³ John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament, Vol. II* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1876) pg.707

⁶⁴ What is ironic, though, is that despite this observation made by Bengel, he still felt, unlike most commentators of his day, that there was only one house church in Rome.

⁶⁵ Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1895) pg. 391

a big city compared to the average *polis* in those days! And it is to this fact that we would like to now turn our attention. (Perhaps, it might be helpful to remember another large city in the Bible—Nineveh, which Scripture says took three days to circumnavigate—Jonah 3:3).

Historical Background of the City of Rome

The book, *The Roman City and Its Periphery: From Rome to Gaul*, states the following about the size of Rome—

“The outer edges of Augustus; fourteen *regiones*, probably created in stages between 7 BC and AD 6, constituted a more significant administrative boundary. The limits of the *regiones* can be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy...Together they enclosed a larger area than either the *Servian* or *Aurelianic* walls, probably including most of the Augustan *continentia aedificia*...Indeed, there is some evidence that the entire area included within the fourteen *regiones* came, after Augustus’ *reorganisation*, to be seen as constituting the Roman *urbs*...”⁶⁶

With this knowledge, we can see (when compared with modern map) that Rome encompassed an area approximately 3-4 miles in diameter.⁶⁷ This was very large city for those days. By comparison, the distance from the old wall in the Western Jerusalem to the Eastern Wall of the Temple Mount, was a little more than a half a mile, thus, when compared with Rome, we can see the city of Rome would be a little more than six times as large in diameter.

Therefore, because Rome was so large, and when one realizes that many of the early brethren were slaves (some were free men, but many were slaves) and that, in some cases, their free time may have been greatly limited, we can realize how hard it would be, if you were a slave in someone’s house way on one side of Rome to ever be able to walk across the city to another meeting. In some cases, a slave may not have been able to take so much time off for such a weekly Church gathering if the

⁶⁶ Penelope Goodman, *The Roman City and Its Periphery: From Rome to Gaul* (Routledge, New York, 2006) pg. 44-45

⁶⁷ The average diameter along a north south axis and an east west axis of Rome within the Aurelian wall is three and a quarter mile. Since areas outside the boundaries, that became the Aurelian wall, were included in Augustus’ fourteen *regiones*, it seems reasonable to say Rome encompassed an area approximately 3-4 miles in diameter.

meeting was not in his or her immediate vicinity or district.

This is all the more understood, when we realize that Rome in that day was not like the city of today, with clearly marked, and easily walked streets going off to every section of the city (although ancient Rome did have main thoroughfares, for instance, the Via Sacra or the Via Appia thoroughfare along which Paul travelled when going into the city—Acts 28:15-16). But, in those areas off the main thoroughfares, Rome was a labyrinth of streets, confusing even to those who lived there. Many streets and pathways were not even named. As such, Romans would have to navigate by references to landmarks or Temples, much like Justin Martyr did (which we will talk about later), when he was asked where he met with other Christians in Rome. He answered near the Timiotinian Bath in the house of Martinus. Obviously, he could not give a street name or address. Rome could be a confusion of streets and alleyways with no rhyme or reason. It was a city where one could easily get lost, especially at night since there were no street lights and landmarks were harder to observe.

The book *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: Movement and Space* addresses some of these points.

For those who were not brought up in Rome, the city must have appeared to be a bewildering labyrinth of streets. By no means all streets had names, and there were no house numbers or street signs to help visitors or newcomers to find their way around. Addresses in Rome were approximate and orientation was usually done by way of a particular landmark such as a Temple, colonnade, a city gate, the house of a prominent individual, or even a tree; and address on a slave collar from Rome, for example, instructs the reader that the wearer should be returned to the barber's shop near the Temple of Flora."⁶⁸

This becomes all the more real when we realize that many streets in Rome, variously known as "*semitae*, tracks or narrow streets; *angiportus*, alleyways; *clivi*, sloping streets; and *compita* or crossroads," were apparently so narrow that "tenants of apartments [were able] to talk to each other and even touch [each other] through windows and from balconies on the upper floors."⁶⁹

Even, today, with maps well laid out, it can take, in some cases, upwards to 1 to 1-1/2 hours to walk from one end of Rome to the other (i.e. covering a distance approximate to that of ancient Rome). This, of

⁶⁸ Ray Laurence, David J. Newsome, eds., *Rome, Ostia, Pompeii: Movement and Space* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011) pg. 248

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 247

course, is based upon an average person's walking time of twenty minutes a mile. And then, if a person had a disability or had some health problem, and so had to stop and rest along the way, that time to walk across the city might end up being closer 1-1/2 hours to 2 hours.

Therefore, taking this into account, and realizing that there were not as many direct routes as there are today, and that the topography has changed, being less pronounced (in other words, valleys between the seven hills have been filled in, somewhat, over the years) one can imagine the time would have taken much longer back in those days.

Added to this is the fact that Rome has a higher population density rate than it does today. Back then, some estimate, that ancient Rome had an average population density of 72,500 per sq. km. They gleaned this by the fact that ancient literature states that in Rome there was approximately 42,660 *insulae* (apartments) and 1790 *domus* (houses). Today Rome has a population density of approximately 3500 per sq. km. By contrast, Mumbai, India, which has the highest population density in the world, has a density of 32,400 per sq. km. Thus, one can imagine that traversing a city that has more than twice the population density of modern Mumbai, without any street signs, and a labyrinth of pathways and alleys could be a daunting task, requiring more time than it would today and could even take longer than the 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

And, then, on top of all this, if the meeting took place a night or early morning before dawn, the feat would become even more haphazard, as the streets did not have street lights as today. In fact, we even have an actual account, written in the first century by one Gaius Petronius Arbiter (written by one not worth reading and one not worth referencing because of its tale of debauchery demonstrating the accuracy of Paul's assessment of Roman life in Rom. 1:24-32) who, upon returning from a Roman dinner party at night from the home of one aristocrat, became hopelessly lost in the Roman labyrinth of streets and alleyways, not finding his way home until right before dawn. If this was the case of a Roman aristocrat living in that day, who knew the city, what would it be like for a Roman slave who had not long been in the city?

Nevertheless, even if we assume little difference in the time it took to walk back then as it is now, if one Christian had to walk across the city to another location it still could take about one hour of walking in order to just arrive at the meeting, and then one hour walking back. And if we assumed a total meeting time of three hours and time spent afterward in

fellowship, such an endeavor could possibly require a total of six hours every Lord's day, just to gather together for worship.

Now while it is true that city slaves (*familia urbana*) had access to more free time than slaves in the country (*familia rustica*) it still is very unlikely that many slaves would have had the freedom to take that much time off every seventh day to gather for worship. This is all the more true when we realize that the Romans did not have a seven day work week, but rather followed a nine day schedule, having the ninth day off, being the market day called *nundinae*.

As such, with the Lord's day coming every seven days, and the Roman market day coming every nine days, the Lord's day would end up falling upon different Roman work days throughout the Roman nine day work schedule. And, because of this, it would be very unlikely that many slaves, especially of the *familia rustica*, could take such time off during a work day to spend one hour travelling and then take three to four hours worshipping and fellowshiping together, and then another hour or two returning to the place of his master. And, if the meetings were held at night or before dawn, the slave would encounter another problem besides the problem of time.

In ancient Rome, many times a slave that was away from his or her own neighborhood would be under suspicion of trying to flee from his master. Rome had many laws concerning the free movement of slaves. Slaves that were away from direct oversight, for one reason or the other, many times were accused of being indolent (i.e. in the eyes of their masters) and truant laws were written to restrict any free time a slave might somehow gain. Therefore, we see that there were many things to hinder a slave from traveling away from their own neighborhood to the neighborhood or district of another, especially those slaves who might be living just outside the city walls in a villa (*familia rustica*).

So, when we come back to the situation in Rome and we remember that worship was for all believers, we can understand why there were different assemblies scattered throughout the city. Rome was just too big for all the Christians to gather together in one place.

It is a misnomer to think that the apostles insisted on their being just one ekklesia per city. There was no law or apostolic injunction in Scripture that required that each city have only one Church, nor was there some Christian legalism that required a city to have only one place of meeting.

Naturally, whenever a new Church was founded in a city where there had never been a Christian witness, there would be only one Church per city and only one place of meeting in that city. But as the Church grew there was nothing to keep another Church from being established. After all, did not the Lord Jesus tell the apostles that wherever two or three were gathered together in his name he would be there in the midst?

Therefore, it seems the Lord in his love and mercy called together a few Christians together here, in one part of Rome, and a few Christians together there, in another part of Rome, so that all could come to worship in assembly where possible. And, would it not be like the Holy Spirit, who is “another Comforter,” to gather a few saints together in the name of the Lord, in this house in one neighborhood of Rome, and then a few more saints together in another house in a completely different neighborhood of Rome, and a then few more saints together in an even different house in Rome, perhaps on the outermost side of the city, all so that it would be as easy as possible for even the lowest member of Roman society, i.e. slave, to have enough time to come to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread every Lord’s day?

Perhaps, it might help us to further understand this same problem of distance and size, by briefly considering the Jews that lived in Rome during those same early centuries. Let’s briefly look to this aspect.

The Existing Jewish Synagogues of Rome

The Jews of Rome also had many meeting places in various synagogues scattered throughout the city. Emil Schürer speaks of the various synagogues scattered throughout Rome in his classic work on the history of the Jewish people in the time of our Lord. He mentions the following in his work:

“From the Roman inscriptions we gather, in the first place, that the Jews living in Rome were divided into a large number of separate and independently organized communities (συναγωγαί), each having its own synagogue, gerousia, and public officials. **Of the existence of anything in the shape of a corporate union of the whole Jews of Rome under one γερουσία there is no trace whatever.** While therefore the Jews of Alexandria formed a great political corporation, those of Rome had to be contented with the more modest position of separate religious societies. Those various communities called themselves by special names, of which the following are mentioned on the inscriptions: (1) a συναγωγή Αύγουσθησίων; (2) a συναγωγή Αγριππησίων (3) a synagoga Bolumni (1. Volumni). These three took their names by certain distinguished personages. And seeing that along with Αύγουσθησιοι we also meet with Αγριππησιοι, there can hardly be a doubt that the former derived their name from the first Augustus, while the latter derived theirs from his friend and adviser M. Agrippa. The designation may be accounted for either by the fact that Augustus and Agrippa were patrons, the one of the one community and the other of the other, or from the circumstance that those communities were for the most part composed of slaves and freedmen of Augustus on the one hand, or of Agrippa on the other (comp. οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας, Phil. iv. 22). Other communities again took their names from the particular quarter of the city in which their members happened to reside, as, for example, (4) the Καμπησιοι from the Campus Martius, and (5) the Σιβουρήσιοι from the Subura, one of the busiest quarters of ancient Rome, and a centre of trade and industry.”⁷⁰

And, the Jewish Encyclopedia says this regarding these synagogues in such a large city as Rome.

“Only in Rome, and probably as a simple police regulation, the Jewish population was broken up into a number of small communities or synagogues named after their patrons, or their quarters, or the native place of their members, etc. Of such communities eight are known: Αύγουσθησιοι, Αγριππησιοι, Βολύμνιοι (after Volumnius, prefect of Syria under Augustus?), Καμπησιοι (from the Field of Mars), Σιβουρήσιοι (Subura), Ἑβραῖοι (Samaritans?)

⁷⁰ Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ: Being a Second and Revised Edition of a Manual of the History of New Testament Times Volume 2* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1901) pg. 247-48

Palestinians?), 'Ελαίας (Velia? Elea?), Καρκαρήσιοι, to which must perhaps be added the synagogue of the Rhodians.”⁷¹

Therefore, we can see how the distance and size of Rome dictated the presence of many synagogues with some being identified by the district in which they met, and others, by the patrons, who, more than likely, provided the place for their meeting.

Now, of course, unlike the Christians of Rome, the Jews had additional reasons (besides travel time) for meeting in various synagogues. The first reason was that by some estimates there were upwards to twenty-thousand Jews living in Rome in the first century. As such, it would be impossible for everyone to ever meet together in one place. Thus, the size of their community demanded multiple meeting places. Secondly, it must be remembered that many Jews observed travel restrictions on the Sabbath. In Scripture this was known as a “Sabbath day’s journey.”

Acts 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem **a sabbath day's journey**. KJV

Now, as with many traditions, the Jews had some ingenious ways to increase this distance, but, in most cases, the Jews would follow the plain and simple sense of the restriction, which was based upon regulations found in Ex. 16:29 concerning a dwelling, and Num. 35: 4-5 concerning the measured distance of 2000 cubits around a city. John Kitto, the editor of the *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature* provides the following definition of a Sabbath day’s journey:

“...the distance which the Jews were permitted to journey from and return to their places of residence upon the Sabbath-day (Exod. xvi. 29)... Thus the distance to which a Jew might travel was limited to 2000 cubits beyond the walls of the city or the borders of his residence, because the innermost tents of the Israelites' camp in the wilderness are supposed to have been that distance from the tabernacle (Josh. iii. 4), and because the same distance beyond a city for a Sabbath-day's journey is supposed to be indicated in Num. xxxv. 4, 5... Some of the Rabbins, however, distinguish a great (2800 cubits), a middling (2000 cubits), and a lesser (1800 cubits) Sabbath-day's journey. Epiphanius (*Haer.* 66 82) estimates the Sabbath-day's journey by the Greek measure of six stades, equal to 750 Roman geographical paces (1000 of which made a Roman

⁷¹ Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, eds., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, Volume 4* (Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1916) pg. 565

mile). In agreement with this is the statement of Josephus (*Bell. Jud.* v. 2. 3), who makes the Mount of Olives to be about six stades from Jerusalem ; and it is the distance between these two places which in Acts i. 12 is given as a Sabbath-day's journey. It is true that Josephus elsewhere determines the same distance as five stades (*Antiq.* xx. 8. 6); but both were probably loose statements rather than measured distances; and both are below the ordinary estimate of 2000 cubits. Taking all circumstances into account, it seems likely that the ordinary Sabbath-day's journey was a somewhat loosely determined distance, seldom more than the whole and seldom less than three-quarters of a geographical mile.”⁷²

Thus one can see an observant Jew would be restricted to an approximate travel distance of three-quarters of a mile to one full mile on the Sabbath. And since this regulation would include the distance to and back from any one location, the restriction would effectively keep a synagogue from being any more than a half a mile (at its broadest interpretation) from any one dwelling. And, if we remember the city of Rome was approximately 3-4 miles in diameter, one can see another reason why the Jews had more than one synagogue in the city of Rome. It would simply be impossible for an observant Jew living on one side of Rome to travel to the other side of Rome for a synagogue meeting. And, even if a synagogue was placed right in the middle of the city, it still would be too far for Jews living in the suburbs or on the outer edges to travel even one way to the synagogue, let alone to and fro.

All this will now help us understand why the last chapter in the epistle to Romans speaks of multiple gatherings of Christians in the city of Rome, and it is to this we would now like to turn our attention.

But first, some may wonder why we mentioned the existing Jewish synagogues in Rome, since, obviously there were not twenty-thousand Christians living in the city at that time (forgetting for the moment the problem of slave travel time) and also the fact that the restrictions of a Sabbath day's journey would not apply to Gentile Christians, nor even Jewish Christians as they did not meet on the Sabbath, but on the Lord's day (Sunday)! So why bring up this information about the Jewish synagogues?

In order to answer this question we must first remember how the first Church or Churches in Rome were originally founded. Neither Paul nor Peter founded the first Church in Rome. It existed long before Paul ever

⁷² John Kitto, ed., *The Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, Vol. II (Iverson & Phinney, New York, 1857) pg. 659-60

came to Rome and, most certainly before Peter ever came to the city (i.e. if that tradition is accurate). More than likely it was begun by those Jews who were present on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, who, upon listening to Peter's gospel message, became Christians and ultimately returned to Rome and thus founded the first Church or Churches in Rome. Acts 2:8-10 says the following.

Acts 2:8-10 "And how is it that we each hear *them* in our own language to which we were born? ⁹ "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, **and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes.** NASB

We see above that on that day in Jerusalem there were Jews and Gentile proselytes from Rome! Therefore, when some, or all of them, returned to Rome what would they have done, now being disciples of Jesus? Well, probably they did what Paul did when preaching the gospel among the diaspora. They would have gone back to their synagogues in their particular district of Rome and presented to their brethren in their own Jewish synagogue the good news of Jesus the Messiah. And, more than likely, in some cases, the same persecution would have happened to them as happened to Paul when Paul preached the gospel. They would have been forced to leave their synagogue, perhaps, even the synagogue they grew up in, leaving the only synagogue in their whole district or neighborhood. So what would they have done? Perhaps, they would have met in someone's house, much like happened in Corinth when Paul, and those from the synagogue who believed in the gospel of Christ had to do after being forced to leave the synagogue.

Acts 18:5-8 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean. From now on I shall go to the Gentiles." ⁷ **And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.** ⁸ And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. NASB

We see above that after being forced out of the synagogue, Paul took the Christians and began meeting with those Christians in the same neighborhood! In fact, it says they met in the house of Titius Justus right next to the synagogue! Why would they do this? Why not meet further

away? Well, we must remember that many Jewish Christians of the first century continued to meet on the Sabbath as well as on the Lord's day. Since, many Jewish Christians continued to be observant of the Law (obviously, not for salvation, but for individual preference) they would have been restricted by the same restrictions of Sabbath day travel as any Jew. Thus, since most Jews in Corinth would have lived within a Sabbath day's journey of their synagogue, the new meeting place would have to be in the same area as they continued their Sabbath gathering along with their Lord's day gathering.

Paul had no problem if a Jewish Christian wanted to continue to observe certain aspects of the Law. Paul speaks to this in Rom. 14:1-10.

Rom. 14:1-10 "Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³ The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ **One person regards one day above another**, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." NASB

Notice that some brethren in Rome continued to observe certain days, which more than likely would have included the Sabbath. And notice also that these same brethren also followed certain food restrictions. Now, Paul, obviously, would object strenuously if such restrictions were forced upon other Christians (as indeed he does in this portion of Scripture in verse 3 and 10) but he also grants certain brethren the liberty to follow such traditions for themselves if they wish, that is, as long as it is not seen as a means of salvation. Thus, it would seem that those Jewish brethren continued to observe the restrictions of a Sabbath day's journey.

Therefore, assuming the same type of scenario could have played out with Christians returning from Jerusalem to Rome after that Day of Pentecost, like happened to those Jewish Christians in Corinth, those

original Christians of Rome, more than likely, would have begun meeting in the house of a Christian in the same neighborhood or district of Rome in which they lived, the same neighborhood where their synagogue was, and thus their meeting place would have been known as the “Church according to the house of so and so.” The same scenario, more than likely, would have also happened in other synagogues in Rome, assuming those who were saved in Jerusalem were all not from the same district in Rome. And so there would have begun another “Church in the house of so and so” in a different district. And, one of the reasons for doing so was probably the same reason the original Jews had to form so many synagogues in different parts of Rome—Rome was simply too wide-spread to have one meeting for all. (It must also be remembered that the composition of the first Churches in Rome, after those pilgrims present at Pentecost had returned, would have been all Jewish, since it was later that Peter opened the door to the Gentiles).

So, if we put this all together, we can see the possible reason why Paul addressed the Church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Apparently, the Christians in Rome already met in various districts or neighborhoods, based upon those original Churches founded by the returning Jews and proselytes from Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost so many years before. And, as Aquila and Priscilla were in the habit of opening their house for meetings of the Church whenever it was needed (as they did when they lived in Ephesus—I Cor. 16:19) they must have done the same thing in Rome following a practice already established by the Holy Spirit many years before.

And so, because Paul knew they followed the same practice in Rome, he included his greeting to the Church according to their house in that particular district or neighborhood of Rome. In fact, this type of designation of a meeting in a house continued even into the second century. We hear of a similar meeting of the Church in an account between Justin Martyr and the Roman prefect Rusticus.

“Rusticus the prefect said, ‘Where do you assemble?’ Justin said, ‘**Where each one chooses and can: for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place?** Not so; because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place; but being invisible, fills heaven and earth, and everywhere is worshipped and glorified by the faithful.’ Rusticus the prefect said, ‘**Tell me where you assemble, or into what place do you collect your followers?**’ Justin said, ‘**I live above one Martinus, at the Timiotinian Bath; and during the whole time (and I am now living in Rome for the second time) I am unaware of any other meeting than his. And if any one wished to come to me, I**

communicated to him the doctrines of truth.’ Rusticus said, ‘Are you not, then, a Christian?’ Justin said, ‘Yes, I am a Christian.’”⁷³

What we see here is that Justin met in the house of one Martinus, near the Timiothiain Baths. He intimates that there were other places where Christians assemble, but he states he does not personally know of any other than the one in which he assembles. The Timiotinian Baths were located in an area of Rome called the Viminal Hill. It was one of the seven hills of Rome. William Ramsay says of this district that, “No portion of the ancient city was less distinguished by public buildings or remarkable sites of any description, and hence we may conclude that it was at all times inhabited chiefly by the poorer classes.”⁷⁴ It was not a large area. It was said to be “a tongue of land about 700 metres [c. 765 yards] long, with a present area of approximately 24 ha. [c. 60 acres] and a height of 50-57 metres [c. 164-187 feet].”⁷⁵ And a depression, right next to this hill was called Subura, and what is interesting is that the Subura district was one of the areas that we know had a Jewish synagogue, as mentioned above— the Σιβουρήσιοι from the Subura. Now it should be mentioned that we do not know if this synagogue existed in Rome at the time of Paul’s writing, but since it is estimated that there were upwards to twenty-thousand Jews in Rome during the time of Paul, ⁷⁶ it would not be surprising that, indeed, this Jewish synagogue existed in the Subura during the early part of the first century.

If this was so (and it must be admitted this is pure conjecture) would it not be interesting if the area of Viminal near the Timiotinian Baths, just up from the Subura, was one of those early areas where early Jewish Christians met, having been forced to leave their synagogue down in the Subura below. They wanted to remain in the neighborhood, as that was where they lived, so they simply found a house of a Christian a few hundred feet up the hill from their synagogue in which to meet, next to

⁷³ Alexander Roberts and Sir James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh 1870) pg. 368

⁷⁴ William Ramsay, *A Manual of Roman Antiquities* (Charles Griffin and Company, London, 1870) pg. 38

⁷⁵ Samuel Ball Platner (as completed and revised by Thomas Ashby) *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Oxford University Press, London, 1929) pg. 581-82

⁷⁶ See Karl P. Donfried, Peter Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-century Rome* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1998) pg. 120

the Timiotinian Baths. And would it not be interesting that this original Church in the house continued in the same house even into the second century! Indeed, archeologists have found below some of the ancient Church buildings in Rome actual private dwellings, which has led some to conjecture that some of these original house Churches may have continued to be Christian meeting places, ultimately being converted into the chapels or Church buildings of early Rome in later centuries.

Therefore, with this understanding, we can now begin to understand the various meeting places of Christians in Rome and why Paul addressed his epistle to the saints in Rome and not to the Church (singular) in Rome.

To recap—we have already seen that Paul’s usage of the preposition *κατὰ* in Rom. 16:5 presupposed other Churches meeting in other houses or dwellings in Rome. Then we spoke of the size and population density of Rome which demonstrated that it would be near impossible for a number of believers to ever meet together in one place on the Lord’s day, especially in light of the presence of many slaves in the early Church and the time it would take them to traverse such a large city. Then we saw how Rome had many synagogues during Paul’s day which were required because of the Jewish understanding of a Sabbath day’s journey, and we saw how the first Christians in Rome may have had to leave their various synagogues upon returning from Jerusalem, and then how they may have begun to meet in the houses of fellow Christian’s living in close proximity to the same neighborhoods, and/or districts (*regiones*) in which their synagogue was located. With all this as background we can now better understand the significance and the uniqueness of Paul’s greetings in Rom. 16: 3-16, which we would now like to look as we finish this section of locality.

House Churches of Rome

“**Greet Prisca and Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵**also greet the church that is in their house**. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.⁶Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. **Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.** ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman. **Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.** ¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. ¹⁴ **Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.** ¹⁵ **Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.** ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. Rom. 16:6-16 NASB

As we read this passage we see that Paul seems to reference five different gatherings of Christians. We have already briefly spoken about the Church associated with Aquila and Priscilla; let us now look to the next two gatherings associated with Aristobulus in verse 10 and Narcissus in verse 11. As we mentioned before, in regard to the Jewish synagogues of Rome, some synagogues were associated with a patron as Emil Schürer stated above—

“The designation may be accounted for either by the fact that Augustus and Agrippa were patrons, the one of the one community and the other of the other, or from the circumstance that those communities were for the most part composed of slaves and freedmen of Augustus on the one hand, or of Agrippa on the other (comp. οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας, Phil. iv. 22).”⁷⁷

He mentioned that some Jewish synagogues were known by the names of Augustus and Agrippa, and he also quotes Paul’s reference to “the ones out of Caesar’s household,” or one could say, “the ones from the house of Caesar” in Phil. 4:22. This is very similar to two of the designations we find in Rom. 16:6-16.

First, Paul greets τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου (those of or from Aristobulus). Aristobulus was a grandson of king Herod. What is

⁷⁷ Emil Schürer, *Op. Cit.*, pg. 247-48

interesting to note is that Paul is not greeting Aristobulus directly (nor Narcissus in the next verse) but is greeting those “of” Aristobulus, those saints that are somehow identified with Aristobulus and in the next verse, verse 11, with those who are in some way identified with Narcissus, τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου, “the ones out of the *household* of Narcissus.” The only difference between the two groups, however, is that Paul greets the entire group of Aristobulus’ household as Christians (reminding us of how all of Lydia’s household were also Christians—Acts 16:14-15) whereas, with Narcissus, not everyone in that group were Christians, as Paul added the qualification, τοὺς ὄντας ἐν κυρίῳ, (the ones being in the Lord). But one thing that is important to note is that both Aristobulus and Narcissus were dead when Paul wrote this greeting! If that is so, then to whom was Paul referring when he wrote this greeting?

J. B. Lightfoot may give us some insight to this enquiry. He says,

“ARISTOBULUS surnamed the younger, a grandson of Herod the Great, was educated in the metropolis, together with his brothers Agrippa and Herod. While his two brothers became kings, the one of Judaea, the other of Chalcis, Aristobulus himself ended his days in a private station... The emperor Claudius, writing at this time, speaks of Aristobulus as entertaining most dutiful and friendly sentiments towards himself. When the slaves of a household passed into the hands of a new master, by cession or inheritance or confiscation, they continued to be designated by the name of their former proprietor.... Now it seems not improbable, considering the intimate relations between Claudius and Aristobulus, that at the death of the latter his servants, wholly or in part, should be transferred to the palace. In this case they would be designated *Aristobuliani*, for which I suppose St Paul’s οἱ ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου to be an equivalent. It is at least not an obvious phrase and demands explanation. And, as the household of Aristobulus would naturally be composed in a large measure of Jews, the Gospel would the more easily be introduced to their notice. Moreover it is worth observing that after saluting ‘them of the household of Aristobulus, St Paul immediately singles out one whom he designates his kinsman, i.e. his fellow-countryman’, and whose name HERODION we might expect to find among the slaves or freedmen of a distinguished member of the Herodian family. This interpretation of the expression τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου will, I think, be confirmed by the salutation which follows. For immediately after, St Paul uses the same form of expression in speaking of the household of NARCISSUS. The name Narcissus indeed is common enough... But here, as in the case of Aristobulus, the expression seems to point to some famous person of the name. And the powerful freedman Narcissus, whose wealth was proverbial (Juv. *Sat.* xiv. 329), whose influence with Claudius was unbounded, and who bore a chief part in the intrigues of this reign, alone satisfies this condition. He was put to death by Agrippina shortly after the accession of Nero (Tac. *Ann.* xiii. 1, Dion Cass. lx. 34), about three or four years before the Epistle to the Romans was

written. As was usual in such cases, his household would most probably pass into the hands of the emperor, still however retaining the name of Narcissus.”⁷⁸

In addition to what J. B. Lightfoot says, it should be noted that a similar type of phraseology (ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου and ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου) is used in Phil. 4:22, where it reads, ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος (of, or from, Caesar). The one difference, however, with this phrase in Philippians is that Paul adds the word οἰκίας near the end, so that it reads, οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας (those of Caesars house or household). This addition of οἰκίας helps us understand these two phrases in Romans and supports the conclusion made by J. B. Lightfoot that this phrase probably refers to “slaves and freedmen attached to the palace...” and that the phrase “corresponds to *familia* or *domus Casearis* (Tac. *Hist.* ii 92) and might include equally the highest functionaries and the lowest menials.”⁷⁹

So we see that, these two grouping of saints, no doubt, were slaves and/or freedman of the house or household of Aristobulus and Narcissus, who upon the death of their master and patron became members of Caesar’s household, retaining the name, however, of their original master and patron, i.e. Aristobulus and Narcissus. And, as members of his household, their quarters (*cellae servorum*), more than likely, would have been somewhere on the Palatine Hill within or connected with the palace complex. And, since slaves, generally speaking, were allowed to maintain their own religious convictions,⁸⁰ their gatherings together in worship would have been considered to be another “Church according to

⁷⁸ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations*, 3rd ed. (Macmillan, London, 1873) pg. 172-73

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 165

⁸⁰ William Blair in his book, *An Inquiry Into the State of Slavery Amongst the Romans*, speaks to this issue. He states: “In matters connected with religion, the Romans were not regardless of their slaves. Their system of polytheism was, at all times, exceedingly tolerant. During the Empire, the introduction of foreign divinities and rites became fashionable; and those of Egypt, in particular, almost supplanted the ancient objects of adoration. It is not surprising, then, that the Pagan Romans should have suffered the servile classes to follow any religion they pleased, and to use its forms.” Therefore, except in times of persecution when Christians were singled out as “atheists” (in the sense that they denied the ‘gods’) a fair amount of liberty was granted them in the practice of their religious convictions within the *domus* or *villa* where they might reside. William Blair *An Inquiry Into the State of Slavery Amongst the Romans* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1833) Pg. 65

a house,” which could have been made up not only of slaves, but also any freedmen of those households.

So these two references may have been referring to two other house Churches in Rome, in addition to the Church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Additionally, we may have two more Churches being referred to in verses 14 and 15, bringing us to a total of five house Churches in Rome. Romans 16:14-15 says the following—

Rom. 16:14-15 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas **and the brethren with them.** 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, **and all the saints who are with them.** NASB

We see that these, unlike that of Aristobulus and Narcissus, are not identified with any one personage or patron, but rather are identified by a number of personages. Why? Perhaps, it was because these were all freemen, whereas those associated with Aristobulus and Narcissus were Christians who were basically slaves and/or former slaves. But what is also interesting is that there are unnamed brethren and saints numbered together with them. In verse 14 there are unnamed brethren mentioned along with Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and Philologus, and in verse 14 there are unnamed saints mentioned along with Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas. Obviously, these “unnamed” Christians were grouped together by Paul with these “named” Christians, unlike the case of those who were grouped together with one named Christian, like Gaius (Rom. 16:23), or those grouped together with one couple in whose house they met (as was the case with Aquila and Priscilla—Rom. 16:3-5). The reason for this may be because these Christians did not live in houses but, rather, lived in apartments. As such, these two groups may have represented two different Churches, not according to a house per se, but a Church according to an insula complex, which were the apartment buildings of Rome, as we have mentioned before.

Some estimate that insulae (apartments) outnumbered the domus (house) by a ratio of 25 to 1 in the city of Rome. So the possibility that the references of verses 14 and 15, were referring to gatherings in an insula complex are greatly increased. Charles Merivale, in his *History of the Romans under the Empire* speaks of the abundance of these insulae.

“There exists an ancient statistical account of Rome, in which, among other specific numerical notices, the number of the *domus* and *insulae*, respectively, is given for each of the fourteen regions. The date of this little work cannot

perhaps be fixed very nearly, but the substance of the information it conveys may be referred to the third century of our era, after the building of the Aurelian walls, and at the period probably of the greatest extension of the city. We must bear in mind, therefore, on the one hand, that the density of habitation in the *urbs* was unquestionably reduced after the time of Augustus; and on the other, that the whole enlarged area was more uniformly occupied with dwellings. If these circumstances may be supposed nearly to balance one another, we may be allowed perhaps to assume that the numbers given in the *Notitia* do not far exceed the actual amount at the earlier period,—namely, 46,602 *insulae* and 1,790 *domus*. The numbers, however, of individuals accommodated in each *domus* and *insula* respectively must still be a matter of mere conjecture, nor can we find any close analogy to guide us...and I confess that I am merely speaking at random in assigning to them an average of eighty occupants.”⁸¹

Wilhelm Adolph Becker, in his work *Roman scenes of the time of Augustus*, has this to say about these *insulae*.

“The *insulae*, or lodging-houses, which were several stories high, and calculated for the reception of several families and single individuals...The building was under the care of an *insularius*, who had to let the apartments for his master. Afterwards, every separate lodging-house was called *insula*. And this is the reason why there were so many *insulae* and so few *domus* in Rome; viz. above 44,000 *insulae*, and about 1780 *domus*.”⁸²

And James R. Clarke, in his work, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration*, says this,

“A highly satisfactory and uncannily modern solution to urban density developed in Rome during the first century A.D. Employing brick-faced concrete with vaulted support and covering systems, the multistory, multifamily apartment house, or *insula*, replaced the *domus* and most of its spatial patterns. With sturdy apartment buildings rising as high as five stories, crowded Roman cities expanded vertically instead of horizontally. Because Rome itself has been continuously inhabited, few of these *insulae* survive, but Ostia, Rome’s supply city during the heyday of the empire, is filled with these dwellings, most of them excavated in the twentieth century.”⁸³

⁸¹ Charles Merivale, *History of the Romans under the Empire*, vo 5 (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1871) pg. 54

⁸² Wilhelm Adolph Becker, Frederick Metcalfe, tr., *Gallus; or, Roman scenes of the time of Augustus*, 2nd ed. (John W. Parker, London, 1849) pg. 232

⁸³ John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991) pg. 26

(In all likelihood, the gathering in Troas (Acts 20:7-9) where the young man name Eutychus fell out of the third story window was in an *insula*, giving us the biblical precedence for Christian gatherings within such apartment complexes.)

But some may ask, “Well, even if this is referring to Christians who lived in apartments, why not just mention the one person in whose apartment they met? To answer that question we must understand the architecture of a Roman apartment.

As to the architecture of such apartments, Gustav Hermansen describes the floor plan of a typical *insula* in his work, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life*.

“There is not much material to determine the room names used by the *inquiline* [tenants] of Roman apartments. However, one very clear example is in the *Digesta* 9,3,5,2, the famous law about the responsibility of those who have caused material damage or bodily harm...The text is from Ulpian’s comment to the law as it was set forth in the *Editctum Perpetuum*... (“Sometimes, however, in the interest of justice, and without doing damage to the plaintiff, the praetor should rather start procedure against the person from whose bedroom or living-room the object has been thrown down, even though several persons live in the apartment. But if something is thrown down from the *medianum* of the apartment it is more right that everybody should be responsible”).

As examples of usual room names, Ulpian mentions *cubiculum*, *exedra*, and *medianum*. These room names must necessarily have been plain and readily understood by everybody and must at the same time have been the correct technical terminology. The character of the three rooms is clear. The *cubiculum* undoubtedly is a bedroom, the *exedra* is a living-room, and the *medianum* is the central, hall-like room which, placed in the middle (*medianum*), gave access to all other rooms.

The word *medianum* is interesting...Over the centuries...the concept of the city-Roman phenomenon *medianum* must have been forgotten and in the later manuscripts replaced by *menianum* (*maenianum*), a balcony, which was more readily understood by somebody who had never seen a Roman apartment. All that it took was to substitute a *n* for a *d*. The *menianum* was generally accepted in the text by later editors and caused scorn to be heaped on the Romans by modern classicist for their ridiculous legislation that everybody in a shared apartment should be responsible for what was hurled down from a balcony. If, on the other hand, the word is *medianum* and it means “the room in the middle,” it makes sense from a legal point of view; the *medianum* was not the private domain of any individual *inquilinus*, **it belonged to them all, since it was the only room through which everybody had to pass in order to get to their own**

room(s). That the word *medianum* was part of the language of the Romans of the time of the *Edictum Perpetuum* and also of Ulpian's time is shown by its use in two places in the *Itala*, the old Latin version of the New Testament, originating in Italy. In preparation for Passover, Jesus sent two of his disciples into the city where they would meet a man with a pitcher, who would show them a room where they could eat the Passover. Mark 14:15 reads, "ipse uobis ostendet locum medianum stratum in superioribus magnum"; Luke 22:12 says, "ille uobis ostendet maedianum stratum magnum."

Medianum is here a dining-room. The language of the translation of the New Testament is the unsophisticated language of the people and reflects the environment from which it originates and for which it is made. It brings us back into the middle of old Rome, where the humble people, the *humiliores*, had to share apartments, the kitchenless apartments. They could not light a brazier and prepare their food in their *cubiculum*, where they would be choked by the smoke, but they cooked in the *medianum* where the smoke could escape through the many windows, sitting on chairs at a table and eating in the same room—the medianum, the dining-room—no *triclinia* for the *humiliores*. Ostia has between forty and fifty apartments which were built around *midiana*.⁸⁴

And in *The Ancient Roman City*, John E. Stambaugh says this:

"The people who lived in such apartments must have had some money with which to pay the rent, but the many who could not afford to rent a whole apartment sometimes shared one. We know, for example, from several legal passages that separate tenants occupied the sleeping and sitting rooms opening off a shared medianum (Justinian, *Digest* 9.3.5.2)...Most characteristic of Ostia and Rome, however, was the multi-storied insula, in which apartments were available for many economic sorts and conditions...Normally, the best apartments were on the ground floor, unless that was taken up entirely by shops. The farther tenants climbed up the increasingly narrow stairs, the more rickety and cramped were their rooms. Martial's apartment in Rome, on the third floor of an insula on the Quirinal, sounds reasonably comfortable (I.117,5.78), but higher up in a neighboring insula, and lower on the social scale, we might meet Juvenal's Codrus (3.203-211), who lived with his wife in an attic apartment furnished with a too-short bed and a few poor possessions."⁸⁵

A typical apartment with a medianum in an insula complex can be seen in the drawing below (Fig. 2). These are shown with two cubiculum each, although, other apartments have been discovered with more than two (e.g. Regio II - Insula III in Ostia, Via dei Vigili). The greater

⁸⁴ Gustav Hermansen, *Ostia: Aspects of Roman City Life* (University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1982) Pg. 20-22

⁸⁵ John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1988) pg. 175-6

number of cubiculum, of course, would increase the number of occupants in the apartment, although one must remember (as is still true in many parts of the world today) sometimes there might be more than one family sharing an apartment, with entire families sleeping in one room (cubiculum).

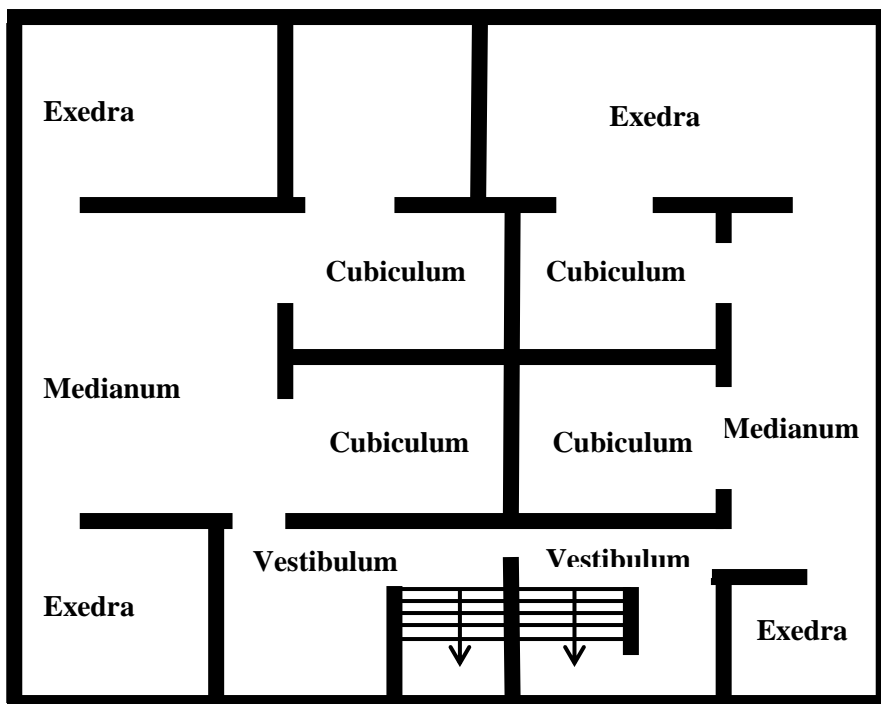


Fig. 2 Example of insula apartment showing relationships of various rooms to the common room (*medianum*). *Cubiculum*: bedroom, *Exedra*: living area, *Medianum*: common room, *Vestibulum*: foyer⁸⁶

Therefore, putting all this together, perhaps we can see the reason why Paul identifies all those Christians together in his greeting in verse 14 and 15 unlike his other greetings. Each named Christian may have been the ones sharing a cubiculum around a common medianum. In other words, Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas may have lived

⁸⁶ This example followed the plan given by Robert Baily, which was sourced from a plan by G. Beccati in *Scavi di Ostia Vol. IV*, 1961, tav. CCXXIV. See Bruce W. Frier, *Landlords and Tenants in Imperial Rome* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2014) Pg. 10

together in one apartment sharing a common medianum in one of the lower stories of an apartment complex. Perhaps, they shared expenses, renting the entire apartment together. As such, they may have been the only ones living in the bedrooms around the common medianum. However, it should also be remembered that because people in ancient Rome were more likely to share one common dwelling together, the other unnamed brethren may have also occupied the same apartment, or, if not, they could have very well lived in the upper stories of the same apartment complex, sleeping in the one room enclosures commonly found in the crowded upper stories of an insula complex.. But, because the other unnamed brethren would come downstairs to meet with the brothers in their medianum, Paul mentions only them along with them as one separate gathering, which, of course, would be considered another Church or assembly in Rome. The same scenario, of course, would be true of the second group Paul mentions in Rom. 16:15. Philologus and Julia, Olympas, along with Nereus and his sister, may have shared one apartment together with in their own medianum, in which case the other saints would come downstairs to join them in worship.

So we see each group may have been Christians living in the same insula complex in Rome. Each group could have shared one apartment in common, or, they could have lived in one insula complex with the poorer brethren living in the smaller rooms of the upper stories, meeting in the large medianum located in one of the believer's apartments in the lower stories. Sometimes those living in the lower stories might have a medianum that were quite large. For, example, in Ostia, there was a medianum that was approximately 49 feet by 16 feet. This size, interestingly enough, was approximately of the same size as what some believe was the upper room in Jerusalem where the Lord gathered with his Twelve for the final Passover, and the room where the early Church met on the Day of Pentecost.⁸⁷

So one can now see how the medianum of an apartment would be a perfect place for a gathering of saints together in assembly in the city of Rome and may be the reason why Paul greeted certain Christians the way he did in his epistle to the Romans.

If all this is true, and we have a hint of at least five different Churches in the city of Rome, the question must be asked, "Why did not Paul repeat

⁸⁷ Bruce W. Frier, *Landlords and Tenants in Imperial Rome* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2014) pg. 44

the usage of the Greek word “ekklesia” in the remaining four groups of Christians in his epistle?” Most certainly, it would have clearly indicated to the reader those other four groups were constituted Churches and one would not have to infer it from the preposition *κατά* or from other contextual reason; but, the fact of the matter is, he did not.

There may be a couple plausible explanations for this. First, it may be based upon the fact that the Church in Aquila and Priscilla’s house may have been the only house-Church in Rome that actually communicated with Paul by letter as a Church, much like Paul mentions with the Church in Philippi.

Phil. 4:15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church communicated with me** as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. KJV

Therefore, it may have simply been that when he thought of Aquila and Priscilla he automatically thought of the Church in their house, which was so dear to him. It was not that the other groupings were not Churches, but he singled them out with the name Church because they were the only ones of all the Churches in Rome that regularly communicated with him.

In addition, since Aquila and Priscilla were close co-workers with Paul, perhaps, this house Church adhered most closely to his teachings. As such, it would only be natural that they would be in the forefront of his greetings. Perhaps, he had a special affinity for them, because they, like the Church in Philippi, not only supported Paul, but may have also conveyed through Aquila and Priscilla that they constantly kept him in their prayers. Also, some of those in this assembly were well-known by Paul. Epaenetus was the first person Paul ever led to the Lord in Asia! Two others were Paul’s kinsmen—Andronicus and Junias. Some others he called fellow workers and others he called beloved by him. Therefore, it would only be natural to address them as the Church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla because they were the only Church in Rome that regularly corresponded with him having a close connection with him personally.

But because of such correspondence, Paul would have most certainly been aware of other house Churches in Rome which explains why he addresses them as the Church “according” (*κατά*) to the house of Aquila and Priscilla and not the Church “in” the house of Aquila and Priscilla. In

other words, Paul was acknowledging the existence of other house Churches by his use of the preposition κατά, but since he had no personal correspondence with any other house Church, he only addressed the one house Church with which he was personally familiar and attached.

This possibility is also inferred by the fact that Paul, when imprisoned in Rome, sought to encourage the Church in Philippi to remain imitators of him, because, perhaps he was made acutely aware that some in the other house Churches in Rome may have opposed to his teaching and so were seeking to cause him distress in his imprisonment.

Phil. 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite (κοιλία), and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. NASB

Phil. 1:15-18 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will;¹⁶ the latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel;¹⁷ the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. NASB

Rom. 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 (κοιλία); and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. NASB

What is interesting is that Paul uses the same word (appetites—κοιλία) in Rom. 16:18 describing those in Rome who were causing dissension and hindrances (more than likely the same ones who were seeking to cause him distress in his imprisonment) as he used in Phil. 3:19 when speaking of those in Rome who were enemies of the cross of Christ. (We will discuss this later, but the phrase, “enemies of the cross of Christ,” does not, necessarily, mean enemies of the message of salvation by the cross of Christ (although, it most certainly may). It may mean those who reject the *way of the cross*, i.e. taking up the cross, denying oneself, and following the Lord in a life completely surrendered to Him. So Paul may not be referring to unbelievers, but rather carnal Christians, enemies of the cross of Christ in their walk in that they refuse to deny themselves, but rather pamper and love themselves, thus explaining the epitome, that they make their belly or appetite their God. These may have been the

Christians in Rome who were well to do and so similar to those found in Laodicea, who because of their luke-warmness and their living for self, made the Lord want to vomit them out of his mouth. If this is so, it may explain why Paul would still rejoice they were still preaching the gospel, as they were Christians, but would explain why he may not have had any correspondence from them as a Church. They did not agree with him; perhaps they opposed him like those Christians opposed him in Antioch (Acts 15: 1-2, 5). If this is true, the phrase, “whose end is destruction,” would have to be understood, not of the destruction of hell, but the destruction or ruin that is possible for a Christian in this life, either through carnal living, and/or the discipline of the Lord. Scripture uses the word in this way, when warning Christians that certain mindsets and ways of life may lead to their own destruction or ruin, e.g. I Tim. 6:9 and II Pet. 3:16. But more of this will be discussed later).

Therefore, the reason why Paul only used the word *ekklesia* with Aquila and Priscilla’s house is that it may have been the only house Church that he was personally aware of through their personal correspondence with him, or, perhaps, through the visit of one of their number to him who identified themselves with a letter of commendation from the “church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla.” Therefore, upon writing to the saints in Rome he was sure to acknowledge this one Church with which he was aware by their support and prayers for him.

The second possible reason might be that to a Greek reader the usage of the word *ekklesia* at the beginning of the greetings might be enough to infer it with the other groups. Perhaps, this is a syntactical structure with which we are not fully familiar. We do have somewhat similar usages in other parts of Scripture. For example, in the genealogical list of Luke 3:23-38 the Greek word son (υἱός) is utilized in the beginning of the list but is not repeated in the rest of the list, its meaning being inferred (the English reader can see this by the repeated “son” being in italics).

Luke 3:23-24 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα ἀρχόμενος, ὧν- ὡς ἐνομίζετο- υἱὸς Ἰωσήφ, τοῦ Ἡλίου, ²⁴τοῦ Ματθαίου, τοῦ Λευίου, τοῦ Μελχίου, τοῦ Ἰαννά, τοῦ Ἰωσήφ.

Luke 3:23-24 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the **son** of Joseph, which was *the son* of Heli, ²⁴ Which was *the son* of Matthat, which was *the son* of Levi, which was *the son* of Melchi, which was *the son* of Janna, which was *the son* of Joseph. KJV

Or when Luke speaks of the various synagogues in Jerusalem in Acts 6:9, he uses the Greek word synagogue (συναγωγῆς) once at the beginning of the list with its others presupposed.

Acts 6:9 Ἀνέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων, καὶ Κυρηναίων, καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων, καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας, συζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ.

Acts 6:9 And there arose up certain of those of the synagogue called of freedmen, and of Cyrenians, and of Alexandrians, and of those of Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. (Darby)

Many translations do not bring this out, but some do as with Darby's translation above. The Pulpit Commentary also bears witness to this, also referencing Chrysostom as one who recognized Luke as indicating more synagogues.

“It seems by the enumeration of synagogues in our text that the foreign Jews had each their own synagogue at Jerusalem, as Chrysostom supposes, where men of the same nation attended when they came to Jerusalem; for the construction of the sentence is to supply before Κυρηναίων and again before Ἀλεξανδρέων the same words as precede Λιβερτίνων, viz. καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης, so as to mean “and certain of them that were of the synagogue called of the Cyrenians,” and so on. The very numerous Jews of Cyrene and of Alexandria would doubtless require each a synagogue for themselves.”⁸⁸

Alford, while admitting the equivocal nature of the construction, also believes more than one synagogue is meant. He says—

“I understand *three* distinct synagogues to be meant, notwithstanding the somewhat equivocal construction.”⁸⁹

Therefore, perhaps, Paul by using the Greek word ekklesia in the first grouping of saints intended his readers to understand that any other grouping or meeting of Christians together in his greetings were also presupposed to be Churches.

However, it must be admitted that such a syntactical construct is not well attested, if it is attested at all. It is only a suggestion as to why Paul did not repeat the word ἐκκλησία in the remaining list of saints. Yet even

⁸⁸ H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary, The Acts of the Apostles* (Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York) pg. 193-94

⁸⁹ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament Vol. II* (Rivingtons, London, 1877) Pg. 65

without such an explanation, the fact remains that Paul does bear witness to the fact that there were other ἐκκλησία in the city of Rome, even if he does not repeat the actual word ἐκκλησία, simply because he uses the preposition κατά in the phrase. This, indeed, is a syntactical construct that is well attested. Paul never affirms in his epistle that there was only one Church in Rome; in fact, he does the opposite. Paul knew that Rome had more than one Church and so he uses the preposition κατά to express this fact.

Consequently, the question must be asked, “How are the names in chapter 16 to be integrated with these five possible house Churches?” It seems there are only two possibilities.

First, the subsequent names might be certain Christians he might have personally known, either as fellow workers together in the gospel, fellow family members, or Christians of special note. He does mention that some of them were workers together with him in the work of the Lord. For example, Aquila and Priscilla are called workers together in the Lord (vs. 3). Mary is singled out as a hard worker in the Lord (vs. 6). Urbanus, perhaps including Stachys, are called workers in the Lord (vs. 9). And, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are listed as workers in the Lord (vs. 12). Paul has some affinity with these saints, being workers together with him in the gospel of Christ; perhaps, he had come into contact with some of them in his many missionary journeys.

Then we see ones like Andronicus and Junias who are called kindred (vs. 7). We do not know what relation they might be to Paul. We do know that Paul had a sister and a nephew (Acts. 23:16). Perhaps, these two might be cousins or, maybe they were uncles of Paul, being older, as he says they were saved before he was. In any case, they were personally known to Paul and he says they were even with him in prison at some time. Also they might have been “apostles” in the same sense as Paul and Barnabas were apostles.

Additionally, in verse 11 he greets Herodion, another relative of Paul, either in an immediate sense, or maybe in the sense of being of the tribe of Benjamin, or maybe just being a fellow Israelite.

Then Paul singles out special Christians whom he praises as being beloved and choice in the Lord, as Epaenetus (vs. 5), Ampliatus (vs. 8), and Rufus (vs. 13). Somehow he was made aware of these Christians or, again, he knew them personally from his many travels. For example, he

most certainly knew Rufus of verse 13 for he calls Rufus' mother his own mother in the sense of affection, which showed he and Rufus must have been very close.

But, the list raises an additional question. If many of these names were Christians personally known to Paul, as indeed, some of them were, why did he list them the way he did? If he knew them all, why did he not greet them in order all at once and then greet the house Churches in general? Or, if he did not personally know them all why did he not greet all those he did know first (e.g. his kinsman) and then list the ones he did not know personally, and then list the house Churches in general? It only seems reasonable when one is writing a list that some order is conveyed. But, rather than seeing a distinct order we see that he greets certain of his kinsman, Andronicus and Junias, near the beginning of his list in verse 7, and then switches to greeting certain Christians of good report, and then, after an interval of four verses, addresses a kinsman again, Herodian, in verse 11. If Paul was thinking of his kinsman in Rome why did he not just greet them in order together and then switch to non-family members? The answer might be that the reason did not follow a particular order of family members, then fellow workers, and then Christians of good report, was that he spread them out because he was grouping them together in a different order and that is what leads to the second possibility of how the names are to be integrated within the five house Churches. The names are grouped by their specific association with the different house Churches.

Thus, those Christians named from verse 6 to verse 10a would be members of the Church meeting in Aquila and Priscilla's house. In this case, Paul's first two kinsmen met with the Church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla. The reason his other kinsman, Herodian, is not grouped with them is because he met with those of the household of Aristobulus (vs. 11). And, this would also mean Paul knew no other Christian in this particular house Church but his kinsman Herodian. In the same way, those names from verse 12 to 13 would be some of those members in the Church making up of those from the household of Narcissus, and the names in verse 14 would be those Christians that Paul knew were in the Church meeting in one of the apartment buildings in Rome, and the other names in verse 15 were be those of the Church meeting in another insula or apartment building somewhere else in Rome. Therefore, if this is true we can see that Paul divided up his greetings according to the five distinct Churches that he knew were meeting together in Rome. Meeting with two of the house Churches were

some of his own kinsman, and in the three others house Churches were some of his fellow workers, close friends (Rufus and his mother), and Christians of good report.

If this is true, then the five Churches in Rome might be grouped this way.

First Ekklesia in a House

“**Greet Prisca and Aquila**, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;⁵ **also greet the church that is in their house.** Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Rom. 16: 3-10a NASB

This house Church meeting according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla may have been in the Trastevere region of Rome where there existed a large Jewish community as well as a main commercial area (See letter A on map below, Fig. 3). Many trades such as the tentmaker trade of Aquila and Priscilla lived in houses attached to their businesses, either on a second story or right behind their work area. As was mentioned above, some of those in this assembly were well-known by Paul. Epaphroditus was the first person Paul led to the Lord in Asia! Two others were Paul’s kinsmen—Andronicus and Junias. And others he called fellow workers and others he called beloved by him.

Second Ekklesia in a House

Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Rom. 16: 10b NASB

Aristobulus was a grandson of king Herod. He grew up and was educated with Claudius, the future emperor of Rome. And, as was mentioned before, upon his death, more than likely, his slaves and freedman became a part of Caesar’s household which would have been located upon the Palatine Hill. Archaeologists have found upon this hill the house or palace of Augustus, the palace of the Flavian emperors, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, as well as the house of Tiberius and Caligula, and

remnants of the palace of Nero. Therefore, this second house Church may have been located somewhere upon the Palatine Hill.⁹⁰ (See letter B on map below, Fig. 3)

Third Ekklesia in a House

Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.¹² Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord. Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine. Rom. 16:11b-13 NASB

Some believe this Narcissus was the wealthy freedman, attached to the emperor Claudius. If so, his slaves and freedman would have also passed on to the emperor, as was with the case of Aristobulus. Thus, this house Church would have also been somewhere on the Palatine Hill. (See letter B on map below, Fig. 3)

Fourth Ekklesia in an Insula

¹⁴ **Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.** Rom. 16:14 NASB

If this “ekklesia” met in one of the many *insulae* in Rome, more than likely, it would have consisted of middle class and poor Christians. Possible locations would include the Viminal Hill (where a house Church existed in the days of Justin Martyr) or the Subura, the valley or depression below the Viminal Hill which was considered to be one of the poorest areas of Rome. Equally it might have been in the area between the Esquiline and Caelian Hills (also considered as part of the Subura)

⁹⁰“Ramsay (St. Paul the Traveller, etc, 353), speaking of Lightfoot's conjectures, which we already referred to, writes—‘In all probability he is right in thinking that all the slaves of Aristobulus (son of Herod the Great) and of Narcissus Narcissus (Claudius' favorite freedman) had passed into the imperial household, and that members of their two familiae are saluted as Christians by Paul (Rom 16 10 ff)...The fact of greatest interest in the whole subject is, that in society so profligate and corrupt as the court of Nero, there were saints, Christian men whose garments were clean and who kept themselves unspotted from the world amid surroundings so dreadful and in temptation so unceasing; that the gospel was known and obeyed and loved, and that hearts and lives were loyal to Christ even in the palace of Nero Caesar.’ —James Orr, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Volume 1* (Howard-Severance Company, Chicago, 1915) pg. 537-38

including its slopes near the present location of the Coliseum, as that is the area Nero burned with fire, blaming it on the Christians supposedly living in that area. (See letter C on map below, Fig. 3)

Fifth Ekklesia in an Insula

¹⁵ **Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.** ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. Romans 16:15 NASB

This Church may have also existed in any of the locations just mentioned above. (See letter C on map below, Fig. 3)

To this list, assuming all five continued to meet for some time, must be added a sixth—the Church meeting held in the rented quarters of Paul when he was imprisoned upon the Palatine Hill awaiting his trial. Acts 28: 30-31 says—

Acts 28:30-31 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹ Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. KJV

Scripture says that no man was forbidding him to preach and teach in his house or room. Thus, as he received all who came to him, most assuredly, Paul would have broken bread on the Lord's day in remembrance of Him with all who would join him. Thus, if only one other Christian would gather together with him in the name of the Lord (although, most assuredly, many would come) the Lord would have been in their midst and their meeting would have constituted a sixth house Church in Rome. . (Also located near letter B on map below, Fig. 3)

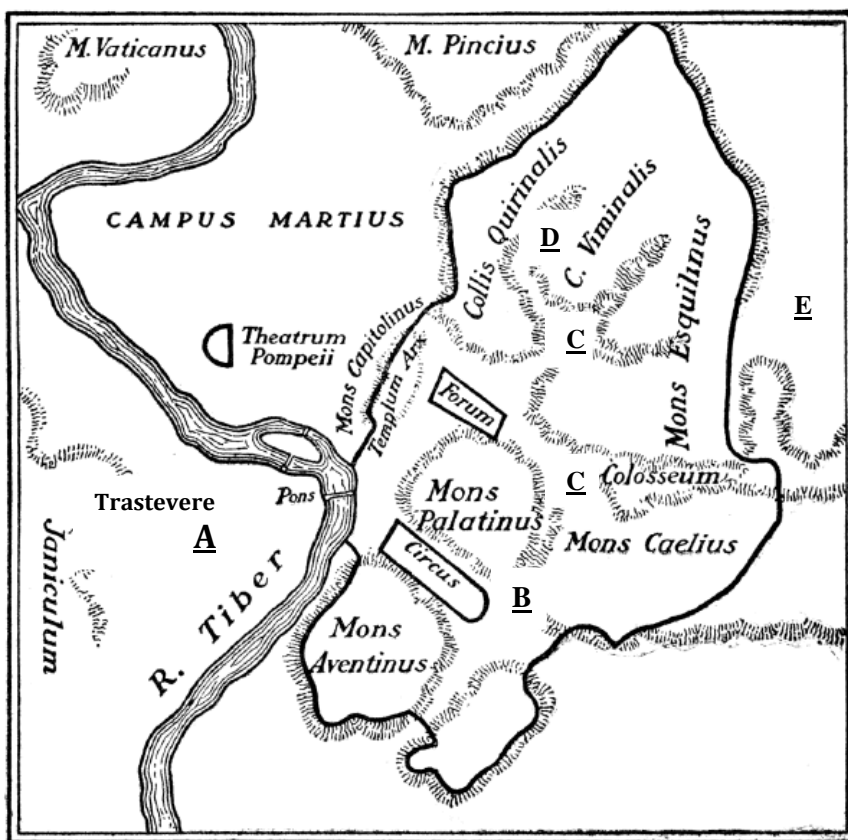


Fig. 3 Map of Ancient Rome showing the seven hills with possible locations of various house Churches.

A. Possible area where the Church according to the house of Aquila and Priscilla was located.

B. Possible hill and area where the Church of those “of Aristobulus” and possibly the Church of those “of Narcissus” had their gathering. This Palatine Hill may also have been where the Praetorian Guard was stationed and so would have been the area where Paul would have dwelt in his own rented quarters during his stay in Rome. During this time he became acquainted with those Christians in the household of Caesar, further identifying this location as the location of the house Church meeting with him, and the probable location of those other house Churches made up of those members in Caesar’s household that retained the name of their former master and/or patron.

C. Possible locations for the insulae where Christians may have met in a medianum of one of the apartments complexes. This area was known as the Subura where many poor Romans lived both in its northern boundaries and also its southern boundaries near the present area of the Coliseum.

D. The Viminal Hill where a house Church existed in the second century near to the Timiotinian Bath where Justin Martyr lived above the house of one Martinus.

E. Other possible locations for other house Churches in the area beyond the Servian wall, later enclosed by the Aurelian Wall, but still considered part of Rome. These would have been the areas where possibly Christian slaves (*familia rustica*) could have lived in the country villas of their masters.

Therefore, we can see the possible areas within the city of Rome where the different Churches may have been located. It must be admitted much of this is conjecture except for the fact that there is ample historical evidence that a large Jewish presence existed in the Trastevere district of Rome, and, as Aquila and Priscilla were in Rome before the expulsion of Jews by Claudius in 44 A.D. (Acts 18:2), they, more than likely, had returned to their house in the area of Rome. Equally, there is ample evidence that Paul may have been imprisoned somewhere on the Palatine Hill. Also the areas of those Christians associated with the household of Aristobulus and of Narcissus, are likely to be somewhere in the vicinity of that hill. But the locations of those Churches probably meeting in an insulae could be anywhere in Rome. Those suggested locations are pure conjecture, however, it is an historical fact that the Subura was a poor neighborhood of Rome and was an area that had a Christian presence in the time of Justin, and the area that Nero burnt around the Coliseum most assuredly had a large Christian presence, enough to warrant Nero making them the scapegoats for his conflagration.

Therefore, each will have to weigh the evidence; but, as to the fact, that there was more than one Church in Rome is borne witness to by many other Christian commentators. I will include a few below to conclude this section in regard to the various Churches found in Rom. 16:1-15.

“Ver. 5a. The expression: *the church that is in their house*, may have three meanings. [1] Either it denotes the entire assembly of the servants and work-people residing and working with them; or [2] it applies to that *portion* of the church which had its usual place of meeting in their house; or finally, [3] the words apply to the whole church of the capital, which held its plenary meetings at their house... This last sense is incompatible with the preposition *κατά*, the

meaning of which is distributive, and supposes other places of worship (vv. 14 and 15). The first is improbable, for the term ἐκκλησία, *church*, would not suit a purely private gathering. The second is therefore the only possible one...⁹¹ The last words of both of the verses 14 and 15: *and the brethren who are with them*, prove that the persons just named are so, not simply as believers, but as directors of a whole assembly which is accustomed to meet around them. They lived, no doubt, in different quarters, and formed, besides the group which met in the house of Aquila's, **two distinct assemblies**."⁹²

—*Frédéric Louis Godet, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*

"*The church that is in their house*. The early Christians had, as a rule, no public place of assembly, but probably met in the houses of the more prominent brethren. In larger cities there seem to have been several such places of meeting; and one of these is here referred to...⁹³ *The brethren who are with them*. Comp. ver. 15. The two phrases may refer to household churches, or to associations of Christians for business purposes. The former seems more probable. **In that case five assemblies are indicated.**"⁹⁴

—*Philip Schaff, ed., The International Illustrated Commentary on the New Testament*

"The "brethren" in ver. 14, and the "saints" in ver. 15, saluted in connection with the groups of persons named, may possibly mean the congregations that assembled under the leadership, or perhaps at the houses, of those persons. If so, there would appear to have been **three congregations in Rome known of by St. Paul**; for see ver. 5, which, indeed, seems in itself to imply that the Church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila was not the only one."⁹⁵

—*H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, eds., The Pulpit Commentary, Romans*

"As to this celebrated family in general...in Rome, as well as at Corinth and Ephesus, it appears to have had in its dwelling the place of assembly (ἐκκλησία κατ' οἶκον), for a division of the city. A city of such extent as Rome must

⁹¹ Frédéric Louis Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Translated from the French, Vol. II* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1881) pg. 391

⁹² *Ibid.*, pg. 396

⁹³ Philip Schaff, ed., *The International Illustrated Commentary on the New Testament, vol. III* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1888) pg. 150

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 151

⁹⁵ H.D.M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary, Romans* (Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York) pg. 456

naturally have very early **had places of assembly in various parts of it...**⁹⁶ The expressions in vers. 14 and 15, οἱ ἀδελφοὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς are to be explained like ἡ ἐκκλησία κατ' οἶκον in ver. 5—the brethren attached to their community or circle, so that the persons named are to be regarded as the presbyters and deacons of this church.”⁹⁷

—*Hermann Olshausen, Biblical Commentary of the New Testament*

“**Verse 14:** Here we have five brethren greeted by name, and also the brethren who are with them: Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes Patrobas, Hermas. This is the second of the **three gatherings of saints in Rome** here mentioned. For we must remember that in the early days of the Church believers gathered in great simplicity, according to our Lord’s word: “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).”

Verse 15: Next comes another such assembly: all the saints that are with Philologus and Julia—precious couple!—and Nereus and his sister. It is a growing wonder that Paul in his multitude of burdens, his ‘care for all the churches,’ remembers, each and all, these beloved individuals!”⁹⁸

—*William R. Newell, Romans Verse-by-Verse*

“V. 5. καὶ τὴν ... ἐκκλησίαν (depends on ἀσπάσασθε, v. 3), and the church in their house: κατὰ w. the acc., extending through; frequent in Homer in this sense. The expression suggests that in **the great city of Rome there may have been several places—private houses—where the Christians were in the habit of meeting for worship**, and that **the house of Prisca and Aquila was one of those places...**⁹⁹ Vv. 14,15 Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren with them. This expression, and the one in v. 15, seems to **indicate a company or assembly (ἐκκλησία) of Christians** who were in the habit of gathering in some particular locality, perhaps what we might call an out-station. Cf. v. 5, note.”¹⁰⁰

—*James Robinson Boise, Notes, Critical and Explanatory of the Greek Text of Paul’s Epistles*

⁹⁶ Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary of the New Testament* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1849) pg. 426

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 427

⁹⁸ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-by-Verse* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1994) pg. 554

⁹⁹ James Robinson Boise, Nathan E. Wood, ed., *Notes, Critical and Explanatory of the Greek Text of Paul’s Epistles* (Silver, Burdett, and Company, New York, 1896) pg. 133-34

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 135-36

“*The church that is in their house* (τὴν κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν). The early Christians had no church buildings....The Roman Christians had probably several such homes where they would meet....¹⁰¹ 14. *The brethren that are with them* (τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀδελφούς). **Perhaps a little church in the house of some one.**...15 *All the saints that are with them* (τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς πάντας ἁγίους). **Possibly another church in the house.**”¹⁰²

— A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*

“Perhaps *Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, and Hermes* were active **in a house church**, like the one in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (16:3,5). *Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas* may have been **the nucleus of another house church.**”¹⁰³

— William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*

“The Christians in Rome appear at this time to have met as groups in house-churches or other local meeting-places. Some of the Jewish Christians may still have counted themselves as adherents of one or another of the Jewish synagogues...Paul sends greetings by name to twenty-six individuals **and five households or house-churches.**...¹⁰⁴ The impression given by these greetings is of a decentralized Christian community in Rome—indeed, the word ‘community’ may be more a spiritual interpretation than a practical fact. The various groups may have differed one from another in outlook, not to speak of differences in outlook within any one group. The Pauline understanding of the gospel was probably fostered especially in the house-church which enjoyed the hospitality of Priscilla and Aquila...but if Paul found the Roman Christians decentralized in organization, he did little to centralize them in this way; indeed, had he wished to do any such thing, his opportunities were limited. And half a century after his coming to Rome the evidence of Ignatius and Hermas is that the Roman church was still less centralized than many other churches were by that time: it was not yet organized under the administrative authority of a single bishop.”¹⁰⁵

— F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*

¹⁰¹ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. IV* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1931) pg. 428

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pg. 428

¹⁰³ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995) pg. 1741

¹⁰⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1984) pg. 385

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 388-89

House Churches in Colossae

We now turn to the next occurrence of a “Church according to a house” found in Philemon 1:1-2. Once again we see Paul addressing a Church according to someone’s house, in this case, the house of Philemon who lived in Colossae.

Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, ² And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: KJV

We do not know when Paul first met Philemon, but it may have been when Paul resided in Ephesus for three years. It says at that time that the gospel was heard throughout Asia.

Acts 19:10, 26 And this continued by the space of two years; **so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.** ²⁶ Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands. KJV

As Philemon was a wealthy man, owning slaves (one in particular being Onesimus whom Paul had led to the Lord, and was the occasion for his writing this epistle—Philemon 1:10-12) perhaps he was once in Ephesus on business. If so, perhaps he heard the gospel from Paul and believed. Upon returning to his home in Colossae, and being called by Paul a fellow labourer (Philm.1: 1), it seems Philemon worked in the gospel and soon had a Church meeting according to his house. Working with him were Apphia and Archippus (Philm.1: 2).

We do not know what other gathering there may have been in the city, but since Paul, again, uses the preposition *κατά* rather than using the preposition *ἐν* (in), there must have been another house Church somewhere in Colossae. Perhaps, that other Church was one started by Epaphras (who is also is described as a worker with Paul who labored, not only in Colossae, but also in Laodicea and Hierapolis).

Col. 1: 6-7 which are come to you, as *they are* in all the world, *and* are bearing fruit and growing, even as also among you, from the day ye heard *them* and knew indeed the grace of God, in truth: ⁶ which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as *it doth* in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth; even as ye learned from

Epaphras our beloved fellow-bondman, who is a faithful minister of Christ for you, (Darby)

Since Scripture says he was the one from whom they heard the gospel, it would only be natural that those first believers in Colossae would have met with Epaphras on that first Sunday of their new life, and as such would have constituted the first Church in Colossae.

But if that first Church was the only Church in Colossae, then it would only make sense that when Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians, he would have addressed them as “the Church of God, the one being in Colossae,” just as he addressed the Church in Corinth (I Cor. 1:1). But, since Paul did not address them in that way, but rather addressed them as simply as the “saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colossae” (similar to the way he addressed the saints in Rome) implies that there was more than one Church in the city. And since there was not one city-wide assembly, Paul could not address them as the Church of God existing in Colossae as he did in Corinth.

However, we should be careful not to exceed what is written, and since Scripture does not give us more information regarding the various meeting places in Colossae—except for the fact that because of the use of the distributive κατά, rather than the preposition ἐν, there must have been more than one Church in Colossae—we should leave it at that.

House Church and the Church of Laodicea

Our final example of a house Church is found in Col. 4:15-16 which speaks of a house Church and an existing city-wide Church.

Col. 4:15-16 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and **Nymphas and the church that is in his house.** ¹⁶Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the **church of the Laodiceans**, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. NKJV

This house Church met according to the house of Nymphas. Because of a variant in the pronoun of the verse some translations will have Nympha, a woman, rather than Nymphas, a man. If it is Nympha, then she would have opened up her house for the gathering of a Church much like Lydia did in Philippi. If it is Nymphas, then he opened up his house for a gathering of a Church much like Philemon did in Colossae. But in either case we see the distributive use of κατά again, implying that there were other Churches in Laodicea. What Churches, we do not know, but, unlike the case with the epistle to Colossae, we do find that Paul mentions the existence of a city-wide assembly in Col. 4:16.

With this being the case, we have to ask ourselves, “Why would Nymphas have a separate Church from the city-wide Church? A city-wide Church implies that all Christians in the city were meeting in one place, so why would a different house Church exist? There might be a few reasons, and we will consider them one by one. But before we can begin to understand the relationship between these two Churches, we must understand some background to the city of Laodicea and the future condition of the Church in Laodicea.

The city of Laodicea may have been the largest of the three cities existing in that area of the Lycus valley, those being Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul references these two other main cities in Col. 4:13.

Colossians 4:13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis. KJV

Colossae was about 11 miles from Laodicea, and Hierapolis was about 6 miles from Laodicea. Laodicea seems to be the largest of the three cities. The Biblical Cyclopedic tells us that “its three theatres, and the immense circus, which was capable of containing upwards of thirty thousand spectators, the spacious remains of which are yet to be seen, give proof

of the greatness of its ancient wealth and population.”¹⁰⁶ It also had a large Jewish population, as it was the primary city of its district. J. B. Lightfoot says,

“A Jewish settlement once established, the influx of their fellow-countrymen would be rapid and continuous. Accordingly under the Roman domination we find them gathered here in very large numbers. When Flaccus the propraetor of Asia (13.0. 62), who was afterwards accused of maladministration in his province and defended by Cicero, forbade the contributions of the Jews to the Temple worship and the consequent exportation of money to Palestine, he seized as contraband not less than twenty pounds weight in gold in the single district of which Laodicea was the capital'. Calculated at the rate of a half-shekel for each man, this sum represents a population of more than eleven thousand adult freemen': for women, children, and slaves were exempted.”¹⁰⁷

So we see that Laodicea was a large city for that time, and had a large Jewish population. Thus, there may have been more than one Jewish synagogue of long standing in Laodicea, much like we saw in Rome. This background is important to understand because it might help us understand this unique greeting at the end of Paul's epistle to the Colossians.

What makes this greeting puzzling is that Paul greets every Christian in Laodicea, but then immediately adds Nymphas and the Church according to his house. What? Are they not a part of the brethren who were already greeted? The problem is not that he greets an individual after having greeted the larger group; he did that in his greetings to those in Rome where he greeted one group as a whole and then greeted specific individuals within that group. So this was not unusual. The problem with the greeting is that he greets the entire group in Laodicea, but then adds another group, i.e. the Church according to the house of Nymphas. Why would he do that? Are they not a part of the entire group—i.e. all the brethren in Laodicea? It becomes nonsensical to greet all the brethren in Laodicea (which means “all” the brethren, which, obviously would include Nymphas and any Christians who are associated with him) and in the next breath add more brethren in Laodicea, for it makes it seem that they are not considered a part of all the brethren in Laodicea.

¹⁰⁶ W. Goodhugh, W.C. Taylor, eds., *The Bible cyclopædia: or, Illustrations of the Civil and Natural History of the Sacred Writings* (John W. Parker, London, 1843) pg. 742

¹⁰⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1892) pg. 20

For example, in Philippians 4:21 Paul ends his epistle to the Philippians with the greeting to “every saint in Christ Jesus.” It would be redundant and awkward if Paul ended his epistle to those Christians in Philippi with this greeting, “Greet every saint in Philippi, and Clement and the Church according to his house.” Would we not wonder, “Paul, what are you saying? Are you saying that Clement and those meeting in his house are not saints?”

In order to explain this seemingly, redundant greeting, some have postulated that Nymphas and the Church according to his house actually lived in Colossae and not in Laodicea. Therefore, Paul would be saying something like this in Col. 4:15-16, “Greet the brethren (in Laodicea), and greet Nymphas (in Colossae) and the Church according to his house. And when this letter is read among you (at Colossae), have it also read in the Church of the Laodiceans.” This view was apparently held by F. F. Bruce, although he does not elaborate upon it (and in other writings he seems to contradict it). Nevertheless, this is what he said in a footnote from his book, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*—

The Christian community **in Colossae** included smaller groups (“churches”) meeting in the houses of Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Philemon (Philemon 2).¹⁰⁸

This viewpoint as some merit for it solves the problem of redundancy in his greeting and/or the possibility that a house Church would exist side by side, not with another house Church, for that would have not been a problem, it being no different than what occurred in Rome and other cities—see Fig. 4. But the problem would be that it existed side by side with an existing city-wide Church, because, by definition, a city-wide Church should include every Christian in the city. This is all the more emphasized because the city-wide assembly is called the Church “of the Laodiceans” and not the Church “in Laodicea.” A “Church of the Laodiceans,” by definition, would have to include every Christian in the city, i.e. every Christian who is a Laodicean. Thus, if Nymphas lived in Laodicea he would have already been greeted when Paul greeted the brethren (Church of the Laodiceans) in Laodicea. Thus, it simply becomes redundant; so the viewpoint of F. F. Bruce makes sense. However, the only problem with this particular viewpoint is the structure of the greeting. Paul wrote: ἀπάσασθε (greet) τοὺς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ

¹⁰⁸ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1984) pg. 384

City	Ekklesia	Ekklesia	Ekklesia	Ekklesia	Ekklesia
Rome	House Church According to Aquila & Priscilla's house Rom. 16:5	House Church within household of Aristobulus Rom. 16:10	House Church within household of Narcissus Rom. 16:10	Possible apartment (<i>insula</i>) House Church Rom. 16:14	Possible apartment (<i>insula</i>) House Church Rom. 16:15
Ephesus	House Church according to Aquila & Priscilla's house I Cor. 16:19	Church meeting in the School of Tyrannus Acts 19:9			
Colossae	House Church according to Philemon house Phm. 1:2	House Church according to Nymphas' house—possibly in Colossae Col. 4:15			
Laodicea	Church of the Laodiceans (city-wide Church) Col. 4:16	House Church according to Nymphas' house—possibly in Laodicea Col. 4:15			
Other Ekklesia in a House or Insulae mentioned in Scripture					
Corinth	Titius Justus Acts 18:7 At the time of Paul's first missionary visit				
Corinth	Gaius Rom. 16:23 At the time of the writing of Romans				
Troas	Insula—third story Acts. 20:6-9				

Fig. 4 Ekklesia and House Churches

ἀδελφούς, καὶ Νυμφᾶν, καὶ τὴν κατ' οἶκον αὐτοῦ ἐκκλησίαν (Greet the brethren in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the Church according to his house). If Nymphas lived in Colossae, and not Laodicea, then it seems Paul would have repeated the verb ἀπάσαθε (greet) again right before Nymphas without an intervening conjunction, which, of course, connects it with the first greeting. Then it might seem more probable that

Nymphas could have lived in Colossae. But the fact that Paul did not write it in this way seems to indicate that he still had Laodicea in his mind when he wrote the second half of the verse.

In other words, if Paul wanted to make a distinction between those in Laodicea and those in Colossae, i.e. Nymphas and the Church according to his house, he would have made the second half a complete greeting in and of itself; nor would he have used the conjunction καὶ (and). It would have then read this way in English— “Greet the brethren in Laodicea— Greet Nymphas and the Church according to his house, etc.” This then would have been similar to his style found in his greetings in his epistle to the Romans. Every time he greeted a new grouping of saints he always began it with an additional verb—ἀσπάσασθε (greet) without an intervening conjunction.

For example, in Rom. 16:10 he began the greeting of a new group as follows, “ἀσπάσασθε (greet) the household of Aristobulus,” then, since the next group in verse 11 was not a part of the same group of verse 10, he left off the conjunction καὶ (and) and began all over with the a new verb—“ἀσπάσασθε (greet) the household of Narcissus.” He also followed the same pattern in verses 14 and 15 with the other groups.

This seems to be the problem with the viewpoint of F. F. Bruce. By not including an additional verb of greeting before Nymphas’ name, he seems to be connecting Nymphas and the house Church with the Laodiceans, not with those in Colossae. Nevertheless, in spite of the awkwardness of the Greek syntax, one cannot say that this viewpoint is completely without merit, for word order is more flexible in Greek and as such it still could be possible.

A second possibility is that the house Church according to Nymphas’ house was located just outside the city of Laodicea in an area near the city but not considered technically a part of the city (*polis*) of Laodicea. Of course, any reader of the epistle today would not know this, but, as those three cities in the Lycus valley were in close contact with each other, it would be perfectly natural that the readers or hearers of Paul’s epistle back then would have known this fact. One Christian commentator who thought this was possible was Matthew Poole. He made the following comment regarding this verse.

“Having saluted the Colossians, in the name of others, circumcised, and uncircumcised, he desires them in his own Name to salute the Christians in the

Church at Laodicea. And some pious Man called Nymphas, **probably living either in the country near the city of Laodicea**; or some eminent Christian of chief note in the city.”¹⁰⁹

This surrounding area in Greek cities, just outside the walls was called the *chora*. In most cases, it was considered a part of the *polis*, but, depending, on the exact location outside the city it may have been considered an area not technically eligible for participation in the city *ekkllesia* (i.e. the secular Greek *ekkllesia*). If this was the case, then perhaps, Paul, using the same distinction (considering the location of Nymphas’ house to be just outside the technical jurisdiction of the *polis* of Laodicea) also considered this gathering of Christians to be distinct from the Church of the Laodiceans, as they were not technically citizens of Laodicea, and so could not be considered to be in the Church (*ekkllesia*) “**of the Laodiceans.**” In this case, the Church according to Nymphas’ house would have been a “village” or “country” Church that was distinct from the city-wide Church of Laodicea.

Perhaps, Nymphas was wealthy (much like Philemon in Colossae) living in a villa just outside the city in the country. Perhaps, he had many slaves and/or freedman under his roof who were all Christians and so the Holy Spirit, in his love and grace, may have led them to gather together in the name of Christ every Lord’s day in his own house as it would be too impractical for an entire household to travel every Lord’s day into the city. And so, since it was still in the *chora* of Laodicea, it was still associated with the city in Paul’s greeting, but because it was outside the city proper, they met as a house Church in Nymphas’ house. This seems, perhaps, to be the simplest explanation of them all.

A third possibility is that there were a number of house Churches in Laodicea and one city-wide assembly. In this scenario, because Paul knows that Laodicea has a number of assemblies throughout the city he uses the preposition *κατά* when greeting the one assembly or house Church that he knows personally, i.e. those meeting in Nymphas’ house, thereby inferring the presence of other house Churches in the city. So far so good, this explains the greeting of the one house Church and the use of the preposition *κατά*; but why would there be a city-wide assembly in

¹⁰⁹ Matthew Poole, *Annotations Upon the Holy Bible. Wherein the Sacred Text is Inserted, and Various Readings Annex'd, Together with the Parallel Scriptures, Vol. II* (Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, et al., London, 1700) comment on Col. 4:15

addition to these house Churches? This brings us back to our original dilemma. To answer this question we must turn to the book of Acts.

We have already mentioned the distributive use of κατά in relationship to various house Churches. The book of Acts uses the same preposition in this sense. For example, consider the following uses.

Acts 2:46 Καθ' ἡμέραν τε προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλῶντές τε κατ' οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας,

Acts 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord **in the temple**, and breaking bread **from house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. KJV

Acts 5:42 Πᾶσάν τε ἡμέραν, ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ κατ' οἶκον, οὐκ ἐπαύοντο διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι Ἰησοῦν τὸν χριστόν.

Acts 5:42 And daily **in the temple**, and **in every house**, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. KJV

Acts 8:1 Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against **the church in Jerusalem**, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. NASB

Acts 8:3 Σαῦλος δὲ ἐλυμαίνετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους εἰσπορευόμενος, σύρων τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας παρεδίδου εἰς φυλακὴν.

Acts 8:3 But Saul ravaged **the assembly**, entering **into the houses** one after another, and dragging off both men and women delivered them up to prison. Darby

What we see in these verses is that even though every Christian in Jerusalem would gather together in one place in the city, i.e. the Temple, yet they still broke bread κατ' οἶκον “according to each house.” We also see in these verses that all those believers in Jerusalem were designated as the one city-wide Church, yet in the last verse above we see that the Church was identified with the phrase κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους “according to the houses.” If we put all this together we see that the one Church or city-wide Church that met daily in the temple, also met according to various homes scattered throughout the city. Perhaps, what we have here in Jerusalem is an example where many house Churches would meet by themselves to celebrate the Lord’s Table, but then which would also

gather together as a city-wide assembly in the Temple for instruction. It never says they broke bread in the Temple, but it does say they gathered together for teaching in the Temple. (Indeed, I do not even know if they could have broken bread together in the Temple, as there were thousands upon thousands of believers in the city!—Acts 21:20.)

Therefore, returning to Laodicea, with this in mind, perhaps, there were a number of house Churches in the city (explaining Paul's use of *κατ' οἴκον*) but Paul only greets the one he knows personally. And then, maybe, like the Church in Jerusalem, Paul also knows that all the house Churches would gather together, from time to time, as a city-wide assembly for teaching (explaining Paul's use of "the Church of the Laodiceans) and so Paul requests that at this city-wide assembly his epistle be read, since, at that "Church," he knew every house Church would be present for teaching and ministry. This might explain Paul's sentence structure in this epistle and why he could mention one city-wide Church and yet also a house Church. Sometimes, today, our Bible Conferences might give expression to this possible viewpoint where many Churches or assemblies in a city gather together for teaching in one specific place from time to time.

However, if this viewpoint is rejected, as well as the other viewpoints, it leaves us with one other possible viewpoint, a fourth possibility, which is a slight variation of the third. This fourth viewpoint takes the greeting as it stands, with all its apparent awkwardness and redundancy, realizing that Paul wrote it that way on purpose to emphasize a specific point.

If we take it as it stands, then it seems the only reason why this greeting would appear awkward is because we presuppose (because of our view of Christian unity) that if a city-wide Church exists, where all Christians in a particular area are encouraged to come together for teaching, then for anyone else to not attend, in that same area, would destroy the unity of the Spirit and cause a division in the Body of Christ. And so, because of that presupposition, it seems that if the city-wide Church existed in Laodicea then Paul would never condone another assembly in that city, by giving it his personal greeting, i.e. if the city-wide assembly was still meeting in one place. Because of this, we see awkwardness in this greeting and attempt to postulate different solutions. But what if our presuppositions are wrong? We might be missing an important spiritual principle the Lord might be trying to teach us in the particular portion of Scripture.

We will delve into this issue in a deeper way when we address the issue of unity in volume two, but suffice it for now to simply say that sometimes, I am afraid, we confuse outward conformity as the unity of the Spirit. Outward conformity is not the basis for our unity—love and respect by the blood of Christ is the basis of our unity. The Faith, those essential doctrines of salvation, is the basis of our unity, not outward conformity to non-essential doctrines.

Conformity is good if we are talking about being conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). Conformity is good if we are talking about being conformed to our Lord's death (Phil. 3:10), but conformity is bad if we are talking about being conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2), or being conformed to traditions of men (Col. 2:8). We are told to be lights to the world, bearing witness to the truth. As such, we must realize that **outward conformity for the sake of outward unity is not true unity of the Spirit at all**. The unity of the Spirit will always arise from the Word of God and the life and love of God within our heart. The Pharisees of our Lord's day, with their man-made traditions, attempted to enforce conformity upon our Lord from without, not granting that He might be led by the Spirit and the Word in opposition to their man-made traditions (Mk. 7:1-13; 11:27-28).

And, this outward conformity, enforced upon others, did not stop after our Lord's death, burial and resurrection. Certain Christians in the early Church (Acts 15:5) who were maintaining a Pharisaical mindset were always attempting to enforce outward conformity upon other Christians (Acts. 15:1-2; Gal. 2: 11-13), never believing that none but themselves were truly being led by the Spirit. The Lord always opposed such mindsets; the apostles Paul and Barnabas, as well as Peter, James and John opposed such mindsets, and so should the Christian ever oppose such mindsets. Succumbing to the outward conformity of a vocal few never leads to the unity of the Spirit; it simply leads to the unity of religious men controlled by their man-made traditions.

However, even though this mindset in Laodicea may have retained certain aspects of such a Pharisaical mindset, we should note they clearly went beyond such a mindset by their inclusion of Gnostic synergism.

So, despite the seeming redundancy, Paul may have purposely intended to greet the brethren (city-wide Church of the Laodiceans) without using the word *ekklesia* (in vs. 15a) and rather use it in his greeting to Nymphas and the Church according to his house. It is not that Paul is

trying to say he does not recognize the city-wide Church as a legitimate *ekklesia*, for he so addresses them in the next verse (vs. 16), but it is because he is trying to show legitimacy to the Church according to Nymphas' house, which, perhaps, some in the Church in Laodicea were questioning, questioning, perhaps because the Church according to Nymphas' house would not conform to their teachings or to their mindsets being expressed in the city-wide assembly.

It must be remembered that leading up to this time, many Christians, influenced by Pharisaical mindsets, were always opposing Paul. They would enter Churches begun by him and turn the saints away from him and away from his teaching, and instead they substituted their own viewpoint of the truth (Gal. 4:9-19). They were still Christians, but they were Pharisaical Christians, pretending to be spiritual, but in reality, were nothing but carnal. They rejected Paul and rejected Paul's teaching, leading many people away from him.

Galatians 4:9-19 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. ¹² I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong; ¹³ but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus *Himself*. ¹⁵ Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶ Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷ They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them. ¹⁸ But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. ¹⁹ My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you-- NASB

So, maybe the same type of thing was happening in Laodicea, albeit in a different form, since Gnosticism was involved, and Nymphas, who like Philemon was a co-worker of Paul, would not succumb to this heresy and to those rejecting Paul's teaching. Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they continued to meet in his own house, doing so as to not cause disturbance with the existing city-wide assembly, as they too were still Christians. And Paul, knowing this, recognizes the ones meeting in Nymphas' house as a legitimate "Church." Yet, at the same time Paul also recognizes that the other believers in Laodicea were also an *ekklesia*, and so he uses the word *ekklesia* for them in the next verse, verse 16.

Col. 4:16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter *that is coming* from Laodicea. NASB

It must be remembered that even though these Churches in the Lycus valley were having great problems, and even though heresies were arising in their midst that could even threaten their status as a true Church, they still were faithful to the Faith, although their practice of that Faith was beginning to change. Paul would always extend in love the benefit of the doubt to other believers. He would always be longsuffering in his desire to bring every saint unto full maturity—as he did with those Christians who opposed him in the province of Galatia, and with those who opposed him in Corinth, and here, with those who were beginning to oppose him in Colossae and Laodicea. We commonly think of John as the apostle of love, but Paul, too, was an apostle of great love. And so, even though, the brethren in Laodicea, meeting together in a city-wide assembly, may have begun to turn away from Paul and his teaching, Paul gently admonished them by first referring to them simply as brethren, and Nymphas and those with him as an “ekklesia,” but then also affirmed their standing as an “ekklesia” by also addressing them as such in the very next sentence.

This does not mean that Paul lightly treated the false doctrines being taught in these Churches. He did not, as we can see by his epistle to the Colossians, and by his desire to have that epistle read in the city-wide assembly of the Laodiceans. If Laodicea was in danger of adopting the heresies referred to by him in his epistle to the Colossians, they were in danger of being drawn away from the Faith unto a rejection of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and an adoption of a syncretic doctrine of Gnosticism mixed with Judaism. But these heresies do not seem to have taken hold yet because Paul still addressed them as a Church. Paul would not address them as a Church if they had already rejected the Deity of Christ.

But, perhaps, the Church in Laodicea was in greater danger than even the Church in Colossae of succumbing to this heresy, which prompted Paul sending to Laodicea their own epistle which is no longer extant (see Col. 4:16). In fact, the danger of this heresy may have been the reason why Epaphras decided he must undertake a long journey to find Paul and seek his help, asking him to write an authoritative epistle to all the Churches where Epaphras was ministering as a co-worker of Paul.

Col. 4:12-13 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. NASB

Now we know that Epaphras was faithful to the doctrine taught by Paul, rejecting the heresies threatening the Churches (cf. II Tim. 2:2). But, since Paul desired his epistle to the Colossians be read to the Church of the Laodiceans, indicates, in all likelihood, there were some in Laodicea who were more open to these false doctrines. These false doctrines may have been a variation or mixture of the same heresy that was being proclaimed in Corinth by men who Paul labels “false apostles” and “ministers of Satan” (II Cor. 11: 4, 13-15).

II Cor. 11:4, 13-15 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. NASB

Thus, Paul was laboring earnestly with his pen and his prayers for the steadfastness and well-being of the Church of the Laodiceans, as was Epaphras and, apparently Nymphas. I am sure the burden of Paul revealed to us in his second epistle to the Corinthians was the same burden he would have had for those in Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colossae.

II Cor. 11:2-3 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. ³ But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. NASB

The false teachers in the Lycus valley were denigrating the person of Christ, denying his divinity. They were even going beyond those Pharisaical brethren that plagued Paul early on in the Churches of Galatia, for these false teachers, unlike those that plagued Paul in Galatia, were not just preaching another gospel, they were preaching another Jesus, introducing their own panoply of gnostic emanations and hegemony of angelic beings, all with a form of asceticism that embraced the Jewish holidays and Sabbaths.

Conybere and Howson present a good description of these heresies and the ultimate form they took. It is somewhat lengthy but well worth the read.

“Hitherto we have spoken of those divisions and heresies which appear to have sprung up in the several Churches founded by St. Paul at the earliest period of their history, almost immediately after their conversion. Beyond this period we are not yet arrived in St. Paul’s life; and from his conversion even to the time of his imprisonment, his conflict was mainly with the Jews or Judaizers. But there were other forms of error which harassed his declining years; and these we will now endeavour ... to describe.”

“We have seen that, in the earliest epoch of the Church, there were two elements of error which had already shown themselves; namely, the bigoted, exclusive, and superstitious tendency, which was of Jewish origin; and the pseudo-philosophic, or rationalising tendency, which was of Grecian birth. In the early period of which we have hitherto spoken, and onwards till the time of St. Paul’s imprisonment at Rome, the first of these tendencies was the principal source of danger; but after this, as the Church enlarged itself, and the number of Gentile converts more and more exceeded that of the Jewish Christians, the case was altered....”

“It is a disputed point at what time this heresy made its first appearance in the Church; **some think that it had already commenced in the Church of Corinth when St. Paul warned them to beware of the knowledge (*Gnosis*) which puffeth up**; others maintain that it did not originate till the time of Basilides, long after the last Apostle had fallen asleep in Jesus. Perhaps, however, we may consider this as a difference rather about the definition of a term than the history of a sect. If we define Gnosticism to be that combination of Orientalism and Platonism held by the followers of Basilides or Valentinus, and refuse the title of Gnostic to any but those who adopted their system in its full-grown absurdity, no doubt we must not place the Gnostics among the heretics of the Apostolic age. But if, on the other hand (as seems most natural), we define a Gnostic to be one who claims the possession of a peculiar ‘Gnosis’ (i. e. a deep and philosophic insight into the mysteries of theology, unattainable by the vulgar), then it is indisputable that Gnosticism had begun when St. Paul warned Timothy against those who laid claim to a ‘knowledge falsely so called’ (*ψευδῶνύμος γνῶσις*)/ And, moreover, we find that, even in the Apostolic age, these arrogant speculators had begun to blend with their Hellenic philosophy certain fragments of Jewish superstition, which afterwards were incorporated into the Cabbala. In spite, however, of the occurrence of such Jewish elements, those heresies which troubled the later years of St. Paul, and afterwards of St. John, were essentially rather of Gentile than of Jewish origin... Moreover, those who laid claims to ‘Gnosis’ at Corinth (as we have seen) were a Gentile party, who professed to adopt St. Paul’s doctrine of the abolition of the law, and perverted it into Antinomianism: in short, they were the opposite extreme to the

Judaizing party... It is not necessary, however, that we should enter into any discussion of the subsequent development of these errors; our subject only requires that we give an outline of the forms which they assumed during the lifetime of St. Paul; and this we can only do very imperfectly, because the allusions in St. Paul's writings are so few and so brief, that they give us but little information..."

"We may consider these heresies, first, in their doctrinal, and, secondly, in their practical, aspect. With regard to the former, we find that their general characteristic was the claim to a deep philosophical insight into the mysteries of religion. **Thus the Colossians are warned against the false teachers who would deceive them by a vain affectation of 'Philosophy,' and who were 'puffed up by a fleshly mind.'** (Col. ii. 8, 18) So, in the Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul speaks of these heretics as falsely claiming "knowledge" (gnosis)... Again, we find the Colossian heretics introducing a worship of angels, 'intruding into those things which they have not seen;' and so, in the Pastoral Epistles, the 'self-styled Gnostics' (ψευδῶν. γνῶσ.) are occupied with 'endless genealogies,' which were probably fanciful myths, concerning the origin and emanation of spiritual beings... The Gnostics of the second century adopted and systematised this theory of emanations, and it became one of the most peculiar and distinctive features of their heresy. **But this was not the only Jewish element in the teaching of these Colossian heretics; we find also that they made a point of conscience of observing the Jewish Sabbaths and festivals and they are charged with clinging to outward rites (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου), and making distinctions between the lawfulness of different kinds of food...."**

"In their practical results, these heresies which we are considering had a twofold direction. On one side was an ascetic tendency, such as we find at Colossae, showing itself by an arbitrarily invented worship of God, an affectation of self-humiliation and mortification of the flesh. So, in the Pastoral Epistles, we find the prohibition of marriage, the enforced abstinence from food, and other bodily mortifications, mentioned as characteristics of heresy. If this asceticism originated from the Jewish element which has been mentioned above, it may be compared with the practice of the Essenes, whose existence shows that such asceticism was not inconsistent with Judaism, although it was contrary to the views of the Judaizing party properly so called... But this asceticism was a weak and comparatively innocent form, in which the practical results of this incipient Gnosticism exhibited themselves. Its really dangerous manifestation was derived, not from its Jewish, but from its Heathen element. We have seen how this showed itself from the first at Corinth; how men sheltered their immoralities under the name of Christianity, and even justified them by a perversion of its doctrines. Such teaching could not fail to find a ready audience wherever there were found vicious lives and hardened consciences. **Accordingly, it was in the luxurious and corrupt population of Asia Minor, that this early Gnosticism assumed its worst form of immoral practice defended by Antinomian doctrine.** ... St. Paul intimates that their principles

were not yet fully developed; he warns Timothy that an outburst of immorality and lawlessness must be shortly expected within the Church beyond anything which had yet been experienced. The same anticipation appears in his farewell address to the Ephesian presbyters, and even at the early period of his Epistles to the Thessalonians; and we see from the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude, **and from the Apocalypse of St. John, all addressed (it should be remembered) to the Churches of Asia Minor, that this prophetic warning was soon fulfilled.** We find that many Christians used their liberty as a cloak of maliciousness; “promising their hearers liberty, yet themselves the slaves of corruption;” “turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.”¹¹⁰

Consequently, even though this heresy had not yet taken root within Churches of Laodicea or Colossae (indeed, it seems Paul was successful and the heretical aspects never did, as there is no mention of it in the letter written to Church in Laodicea by the apostle John in the Book of Revelation many years later) perhaps it was threatening the stability of the Church in Laodicea. If so, maybe these believers, being influenced by this Jewish form of Gnostic synergism, were beginning to pull away the Church from those believers who remained faithful to Paul’s teachings. If so, then, perhaps Nympha and those with him decided to forego meeting with the other house churches in the city-wide Church for teaching in order to maintain the liberty of the Gospel as taught by Paul.

This may be why we have such an unusual sentence structure in Col. 4:15 (not unusual syntactically, but unusual in its way of address as compared with Paul’s other greetings). The “brethren” in the first part of that verse could have primarily been those Christian brethren who were in danger of succumbing to, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men ... matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:21-23). Perhaps they were Jewish and Gentile Christians who were in danger of accepting this form of Jewish/Christian Gnostic synergism. Therefore, maybe Nymphas and those with him—who adhered to Paul’s teaching, following his ways in Christ Jesus, who had no desire to disturb the existing Church of the Laodiceans, because they still considered them fellow believers in Christ—perhaps they simply left off meeting with them in their city-wide assembly that met from time to time for teaching and simply continued

¹¹⁰ W. J. Conybeare, J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Volume 1* (Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, London, 1852) pp. 480-486

on with their existing house Church as it had been, awaiting until the false doctrine could be corrected by Paul himself. (Perhaps Nymphas knew that Epaphras left, looking for Paul, for this very reason.)

If this last viewpoint is accurate, it shows us that sometimes the Holy Spirit draws many Churches in one city to gather together for teaching. But, it also shows us that if a house Church does not agree with the teaching that is occurring, they have perfect the liberty to forego such a city-wide assembly as they are a Church in their own right. And it shows Paul condones such decisions since he recognizes them as an autonomous house Church by giving them his personal greeting. And, at the same time, it also shows that those other house Churches in the city-wide assembly are called to respect another house Church's decision. And, finally, it shows that outward conformity is not an indication of the unity of the Spirit, but rather love and respect for each other is an indication of the unity of the Spirit.

Regarding this principle of liberty and respect between house Churches, and/or Christians, Anthony Norris Groves once said this—

“In Theory nothing can be more simple and apparently true, than, that if you are all 'baptized into one body,' by one Spirit, you ought to speak the same thing, and be of the same judgment; but in fact, nothing is more certain than that, notwithstanding the unity of the body and the unity of the baptism, this is not, and never has been the case: we must therefore, in a multitude of cases, leave every man to be 'fully persuaded in his own mind.' **In smaller matters, this will be easy; in graver, it will be better to form small separate households of faith in love, each preserving their conscience inviolate, than that either party should coerce others into their views and opinions. Uprightness of conscience is essential to all spiritual prosperity, but coercion into some judgment is not. Infinitely better is it for each household of faith to seek to walk in all things well-pleasing to the Lord, than to undertake the management and direction of other households.** The unity of the national family is not destroyed by each household acting for itself, as long as all act for the welfare of the nation, and within its appointed laws; and even if these are transgressed, every individual cannot take the place of judge, but those to whom it is appointed by the king. If those who judge can show the king's commission for pronouncing sentence upon another man's servant, and calling him to the bar, well; they all have the right of passive judgment, namely, by withdrawing from him, or from any household of faith, if they think he or it is walking against the will of their Lord, but here I consider their authority ends; and certainly, for myself, I could not exercise more; nor should I feel called upon to submit to more, except from the household of faith to which I more immediately belonged; to them I would concede much, and from them be subject to much

more. "What I mean is this, if all the households of faith in England were to unite in bidding me cease teaching, I should consider their authority nothing, if my conscience stood clear in the matter; but if the household to which I felt myself called to minister were to desire me to cease, I should at once feel it right to do so, notwithstanding any clearness in my own conscience as to their being in error in their judgment. **I think the mode of pressing unity adopted by some, is most absurd.**"¹¹¹

Therefore, to recap the various viewpoints as to how a house Church could exist with a city-wide Church that supposedly already included every believer in Laodicea, they are—1) Perhaps, as suggested by F. F. Bruce, the house Church according to Nymphas' house was actually located in Colossae. In this case, there were at least two house Churches in Colossae, the one according to Nymphas' house, and the one according to Philemon's house. 2) The house Church according to Nymphas' house was located just outside the city of Laodicea in an area (*chora*) near the city, but not considered technically a part of the city (*polis*) of Laodicea. In this case, it was more of a countryside Church, or what we might consider today as a Church in the suburbs. This was, perhaps, the simplest explanation if all and would explain how Paul could greet all the saints in Laodicea and then greet another group which one would think was a part of the first group. 3) The house Church according to Nymphas' house was, indeed, located within the city proper along with other house Churches. As such, from time to time all the house Churches would gather together for a city-wide assembly in the city, much like occurred in Jerusalem. And since Nymphas was the only house Church, with which Paul was acquainted, he gave it his personal greetings. And, finally, 4) there were many houses Churches in Laodicea who would gather in a city-wide assembly from time to time, as mentioned in point three. But the reason why Paul singles out the house Church according to Nymphas' house was because, after certain Christians in Laodicea began abandoning the teachings of Paul, following instead the false teachings of a Jewish/Christian form of Gnosticism, and then after they began to teach such doctrines in the city-wide assembly, those meeting in Nymphas' house were the only house Church that decided, in line with their liberty and autonomy in Christ Jesus, to forego their attendance in such city-wide assemblies.

¹¹¹ Anthony Norris Groves, Harriet Baynes Groves, ed., *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves: compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc* (James Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 441-42

Everyone will have to decide for themselves which viewpoint one prefers, but we can all learn something no matter which viewpoint is adopted regarding the structure of Col. 4:15. And that is this; regardless of which viewpoint is correct, there still are two underlining facts that are true with all four viewpoints. First—by use of the prepositional phrase κατ' οἶκον, Paul is indicating the existence of more than one assembly in a city. This teaches us that Scripture never requires a city to have only one Church per city. Second—a Church is never controlled by other Churches. This teaches us that every Church should be autonomous, as we will see in the next chapter. These are two facts that are true regardless of which viewpoint is adopted, and can teach us certain principles in regard to Paul's understanding of the Church.

So, in concluding this section on locality, we can see that the Church was simply identified by where it met. In all cases it was simply known as “the Church,” for that was the common appellation adopted by the Holy Spirit. If the city was small enough and they all met together, it would be known as the Church “in that city,” or the Church of the name given to those who lived in that city, e.g. Church of the Thessalonians. If the city was too big, and not all the Christians could meet together, it was identified by the place where they met, e.g. the Church according to Aquila and Priscilla's house, or, the Church according to Philemon's house. They did not create new names to identify themselves, even if for some reason there were many Churches in one city existing together. They retained in simplicity the name God had given to them – the Church, i.e. the Assembly, identified by where they met, or the one to whom it belonged.

May we do the same today and not create artificial names to identify ourselves in contradiction to the name God has given us. If there are many meeting places in our city, then we can only be the “Church” according to where we meet, whether it is the name of the street, or the name of someone's house, or the name of a building, like a school, a chapel or a hall. We can say were the Assembly or Church that meets at so and so “Chapel” or that meets at so and so “Hall.” In that way all God's people, whether known as brethren, saints, Christians, disciples or any other nomenclature given to us in God's Word, will be known as the “Church” and that in itself will be a testimony to unity of the Spirit.

Autonomy of the Churches

We concluded the last chapter with the truth that a city-wide assembly belongs to those in whose city it exists. This is an important principle to understand, for it will help us understand not only the locality of each Church, but also the autonomy of each Church in the New Testament.

As we mentioned before, Paul says the following in I Corinthians 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 the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.” NASB

If you translated this verse literally, it would be:

“To the Church of God, the one existing (or being) in Corinth...”

This shows the believer that the locality of the invisible Church (Jewish usage) was based upon an actual local and physical assembly in Corinth (Hellenistic usage), being constituted by all Christians in the city. However, when we came to Col. 4:16 we saw it stated a little different. Paul did not tell those in Colossae to have the epistle read in the Church of God, the one existing “in Laodicea;” he said have the epistle read in the Church “of the Laodiceans.” This change shows us the autonomy of every local Church.

Another place in Scripture where Paul uses this same structure in found his epistles to the Thessalonians—

I Thess. 1:1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

Paul does not say the “Church in Thessalonica,” or as with Corinth, “the Church existing (or being) in Thessalonica.” It says the “Church of the Thessalonians,” i.e. a public assembly of all those Christians belonging to that city. And that designation, coupled together with the other designations we saw above about the locality of the Church, teaches us that a Church is bounded by the boundary of their locality. The Church in Thessalonica was the gathering of those Christians living in Thessalonica (i.e. Thessalonians) gathering together in their public assembly. In other words, the Holy Spirit is saying the local Church in Thessalonica did not

belong to any other Christians, but only to those Thessalonians Christians.

So what the epistle to the Thessalonians tells us is, if you were a Christian living in Thessalonica, you were automatically recognised as a member of that city-wide Church that publically met in Thessalonica. It was the Church of the “Thessalonians;” it was their Church. It did not belong to the Philippians or to the Ephesians. In other words, an Ephesian Christian was not a part of that local Church, that person belonged to the Church of the Ephesians, that is, assuming they also had a city-wide public assembly. (If they did not have a city-wide assembly, but had multiple house Churches, like that which occurred in Rome, then they would belong to a particular house Church.). However, if that same Ephesian Christian moved to Thessalonica, then, of course, he would automatically be a member of the Church of the Thessalonians.

Thus, by this usage we see that the jurisdiction of one Church could not encompass another Church. The Church in Ephesus could not dictate anything to the Church in Thessalonica, for that Church only belonged to those Thessalonians in Christ. It did not belong to any other Church, not to the Ephesians, not to the Antiochians, not to the Romans, not even to those Christians in Jerusalem.

Conversely, Christians in Thessalonica could not tell Christians in any of those other cities what to do, nor could Christians in any of those other cities tell the Thessalonians what to do, for the Churches were locally governed by the boundary of their physical assembly or gathering. There was no hierarchy of Churches in the days of the early Church. Each Church was autonomous and independent. If all the Christians in a city or area met together in one place, that assembly or Church belonged to them, not to Christians in other localities.

This different usage of the Greek word *ekklesia* in the epistle to the Thessalonians (as well as in Col. 4:16) is very important for it shows another nuance of the word adopted by the Holy Spirit. Hitherto we have focused upon the actual physical gathering indicated by the word, but with this usage we see that Paul is emphasizing not the actual gathering, but the ones who made up those gatherings. In doing this, he is emphasizing an important point readily understood by anyone living in a Greek city of that day, for Paul was using the Greek word as any secular Greek citizen would understand it. In Greek culture, every *ekklesia* was *autonomous*, simply because every city-state was *autonomous*, belonging

only to the citizens of that city. Paul was emphasizing this autonomous aspect of the word by using the phrase “Church of the Thessalonians,” and/or the “Church of the Laodiceans.”

We could stop here and end the chapter, for the phraseology chosen by the Holy Spirit reveals the principle that each assembly is autonomous. If Rome had remembered this, they would not have dictated things to other Churches. If Metropolitan Sees had remembered this, they would not have dictated or controlled certain things within other Churches. And if brother Darby had remembered this, he would not have dictated things to other assemblies, either directly or indirectly. This would have saved many in the assemblies from experiencing all the heartache of division. But, let’s not stop here. Let’s look further into this principle. Let’s first examine this sense of autonomy found in the word *ekklesia* itself.

Henry Roshier James speaks to this autonomous aspect in his book *Our Hellenic Heritage*.

The Greeks were never in the days of their political independence a people united under one government. They were not really unified politically till they came under foreign dominion. This inability to form one united people was the weakness of the Greeks. But this weakness was the other side of qualities which made the strength of Greece, the extraordinary vitality and diversity of a number of small independent states, the names of many of which are familiar as household words. **What these Greek communities prized more than anything else on earth was their 'autonomy,' the sovereign independence of their 'polis,' or city-state,** with its customs, institutions and traditions, peculiar and individual for each.¹¹²

As such, each *ekklesia* could be identified by the citizens of each particular city-state. The *ekklesia* of Athens, for example, would also be known as the *ekklesia* of the Athenians. (A city-state constituted the city proper with its suburbs. In some cases, as with Athens, this constituted a large area, encompassing many small villages surrounding the city, but in most cases, the city-state—*polis*, was a small city with its immediate surrounding farmland called the *chora*).

Westel Woodbury Willoughby speaks to this issue.

“The Greek's conception of the state as an entity of which he was an integral

¹¹² Henry Roshier James, *Our Hellenic Heritage, Vol. 1* (Macmillan and Company, Limited, London 1921) pg. 19

part, and as a being in whose will he saw voiced his own will, enlightened and purged of selfish particularity, was one not so difficult for the Hellenes to realise as it would be to a modern. Because of the smallness of the ordinary Greek polis every citizen could, and in the latter democratic period did, take personally an active part in the administration of public affairs. That he was thus a part of the state, and that its life was a part of his life, was thus an obvious reality to him. Every Athenian citizen could sit in the ecclesia, and every one over thirty years of age in the law courts. In order that this right should be one that every one, poor and rich alike, might equally enjoy, a small payment for attendance at the meetings of the ecclesia as well as of the law courts was provided in the time of Pericles. In the ecclesia the citizen body heard debated, and by their votes decided, every question of public importance. In the courts they gave final judgment upon every question referred to them...”

“Thus, as is well known, the state is always pictured as a polis or city, in which the number of citizens is not so great but that they may all assemble in one place, and be personally acquainted with one another. It is true that the Athenian state comprised not only the people actually resident in the city, but all those living in Attic territory. But these latter were conceived of as having a political existence not as inhabitants of Attica, but as citizens of the polis Athens...”

“This “small-state” idea the Greeks never abandoned. **The city as a political body sufficient in itself, and absolutely independent of control from outside power,** ever remained to them the type of a true civic whole. When in later times the federal idea was forced upon them, it was viewed, as indeed it was, as politically a downward step.”¹¹³

This autonomy and independence was a common aspect in Greek culture.

A polis (plural: poleis) was the typical structure of a community in the ancient Greek world. A polis consisted of an urban centre, often fortified and with a sacred centre built on a natural acropolis or harbour, which controlled a surrounding territory (chora) of land. **The term polis has, therefore, been translated as ‘city-state’ as there was typically only one city and because an individual polis was independent from other poleis in terms of political, judicial, legal, religious and social institutions and practices,** each polis was in effect a state. Like a state, each polis was also involved in international affairs, both with other poleis and non-Greek states in the areas of trade, political alliances and wars.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Westel Woodbury Willoughby, *The Political Theories of the Ancient World* (Longmans, Green, New York, 1903) pg. 65-67

¹¹⁴ Mark Cartwright, publishing director, Ancient History Encyclopedia: Mark Cartwright, *Polis* (accessed 1/28/15 <http://www.ancient.eu/Polis/>)

Now, some might wonder why address such a secular issue in a book on Church principles. The reason is because a proper understanding of Scripture requires a literal, grammatical and historical hermeneutic. The biblical basis for a literal hermeneutic is John 21: 23. A biblical basis for a grammatical hermeneutic is Gal. 3:16. And a biblical basis for a historical hermeneutic is Mark 7:3, 11.

Thus, it is important to understand the historical background and milieu of the day in which the apostle Paul wrote his epistles, for Paul wrote to Gentiles who clearly understood the autonomous nature of each and every *ekklesia*. If a Christian *ekklesia* was not autonomous, then Paul would have surely made that known to his readers for he knew they would have never had a concept in their mind where one *ekklesia* could ever have any type of authority over another *ekklesia*. Such thinking would be completely foreign to them.

So with that question answered, let us continue our brief look into the nature of a secular Greek *ekklesia* as would be understood by most of Paul's readers. It should be noted that even though most of our understanding of the relationship between the *polis* and the *ekklesia* comes down to us from the days of Solon's reforms in the sixth century B.C., the basic structure continued unto Roman times.

“These changes were prompted by a desire for order and good government, but they brought with them the mischiefs that attend on centralisation. The new officers were not supposed to change the constitution of the towns, but to see that the charters were honestly administered. Yet there was a continual diminution of local initiative and responsibility. ...But the whole mass of evidence drawn from inscriptions, literature, and the remains of imperial rescripts touching the cities shows the reluctance of the earlier emperors to interfere with long-established custom, or to touch vital elements in the municipal codes...Some interesting records of the date of Caesar have come to light, which indicate that in three towns of the province of Asia, Miletus, Pergamum and Aegae, the local *ekklesia* had been suppressed and was then restored in answer to a petition. The turbulent Greek democratic assemblies were suspect to the Romans and disorder sometimes gave them the opportunity of curbing them. The town-clerk of Ephesus was wise in reminding the citizens who made uproar against St Paul, that they were in danger of being called in question for the riot. The reverence shown by the Roman government for long-established practice is well shown in the numerous inscriptions which relate to the settlement of quarrels about boundaries. These were often decided after exhaustive inquiry going back to a remote past...[Indeed] numerous passages in the Roman law books which allude to the 'lex municipalis' of individual cities,

show the regard which was maintained for local usage, even in the later period of the empire.”¹¹⁵

And so we see, because of the autonomy of every city-state with its corresponding *ekklesia*, a Greek naturally took much pride in his city and the *autonomy* of their *ekklesia*. Even during the days of the Roman Empire, this pride and loyalty to one’s own city continued. Even, the apostle Paul, before he invoked his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-28), invoked his city’s citizenship!

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, “I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, **a citizen of no insignificant city**; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.” NASB

Citizenship was a prized possession to those living in the Grecian cities, for it gave one a place within the *ecclesia* of the city, and citizenship was commonly granted or recognized by one’s descent or connection to one of the original tribes that constituted the formation of city-state. With Paul, it is commonly believed that one of the original tribes within the city of Tarsus was a group of Jewish immigrants. This qualified Paul to be a citizen of the city and a member of the city *ekklesia*.

Sir William Ramsay speaks to this in his book *The Cities of St. Paul Their Influence on His Life and Thought*.

“The view which we take is that the Jews of Tarsus were, as a body, citizens with full burgess rights... The reasons for the view that there was a body of Jewish citizens in Tarsus are as follows. In the first place, Paul was a citizen, as he himself asserted most emphatically in very dramatic circumstances at Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 39). This implies that he was a member of one of the Tribes into which those Hellenic Colonies were always divided. Now the members of a Tribe were closely bound to one another by common religious rites, which were performed at every meeting of the Tribe. In every Hellenic city the common religion of the Tribe was an extremely important element in the life and the thought and the patriotism of all citizens. No man could be a citizen except as a member of a Tribe; and the tribal bond was intimate and sacred. Now no Jew could possibly become a member of an ordinary Tribe in a Greek city, because he would have been obliged to participate frequently in a pagan ritual, which even the most degraded of Jews would hardly have faced. There was no possible way by which Jews who retained any religious or patriotic feeling or national pride—and what Jew does not ?—could become citizens of a Greek city, except by having a Tribe set apart for them, in which they could control the religious

¹¹⁵ James Smith Reid, *The Municipalities of the Roman Empire* (The University Press, Cambridge, 1913) pg. 474-75

rites and identify them with the service of the synagogue. This method was adopted in Alexandria, where the Jews were all enrolled in the Tribe called “the Macedonians “; and there can be no doubt that the same method was followed in all the Seleucid foundations, where a Jewish body of colonists was settled.”

“Accordingly, inasmuch as Paul was a Tarsian citizen and his father before him was a citizen, there must have been a body of Jewish citizens constituting the Tribe in which they were enrolled. There can never have been a single and solitary Jewish citizen of a Greek city: if there was one Jewish citizen, there must have been a group of Jews forming a Tribe, holding together in virtue of their common Jewish religion; and it may be regarded as practically certain that the synagogue was their Tribal centre, where they met not only for religious purposes, but also for judging all cases affecting their tribal union and rights.”¹¹⁶

Consequently, as a citizen of Tarsus, Paul would have been a member of the *ekklesia* of the city, taking place in all its functions and responsibilities. The attendance of each assembly by a Greek citizen was not only expected, in some cases, apparently, it was mandatory, being considered a punishable offence if one did not attend (see below) which also reveals the importance and responsibility each citizen felt to his own *ekklesia*.

“In a city constitution, however it may be formed; the right of citizenship is the first and most important...In free cities, the constitution and the administration are always connected in an equal degree with the division of the citizens. But here again we find a vast difference among the Greeks. We first notice those states which made a distinction in the privileges of the inhabitants of the chief town, and of the villages and country. There were some Greek states in which the inhabitants of the city enjoyed great privileges; and the rest of their countrymen stood in a subordinate relation to them; whilst in others there was no distinction of rights between the one and the other...On these divisions of the citizens, the organization of the public assemblies (*ἐκκλησίαι*) was founded. These assemblies, which were a natural result of city governments, were, according to the views of the Greeks, so essential an institution, that they probably existed in every Grecian city, though not always under the same regulations. Yet the manner in which they were held in every city, except Athens and Sparta, is almost wholly unknown to us. It is certain, however, that this must everywhere have been established by rule. It was the custom to give to one magistrate the right of convoking and opening them. But we do not know in what manner the votes were taken in the several cities, whether singly, or by the tribes and other divisions of the people. And in this, too, there was a great difference, whether all citizens had the right of voting, or whether a certain amount of property was requisite. In most of the cities, regular assemblies seem

¹¹⁶ Sir William Mitchell Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul Their Influence on His Life and Thought* (A.C. Armstrong and Son, New York 1908) pg. 174-77

to have been held on fixed days, with occasional extraordinary meetings. **To attend was regarded as the duty of every citizen; and as the wealthier and more educated citizens were apt to remain away, especially in disturbed times, absence was often made a punishable offence.**¹¹⁷

No doubt, as a citizen of Tarsus, and member of his tribe, Paul would have attended the *ekklesia* of Tarsus for the ten years or so he lived in the city after his departure from the Church in Jerusalem, that is, the time before Barnabas found him and brought him to Antioch.

So we can now understand how Paul would have known how the Greek word *ekklesia* would have been understood by his Gentile readers and how each would understand its locality and each would understand its autonomy. They took much pride in their city and each city's *ekklesia*. **This is the word Paul chose (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) knowing that his Greek readers would understand the word by its common meaning and usage.** He knew that they would understand it was an actual physical gathering of citizens called out by the city magistrates with each assembly having a beginning and an ending (at the end of that day's business), and that each *ekklesia* would be independent and autonomous from any other *ekklesia* existing in another locality. Knowing this, if the Holy Spirit ever intended that one Church should ever govern another Church, Paul would have certainly made that clear for he knew such a concept would be foreign to his Greek readers.

Moreover, as we will now see, besides this autonomy being shown by Paul's choice of the word *ekklesia*, this autonomy of Churches was also shown by the precise grammatical structures in Scripture. So let's now look at Col. 4:16 again, but let's look into the structure a little deeper.

Church of the Laodiceans: Colossians 4:16

Col. 4:16 Καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνῶσθῃ παρ' ὑμῶν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικαίων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνῶσθῃ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγῶτε.

Col. 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. KJV

¹¹⁷ A. H. L. Heeren, Tr. G. Bancroft, *A Sketch of the Political History of Ancient Greece*, 2nd edition (D. A. Talboys, Oxford 1834) pg. 142-46

In this verse we also see a relationship between two sets of Churches, between those Christians in Colossae and those Christians in the Church of the Laodiceans. We see that those Christians in Colossae could not tell the Church in Laodicea what to do, even with the authority of an apostle behind them. The Holy Spirit never reveals such a command structure, despite the way it is translated in many English versions. Each Church respected the autonomy of the other. The only command found in the verse was that those in Colossae should “make available” their epistle to the Church of the Laodiceans so that they “might” be able read it.

Paul, very clearly uses the subjective mood for the Greek verb “to read” in the verse (ἀναγνῶσθῃ), which, in the Greek language, is a mood once removed from actuality and is used when the action may or may not be accomplished. And although some consider a subjunctive verb in an ἵνα clause (coming after an imperative) to have a sense of command (sometimes called an elliptical imperative) such is not always the case and I believe this verse is an example of where it is not the case and the switch to a subjunctive mood indicated that Paul respected the autonomy of the Church in Laodicea.¹¹⁸

In other words, the Church of the Laodiceans had the freedom to read or not read Paul’s epistle. That remained their prerogative. Thus, those in Colossae could not command them in Paul’s name to read his epistle, for the authority of one Church could never be extended beyond the boundary of its locality. Paul was not commanding that one Church to command another Church; he was simply commanding one Church that it be “made available” for another Church to read.

Unlike the KJV above, a few English versions bring out this nuance found in the subjective mood of the verb. Young’s Literal translation

¹¹⁸ Also, consider another example where ἵνα and a subjunctive retains a mood of possibility, that being II Cor. 8:7. The following versions maintain this mood of possibility in their translations: “But even as ye abound in every way, in faith, and word, and knowledge, and all diligence, and in love from you to us, that ye may abound in this grace also—**Darby**. “Now as you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also—**New American Bible**. “But even as in everything ye do abound, in faith, and word, and knowledge, and all diligence, and in your love to us, that also in this grace ye may abound—**Young’s Literal Translation**.

reads: “and when the epistle may be read with you, cause that also in the assembly of the Laodiceans it may be read, and the epistle from Laodicea that ye also may read.” And the New Living Translations reads: “After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.”

Perhaps, if Paul used an aorist infinitive of the verb ἀναγνώσκω (read) and the imperative mood of ποιήσατε (make) it might then have clearly been carried over into an overall command, where one Church was actually making a command of another Church in the name of Paul. Or if he used the imperative mood for the verb “to read,” and then written the sentence accordingly, it might provide us an example. If that is what Paul desired, there certainly were different ways he could have made that clear. But, the fact of the matter is, Paul did not write it that way. This use of the Greek subjective mood in this verse, while not being a conclusive assertion of autonomy in and of itself, nevertheless, is a subtle reminder that Paul respected the autonomy of each and every local Church. And the fact that Paul in his epistles never gives one Church authority over another Church becomes all the more significant when we realize that he was well aware that certain believers from Jerusalem were trying to establish that very thing.

As an apostle of Christ, he exercised spiritual authority over all Churches under his responsibility, but he was ever careful never to change that spiritual authority (which some might call a moral authority) into a formal or structured hierarchical authority. That authority was left to the local bishops of each Church. We see this aspect of local autonomy next demonstrated to us in II Cor. 1:24 and I Cor. 11: 13& 16.

Preserving Liberty: II Cor. 1:24

Even with the Corinthian Church, as carnal as it was, we see Paul was careful to respect its local character as an autonomous *ekklesia*. He clearly told the Corinthians that he would not lord it over their faith, thus recognizing their autonomy (II Cor. 1:24).

II Cor. 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

He also made clear that, in certain cases, decisions were left to their own discretion, even though he felt otherwise. He would not lord it over their

faith, and/or liberty. For example, in I Cor. 11:13 and 16, Paul says the following.

I Cor. 11:13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered? NASB

I Cor. 11:16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. NASB

Yet in I Cor. 14:37 he states that what he writes are the Lord's commands.

I Cor. 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. NASB

He clearly exhorts the Church in Corinth to follow his exhortation, even mentioning in I Cor. 14:37 that what he wrote were the commands of the Lord, and yet, he told them, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to "judge for yourselves." Why would he do that? If what he wrote were the commands of the Lord, why did he not just enforce them? The reason is because he felt he needed to respect their own autonomy, reserving the ultimate decision to their own judgment. He never would "lord" it over the saints, for in his eyes, each Church was individually accountable to the Lord, not to him in some hierarchical position of authority, and certainly not to any hierarchy authority of Churches. He truly believed the Lord "ruled" His Churches, and Paul would not dream of usurping that position of the Chief Shepherd, even though he was an apostle of Christ. He believed only the Messiah could "lord" it over the Churches, for that was His and only His prerogative.

Thus, while the customs or practices of other Churches were important, they could not be imposed upon other Churches. Paul understood that each Church would stand or fall, not before another Church, but before the Lord. He trusted that the Lord, as Chief Shepherd, would deal with any Church which failed to follow the dictates of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Scripture. Paul was never afraid to exercise his spiritual or moral authority. Indeed, he was not afraid to give commands in the name of the Lord to individual Churches. But the ultimate decision of whether a Church would listen or obey his admonitions was left to each assembly. Paul could do this because he trusted in the true hierarchical structure of authority that did exist among the Churches, an authority that Paul was never presumptuous enough to usurp, even as an apostle. It was the authority of the LORD Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd, High Priest

and sole Rabbi or Master over all the Churches. And this truth leads us to another picture that shows us this autonomy between the Churches—the picture of the seven Churches in Asia.

Seven Churches of Asia: Rev. 2-3

Rev. 1:11 saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send to the seven assemblies: to Ephesus, and to Smyrna, and to Pergamos, and to Thyatira, and to Sardis, and to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea. Darby

Rev. 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou hast seen on my right hand, and the seven golden lamps. -- The seven stars are angels of the seven assemblies; and the seven lamps are seven assemblies. Darby

Rev. 3:22 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies. Darby

The apostle John was directed to send epistles to the seven Churches in Asia in Rev. 1:11. In the vision that he saw he was told that the seven candlesticks or lamps were seven Churches. And what is interesting in this vision (considering the Jewishness of the writer and his familiarity of a Jewish menorah) is that seven distinct lampstands are seen as representing the Churches, rather than just one lampstand with seven branches. If the vision had one menorah representing the seven Churches in the province of Asia, perhaps one might have had a biblical basis to suggest a picture of a Metropolitan See. But the fact of the matter is a picture of one menorah was not used and that is significant. These are seven different lampstands and not one, for John clearly says the Lord walked “in the midst” of the seven lampstands (Rev. 2:1).

Even if one still desires to equate these lampstands with the one menorah found in the Tabernacle (which is translated by the same Greek word) the text would still say there are seven distinct menorahs. In other words, each of the seven cities in Asia still contained their own menorah. Each was distinct, and each was responsible to the Lord to hold forth light unto the city. (The same word is also used in Rev. 11:4 of the two witnesses who were given to prophesy by the Lord in the end times. Each was considered a separate lampstand and neither had power over the other; each was equal and directly responsible to the Lord.)

Consequently, since each Church is directly responsible to the Lord, the Lord is shown walking in the midst of the seven distinct lampstands admonishing each Church directly through his servant John who was prophesying. He never commanded, Ephesus, for example to direct or oversee the other Churches (Ephesus was later considered by the historic Church to be a Metropolitan See.) Each Church was independent, yet still in fellowship with each other since the epistles were all to be shared with each other, as can be seen in the closing statement of each epistle: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.”

The Spirit did not speak to one Church, which would then enforce it upon the others, but the Spirit spoke directly to each assembly. Additionally, when we get to the Church in Philadelphia we notice a reference is made to the key of David, which is a symbol of authority and governance (Rev. 3: 7-8). And what is significant is that in that capacity of authority and governance, we notice that to the weakest of the Churches the Son opens a door which none can shut. The word *δύναται* used in verse 8, which is variously translated as “can” or “able,” could be paraphrased as “has the power.” The Lord Jesus gives an open door directly to the Church in Philadelphia and no one, not an apostle, not even another Church “has the power” to close that door. No other Church could exercise power over another. The Church in Philadelphia answered directly to the Lord.

Next, we can see this principle of autonomy demonstrated to us in II Cor. 11:2.

Espoused to One Husband: II Cor. 11:2

II Cor. 11:2 For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” NASB

In this verse, we see that Paul betrothed the local Church to Christ. The Church as a bride was under the authority of one husband. What bride is ever accountable or under the authority of another man besides her husband? The Church in Corinth was seen as being autonomous from all other Churches, being espoused to one husband—the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He, as her husband, as her head, in a local sense, could exercise direct authority over her.

Freedom from Hegemony: Gal. 2:11-14

“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. ¹² For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” **Gal. 2:11-14 KJV**

In the epistle to the Galatians we have another example of autonomy; we see that Paul is fighting for the autonomy of the Churches in contradistinction to those who came from the Church in Jerusalem. Some Christians from Jerusalem wished to create hegemony over all the other Churches. They thought that Jerusalem should be considered the mother Church.

Paul was telling the Galatian Churches, with his use of the example of what occurred in the Church in Antioch, to resist anyone who would come from another Church (i.e. Jerusalem) seeking to subjugate them to their authority. In Paul’s mind they each answered directly to Christ and so they were urged to stand fast in the liberty they had in Christ Jesus (Gal. 5:1). The Lord Jesus never delegated His authority to another disciple who held a place above other believers. Those from the sect of the Pharisees, however, were trying to create a hegemonic spirit over every Church. They saw the Church as an extension of Israel and so they thought a similar type of jurisdiction practiced by the Jewish Sanhedrin should be practiced among the Churches.

The Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem maintained authority and control over Jews living elsewhere. Certain Christians in Jerusalem were trying to establish the same type of jurisdiction within the Church. And, just as the Jewish Sanhedrin had one sole presiding president of the council, those Christians from Jerusalem were trying to elevate James to be the sole authority in Jerusalem and over other Churches (James, of course, never acquiesced to such a role). This was based, of course, upon the current mindset prevailing in those days in which the Sanhedrin, with the presiding president, retained spiritual and judicial authority over Jews in the Western diaspora. (Unfortunately, this same mindset was later adopted by the one who was elevated to be the bishop of Rome. This mindset had its roots in the Jewish Sanhedrin.)

Emil Schurer speaks of this mindset in his *A History of the Jewish People*.

“In a certain sense, no doubt, the Sanhedrim exercised such jurisdiction over every Jewish community in the world, and in that sense over Galilee as well. Its orders were regarded as binding throughout the entire domain of orthodox Judaism. It had power, for example, to issue warrants to the congregations (synagogues) in Damascus for the apprehension of the Christians in that quarter (Acts ix. 2, xxii. 5, xxvi. 12). At the same time however the extent to which the Jewish communities were willing to yield obedience to the orders of the Sanhedrim always depended on how far they were favourably disposed toward it. It was only within the limits of Judaea proper that it exercised any direct authority. There could not possibly be a more erroneous way of defining the extent of its jurisdiction as regards the kind of causes with which it was competent to deal than to say that it was the *spiritual* or *theological* tribunal in contradistinction to the civil judicatories of the Romans. On the contrary, it would be more correct to say that it formed, in contrast to the foreign authority of Rome, that supreme native court which here, as almost everywhere else, the Romans had allowed to continue as before, only imposing certain restrictions with regard to competency. To this tribunal then belonged all those judicial matters and all those measures of an administrative character which either could not be competently dealt with by the inferior local courts or which the Roman procurator had not specially reserved for himself. The Sanhedrim was, above all, the final court of appeal for questions connected with the Mosaic law, but not in the sense that it was open to anyone to appeal to it against the decisions of the inferior courts, but rather in so far as it was called upon to intervene in every case in which the lower courts could not agree as to their judgment... The facts to be gleaned from the pages of the New Testament are of a somewhat more valuable character. We know, as matter of fact, that Jesus appeared before the Sanhedrim charged with blasphemy (Matt. xxvi. 65; John xix. 7), and that, before this same tribunal, Peter and John were brought up charged with being false prophets and deceivers of the people (Acts iv. and v.), Stephen with being a blasphemer (Acts vi. 13 ff.), and Paul with being guilty of transgressing the Mosaic law (Acts xxiii).¹¹⁹

And in this Great Sanhedrin we are told that the Pharisees retained the greatest power and influence.

“...It follows from all we have just been saying, that Sadducees and Pharisees alike had seats in the Sanhedrin (especially during the Romano-Herodian period

¹¹⁹ Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus Christ, Volume 1*, trans. John Macpherson, Sophia Taylor, Peter Christie (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1890) pg. 185-87

with regard to which alone can we be said to have any precise information). This is further corroborated by the express testimony of the New Testament and Josephus. During the period in question the greatest amount of influence was already practically in the hands of the Pharisees, with whose demands the Sadducees were obliged, however reluctantly, to comply, 'as otherwise the people would not have tolerated them.' This remark of Josephus gives us a deep insight into the actual position of matters, from which it would seem, that though formally under the leadership of the Sadducean high priests, the Sanhedrin was by this time practically under the predominant influence of Pharisaism.¹²⁰

Throughout Paul's life, he stood fast against this mentality so prevalent among those Christian from the sect of the Pharisees in Jerusalem that sought to subjugate other Churches to the supposed authority of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15: 5). Those brethren continued with a Pharisaical Rabbinical mindset (the same mindset that controlled the Jewish Sanhedrin). With this Pharisaical Rabbinical mindset, they sought to raise up many disciples unto themselves, continuing the tradition of Rabbinical discipleship, in which tradition, they submitted to the ultimate authority centralized in a council headed by a *Nasi*, or Chief Rabbi.

Paul, who once was a part of that system, indeed, one who was advancing in that system of Pharisaism more than any of his peers, completely abandoned that system, following the Lord's injunction to not be called Rabbi.¹²¹ In Paul's mind, rabbinical discipleship practiced by other men, came to an end in Christ Jesus, the one and only true Rabbi. The whole system was replaced with a new creation which was the Church, distinct from Israel, composed of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who were baptized into one body, answerable to one Rabbi, Disciple, or Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. And, in Paul's mind, each Church became a distinct and local manifestation of that universal Church, and, as such, was accountable to the one husband to which Paul had espoused each Church (II Cor. 11:2).

Even Paul, himself, understood that that special relationship between the local Church and Christ superseded even his authority as an apostle, so much so that he put an anathema on himself if he preached a different gospel to a Church (Gal. 1:6-8). This becomes all the more significant when we realize that part of that alternate gospel had more than to do

¹²⁰ Ibid., pg. 178-79

¹²¹ For future study, see author's book entitled, *What is Biblical Discipleship*, available from Assembly Bookshelf.

than just preaching salvation by works. It had to do with every aspect of salvation, not only the means of our justification, but also the means of our sanctification—it also preached ones sanctification could only come by being discipled by a rabbi (discipler), to whom each disciple must become accountable. But in Paul’s mind, such a system could never sanctify, because it sought to usurp Christ, Himself, as the sole Rabbi. In Paul’s mind, Christ, Himself, was the Chief Shepherd. Christ, Himself, was the first Apostle sent by God. Christ, Himself, was the Husband of the bride. Christ alone retained sole authority in the midst of the Churches, chastening those whom He loved. In Paul’s mind, because of his great faith, Christ was a living Master, Chief Shepherd and sole Rabbi, who never delegated that position to other men, just as he never delegate His role as High Priest to another. After His ascension to heaven, He never relinquished any of these offices to a vicar, and for any believer to attempt to act like a “vicar of Christ” upon the earth in any of these offices, whether as an individual, or as a Church, to Paul was a great and presumptive usurpation of the prerogative and authority of Christ.

Paul fought hard for this principle in his life; he fought hard for the autonomy of every local Church, answerable only to the Son of God, free from the hegemonic spirit emanating from Christians who had that rabbinical mindset of discipleship, free from those who wished to impose a hierarchical structure of authority similar to that which existed in the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Now, that did not mean Paul could not exercise a spiritual authority within the Churches as an apostle of Christ. He could and he did on more than one occasion (II Cor. 13:10). But he never saw that authority as a replacement for the ultimate authority of Christ. Paul exercised spiritual authority, yes—even with all command—but he always respected the autonomy of every local Church, never “lording it over their faith.” If they refused Paul’s exhortation, he knew the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of their souls would deal with the situation. Paul recognized that a Church could ignore his admonitions and authority (to their own peril), because he knew that they ultimately would answer to the Chief Shepherd, walking in their midst, in all His wisdom, ever chastising those who disobeyed. Paul had great faith in the real presence of Christ shepherding His sheep. (We will talk more about this when we deal with the local Church and the work.)

Finally, we see the extent of the authority of each Church seen through the shepherding of each Church by the elders of the Church. We first see this in Acts 20:27-30.

Boundaries of Oversight: Acts 20:27-30

Acts 20:27-30 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, **in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops**, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood.²⁹ I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ASV

In this verse we see that the elders of Ephesus were made overseers only of the flock in which they were shepherding, which we know from verse 17, was the Church in Ephesus. They were not made elders of the Church as a whole, nor of any other Church, but they were made bishops only of one Church, the Church “in which” they were among.

Thus, since overseeing is an exercise of ecclesiastical authority, the extent of the authority would coincide with the extent of the Church or flock in which they were among. If the flock did not extend beyond the boundary or locality of the Church, neither could their authority, for each local Church was a flock in and of itself with one set of elders or shepherds. Thus each flock or Church had to have been autonomous from another. Nowhere does Scripture give us an example where elders also oversaw the flock of another city. And since elders were the same as bishops, this verse shows that a bishop could never exercise his oversight or authority beyond the boundary of the flock in which he shepherded. Thus, since we never have an example of a Church wider than the locality of a city, a bishop could never exercise authority over a Church other than the Church “in which” he was made bishop. Or, if a man was made a bishop in a house Church, that being the flock in which he moved, he never could exercise authority over other house Churches. Each bishop was bounded by the extent of the locality of his flock, whether a house Church, or a Church according to an insula, or a Church according to a city.

Thus, if the jurisdiction of a bishop was limited by the boundary of the Church, obviously, each Church had to be autonomous from each another, for each Church was told to submit to the bishops or elders which the Holy Spirit placed over them.

If this simple principle had been recognized and followed in the early Church, a Metropolitan See could have never been established, let alone a Holy See. The bishop of Rome would never have presumed to exercise an authority wider than the locality of Rome, for that was the only flock in which he was made bishop.

We can also find this very same principle in I Peter 5:2-3. Let's now examine that verse.

Allotments: I Peter 5:2-3

I Pet. 5:2-3 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." NASB

Peter exhorts the elders, in this portion of Scripture, to shepherd the flock (Church) of God that was "among them." The phrase "among you" is the Greek phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, which literally carries the idea "with you," or "in the midst of you," meaning the sheep were moving not only with, but also within the circle of elders, and, conversely the shepherds were walking in the midst and also around the sheep. It provides us with a picture of elders or shepherds on the outer edge of the flock, so to speak, overseeing and protecting the flock, and/or the shepherds walking along in the midst of their sheep. In other words, the extent of their shepherding, and thus their authority, was limited to the flock that was "with" them and "within" their circle. It was limited to the flock "in which" they functioned as shepherds. Thus, a shepherd in Ephesus could not physically walk in the assembly in Thessalonica, so, obviously, Scripture was limiting shepherding to the sheep with which the shepherd was able to move and walk about. (How interesting it is to realize the Lord, as the Chief Shepherd, walks in the midst of all the Churches, represented of course by the seven Churches in Asia—Rev. 2:1. Thus, His authority, His overseeing, His shepherding is over every Church.) It would be wrong to have the authority of one Church or the authority of one set of shepherds to extend to another Church, to another flock. Nowhere, again, do we have a command for this to occur, nor do we have an example of such a thing left for us in Scripture.

Peter reinforces this truth also by the use of the Greek word translated as "heritage" in the KJV and "allotted to" in the NASB. It is the Greek word, κληρος, which sounds like "klā-rōs" (using Erasmusian

pronunciation). This is the Greek word where we get “clergy.” And what is so ironic is that it is the flock or the Church which is called the “klā-rōs” of God, not just the bishops (elders). In other words, in Scripture it is the people (Gr. λαός—where we get the English—laity) who are the *clergy*, and conversely the bishops who are also the *laity*, not just the flock or the people, in contradistinction to the bishops! We are all *clergy* and we are all *laity*! There is no clergy/laity system in Scripture. The word literally means a “lot,” and bespeaks the fact that God allots certain sheep to certain shepherds. Thus, the sheep assigned by lot by God to one set of elders or shepherds, cannot be taken over or shepherded by another set of elders or shepherds. Thus, again, we see that God intended every flock (Church) to be autonomous from other flocks (Churches).

This limitation of a group of elders responsibility, authority, and/or shepherding over the flock allotted to them is also affirmed by the Holy Spirit in Scripture in Acts 14:23, albeit from a different perspective. This perspective is seen in regard to an elder’s appointment; the verse says elders were appointed “according to” every Church or assembly. It is important to note that Scripture uses the same preposition κατά in this verse that he used with house Churches.

Act 14:23 Χειροτονήσαντες δὲ αὐτοῖς πρεσβυτέρους κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν, προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστεϊῶν, παρέθεντο αὐτοὺς τῷ κυρίῳ εἰς ὃν πεπιστεύκεισαν.

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. NASB

Thus, we see in this verse that the Holy Spirit assigns elders “according to” their own particular assembly. It limits and defines the extent of an elder’s responsibility to the one particular Church to which he is appointed. He is appointed “according to” a specific Church. This shows us the same principle Peter spoke about when he states that each flock is “allotted to” certain shepherds or elders. It shows us from a different perspective, that of the elders. Not only does God assign the sheep to certain elders, He assigns the elders to certain sheep!

This word, κλήρων, “heritage,” “allotted to,” is defined by W. E. Vine as follows: “a lot, allotment, heritage...”¹²² He also defines the verbal form

¹²² W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 181 (Vol. 1)

of the word as “to cast lots” or “to choose by lot,” then, ‘**to assign a portion...**’”¹²³

This same word used by Peter is also used in the LXX in Deut. 19:14 in speaking of the land allotted to the Israelites. Each tribe’s inheritance remained inviolate (Num. 33:54) and it was a crime to move someone else’s landmark in order to encroach upon their “allotment.” Job speaks of those who do such a thing, those who do not respect the ancient landmarks, those who seek to make that which is allotted to someone else their own. (Of course, Job was referring to different landmarks.)

“Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed *thereof*.”
Job 24:2 KJV

It was a serious thing to ignore the ancient landmarks, the ancient allotments given by God. In the same way it is a serious thing for any Christian leader or set of elders to ignore the landmarks of another local Church, landmarks that were placed by the Holy Spirit Himself; and then, in that ignoring, seek to exercise his authority or oversight over those sheep “allotted to” other elders or shepherds. It is equally serious for a Christian leader, appointed to be an elder “according to” one Church, to move the landmarks of that Church in order to broaden and extend the boundaries of his own Church, so that he might have more influence and say.

Only our Lord has the right to oversee, to lord, and to rule over every local Church. Christian leaders do not. They are to be content with the flock allotted to them. In Matt. 20:25 our Lord told his apostles the following—

“But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord** it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.”
NASB

He warns them not to seek to “lord” it over others; the same word is used in Ps. 110:2 (109:2) in the Greek LXX translated as “rule” below.

The Lord shall send out a rod of power for thee out of Sion: **rule** thou in the midst of thine enemies.” Psalm 110:2 (109:2) Brenton’s Version

¹²³ Ibid., pg.217-218 (vol. 2)

What this shows us is that such an exercise of authority, i.e. lording it over others, can only be done by the Lord Jesus Christ. He will “lord” it over all the earth as it should be done, in righteousness, grace and purity. Indeed, it says he will “lord” it over all his enemies, which we know from Rev. 11:15 includes the whole world. He will do so for He, indeed, is Lord of lords and King of kings. The Lord Jesus is the only one in Scripture who can “lord” it over all the saints, the only one which can rule over more than one locality of the Lord’s people, the only one who can “lord” it over every Church.

He is the only one in Scripture ever allowed to exercise such authority. The Lord Jesus has no “vicar” on the earth in the person of a bishop, an elder, nor, indeed, in the name of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor or teacher. Scripture never allows such a thing. Even the apostle Paul did not presume to take such authority upon himself and “lord” it over the Churches (II Cor. 1:24). Nor did Peter, ever take such authority upon himself, rather, he exercised his spiritual authority by example, just as he exhorted the elders to do so in his epistle (I Pet. 5:3).

So we see all these verses speak to the autonomy of every individual assembly. Each Church is autonomous because it has been assigned or allotted to a particular group of elders or shepherds as the heritage of God that has been allotted to them for their care. It is a great responsibility. As such it is wrong for others outside that Church, or other elders in another Church, to ever seek to usurp the boundaries of oversight that have been set up by the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

So let us review what we have seen so far. Each Church is local, bounded by the extent of their physical gathering. Each local Church belongs only to those Christians gathered in that physical locality. Each local Church is a flock and each flock is a local Church. And, finally, Christians in another Church could not command another Church to do their bidding because each Church had been allotted by the Holy Spirit to a particular group of elders for oversight and care. The extent of an elder’s responsibility never extended beyond the boundary of the Church among in which he moved and walked. But some may still ask, “What about the Church in Jerusalem and the first council that was held in Acts 15?” Did they not tell other Churches what to do? This is a legitimate question and so it is to this last example we would now like to turn our attention as we continue to seek to understand the locality and autonomy of each local assembly.

The Council in Jerusalem: Acts 15:1-21

Acts 15:1-21 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. ² When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. ³ And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. ⁴ And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses. ⁶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. ⁸ And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; ⁹ And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. ¹² Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. ¹³ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men *and* brethren, hearken unto me: ¹⁴ Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. ¹⁵ And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, ¹⁶ After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: ¹⁷ That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸ Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. ¹⁹ Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰ But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. ²¹ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. KJV

The first question that must be addressed is why would the Church in Antioch determine that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem concerning this matter? Since each Church was autonomous, why did they still have to go see the apostles and elders in Jerusalem? The answer is not because the Church of Antioch was subservient to the Church of Jerusalem, but the answer was because those believers who came from

Jerusalem apparently were claiming that they had authority to teach and exercise their authority within the Church in Antioch as representatives of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. They claimed that they were commanded to say the things they were saying. We see the reference to this claim in verse 24 where James says, “we gave no such commandment” to them.

Therefore, the first thing that we must see is that the hierarchy that those from Jerusalem were claiming, or trying to create, did not exist in those days. The reason why Paul and Barnabas went to the apostles in Jerusalem was not only to establish the truth of the Gospel and the means of salvation (represented by some saying that circumcision was necessary) but also to ascertain whether this claim of hegemony by those brethren was true (represented by the insistence of keeping the Law, since Jewish tradition taught that part of keeping the Law including submitting to the authority of the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem). And so, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem not only to fight for the truth of the Gospel, but also to fight for the autonomy of the Church in Antioch, for if they acquiesced to what these brothers were claiming it would set up a precedent of control not only over Antioch, but also over all Churches.

We must remember that Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees, having been educated under Gamaliel (see Phil. 3:4-5; Acts 22:3); he well knew the Law with all its requirements as found in its traditions (Gal. 1:14). As such, Paul well knew the consequences that would result if all believers were required to be circumcised, keeping the Law. It would mean that every believer and every Church throughout the world, would become subservient to the Church of Jerusalem with its Christian equivalent of the Great Jewish Sanhedrin (as we will see below).

Many Christian view this council as only dealing with the nature and character of the Gospel of salvation. Indeed, this is a primary aspect of the dispute. But what many forget is that one’s liberty in Christ Jesus, which in the case of Churches would mean local autonomy, was also a point of dispute with these brothers. Paul is indirectly referring to this concept of Jerusalem preeminence and authority in Gal. 1:17 when he states—

Gal. 1:16-17 To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,¹⁷ **nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me**; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. NASB

—and then a few verses later in Galatians he directly refers to this idea of Jerusalem preeminence and authority when he states—

Gal. 2:4-6 But *it was* because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.⁵ **But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour**, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.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. NASB

Now, of course, the Church in Antioch did not want to call the claim made by these brothers from Jerusalem a lie. Therefore, they decided they must go to the apostles in Jerusalem to find out the veracity of their claim. Why Jerusalem?—because that is where the apostles resided. If all the apostles were residing in Caesarea at that time, then, more than likely, the brethren would have sent them off to Caesarea and not to Jerusalem. The reason they went to Jerusalem was because not because the Jerusalem Church was considered to be, what would later be called, the Metropolitan See of the area. However, that was the danger that would result if what the brethren from Jerusalem were saying was true. In other words, if the apostles, themselves, as they claimed, were, indeed, claiming such authority.

3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

In this verse we see that Paul and Barnabas met with the Church, and with the apostles and elders, perhaps, in Solomon's Porch, as the size of the Church in Jerusalem by that time required a place larger than a house or the upper room. Once gathered they declared to them all the work God had been doing among the Gentiles.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

Now, in this verse, we find the true actors behind the claim of those brethren who came to Antioch—purportedly in the name of the apostles.

It was not in the name of the apostles, but it was in the name of a group of brothers in the Church in Jerusalem who continued with their Pharisaical system of discipleship. The cry of the Pharisaical party continued to be the same cry of Rabbi Hillel, “Raise up many disciples.” In their mind, that meant that ultimately every disciple would be accountable to the equivalent of a *Nasi* in the Christian Church, which, apparently, in their eyes should be James, the brother of our Lord.

As we said, the *Nasi* was considered to be the head of the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. William Brown in his book *Antiquities of the Jews* says this regarding this Sanhedrin or Council.

“But we cannot leave the chamber, where the great council of the nation assembled, without attending a little to its history. It received its name ...from the Greek word συνέδριον, a sitting together, or an assembly; and it consisted of seventy-one members, answering to Moses and the seventy elders, whom he chose, when God, in the wilderness, first appointed it. These members were composed of priests, Levites, and Israelites; or, as they are called in the New Testament, chief priests, scribes, and elders...The most eminent person among them, for worth and wisdom, was chosen *Nasi*...that is, prince, or president.”¹²⁴

And Herbert Danby in his book on the Mishnah says this about the Great Jewish Sanhedrin.

The Roman authorities appear to have acquiesced to this court’s exercise of some measure of control and supervision over its co-religionist, and its *Nasi* (‘President’ or ‘Patriarch’) became the nations’ accredited representative. This system of a Patriarchate of Palestinian Jewry was destined to continue for some 350 years. After the retirement of Johanan ben Zakka the office became hereditary in the Hillel family. Tradition makes Hillel the Elder himself *Nasi* of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, as also his son (Simeon I, c. A.D. 15), grandson (Gamaliel I, c. A.D. 35, the Gamaliel mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles), and great-grandson (Simeon II, ben Gamaliel, c. A.D., one of the leaders in the revolt against the Romans)...¹²⁵

We must realize that many of the early Christians in Jerusalem were of the Pharisaical party and after their salvation they, unfortunately, continued with their Pharisaical mindset (unlike Paul) which culminated

¹²⁴ William Brown, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Volume 1(Waugh & Innes, Edinburgh, 1826) pg. 98-99

¹²⁵ Herbert Danby, tr., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2012) pg. xx

with this idea of a Christian *Nasi* following the example of the Jewish Council of elders with its head Rabbi. Part of their system was to create this discipleship hierarchy with their supreme *Nasi* or Rabbi over all the Churches, which inculcated the observance of the Law according to their interpretations. (How interesting it is that the mindset behind this system ultimately prevailed within Christendom with the rise of the concept of a Pope over all the Churches.)

The concept of discipleship, traditionally, is said to have been begun by Ezra. He set up this system after their return from their Babylonian captivity to help insure that the Israelites would never disappoint and grieve the heart of God by returning to their idolatrous ways. The thought behind discipleship was good, and it was practiced in a godly way by many Israelites and in the New Testament by John the Baptist, and, of course, by our Lord Jesus Himself. But when the Law ended, being fulfilled in Christ, that discipleship system ended, also being fulfilled in Christ. Our Lord ended Rabbinical discipleship among men, forbidding His disciples the continuance of the system by his refusal to allow them to become rabbis or disciplers themselves. Why?—because He declared that He was the sole Rabbi or Discipler. He promised to disciple each and every new believer personally in the Church Age, having promised to be with us until the end of the age. The role of Rabbi is now His alone and it is nothing but presumption to decide to usurp His role as such, just as it would be presumptuous to usurp any of his other roles, such as High Priest, or Chief Shepherd. Why would we desire to do such a thing when He forbade the practice.

This is what was happening in the Church of Jerusalem. There were certain Christians in the Church that thought God wanted them to continue this practice—which, in their eyes, included the practice of circumcision and the observance of the Law, not only among their fellow Jews in the Diaspora, but also by Gentile believers.

This is what was really behind this disturbance in Antioch. Those Christians who continued with a Pharisaical mindset, apparently believed that Church was the new Israel, and as such should have its own Sanhedrin, which, by definition, would have authority over every other Church, as the Great Sanhedrin of the nation of Israel had a certain authority over every other Jewish community in the Diaspora. They sought to establish a system of authority within the Church of Christ equal to that in the nation of Israel, for in their mind, they believed they were the true and new Israel of God. And because of this, they felt that

all spiritual and doctrinal decisions must be made by those in Jerusalem, which, in their mind, apparently, meant James as the *Nasi* of the Christian community. They went out in his name trying to enforce their view of salvation and the accountability of every disciple and community of Christians to Jerusalem—for in their minds, if a believer was circumcised, he was bound to keep the Law of Moses, which meant that every believer must be accountable to a Christian Sanhedrin in Jerusalem with its *Nasi*, as every Jew throughout the world was bound to the Great Sanhedrin of the nation of Israel in Jerusalem with its *Nasi*.

We must remember that the Law taught that all those “under the Law” were bound to a council of priests and Levites with its head judge. In the first century this became known as the Great Sanhedrin, and its head judge was the *Nasi*. They based this upon Deut. 17:8-9.

Deut. 17:8-9 “If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. 9And you shall come to **the priests, the Levites, and to the judge** there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.” NKJV

This is what the Law taught and those Christians from the sect of the Pharisees were insisting that this aspect of the Law was fulfilled by a council made up of the apostles and elders with James as its head, as a *Nasi* (although James never claimed such authority). Often, people with great zeal, who have no authority in and of themselves, will use one who does have the authority to advance their own agenda. Such as always been the case; it is part of human nature. For instance, in David’s day we read the following—

II Sam. 3:39 And I *am* this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah *be* too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness. KJV

The sons of Zeruiah, David’s nephews, Joab and Abishai, utilized their connection to the royal house to advance their own agenda different from the agenda of David. And, invariably, in such cases, when the agenda of the one, does not line up with the agenda of the other, the one will always question the wisdom of the other in charge, thinking they know better; such was the case of Joab. It betrays a lack of trust in the

spirituality of the one in authority and betrays an arrogance and pride in the one seeking a different agenda, just as is seen in this story in Samuel.

II Sam. 3:24-25 Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why *is it that* thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? ²⁵ Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest. KJV

This was not the first time Joab ignored the true feelings of David. He not only ignored them in this case of Abner, murdering him instead, he also ignored them in the case of Absalom, and in the case of Amasa. In each case, he ignored the true wishes of David, all in order to advance his own understandings of how things should be in contradistinction to David's own understanding (II Sam.18:11-14; 19:13; 20:4-10). Many times Joab was a plague to David, pretending to others to be operating with the authority of David, while the opposite was the truth. But Joab did not care, for in his own pride, he thought he knew better.

This apparently is what was happening in Jerusalem with the brethren who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. They had their own agenda, thinking they were right (as Joab thought he was right). They did not have the authority of the apostles or of James, but they sought to use their connection to the apostles and James to further their own agenda, pretending to speak with their authority and wishes. And, apparently, since James was never commanded to go into all the world (unlike the Eleven) he eventually became the only apostle remaining in Jerusalem, and so became, in the mind of these Christians, the *Nasi* of the Christian Sanhedrin of the Church. As such, James became the one in whose name they would presume and pretend to speak since he had the spiritual authority (cf. Gal. 2:12).

But like was the case with David, James never instructed the brethren of the sect of the Pharisees to teach or demand the things they were teaching and demanding (Acts 15:24). They, like Joab before them, assumed a role based upon pride and their own understanding of how things should be, a role that loved having preeminence and loved having a title of "men of high reputation" (cf. Gal. 2:6 NASB and Jam. 2:1-13). Moreover, just like Joab before them, they, apparently, became a trial to the soul of James, as Joab became a trial to the soul of David (cf. II Sam. 3:39; 19:22 and Acts. 21: 18-24).

When such men arise in such situations, the carnality of their supposed spirituality eventually becomes the basis of their downfall. This is apparently what happened within this party in Jerusalem. As time went on, it seems some, having the same mindset, finally departed from the Faith, going out and this time, not just preaching another gospel, but also preaching another Jesus, still seeking to subjugate all Christians to their own brand of “Christianity” (II Cor. 11:4, 13,20-23).

Such are the ways of those who think more highly of themselves than they ought, and even among those who never departed from the Faith, like the aforementioned men, they still departed from the revealed form of Church government (contrary to the revelation of how the Church should be governed, as given to Paul). It seems it was from this party within the Church that the concept of monarchical bishop arose, first spreading to Antioch, and from there, after the death of the apostle John, spreading to other Churches through the exhortations of one Ignatius. But we will look into that matter in another chapter. Suffice it to say now that the nascent form of this thinking, apparently, began with the sect of the Pharisees within the Church of Jerusalem through the supposed acquiescence of James the brother of the Lord as *Nasi*; James would never condone such a mindset.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the Tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the

residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

After the church, along with the apostles and elders, heard what Paul and Barnabas had to say, and after those Christians from the sect of the Pharisees made their views known in opposition to Paul and Barnabas, the apostles and elders now retreated together to consider this issue. After much disputing (apparently some from the sect of the Pharisees were also elders) Peter makes his view known. Then we see that James make his view known, after which, the disputing comes to an end. James gives his sentence in verse 19. This is an unfortunate translation in the KJV for it gives the sense that James made the final decision. That was not the case; James simply gives his opinion, as did Peter. The New King James Version translates the verse more accurately. The word translated “sentence” is actually a verb in Greek, meaning “I judge.”

Acts 15:19 "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, (Act 15:19 NKJ)

Nor does this mean that James’ judgement was a decision of a *Nasi* (as some believe) as if his was the final judgment or sentence, for in the next chapter (Acts 16:4) we are told it was the **apostles and elders** who made the judgment or sentence, not James.

Acts 16:4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were **ordained of the apostles and elders** which were at Jerusalem. KJV

Perhaps, we might look at Young’s Literal Translation, as he seems to bring this fact in a clearer way.

Acts 16:4 And as they were going on through the cities, they were delivering to them the decrees to keep, **that have been judged by the apostles and the elders** who *are* in Jerusalem.

The word translated “ordained” in the KJV is the word translated “judged” in Young’s translation. In fact, it is the perfect passive participle of the same exact verb that is used for the “judgement” of James in Acts 15:19.

And in another verse, Acts 21:25, James states the same thing.

Acts 21:25 But as touching the Gentiles that have believed, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication. ASV

James does not say, “I wrote, having judged,” but “we wrote, having judged,” or, as per the American Standard Version, “given judgment” And, as with Acts 16:4, Luke once again uses a participial form of the same verb κρίνω (judge) in this verse, showing again that the decision that was made so long ago was a mutual “judgment” of the apostles along with the elders.

If such was not the case, if James thought that he was the one who made the final judgment when he used the words, “I judge” in Acts 15:19, he would he not have related later that it was a “judgment” of all the apostles and elders together.

J. A. Alexander¹²⁶ has a succinct comment on this verdict of James, and in particular the significance of the very words used by James when he said the following, “Wherefore my sentence is...” This is J. A. Alexander relates.

“*Wherefore*, because this mode of dealing with the Gentiles has been fully sanctioned by divine authority, and long ago predicted by the prophets. *My sentence is*, literally, *I judge* (as in the Rhemish version; Wiclif has, *I deem*), a common formula, by which the members of the Greek assemblies introduced the expression of their individual opinion, as appears from its repeated occurrence in Thucydides, with which may be compared the corresponding Latin phrase (*sic censeo*) of frequent use in Cicero’s orations. That James here settles the whole question by a decision *ex cathedra*, is as groundless an opinion as that Peter had already done so by his *dictum*. There is no trace in the narrative of any such superiority on either side. The whole proceeding is analogous to that which continually takes place in our own church-courts, when the roll is called to give the members present an opportunity of stating their judgment upon some important question. Even in Tyndale’s version, copied by King James’s Bible, *sentence* no doubt means opinion (*sententia*) not a final decision.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ For those not familiar with J. A. Alexander, he was a professor at Princeton Seminary of Ancient Languages and later, of Hellenistic and New Testament Literature, in those days when Princeton was still sound in the Faith.

¹²⁷ J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. II* (Charles Scribner, New York, 1858) pg. 83

He also relates the following regarding James use of the phrase, “hearken unto me” in Acts 15:13:

“*Hearken unto me*, or simply *hear me*, i. e. me too, or me also; hear what I, as well as they who have already spoken, have to say upon the subject. This request is very far from favouring the notion that James spoke with superior authority, or even as the president of the assembly.”¹²⁸

What is interesting also it that this exact phrase, translated “hearken unto me,” is only used one other time in Scripture, and in both places it is used when automatic acquiesce or obedience is not expected. The other place it is used is in Mark 7:13 where the Lord tells the multitude to listen to Him regarding what defiles a man. The fact that our Lord did not expect automatic obedience is shown by the fact that he concludes it with the phrase, “If any man has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 7:16). Now, it is admitted that our Lord spoke with authority. Of that, who can deny? And, indeed, we are not saying that James did not speak with authority—so did Peter a few moments earlier in the council. But what we are saying is that when our Lord used this phrase, he realized that all would not necessarily listen to Him, for even though He was the Lord God Himself, He came as a servant to give His life a ransom for many. As such, our Lord was careful to respect the free will of His hearers. Most assuredly, all should listen to and obey the Lord, but the Lord did not expect an automatic obedience, because at that time He did not come “to judge,” but to save. Subsequently, when the Lord comes a second time, when He speaks, He will expect immediate obedience, and to those who refuse, they will receive immediate judgment (cf. Zech. 14:16-21).

In this same way, James was not speaking, as J. A. Alexander said, *ex cathedra*, expecting immediate obedience because his word was the final say. He knew his word was not the final authority on the matter, although, of course, he desired their agreement. He appealed to them as equal members of the council and appealed to them with an authority no greater than that of Peter who spoke before him.

Additionally, we also have the testimony of Paul, himself, who was present at the council who clearly stated that the Church was upheld by three pillars, not one pillar (Gal. 2:9). The term pillar was a Hebrew idiom, bespeaking leadership or rulership. Paul applies this idiom to three men (thus James could not be the *Nasi*). Nor does he designate one

¹²⁸ Ibid., pg. 80

of the three pillars a “chief pillar.” He refers them all together as three equal pillars of the Church.

This is all the more significant when we realize that Rabbinical Judaism considered a *Nasi* to be the “chief pillar.” Within a few years after this council, Rabbi Johanan ben Zakka became the *Nasi* of the Great Sanhedrin, and in referring to him, the Talmud relates that he was viewed as the “chief pillar.”

“When Rabbi Jochanan was sick his scholars also called upon him. When he beheld them he burst into tears. “Rabbi!” they exclaimed, “Light of Israel! **The chief pillar!** Why weep?”¹²⁹

So one can see that the *Nasi* was called the “chief pillar,” yet Paul did not call James a “chief pillar,” not did he call Peter a “chief pillar.” Nowhere does Scripture ever call James a “chief pillar,” or a *Nasi*, or even a bishop that was first among equals. No such thing existed within the Church in Jerusalem, as existed in Judaism. Old things had passed away; all things had become new. In Judaism one man continued to be elevated to a place of preeminence, but in the Church only one Person occupied that position, and that was none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, our one and only Rabbi.

Despite the attempt by those Christians from the sect of the Pharisees to continue with that system of Rabbinical discipleship, that elevated one man above the rest in the position of a *Nasi*, the apostles forbid such a system or mindset (no doubt remembering our Lord’s command to them in Matt. 23:8). To them they had only one “Chief Pillar,” their precious Lord Jesus Christ. Only after Him, were they considered to be “pillars” in the Church of Jerusalem; only after Him as Chief Shepherd, were Christian leaders considered to be fellow shepherds or elders (I Pet. 5: 1-4). Never would they presume to usurp a position the belonged solely to their Master, nor would they ever presume to take His place and be elevated by others to be first among equals or to be a *Nasi* (or, as happened later in Church history, a monarchical bishop elevated above the presbytery). The Lord Jesus continued to be first, in all things, in all their lives.

¹²⁹ Hymen Polano, tr., *Selections from the Talmud: Being Specimens of the Contents of that Ancient Book, its Commentaries, Teachings, Poetry & Legends* (Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, Philadelphia, 1876) pg. 303

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

Here we see that the apostles and elders and the brethren from the Jerusalem Church send their greetings. There are a couple of important points to notice. First, James is not singled out as the head of a council or the *Nasi* of a Jewish Christian Sanhedrin. It was the apostles and elders together who are addressing the Church in Antioch. How different this is from the Jewish Sanhedrin which sent out a letter from one man with his council of elders.

Acts 9:1-2 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the **high priest,** ² and asked **for letters from him** to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. NASB

Acts 22:4 “And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,) ⁵ as **also the high priest and all the Council of the elders** can testify. **From them I also received letters** to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. NASB

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

As was said before, this verse shows that those from Jerusalem, called those brethren of the “sect of the Pharisees which believed,” and in the epistle to the Galatians, called the “party of the circumcision” (Gal 2:12 NASB) did not speak the truth. They pretended that they spoke in the name of the apostles, telling every Gentile believer that they must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders in this letter flatly deny this assertion, declaring the opposite. This affirms the

liberty of the Churches from any hierarchical scheme devised by the party of the circumcision. Gentile believers were never bound to a Christian Sanhedrin in Jerusalem by some form of accountability of Rabbinical discipleship reinforced by the observance of the Law. This letter from the apostles and elders affirms this command of our Lord.

Matt. 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren. KJV

We are all brethren and we have one Rabbi, one Master, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the Lord forbid the setting up of a Christian Sanhedrin where one became the *Nasi*, because He alone was the *Nasi*, the Rabbi, the Master, the Chief Shepherd. None of the apostle would ever presume to take on those titles or positions, nor the subsequent titles instituted in the Church, such as Patriarch, Archbishop, let alone Supreme Pontiff. It is only when men lose their faith in the continued presence and ongoing discipling of our Lord and Master that they begin to set up a system in His name, whether it be the “Nasi” of a Christian Sanhedrin or the Vicar of a Catholic Church, or a Discipler over one’s presumed disciples.

25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

In conclusion, this passage shows us a number of things. First we see that Jerusalem was not considered to be a ruling Church. The reason why Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem was simply because that is where the apostles were residing. In fact, what is interesting is that once this issue was dealt with, i.e. the affirmation of Gospel of grace, and, as a consequence, freedom from the Law and the independence of every Church from Jerusalem, we never have recorded for us another council in

Scripture. There was no need because the first and only council in Jerusalem established the principle that every Church was subjected to Christ Himself, and none of the Twelve apostles ever presumed to assume that role for themselves, either as one presiding over a Sanhedrin, nor as individuals. Secondly, in the same way, James never claimed or assumed or accepted a role like that of a *Nasi* that was put forth by the sect of the Pharisees. He considered himself just an apostle among many, like any other. And, finally, the Church of Jerusalem never ruled over other Churches, either by the preeminence of their founding or by the leadership of their elders (although they did command a spiritual respect by being the source of the original proclamation of the Gospel).

So, when a set of brethren take it upon themselves to set up a hierarchical structure of Churches where one Church becomes more important than other Churches, or where many Assemblies become accountable to a ruling of another Assembly, or to the will of one Assembly, they become guilty of creating a clergy/laity system on an ecclesiastical level not found in Scripture. In such a system, the “one Assembly of God” (coining a phrase used by those following Darby) becomes the controlling *clergy*, having the supposed mind of the Lord, and the other Assemblies become the *laity*, having the responsibility to submit to the one controlling Church which claims to manifest the mind of the Spirit.

Therefore, we see that in the early Church, every assembly retained autonomy before the Lord. Each Church was constituted the Body of Christ in that particular locality, and then, all those Churches together, each in its own locality constituted the universal Church which was gathered together in Christ Jesus by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, having been seated with Him in the heavenlies. There was no such thing as one Church being raised up over other Churches, or, to put it another way, one Church in one locality becoming the “one Assembly of God on earth” unto which all others assemblies should be accountable. And, most certainly, there never was an example of one Church or Assembly actually excommunicating another assembly or Church. Such a thing was unknown in Scripture, and when one starts a practice of something not found in Scripture one is in danger of operating out of a false zealotry in the things of God. It is a dangerous thing to be more zealous than the Lord, **for His zealotry is perfect, having the perfect balance of righteousness and mercy.** So anything that is less than His zeal, or more than His zeal, will always be imperfect and out of balance by definition. When anyone ends up excommunicating whole assemblies in the name of the Lord, one is being more zealous than the Lord, and so should be

roundly censored and/or resisted and ignored.

And, yet this is exactly what has happened over and over throughout Church history by misguided Christian leaders whose zealotry exceeded our Lord's. Consider the following regarding this unfortunate practice that began in the first few centuries of the Church. In the second century, Victor, who was considered the bishop of Rome, who is called Pope St. Victor I today by Roman Catholics, sought to enforce his authority over other Churches throughout the province of Asia. Now, the quote below is from an Eastern Orthodox perspective, but it accurately frames the topic at hand—does one individual or Church ever have the authority to excommunicate any other Church.

“Thereupon Victor, who presided over the Church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there completely excommunicated.”¹³⁰

“Victor obviously claimed superior authority, probably from St. Peter, and decided - or at least “attempted” to excommunicate a whole group of Churches because they followed a different tradition and refused to conform. One could therefore argue that the Great schism started with Victor, continued with Stephen and remained underground until the ninth century! But the question is this: even if Victor was not acting wisely, did he not have the power to “cut off whole Churches”? This is what Roman Catholics argue with the implication that such an excommunication would be ontologically meaningful and put someone “outside the Catholic Church”. Yet, we do not see bishops “pleading” but indeed “sharply rebuking” and “admonishing” Victor. Ultimately this is why his letters of excommunication came to no effect. Nevertheless it is possible to read in Eusebius' account the possibility that St. Irenaeus recognized that Victor could indeed “cut off whole Churches” and that such excommunication would have been ontologically meaningful. ... In the end, it took some patience and an Ecumenical Council to achieve what Victor could not achieve by his threat to excommunicate.”¹³¹

In modern times, we see this same practice carried on by J. N. Darby and those brethren who were associated with him; together they facilitated the excommunication of entire assemblies. Like Victor before them, they sought to extend their authority over other Churches; they “attempted to

¹³⁰ Laurent Cleenewerck, *Understanding and Healing the Schism Between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches : an Orthodox Perspective* (Euclid University Press, Washington, D.C. 2007) pg. 154

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 155-156

cut off from the common unity”¹³² (using Eusebius’ phrase above) those assemblies who would not agree with them, declaring such brethren “completely excommunicated.”¹³³ Henry Groves, the eldest son of Anthony Norris Groves, relates this most unfortunate practice among those early brethren from the 19th century. He writes:

“Having failed to induce these brethren to carry out his wishes, he [Mr. Darby] started off on his unholy errand, and surely ‘destruction and misery have been in his ways.’ At one place as in Stafford he led those meeting there into his views, at another as in Kendal, he failed. From one place to another, he went, sowing discord and strife, seeking to enforce everywhere the adoption of his course towards Bethesda, which has, in its consequences, and in the miseries it has caused, cast into the shade all that had taken place in Plymouth. Assemblies of saints, one after another, were placed under the ban of excommunication, for no other sin than not being able to see that Mr. Darby was right, and Bethesda wrong. The eyes of many ran down with tears, and the hearts of many were broken, at this proud, high-handed dealing with the consciences of others, and this trampling in the dust the rights of very conscience but its own.”

“...we find Mr. Darby, on reaching Leeds, writing, and with one stroke of his pen in his lithographic circular from thence, bearing the post mark of August 26th, 1848, by which he cut off not only Bethesda, but all assemblies who received any one who went there. ‘I,’ he writes, ‘should neither go to Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were willingly admitted; for this,’ he adds, ‘involves the whole question of association with Brethren.’ In these actings of Mr. Darby one is struck with the entire absence of all that ‘corporate action,’ so demanded of others, and so boasted in. The moment any act of importance has to be performed, the very semblance of a corporate church responsibility is set aside, and the entire guidance of the Spirit is made virtually to centre *in his own individual person*. ‘I should not go to, nor receive from Bethesda,’ is quite sufficient, and on this have most of those been acting who would now claim an individual conscience in the matter.”

“In the primitive church, when a matter touching the welfare of the Church at large was taken up by the Apostles, after a solemn meeting of the elders and of the whole church in the name of their Master, they say, ‘It seemeth good to the Holy Ghost and to us;’ but in the present instance, as if Spirit and Apostle, church and council, all centred in one man, Mr. Darby writes in the first person, and says that obedience in the matter involves ‘the whole question of Brethren.’ It doubtless involves the whole question of the party who have submitted themselves to the control of him who utters it, but, God be praised that His church is bound by no such assumption, and gives allegiance to no such

¹³² Ibid., pg. 155

¹³³ Ibid.

decretal.”¹³⁴

What we see in all this is this continuing ability of fallen human nature to “think more highly of oneself than one ought.” Unfortunately, we are all guilty of this to one degree or another (otherwise Scripture would not warn every one of us in regard to this—Rom. 12:3) and brother Darby was no different. He, and those with him, acted in the same spirit as Victor and those with him. That is not to say that brother Darby followed the same doctrinal errors that Victor followed; **he certainly did not**; but he certainly followed the same mindset that seeks to control the consciences of other brethren and/or assemblies. He certainly felt that he was acting in the name of the Lord with the supposed authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he certainly felt, like Victor before him, that the Holy Spirit was guiding him in all his pronouncements and actions. But like Victor, brother Darby was exceeding the parameters of Scripture, and most certainly any supposed authority of the Holy Spirit.

Henry Groves continues:

“It has been assumed that this letter contained a refusal of the leading Brethren to investigate for themselves the evil doctrines at Plymouth, so as to enable them to keep out the evil should it arise amongst, or come into the midst of those in fellowship. We have already noticed that the evil tendencies of this teaching were fully appreciated, and a very clear judgment arrived at in reference to them; but what was demanded was something very different; it was that the matter should be *formally* investigated, and *judgment given* on it. It was THIS and THIS ONLY that was objected to...It was felt a solemn thing to commit the church to a ‘formal judgment’ on a matter as yet not immediately connected with them, involving an act of excommunication on one or more, who had been looked up to as Christians for years. To those who with a wholesale excommunication are accustomed to cut off alike the precious and the vile, the godly sensitiveness of those who shrunk from passing sentence of condemnation formally as a church, may not be understood. This official church declaration as to the heresy, and as to the manner of treating those who upheld it, was that which was demanded as pre-requisite for fellowship. We ask, can this be demanded on scriptural authority of any body of elders, in regard to false doctrines which may have arisen outside the fellowship of the Light of the Candlestick in which they individually stand, and beyond the bounds of the individual assembly to which they belong? We think not. The elders should seek an insight into dangerous forms of error that may be spreading, so as to be able to guide, and warn, and admonish all connected with them, is admitted on all

¹³⁴ Henry Groves, *Darbyism: Its Rise and Development, and a Review of “The Bethesda Question”* (Houlston & Wright, London, 1867) pg. 47-48

sides, as demanded by the position they hold as shepherds over the flock.”¹³⁵

We concur with brother Groves; Scripture never sanctions such actions. Such thinking arose over time with the introduction of man-made traditions and rules. It came from Scriptural verses being taken out of their context and then being used to support an unbiblical model. But then, this has always been the case, even going back to the days of our Lord’s incarnation upon earth. The Lord Jesus said concerning these traditions, the following—

Mark 7:7-9, 13 “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.¹³ thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” NASB

Christians who succumb to the natural (soulical) man will always find a way to justify their teachings and positions with verses found in God’s Word, even when other verses in God’s Word are shown to contradict such a position. It will always happen when we become so convinced that our position is the “only true position” (despite the disagreement of others, who equally feel their position is justified by Scripture) that we completely ignore their liberty in Christ Jesus and so demand their entire submission to our own particular viewpoint. When we do that, we create a man-made tradition. The problem is not that we have a different opinion. The problem is when we insist that everyone must agree with our opinion.

Instead, Scripture calls us to act in love, giving liberty to our brethren who disagree, trusting in the judgment and discipline of the Lord to decide such cases—just as Paul says in Romans 14: 1-10.

Rom. 14:1-10 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*² One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only.*³ Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.⁵ One man regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike.* Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the

¹³⁵ Ibid., pg. 35-36

Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. NASB

But, as was with the case of brother Darby, sometimes our zeal overwhelms our better judgment and soon we are acting with a narrowness of heart that produces nothing but heartache throughout the Churches. Why can we not rather trust our Lord in such cases, and respect the liberty each one has in Christ Jesus, knowing that we will all stand or fall before Him?

It is important to realize that the question above, in this account by Henry Groves, was not whether the doctrine espoused by some was false or not; all agreed it was false. The question was whether Scripture allowed one man or assembly to dictate the actions of another assembly, and whether Scripture ever gave to one assembly the power to excommunicate another assembly. The answer in Scripture is a definite no! Such actions are always the prerogative of the Chief Shepherd; the Lord never delegated such authority to a man, or to an assembly. When a man or assembly presumes to usurp this prerogative of the Lord, they have, in reality, lost their faith in the real presence of the Lord within His assemblies to discipline and, if necessary, remove a candlestick from out of its place (Rev. 2:5).

If one assembly feels another assembly is wrong, then the one assembly must trust in the "lordship" of Christ to correct and/or to judge the things in that other assembly. They should not usurp the place of the Lord; that is a most presumptuous sin. Their responsibility is to guard their own assembly, not to judge with excommunication the other assembly. We must leave that to the Lord. Of course, if one from that other assembly desired to enter into their assembly, then as an autonomous assembly they have the Scriptural prerogative to say, "No, we feel your judgments are wrong in your assembly, so we cannot receive you if you into ours." Now, depending on the circumstances, one may not agree with their decision, but we cannot for that reason ignore their own autonomy as an assembly before the Lord. If we feel they are wrong, being too zealous in not receiving that particular Christian, we must still grant them the liberty to guard their own assembly as they feel led by the Holy Spirit. If

they are wrong the Lord will deal with them. Autonomy works both ways. They are answerable to the Lord, not to us.

And so, whenever we are not content with the boundaries of our own assembly, whenever we wish to extend our authority and control to other assemblies, taking upon ourselves the power of excommunicating entire Churches, being convinced that we are acting in the Lord's stead, protecting the purity of His Church, we must realize that we have lost our faith in the "lordship" of Christ Jesus. We are acting as if we have become the "vicar" of Christ upon earth. We are taking upon ourselves a position not even taken by the Twelve, nor taken by Paul, or Barnabas, or Silas, or James, our Lord's brother.

The apostle Paul never presumed to excommunicate an entire Church. Instead, he made it clear, using the Church in Corinth as an example, that he did "lord" it over their faith. Yes, he exercised his spiritual authority. Yes, he told them to put away evil from their midst. Yes, Paul once decided to deliver an offending brother to Satan. But Paul never threatened to excommunicate the entire Church if and when they might ignore his spiritual commands. In fact, if the truth be told, Paul halfway expected the Church in Corinth to ignore his spiritual admonitions. He was not sure they would be obedient (II Cor. 2:9; 7:2-13). But he never told the entire assembly that if they ignored his commands, he would have to excommunicate the entire assembly. And even after he heard they had followed his admonition, he still was afraid that many of those who had opposed him would continue to oppose him, continuing in their evil ways, and, as such, he would have to come to them with tears and great sorrow of heart, being humiliated by God over those not repenting of their evil (II Cor. 12:21).

Evil was present in the Church of Corinth, yet during this time of uncertainty, Paul continued to greet them and pass on the greetings of others. Why?—because the entire Church did not automatically become evil by the evil of a few. Yes, that could eventually happen, as Paul warns in I Cor. 5:6-7, but the presence of evil by some did not require wholesale excommunication. Paul never dreamed of excommunicating an entire Church as one whole body. If excommunication was necessary, it was done one by one on an individual basis as Scripture teaches. In one sense, one could say that each Christian has the individual right of "due process." To ignore such a procedure is a sin in itself, for it ignores the command of Scripture.

Nevertheless, if the Church decided to ignore Paul, Paul was ready to exercise his spiritual authority as an apostle of Christ. He was ready to use severity, where severity was needed (II Cor. 13:10). It was not a light thing to ignore an apostle of Christ and their spiritual authority—remember Ananias and Sapphira—but that authority never included the excommunication of an entire Church. In fact, the one example we have in Scripture, which might be comparable to wholesale excommunication, is that found in Rev. 2:5.

Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place-- unless you repent. NKJV

This verse shows us that such an action is the Lord's prerogative, not ours. According to Scripture, our recourse, when necessary, is individual excommunication, one by one, not the wholesale excommunication of an entire assembly. No one on earth has the authority to act in such a way. Nowhere does God give such authority to a man or to an assembly, and for either one to act in such a way, exercising more authority than even that which was exercised by the apostle Paul, or by the apostle John, is in reality, nothing but presumptuousness and false zeal in the name of the Lord.

We can all be blessed by many things our brother Darby taught. But in this aspect, our brother was wrong. In this, he lost his way; in this, he exceeded what is written in Scripture. We should always remember that our loyalty and love must always be first to the Lord and His Word—no matter how much love and respect we might have for a servant of His.

If only our brother would have taken to heart the fellowship of those who remembered him in the early days of his ministry, then, perhaps, much heartache and division might have been prevented in the assemblies. The Darby of later years was not the Darby of earlier years, at least in this one area. Narrowness had developed in his heart based upon a false logic developed from his concept concerning the ruin of the Church and his view concerning the basis of our unity in Christ Jesus. He allowed human wisdom and logic to guide Him rather than the unvarnished Word of God. He departed from those very first principles practiced by him and those other early brothers meeting in simplicity during those early years of the 19th century.

Only with a renewed mind, a humble spirit, a willingness to listen to the witness of other godly men, based upon a literal, grammatical, and historical hermeneutic, and, most importantly, with the loving grace of God in our lives, can we ever hope to keep ourselves from being deceived and doing the same thing as our brother Darby did in his later years.¹³⁶ That is why it is so important to be careful to not exceed what is written in Scripture. So many times we allow our human logic, or the pragmatic needs of the moment to guide our thinking. We need to remember that God wrote exactly what the Church needs for life and godliness. If we cannot find a teaching or a course of action in Scripture, then we should abandon that teaching or the course of action. It is only when learn to never exceed what is written, when we keep our faith in the ability of the Lord Jesus to discipline His children and/or assemblies according to His own timetable, when we learn to mind our own business, keeping pure our own assembly, and ever recognizing the autonomy of each and every assembly, only then, maybe, we might get to the end of our life and hear our Saviour say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

¹³⁶ For a fuller account of how our brother departed from the earlier principles practiced by the brethren in the early 19th century, see *Bearing Witness to the Original Principles of the Early Brethren: As Found in a Letter Written by A. N. Groves to J. N. Darby in 1836 (Updated Version)* by B. P. Harris (Assembly Bookshelf).

II Church Governance

Divine Order and Governance

Our Lord told his disciples in Matthew 16:18 that in the future he would build his Church. We saw in previous chapters how the Lord began this work of building his Church on that wonderful Day of Pentecost when He baptized His disciples with the Holy Spirit fifty days after his resurrection from the dead. That Church began with approximately one hundred and twenty souls as is seen in Acts 1: 13-15; 2:1.

Acts 1:13-15 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. ¹⁵ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty.) KJV

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. KJV

And so, on that day those first Christians were formed into an *ekklesia*, not only in the Jewish sense of the word, but also its common Hellenistic sense of the word, seeing that they were gathered into an actual physical assembly in one place—the upper room. Thus, not only was the Church (*ekklesia*) formed on that day (Jewish usage), the first meeting of the saints in assembly (common Hellenistic usage of the word *ekklesia*) occurred at the same moment, since they were all together in one place on the first day of the week, that is Sunday. This was the beginning of the Church, and was the beginning of our Lord's rule, or governance of his people in this dispensation of grace. All rule and governance has always belonged to the Son.

Isa, 9:6 For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose **government** is upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him. (Brenton's Version)

He has always ruled over creation, all things being created by Him and for Him—

Col. 1:15-17 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth,

visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created **by Him and for Him**.¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. NASB

And He most certainly ruled over the nation of Israel—

I Sam. 8:7 And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, **that I should not reign over them**. KJV

Isa. 44:6 Thus saith the LORD **the King of Israel**, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. KJV

And so, on this Day of Pentecost, at the beginning of the Church Age, He began his rule over the Church as the Head of the body.

Eph. 1:18-23 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (¹⁹ And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, ²⁰ Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: ²² **And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church**, ²³ Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. KJV

His rule will always bring “order” to the “disorder” of man, for “disorder” is not an aspect of God; it is the opposite of that which has existed for eternity between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

I Cor. 14:33 For God is not *a God* of **disorder** but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints. (Darby)

The word translated in this verse by Darby as “disorder” is the Greek word ἀκαταστασία. W.E. Vine gives it the following definition: “...a state of **disorder**, disturbance, confusion, tumult.” The word was used for confusion, rebellion, and a rejection of all rule. James says “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is **disorder** (ἀκαταστασία) and every evil thing” (Jam. 3:16). Paul says to the Corinthian Church, in II Cor. 12:20, that he was afraid that when he came to them he might find them with strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, **disorders** (ἀκαταστασία).” And our Lord says in Luke 21:9

that in the end, nations and kingdoms will rise up against each other causing “wars and **disorders**” (ἀκαταστασία).

Disorder is not an aspect of God’s eternal nature. All that He does or creates will always exist with that which is the opposite of disorder—a stated order. For example, creation follows a stated order called the “laws of nature.” Israel followed a stated order called the Law of God, which was given to Moses. And so, the Church follows a stated order of the Son as Head of the body and Christ as the Chief Shepherd of the flock, together with a plurality of shepherds, also known as bishops and elders ruling under Him within the assembly. God will never establish an assembly without order. His dictum is that all things should always be done “decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40). As such, this most important work of the Son, planned from all of eternity, called the Church, began with the divine order of the Son ruling over and within the midst of His assemblies.

However, when the Church began on the Day of Pentecost we find no elders, no deacons, no pastors, no teachers, only apostles. Does that mean the Lord established the Church with no leadership or governance? No, of course not—he began His Church with the governance of his Twelve Apostles (with Matthias being added to replace Judas—Acts. 1:15-2:1). The Lord Jesus did so because God is always a God of order; He never wills disorder. (It should be noted, of course, that even when the Church is sometimes left without any human leadership—during days of persecution, for instance—that does not mean there is no order. Our Lord will ever remain faithful as the Chief Shepherd and ever remain the Head of his Church, so even if there is a lack of leadership for one reason or the other, whether of apostles, elders or laborers in the work (I Cor. 16:15-16), order will always be present within the assembly, and it will always be manifested if every member obeys its Head and walks by the Holy Spirit, humbly awaiting the time till human leadership is once again restored by God.)

The Basis of Governance

What does the word “governance” mean? And why would we use the word? Is it even a biblical word? The word “governance,” in English, is derived from the French “gouvernance,” which is derived from the Latin “gubernantia” which is used in the Latin Vulgate as a translation of the Greek word κυβερνήσεις which is used in I Cor. 12:28.

I Cor. 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, **governments** (κυβερνήσεις), diversities of tongues. KJV

This gift of the Spirit called “governments” flows from the very nature of our God of order. The word carries the idea of *guidance*, *setting a course*, and *steering*. Vine defines it as follows: “(κυβέρνησις), from *kubernao*, “to guide” (whence Eng., “govern”), denotes (a) “steering, pilotage;” (b) metaphorically, “governments or governings,” said of those who act as guides in a local Church, 1 Cor. 12:28. Cp. *kubernetes*, “a pilot,” Acts 27:11; Rev. 18:17.”¹³⁷

Moulton and Milligan relate some other uses in their *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*.

“κυβέρνησις. The verb, which is used of Divine “guiding” in Wisd 14⁶, is applied to the management of a household in the inscr. quoted s.v. ἀνέγκλητος *ad fin.*: cf. 1 Cor 12²⁸ ...”¹³⁸

And so we see that “governance” is, indeed, a biblical word bespeaking the guidance, leadership, piloting, or management of a household, a gift given to men that flows from the gifts of the Spirit, which, in turn, are simply a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good.

But one may ask, “How does that relate to the governance of the apostles of the Church before the existence of elders, since apostles are listed in I Cor. 12:28 apart from the gift of governments that belongs to the last grouping?” To answer, this question we must understand the Greek

¹³⁷ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 168 (Vol. 2)

¹³⁸ James Hope Moulton, George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1976) pg. 363

construction of this verse and the historical background into which it was written.

The verse in question is written with a certain construction that shows us contrast. In the Greek, Paul lists three specific groups and then seems to designate the rest as a fourth group. He accomplishes this by using three ordinal adverbs for the first three groups— πρώτον, δεύτερον, τρίτον (meaning first, second, third), but then, after that grouping of three, set apart by his use of ordinal adverbs, he switches to the general adverb ἔπειτα (then) that sets off the rest of the list. In the Greek it looks this way.

Καὶ οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ **πρῶτον**,
And certain ones placed God in the assembly **first**

ἀποστόλους, **δεύτερον** προφήτας **τρίτον** διδασκάλους, **ἔπειτα** δυνάμεις,
apostles **second** prophets, **third** teachers, **then** powers

εἶτα χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων, ἀντιλήψεις, κυβερνήσεις, γένη γλωσσῶν.
then gifts of healings, helps, governments, kindred tongues

And when we consider the fuller context, it seems that Paul is using these adverbs as an enumeration of rank and not as a list of temporal appointments. In other words, Paul is not saying God temporally placed first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, but, rather he is saying God placed apostles—first in the assembly, *God placed* prophets—second, *God placed* teachers—third. Thus the adverbs are an enumerating order within the actual physical assembly (using the Hellenistic usage of the *ekklesia* referring to an actual gathered assembly).

Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker state the following regarding these ordinal adverbs: “of sequence in enumerations (not always clearly distinguished fr. mng. a) first πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας, τρίτον...1 Cor 12:28.”¹³⁹

The meaning that they say it is not always clearly distinguished form is the temporal usage of the first ordinal adverb—πρῶτος. But because of

¹³⁹ Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd Edition* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979) pg. 726

contextual constraints, it seems self-evident that Paul is speaking of a list enumerating an order, not a list of temporal appointments. However, it is interesting, if one prefers, instead, to see this temporally, that Scripture still identifies these three gifts as being manifested in this same temporal order. God begins His Church with apostles gathered with the Church of the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:26; 2:1). Then, secondly, the apostles are seen as prophets, in that they then prophesy on that Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 16-18). And, finally, they are seen as teaches, in that they teach those that are present that day concerning the things of the Lord (Acts 2:22-41, 42).

But, getting back to this enumeration, Paul also shows contrast in this list by the use of the Greek construction οὗς μὲν and ἔπειτα. Usually in Greek, the phrase οὗς μὲν is usually followed by οὗς δὲ in a list (e.g. Mk. 12:5; Acts 27:44; Jude 1:22-23). However, in this list, rather than writing with that normal combination, Paul employs the adverb ἔπειτα instead. This causes a distinct contrast to be made between the specific (first, second, third) and the more general, the rest (then...then). It should be noted some manuscripts repeat the adverb ἔπειτα, however, this is simply a continuation of the contrast between the three and the rest and should not be taken to mean “fifthly.” Concerning this, Robertson (and Plummer) say this: “we must not count ἔπειτα, ἔπειτα as equivalent to ‘fourthly, fifthly.’”¹⁴⁰ They also state in their Commentary the following.

“The sentence should have run, οὗς μὲν ἀποστόλους, οὗς δὲ προφήτας, but the original construction is abandoned, perhaps intentionally, because an arrangement in order of dignity seemed better than a mere enumeration...”¹⁴¹

And Robertson, alone, in his *Grammar of the Greek New Testament* says one of the reasons for the particle adverb construction of μὲν... ἔπειτα was to show antithesis. “We have μὲν—ἔπειτα in Jo. 11:6; Jas. 3:17; 1 Cor. 12:28. These are all efforts to express antithesis.”¹⁴²

But why? Why is Paul making this contrast? Perhaps it is because Paul, well knowing the Greek social mindset and the makeup of a typical

¹⁴⁰ Archibald Robertson, Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1911) pg. 280

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 278-279

¹⁴² A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research* (Hodder & Stoughton, New York, 1914) Pg. 1152

Greek *ekklesia* of a Greek city (polis), wants the believers in Corinth to see a contrast between the Greek secular *ekklesia* (of which they were well aware) with that of God's *ekklesia*. This would perfectly natural for Paul to make such comparisons; he already used the secular games in Corinth to teach spiritual truth in I Cor. 9: 24-27, so, perhaps, now he is using the secular *ekklesia* in Corinth to also teach spiritual truth. To understand this, however, we first need to look into the social mindset of a typical Greek citizen.

Social Mindset of a Greek Citizen

For over six centuries Greek society had been molded by a social consciousness that was based upon the economic, social and constitutional reforms instituted by Solon around 594 B.C. Over the centuries, even though these reforms waxed and waned, they still left a social impression upon the Greek consciousness that continued even to the time of the apostle Paul.

Henry Roshier James in speaking of these reforms in his book *Our Hellenic Heritage*, says this.

“Solon's attempt to effect a political settlement was to apportion privileges among four classes of citizens distinguished according to their means of serving the state. These classes apparently already existed at the time for the purposes of taxation and state service. The wealthiest called by the high-sounding name of ‘**Pentakosiomedimni**’ (which, however, only means ‘Five hundred measuremen’), were the large landed proprietors whose revenues reached a minimum of five hundred measures in corn and wine and oil. Next came the **Hippeis**, or Knights (so called because they could keep a horse for mounted war-service), who had at least three hundred measures; after these came the **Zeugitae**, or Yoke-men, small farmers who ploughed with a yoke of oxen, and whose income must be at least two hundred measures. From **these three classes** all state officials must be chosen, the highest officials from the highest class only. Outside these **three propertied classes** were all the people, free cultivators and free craftsmen, who had little property or none at all. Under Solon's constitution these ‘**Thetes**,’ as all were called whose income was less than two hundred measures, for the first time received substantial political recognition. They were not eligible for any public office, but they had two important rights. Firstly, they had the right of voting in the **Ecclesia**, or general Assembly of citizens, and hence now took part in the elections to all state offices. Secondly, they were admitted on equal terms to the new law courts which Solon instituted. These were the *dicasteries*, courts in which the judges (dicasts) were just groups of citizens selected out of the body of the people. This latter was a most important right and in its ultimate effect extremely democratic, since it made everyone, the

high and noble as well as the commonalty, subject to the jurisdiction of the people.”¹⁴³

A major characteristic in these reforms was the matter of honour (τιμή) within society. Solon’s reforms established a system which bestowed a measure of honour upon those in the first three classes who served in public office, those called the *Pentakosiomedimni*, the *Hippeis*, and the *Zeugitae*. In this system, it was one’s property or wealth that became the measure of one’s honour. However, it should be noted that those in the fourth class, the *Thetes*, were excluded from this shared honour, because they were prohibited from holding any public office. As such, this system, commonly called a *Timocracy*, eventually led to a distinct social division of honour between the first three classes and last class called the *Thetes*. And, since the public burden fell upon those in the higher classes, the highest honour followed their service.

It is also important to note that part of the reason why those in the last or the fourth class were restricted from holding public office was because public offices were not paid positions. As such, it required someone who was not only wealthy enough to serve without compensation, but one who was also wealthy enough to make public expenditures out of his own means for the common good. Consider the following observation made concerning this reality.

“In most of the Grecian cities, there certainly existed a reason, why regard should be had to wealth; because that consisted almost always in real estate. But where the poor were excluded by no restrictive laws, they were obliged of their own accord, to retire from most of the magistracies. **These offices were not lucrative; on the contrary, considerable expenses were often connected with them.** There were no fixed salaries, as in our states; and the prospect, which in Rome in a later period was so inviting to the magistrates, the administration of a province, did not exist in Greece. It was therefore impossible for the poorer class to press forward with eagerness to these offices; in many cities there even existed a necessity of imposing a punishment, if the person elected would not accept the office committed to him. It was far more the honor and the glory, than the gain, which gave a value to the magistracies. But the honor of being the first, or one of the first, among his fellowcitizens, is for many a more powerful excitement, than that which can be derived from emolument.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Henry Rosher James, *Our Hellenic Heritage, Vol. 1* (Macmillan and Company, Limited, London 1921) pg. 245

¹⁴⁴ Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, Tr. George Bancroft, *Ancient Greece*, 4th ed. (Henry G. Bohn, London, 1845) pg. 175

In fact, one can see an example of this type of honour that was derived from the private expenditure of one's own wealth for the common good in the archeological remains of Corinth. F. F. Bruce makes the following comment in his book *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*—

“Writing his Epistle to the Romans from Corinth during the winter of AD 56-57, Paul sends greetings from some of his companions, and adds: 'Erastus the City Treasurer greets you' (Rom. 16: 23). In the course of excavations in Corinth in 1929, Professor T. L. Shear found a pavement with the inscription ERASTVS PRO : AED : S :P : STRAVIT (**Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense**). The evidence indicates that this pavement existed in the first century AD, and it is most probable that the donor is identical with the Erastus who is mentioned by Paul.”¹⁴⁵

This is a perfect example of why honour was associated and reserved for those in the first three classes, those who had the wealth whereby to provide the common good of the Greek *polis* (city). This was a type of honour that was most familiar to the average Greek citizen, and was recognized as a normal thing within Greek society. In fact, Scripture speaks to this bestowal of honour when it exhorts the believer to give “honour to whom honour” is due (Rom. 13:7).

But, as is usually the case, this system of recognition and honour given to those in the upper three classes— honour given because of their beneficence—soon produced in those classes a mindset which craved more and more honour and recognition to the point where the honour conveyed became nothing but fleeting pride (in fact the Greeks had a word for this—φιλοτιμία, *love of honour*). This eventually caused a marked division between those in the higher classes and those in the poorer class. The pride of life soon caused this bestowal of honour to be an all-consuming passion, which, in turn, fueled a need for greater and greater wealth, for one's wealth allowed one to gain more honour.

This pride of life and marked social division caused by one's wealth and honor helps us understand the reason for Paul's chastisement of those wealthy believers in Corinth who refused to share their food and drink at the Lord's Supper with their poorer brethren. Apparently, many believers in Corinth were imbued with this mentality of superiority fostered by this concept of honour and wealth.

¹⁴⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2003) pg. 96

I Cor. 11:18-22 For first, when ye come together in assembly, I hear there exist divisions among you, and I partly give credit *to it*.¹⁹ For there must also be sects among you, that the approved may become manifest among you.²⁰ When ye come therefore together into one place, it is not to eat *the* Lord's supper.²¹ **For each one in eating takes his own supper before others, and one is hungry and another drinks to excess.²² Have ye not then houses for eating and drinking? or do ye despise the assembly of God, and put to shame them who have not?** What shall I say to you? shall I praise you? In this *point* I do not praise. (Darby)

R. C. H. Lenski makes this comment on this portion of Scripture.

“The food for the Agape, from which some of the bread and the wine was reserved for the Sacrament, was brought by the members who came to the meeting. Some were poor and could bring little or nothing. (‘them that have not.’ V.22). Now instead of taking all the food that was brought and apportioning it to all who were present so that each should receive a proper share, cliques were formed, and relatives, friends, those of one clique sat together, probably at private tables, the rich and prosperous separated from the poor, letting those who could bring little or nothing sit by themselves. Then each person consumed what he had brought irrespective of the poorer members, some of whom were slaves.”¹⁴⁶

Thus, we see that the divisions in Corinth were more than just doctrinal divisions based upon a preference for a particular individual or leader; they were also economic. Those who were rich in Corinth were looking down upon the poor. They were “not discerning the Lord’s body,” a phrase which encompasses many things, including, but not limited to, the thought that those wealthy Christians in Corinth did not understand the true nature of the Body of Christ—i.e. the Church; if they did, they would not treat their poor brethren the way they did. Those wealthy Christians did not realize that even the poorest believer, even a believer that was a slave, could have just as much honour as one who was wealthy. They did not understand that in the Church (*ekklesia*) of God, “honour” had nothing to do with “material wealth” but had everything to do with “spiritual wealth” (unlike that in the earthly *ekklesia* of the Greek *polis*). As such, even a poor slave could have the same honour as a wealthy member in the Church, indeed, a poor slave could even have more honour than the wealthiest member in the Church! By not

¹⁴⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998) pg. 458-459

recognizing this fact, the wealthy members were not truly discerning the true nature of the Lord's body (the Church).

John Inglis speaks to this truth in *The Witness*.

“...it is of great importance to everyone who eats that bread and drinks that cup to know precisely what is meant by "discerning the Lord's body," since a failure to do so exposes them to judgment and the chastening of the Lord. In consequence of a failure in this respect among the saints of Corinth, Paul says, "Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Let us turn back to see the occasion of the apostle's rebuke and expostulation, that we may understand how it was that they failed to discern the Lord's body. First of all, when they came together in the church there were divisions among them, they were broken up into parties, and these divisions were carried out in their professed eating the Lord's Supper. Little parties or circles joined together and made it an occasion of social entertainment, or even of individual gluttony and drunkenness, and thus they 'despised the church of God and shamed the destitute.' It was thus that they ate and drank, 'not discerning the Lord's body;' and of such a partisan and selfish feast the apostle says, 'This is not to eat the Lord's Supper.' In other words, the discernment and recognition of the Lord's body is essential to eating the Lord's supper. It is not to be used as a party badge or an individual enjoyment; it is for the Church which is His body; it is as members of the body and in the recognition of the body, in the communion of saints, that we are "to eat of the bread and drink of the cup."”¹⁴⁷

So we can see that even though the divisions mentioned in chapter one were based upon doctrinal issues and personality, the divisions mentioned by Paul in chapter eleven were divisions based upon material wealth and class distinctions. Because of this, Paul had to remind them that they unlike the world, they were one in Christ, whether slave or free; he reminded them that in Christ there was only one body; in Christ, there were no economic divisions; in Christ, all were to be honoured; in Christ, everyone was wealthy.

He also reminded them that as a body they were all members of the whole, and that each one had an important part to play in the proper functioning of the body, and, as such, everyone, despite their economic differences, should have honour care for each other.

I Cor. 12:22-26 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those *members* of the body,

¹⁴⁷ James Inglis, ed., *The Witness*, Vol. 7 (James Inglis & Co., New York, 1871) pg. 6

which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly *members come to* have more abundant seemliness,²⁴ whereas our seemly *members* have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked,²⁵ that there should be no division in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another.²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. NASB

Paul reminds them that unlike the Greek society in which they lived, God bestows honour in a different manner. God's honour is bestowed not because of economic status or wealth. He bestows it based upon spiritual status and spiritual wealth. In fact, Paul makes it clear that it could well be a member who lacked the most economically, a member with no social status, could well be a member having more honour than the richest member having great social status. Repeatedly, Paul made it clear to them that God's ways were not our ways and Paul made it clear to them that "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God (I Cor. 1:27-29).

In light of this, Paul then tells them that every single believer in Corinth constitutes Christ's body, being members of that body, and that it is God who has determined the place of each one within the *ekklesia*, and the placement was not based upon the level of one's wealth or status, as it was in their secular *ekklesia*. He tells them in I Cor. 12:13 that it has nothing to do with whether one is a Jew or a Greek, or one is a slave or a free man. He tells them their place in the Body of Christ has nothing to do with class distinctions (vs. 13). He tells them it solely had to do with their spiritual wealth, their possession of spiritual gifts (vs. 28), not their possession of money or land. And so this brings us back to I Cor. 12:28.

I Cor. 12:28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. NKJV

With this background in mind, we can now see how Paul is challenging the carnal attitude of certain wealthy believers in Corinth who were thinking their wealth and honour, that gave them such preeminence and status in their secular assembly (*ekklesia*), should give them the same preeminence and status within their Christian assembly (*ekklesia*).

Paul does this so succinctly by his switching from a normal Greek construction within his sentence (as we saw above) to a construction that emphasized **three main groups** with a more **general fourth**. Perhaps, he is alluding to the timocratic makeup of a secular assembly (*ekklesia*)—with its three groupings and a fourth grouping—with the three groupings and the fourth grouping he enumerated in the Christian assembly (*ekklesia*) in Corinth.

In the secular assembly, the three groups with special honour were the Pentakosiomedimni, the Hippeis, and the Zeugitae; and the rest were the Thetes. In the Christian assembly the three groups with special honour were the apostles, prophets and the teachers;¹⁴⁸ and the rest were those

¹⁴⁸ The reason why Paul does not list evangelist in this list may simply be because the gift of evangelist was not yet known as a distinct gift. The word is only used three times in the New Testament, all written years after Paul's epistle to the Corinthians was written (Acts. 21:8; Eph. 4:11 and II Tim. 4:5). Before that time Timothy is simply known as a fellow worker of Paul actively engaged in preaching the gospel (I Thess. 3:2). It must be remembered that all Christians preached the gospel in the early Church, not just men known as evangelists (Acts 8:4). Equally it must be remembered that when Philip first preached the gospel in the book of Acts, he was only known as one who had been designated a deacon, not as one who had been designated an evangelist (Acts 6:5 with Acts 8:5). He was not known as an evangelist until much later in time, perhaps, as much as twenty years later (Acts 21:8). Perhaps, part of the confusion on this is because an evangelist is primarily known today as one who preaches the gospel. In the early Church, being an evangelist involved so much more. He was not simply one who preached the gospel of Christ. Every Christian did that. He was also one who understood and taught the major doctrines of the Bible (I Tim. 1:3). He was one who commanded Christians with a spiritual authority to not follow heresies and fables and endless genealogies (I Tim. 1:4-5). He was as a worker in a circulatory ministry who helped Churches with the practical issues of life (I Tim. 2:1-15; 5:1-16; 5:17-19). So, maybe the reason Paul did not list this gift at this time is because the Holy Spirit had not yet given this gift to the Church. Perhaps, the Holy Spirit gave this gift after the apostles began to travel into far off nations and other apostles had begun to be martyred and/or imprisoned. In many ways, apart from the foundational nature of an apostle, an evangelist would do much of the same type of ministry of an apostle, without, of course, exercising any of the authority of an apostle. So, before apostles became scarce in the life of the Churches maybe there was no need for such a gift, but after the pioneer work of an apostle had been accomplished, perhaps, the continuing ministry of evangelism and instruction were combined by the Holy Spirit into this one gift. It is unfortunate that today the focus of the gift is reserved only for the gospel. It was a much fuller gift and ministry in the first century.

possessing the gifts of powers, healing, helps, governments, kindred tongues (See Fig. 5). In the secular assemblies one's honour was based upon one's possession of wealth and property. In the Christian assembly one's honour was based upon one's possession of spiritual wealth and spiritual gifts (not material wealth). In the secular assembly the first three groups could never be poor. In the Christian assembly the first three groups could not only be poor, in many cases they were poor!

Groups	In the Secular Ekklesia	In the Christian Ekklesia
First	Pentakosiomedimni	Apostles
Second	Hippeis	Prophets
Third	Zeugitae	Teachers
Fourth	Thetes	Powers, Gifts of Healing, Helps, Governments, Kindred Tongues

Fig. 5 Comparing the groupings between a normal secular ekklesia with the Christian ekklesia

Perhaps, this is the contrast Paul was trying to make with the Corinthian believers, for even if such groupings were not still currently being maintained in the secular assemblies of Paul's day, the mindset certainly was. The rich Corinthian Christians were acting with the same mindset of the upper classes of secular Greek society. Since wealth in Greek society earned a person honour, they thought their wealth should earn them a place of honour in their Christian assembly. But Paul told them the opposite was true. He told them such a mindset (manifested in their abuse of the Lord's Table) was wrong, for in God's assembly honour was given even to poor members who were yet rich in spiritual gifts, of whom the rich thought would never be able to qualify for any honour.

In the same way the Holy Spirit inspired James to write in his epistle, "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith?" It seems the Holy Spirit was having James emphasize the same thing. And like James, Paul also said this—

I Cor. 1:26-29 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called:* ²⁷ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath

chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence. KJV

But this is not all. When we understand this background, we see that Paul may be also making another comparison. Since the first three groups in a secular assembly possessed honour in proportion to their wealth and placement in the *ekklesia*, Paul says that any honour that is given to a member of the Body of Christ comes God's placement of that Christian in the Body of Christ, which placement is based upon the proportion of one's spiritual wealth, and not their worldly wealth. Paul reminded them of this spiritual wealth, as opposed to any worldly wealth, when he declared to them the following in I Cor. 1:4—

I Cor. 1:4-7 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;⁵ That in every thing **ye are enriched by him**, in all utterance, and *in* all knowledge;⁶ Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:⁷ So that **ye come behind in no gift**; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: KJV

As such, just as the first group called the “Pentakosiomedimni” possessed more worldly wealth than any other group in a secular assembly, so too, the first group mentioned in the Christian assembly, the Apostles (even if they are the poorest materially) possessed more spiritual wealth¹⁴⁹ than any other group in the Christian assembly. In other words, if the “Pentakosiomedimni” were the richest of all groups materially, they would naturally possess more wealth than the second group, the “Hippeis,” and the same amount of wealth and more than the “Zeugitae,” and, most certainly, the same amount of wealth and more than the “Thetes.”

In the same way, if Paul is alluding to these grouping he would be indicating that the Apostles, being the richest spiritually of all the groups listed, should have had the same amount of spiritual gifts and more than what the prophets would have had, or what the teachers would have had, and, indeed, more than anything the last or fourth group might have had.

¹⁴⁹ Spiritual wealth, in this sense, does not refer to our spiritual wealth that is Christ Himself, including our salvation, etc., which is, therefore, equal to every member of the body of Christ, but spiritual wealth, in this sense, is referring to our spiritual gifts, much like the example in our Lord's parable regarding those servants who received five talents, two talents and one talent from the Master (Matt.25:12-29).

What a wonderful observation this is—for the Apostles, who were the opposite of the “Pentakosiomedimni” in material wealth, being for the most part very poor, and having no honour from a worldly point of view, were actually the wealthiest in terms of spiritual wealth. Paul says the following about the apostles—

I Cor. 4:9-13 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. ¹¹ To this present hour **we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;**¹² and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;¹³ when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now. NASB

The Apostles would have been the lowliest members of a secular Greek *ekklesia* for they had no worldly wealth. They would have had the least honour of all, for they were poor. And yet, in the Christian *ekklesia*, they had the first place of honour, being the richest spiritually. From a worldly point of view they were the poorest having little honour; from a spiritual point of view they were the richest having much honour.

Therefore, just as the “Pentakosiomedimni,” being the richest of all, had to have possessed in material wealth, the same amount of wealth and more possessed by every other group, so too, the Apostles, being the richest of all spiritually, had to have possessed in spiritual wealth, the same amount of spiritual gifts, and more, possessed by every other group.

And this brings us back to our original reason for looking at this verse. At the beginning of this section we made the following comment and asked the following question.

“And so we see that “governance” is, indeed, a biblical word bespeaking the guidance, leadership, piloting, or management of a household, a gift given to men that flows from the gifts of the Spirit, which, in turn, are simply a manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good.

But one may ask, “How does that relate to the governance of the apostles of the Church **before the existence of elders**, since apostles are listed in I Cor. 12:28 apart from the gift of governments that belongs to the last grouping?”

We can now see the answer to this question. The reason why governance can be applied to the apostles, even though the gift of “government” is listed after them in the very last grouping, is because the apostles, being the richest of all groups spiritually, spiritually possessed everything all the other groups possessed together (See Fig. 6).

Apostle’s Possession of Every Gift Listed in I Corinthians 12:28	
Gifts	Scripture
Prophets (prophecy)	Acts 2:16-18; Rev. 10:11
Teachers (teaching)	Acts 2:42; II Tim. 1:11
Powers (Miracles)	Acts 19:11-12
Gifts of Healing	Acts 3:6-8; 5:14-15
Helps	Acts 20:33-35
Governments	Jn. 21:16; Acts 1:20; 15:6; II Cor. 13:10; I Pet. 5:1
Kindred Tongues	Acts 2:3-4; I Cor. 14:18

Fig. 6 Apostolic Gifts

Thus, we see that the apostles had the gift of prophecy (Acts 2:16-18; Rev. 10:11). We see that they were teachers (Acts 2:42; II Tim. 1:11). They possessed the gift of powers or miracles (Acts 19:11-12). They possessed the gift of healing (Acts 3:6-8; 5:14-15). They most certainly would have possessed the gift of helps, for they poured out their lives for everyone, working with their own hands to “help” those in need (Acts 20:33-35). They possessed the gift of tongues (Acts 2:3-4; I Cor. 14:18) and they, of course, possessed the gift of governments for they led the Church (Jn. 21:16; Acts 1:20; 15:6; II Cor. 13:10; I Pet. 5:1).

So we see that even **before there were elders**, the apostles possessed the gift of governments, given to them by the Holy Spirit, so that the Church would be a place where the rule of Christ Jesus would be manifested in an orderly way, all according to His nature and will. At first the governance of the Church was carried out by the apostles; it was only later that elders were established by the Holy Spirit in the Church. We will examine this later, but for now let’s look at the practice of governance, whether carried out by the apostles, or later by the elders.

The Practice of Governance

This is such an important principle to see and understand, especially after elders began to be established in the Church as we will see in the next chapter. Rule or governance in the assembly was never based upon leadership qualities or natural talents; it was based upon possessing of the spiritual gift of “governments.” As such, being a natural “born leader” does not qualify one to become a leader or elder in the Church of God. Governance is not based upon one’s natural charisma, natural talents or wisdom. Nor does a person become qualified to be a leader or elder in the Church simply because he has undergone training in a leadership training program. No, no—an elder is one who has been gifted with the spiritual gift of “governments.” It is a spiritual gift granted by the Holy Spirit, usually, at the time of our spiritual new birth; it is not a natural talent given to us by God in our natural birth.

Consider what brother Anthony Norris Groves once said in another place and in another time about the Christian’s natural talents. He said:

“Now, let me state, I give no opinion as to how far the cultivation of “natural talent” may be allowable or desirable for a Christian in the pursuit of a worldly vocation; but the moment he approaches “the burning bush,” let him lay aside these shoes, for it is holy ground—Jehovah is there!”¹⁵⁰

Natural talents might be honed and polished for our earthly pursuits and employments, but not for our spiritual pursuits. In our spiritual pursuits, we must use the spiritual gifts God has provided us, and such spiritual gifts cannot be honed or polished, **for they are but manifestations of the Holy Spirit working through us** (I Cor. 12:4-7). Natural talents have to do with our soul. Spiritual gifts have to do with our spirit. Natural talents are given to us by God at our birth and are rightly used by us for God in our earthly occupations and earthly pursuits (Col. 3:22-23).¹⁵¹ Spiritual gifts, on the other hand, are given to us at our new birth,

¹⁵⁰ Groves, Anthony Norris, *On the Nature of Christian Influence*, (Assembly Bookshelf, Sacramento, 2008), pg. 34

¹⁵¹ Paul is speaking, in this context, about our earthly work or service. Literally, the phrase, “do *it* heartily” in verse 23, would be better translated “do *it* from your soul.” In other words, in our earthly work, we should use all our natural talents. For further treatment on this truth please see *Press on to Spirituality*, also published by Assembly Bookshelf.

i.e. our second birth,¹⁵² and are rightly used by us for God in our heavenly occupations and heavenly pursuits as we serve Him in spirit (Rom. 1:9).

This is such an important principle because so much heartache has been wrought in our Lord's Church by men who rule by their own natural talent, rather than by the spiritual gift of governments. People think, "Oh, they have such charisma...would they not make an excellent elder or pastor?" Such a thought betrays a lack of spiritual discernment, for such governance only produces wood, hay and stubble. It brings God's people into bondage and introduces man-made traditions into the Church, introduced to facilitate the control of the one so governing. Our Lord warned against this type of governance. He told His apostles the following principle regarding such governance—

Matt. 20:21-28 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left."²² But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able."²³ He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."²⁴ And hearing *this*, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "**You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.**²⁶ **It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,**²⁷ **and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;**²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Within the world, unbelievers govern by their natural talent and personal charisma. How else can they rule and lead? They do not possess any spiritual gifts, as they are unsaved. All they have is their natural talent, and so, such men, being politicians, govern by their own ingenuity, creativity, and by the power of their personal charisma—their natural self. But such is not the case with the Church. God asks all those who are called to govern, to deny themselves, to not let their natural talents or personal charisma to become a source for their leading. Biblical leaders are asked to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit, not the prompting of new ideas dreamed up by one's own creative self; we are asked to obey,

¹⁵² I realize Scriptures intimates that other spiritual gifts might be given to us after our new birth, but usually, I believe, they are given to us when we are saved.

not to create. Biblical leaders are exhorted to take up their cross, following their Master, ever being filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, using, the spiritual gifts God has given them, not their natural talents. How sad that this principle has not been understood, but, rather the principles of worldly governance based upon human psychology are offered instead. To illustrate this point consider the following advice once given to Christian assemblies.

“If we are going to implement change in the church, we need to do it wisely. Larry Osborne has collected a number of good ideas he calls Change Diplomacy. First, we must test the waters. Probably the worst thing we can do is make a plan and just announce it cold, in front of the whole church. **Do what the government does, leak your idea. Send out a trial balloon. Say it’s just an idea.** Use a social setting in a non-threatening way to say, “What about this? What do you think?” See what people say. Listen and respond to people who are resisting the idea. You can actually change your idea and make it better as you let people tell you what’s wrong with it. They’ll certainly find flaws and weaknesses and defects, but you can improve your idea if you listen to them. It’s also better to convince individuals before groups. If you force people to say “No” in a public meeting, and, “No,” is our normal default response to any change, then that usually becomes the permanent decision. So, talk to people individually and work to help them understand the new idea. Some people won’t adopt a new idea until they find out that other people have bought into it. When you reach a state where people are beginning to see the wisdom of your idea, lead boldly. You need a champion who will push the cause through. To be fair you must make the alternative views known, but you are also allowed to persuade those who still have some misunderstandings. To summarize, we need not be as afraid of change as we are.”¹⁵³

And, the person referenced above, Larry Osborne, suggested this in one of his books.

“The first thing I want to do with a new idea, potential change, or innovation is to find some way to gauge how people will respond, I call it “testing the waters.” **I do something political leaders are masters at.**

“Long before making a major proposal, **they leak a rough sketch of it and then stand back and analyze how the press, their constituents, and their opponents respond.** Was the idea vehemently rejected? Widely praised? Which points did opponents attack? Which criticisms were legitimate, and which were

¹⁵³ Ken Daughters, *A Theology of Change, Journey, Fall 2006*, (Emmaus Bible College, Dubuque, IA), pg. 19

obviously partisan? And most important, what changes are needed before making the proposal official?¹⁵⁴

Then in this same journal another book was recommended for those wishing to introduce change. It was the book entitled, *Navigating the Winds of Change* by Lynn Anderson Howard, and this is what was said in the journal regarding this book—

“In this book, Anderson—a well-known author, minister and leader—presents a wealth of practical, effective strategies for managing change in the church. He is the creative force behind the annual “Church That Connects” seminar that has helped hundreds of church leaders manage positive change in their congregations; and now he gives these vital strategies directly to you.”¹⁵⁵

This respected journal highly recommends this book; yet listen to the advice given in this book. Listen to the advice given to those wishing to lead the Church! It should break our heart that a Christian could recommend such things.

“Weave! Alternate between safety and disequilibrium. Teach new ideas a while, stretching your church out beyond comfort zones and into fresh thinking. At first you may hear, “Wow! I never noticed that in the Bible before!” This is only mild disequilibrium. But when you feel your church approaching the limits of tolerance, back off! Talk about familiar and safe things for a while. Then, move back out to the cutting edge again. Weave out and in - weave out with new ideas, then weave back in with talk of comfortable things. Then weave out again by implementing new practices; then weave back to some old practices that feel safer. Weave! Two steps forward and one step back.”¹⁵⁶

Dear brethren, what could be more soulical than the suggestions made above! It betrays a walk that is rife with the thinking and wisdom of the world. It is not the way of the cross. It is the opposite of the admonition of the Lord to us that we are to walk in the light as he is in the light; it reflects nothing more than dissimulation and dishonesty in the things of the Lord.

Again (apart from the condescending attitude expressed toward the

¹⁵⁴ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2010) pg. 173

¹⁵⁵ Ken Daughters, *A Theology of Change, Journey, Fall 2006*, (Emmaus Bible College, Dubuque, IA), pg. 5

¹⁵⁶ Lynn Anderson, *Navigating the Winds of Change*, (Howard Publishing Co. Inc., West Monroe, LA 1994), pg. 173

people of God) this mindset is nothing more than plain dissimulation. What could be more disingenuous? And yet this book was recommended by a respected Journal! Our Lord's apostles would never use such dissimulation in their guidance of the Church. Listen to the apostle Paul, exhorting all believers to be free of such dissimulation, even when it is supposedly done for love.

Rom. 12:9 *Let love be without dissimulation.* Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. KJV

God's Word calls us to be spiritual Christians, speaking plainly to our brethren with no dissimulation or guile in our hearts where one is hiding or obscuring one's true agenda. If we are governing and being led by the Holy Spirit we do not need to be sneaky, "weaving in and out," trying to lead with human wisdom and political machinations. How fleshly and soulical it is to do "as the politicians do," or do what "government does." Rather our advice should be to those who lead, "Bring things openly before the brethren in the light of Scripture; teach its spiritual principles and teach its truths. Bring things before the brethren in the light of the Lord; trust that if any change is necessary, the Lord will bring it about in His own time by changing the hearts of His people by the indwelling Spirit of God and by the working of the cross within each life. Believe that the Lord is the Chief Shepherd and, if we but lead people into a walk of spirituality, any change our Chief Shepherd desires will be brought about if we but hear His voice and obey His Word."

How horrible it is to do the opposite, doing as governments do, practicing the art of "leaking" our intentions to the brethren, rather than honestly sharing with the saints the burden of our hearts. How horrible it is to suggest that one should try to implement change in the Church by using such methods, saying that by such methods one can make ideas better, by discovering its flaws, weaknesses, and defects. Dear brethren, God has given us everything necessary for life and godliness in God's Word. If we are being led by the Spirit there will be no flaw, weakness or defect in an idea, for the idea would have come from the Holy Spirit of God, Himself, in accordance with the doctrines and principles of God's Word. If an idea is not an addition or subtraction from God's Word, if it is from the Holy Spirit and not our own creativity, how could it be improved?

May our ideas be nothing else than those which come from the voice of the Saviour, who will guide us by the doctrines and principles of the

Word of God. If that is the case, one could never say that by interaction an idea can be improved, for one would then be saying God's Word can be improved! Or, one could not say a new idea may have defects or flaws, for if the idea is rooted in Scripture it can have no defects or flaws! The only way one could admit an idea could be improved or possess some weakness or flaw, would be because the idea did not come from God's Word, or from the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but rather was an idea, more than likely, coming from one's own natural talent, or human psychology, or perhaps, from a marketing technique of the world, or the creative activity of one's own human soul. Such is not walking by the Spirit and the Word of God, but is rather a walking by the human soul and self.

Now some might say, "No, the idea is not from my own self or the world; it comes from God, but no one can say they are infallible, so one cannot claim that such an idea might not have a flaw in it which can be improved." Well and fine, but, if that is true (and it is, for no one is infallible) then why be so secretive about how to get it implemented? If one is not sure of the leading of the Spirit, then admit it and seek the fellowship of the saints regarding your idea. Do not use dissimulations to get your idea implemented, for do we really want to implement something that may not be from God by our own admission?

Or let's say an idea is not directly found in Scripture (e.g. changing the layout of seating in a chapel). Well and fine, but again, if that is the case why does it still need to be introduced by dissimulation? If it is an idea not directly found in Scripture, but, rather is a burden to facilitate some work in a certain way, why does one need such secrecy in implementing such a burden from the Lord. The liberty of Christ should rule in the hearts of the saints and one should stand fast in the liberty one has in Christ Jesus and do what he or she feels they are led to do, **as long as it does not contradict some principle from God's Word**. Even though an idea may not be found in Scripture, there will always be a "principle" of God's Word to guide its implementation, and that "principle" will never involve the use of guile, or political tactics. The Lord is our example and Scripture clearly says that there never was any guile in our Lord's mouth.

I Peter 2:22 Who did no sin, **neither was guile found in his mouth**. KJV

And what is guile? *Random House* defines it as—"insidious cunning in

attaining a goal; crafty deception.”¹⁵⁷ No matter which way you look at it the advice given above in the journal and recommended books for the “governance” of a Church is wrong. Paul clearly said that his “governance” of a Church was never done in that way. Paul said,

I Thess. 2:3 For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: KJV

Can we ever imagine the Lord Jesus ever using the tactics that were suggested above? Do we really believe the Son of God would do what a worldly “government does?!” Do we really believe that the Son of God would ever “do something political leaders are masters at,” leaking those things he thought needed to be changed or taught in Israel and then then stand back, like a politician, analyzing how his constituents, and opponents respond! Would the Lord Jesus ever council His apostles to lead the Church by weaving in and out, using dissimulation and guile in order to attain one’s goal!

Beloved, utilizing the worldly tactics politicians use so as to influence people’s way of thinking is not walking in the light. What has ever happened to the leaders in our Churches that they need to resort to such tactics? Paul never tried to hide his true motives; he never acted with craft using dissimulation in order to elicit change among the saints. It was Paul who wrote sarcastically to the saints showing such dissimulation is wrong.

II Cor. 12:16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, **crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.**

Is this not exactly what dissimulation is—craftiness and deceit? Again, *Random House* defines such dissimulation as follows—“to conceal one’s true motives, thoughts, etc., by some pretense; speak or act hypocritically.”¹⁵⁸

Paul would never do such a thing; he never tried to hide his true motives; he never acted with craft, using dissimulation in order to elicit change.

¹⁵⁷ Random House Kernerman Webster’s College Dictionary. (2010). Retrieved March 24 2015 from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/guile>

¹⁵⁸ This definition of dissimulation was found under the heading—dissimulate. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dissimulate> (accessed: March 23, 2015).

All this is the result of men leading by natural talent and not by the spiritual gift of governments. What we need in our Churches is men of God who will “speak the truth in love,” speaking openly, saying “I feel burdened by the Holy Spirit concerning certain things—let’s see what Scripture says about this; let’s pray and seek the Lord together about this issue.”

Dear brethren, that is walking in the light. That is trusting in the power of God to change the hearts of His people (if such change is His will). Christians leaders do not need to do what the government does; they do not need to practice the masterful art of politicians; they need to be filled with the Spirit of God, never loving their “self,” but rather denying their “self,” with all its power, creativity and wisdom, and instead be a Christian who takes up his cross, and follows the Lord, obeying every prompting of the Spirit in accordance with God’s Word.

That is the true governance found in Scripture. The Eternal Son of God, begotten eternally of the Father is our pattern and example. All governance is rooted in Him. And it was by His placement of Apostles in the Church that it was first granted to men by the gift of the Spirit. And, today, it continues to be granted to those gifted men within the assembly who continue to be given the gift of government. May the spiritual gift of government be the basis of all leadership within the Churches. May it be directed by the Holy Spirit in men of God who have learned to deny themselves and their own creativity and natural talent, and instead walk in the light of God’s Word under the fullness and wisdom of the Holy Spirit of God.

And so we see that God did not leave His Church without order, even though there were no elders on that Day of Pentecost. But why did God do it in this way. Why did He not appoint elders from the very first? Let’s look to God’s Word to find the answer.

The Unfolding of Governance

The Apostles were the first ones gifted by the Lord Jesus with the gift of governments. However, such governance was not to be done by lording it over the flock, exercising great authority as those in the world who governed by their natural talent. Rather, their governance was done by spiritual gifts, and by their example and service. The reason there were no elders on that Day of Pentecost was because the need had not yet developed. Even though the apostles were commanded by the Lord to eventually “go into all the world,” they were told they must first be His witnesses in Jerusalem—it was only after that witness was accomplished that they then would proceed to Judea, and then to Samaria, and then, finally, to the remotest part of the earth.

Acts 1:7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” NASB

When we compare this Scripture with historical record we find that this period of direct and present witness in Jerusalem lasted for about ten years or so, as we will now see.

In Acts 8:1 we find the apostles were still living in Jerusalem, even after the persecution of Saul.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. KJV

Yet by the time we get to Acts 11:1 we find they were no longer just in Jerusalem, but were now found ministering throughout the area of Judea.

Acts 11:1 Now the apostles and the brethren who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. NASB

We can approximate the time of this ministry in the book of Acts for most agree that King Herod Agrippa killed the apostle James around the year 44 A.D., as recorded in Acts 12: 1-2. And we know that it was not till after Claudius became emperor in Rome in 41 A. D. that Herod was

even given the additional rulership in Judea; and we know that King Herod died in 44 A.D. in Caesarea (Acts 12:19-23). Therefore, since it seems James was killed right before Herod died, most date this occurrence to that approximate date of 44 A.D.

This gives us a period of approximately ten to fifteen years of continual witness in Jerusalem before the Apostles finally departed from Jerusalem as their principal place of residence (depending, of course, on when one dates the death of Christ).

Therefore, sometime near the end of the fourth decade (c. 40 A.D.) the apostles, it seems, had begun to venture out into Judea preaching the gospel of Christ. Yet, during the beginning of this new phase of witness, it seems they still kept their residence in Jerusalem, as we saw in Acts 8:1 when Saul began his persecution of the Church.

And, then a few verses later in Acts 8:25, we find that they began their witness throughout the area of Samaria. Thus, since the Lord gave them the order of first Judea and then Samaria, it seems the apostles must have already begun their witness to Judea before they would have begun a gospel campaign in earnest in Samaria. Therefore, when we see that Scripture specifically states the apostles were already spread throughout Judea in Acts 11:1, we find that their Judea witness must have begun sometime shortly after Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 8:1, but before their Samaritan witness in Acts 8:25. Perhaps, it began shortly after the scattering of the Jerusalem Church as the apostles must have assuredly desired to see how the brethren were doing. So maybe they took this persecution by Saul as the sign that God now wished them to begin their Judean witness. We know that by Acts 9:31 (and by Acts 11:1) their witness in the outlying areas of Israel was an established fact for Acts 9:31 mentions Churches were existing in Judea, Samaria and Galilee, but during this time they apparently continued to keep Jerusalem as their home base, returning to Jerusalem even after the beginning of their Samaritan witness, as Acts 8:25 clearly states.

Acts 8:25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, **they returned to Jerusalem**, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. NKJV

Acts 9:31 Then had the **churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria**, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. KJV

Therefore, when compared with the definite date of James' death in Acts 12:1-2, it seems the apostle's continual witness in Jerusalem was coming to an end by the time of James' martyrdom (c. 44 A.D.).

Therefore, if this is true, the apostles remained in Jerusalem for the first ten years or so of their ministry after the beginning of the Church. As such, there would have been no need for elders in those early days, since the gift of shepherding would have been accomplished by them.

Remember that in Scripture apostles are shown to be pastors (shepherds), elders, and bishops. From the very beginning, the apostle Peter was told to "shepherd the sheep" (Jn. 21:16), and he affirmed that function by calling himself an elder in I Pet. 5:1, and in Acts 1:20-25, he referred to the fact that apostles had oversight, making themselves bishops.

Acts 1:20-25 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his **bishoprick** (ἐπισκοπήν) let another take. ²¹ Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. ²³ And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, ²⁵ That he may **take part of this ministry and apostleship**, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. KJV

In Scripture, pastors, elders and bishops all refer to the same person as we will see in the next chapter. In the beginning there was no difference or separation of function between an apostle, pastor, elder or bishop. Nor, as a matter of fact, was there any difference between a deacon and an apostle. At the very beginning of the Church, the apostles were also performing the function of a deacon (cf. Acts 4:34-35 with 6: 1-4). So we see that at the beginning of the Church the apostles performed the function of an elder until the time came that they were spending more time away from Jerusalem than in Jerusalem, and so were not able to continue the shepherding of the brethren (in the same way they were not able to continue the function as a deacon, as referenced above). Consequently, by the time we get to the time of the Council of Jerusalem, which most believe occurred around 49 A.D., we find that other men had been chosen to perform this function of shepherding, eldership, and overseeing (Acts 15:2).

And so, when we compare this with the their continual witness in Jerusalem coming to an end around 40 A.D., the establishment of elders distinct from the apostles must have occurred sometime between 40 A.D. and 49 A.D., especially when we compare this with the account given to us in Acts 14:23 where we see elders being commended to the Lord. As such, it seems that Paul and Barnabas must have been acquainted with this function as a gift distinct from that of an apostle by the end of their first missionary journey (perhaps, around 46-47 A.D.)

Therefore, sometime around this period the Holy Spirit had already begun designating other men than the apostles as elders, which designating continued throughout the days of the early Church, having been set up by the Holy Spirit of God.

As we have said before, God is not a God of confusion; He has always provided for order within the Church by the gift of governments given to certain men within each local assembly, whether it was the apostles, as at first, or, subsequently, by other men named elders and bishops, raised up and prepared for this function. It is contrary to the nature of the Blessed Trinity to ever leave the Church without order and governance. The governance and order within the Church is part of those things which the Lord has provided for the life and godliness of every Christian.

II Pet. 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. NASB

Peter says “everything” has been granted. There is nothing lacking in God’s provision for our life and godliness. Sheep need a shepherd; young men need elders; believers need oversight. All of this has been provided by God for the Church, first in the Person of His Son, who is our Chief Shepherd (I Pet. 5:4), the eldest among many brethren (Rom. 8:29), the Bishop of our souls (I Pet. 2:25 KJV). Then by the ministry of the apostles within the Church, who were gifted by God to be shepherds, elders, bishops, and, then, finally, by the ministry of distinct men as elders within each local assembly who are also known as pastors and as bishops. If this was not true, then God would have not said that He has given us all things pertaining to life and godliness.

Some say that because the “Church is in ruins” elders no longer “formally” exist, they say they have ceased to formally exist because elders can only be appointed by apostles and/or “apostolic delegates; but

Scripture never says this, and, on the contrary, Scripture asserts the continuation of men called pastors (elders/bishops) within the assembly until the end of this age as can be seen in Eph. 4: 8-16.

Eph. 4:8-16 Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.”⁹ (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we 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. NASB

Paul reveals by the Holy Spirit in these verses that pastors are given for the perfecting of the saints until the Church comes unto a mature man, or, as the King James Version says, a perfect man. Obviously, a Church that is in ruins, cannot be considered to be a Church that has grown into a perfect or mature man, and so, this being the case, the presence of pastors (elders/bishops) are still required for their function of perfecting or equipping the saints until they grow to a perfect man. Eldership has never ceased in the Church and the Holy Spirit continues to gift certain men within an assembly to perform this function. Paul clearly says that Christ gave them until “we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” If that has not happened, then one cannot say that elders no longer “formally” exist.

Additionally, Scripture never says that apostles are necessary for the placement of elders within an assembly—but it does say the Father’s placement is necessary (I Cor. 12:18, 28). And Scriptures never says it was apostles who imparted the gift of eldership to other men, but it does say that elders were the result of those gifts given by the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who had ascended on high—thus it shows the Lord Jesus Christ is necessary (Eph. 4:7-11). And, finally, Scripture never says that it is the apostles who make elders, but it does say it is the Holy Spirit

who make elders—thus the Holy Spirit is necessary (Acts 20:28). Now, of course, sometimes apostles were instrumental in “recognizing” those who were made elders by the operations of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, but they are never mentioned in Scripture as being necessary or as being the source of their gift or placement. But we will examine this point more fully, presently.

Now, it is admitted by those who say elders do not formally exist, that they can exist informally. In other words, they can still function as elders even though they are not formally recognized as elders. This certainly is true. One does not need formal recognition to function according to the gift given to such a one by God. But the practical effect of denying formal recognition is that disorder is introduced into the assembly for if someone disagrees with the one who functions as an elder, but is not formally recognized as an elder, such a one simply says “submission” is not necessary to that person for he is not an elder! In other words, everyone ends up doing what is right in his own eyes as is borne witness to by one familiar with such assemblies.

Anthony Norris Groves said the following about this reality within each assembly.

“For myself I would join no Church permanently that had not some constituted rule, I have seen enough of that plan, of every one doing what is right in his own eyes, and then calling it the Spirit's order, to feel assured it is a delusion...I think I can now feel practically convinced (as I ever have in theory) that **recognized** pastors and teachers are *essential* to the good order of all assemblies; and as such required and commanded of God; and though I should not object to unite with those who had them not, if it were the result of the Lord's providence in not *giving* them any, I should feel quite unable to join *personally* those who rejected them as unnecessary or unscriptural. If the question were put to me (as it often has been) do you consider the Spirit unequal to the task of keeping order in the way we desire to follow? my reply is simply this, show me that the Lord has promised His Spirit to this end, and I at once admit its obligation in the face of all practical and experienced difficulties: **but if I see pastorship, eldership, and ministry recognized as a settled fixed service in the Church to this end, I cannot reject God's evidently ordained plan, and set up one of my own, because I think it more spiritual...**D[arby] seems justified in rejecting all such helps as the way of obtaining proper subordination in the assembly of God's saints, by saying the ' Church is in ruins;' this is his *theory*; but neither in the *word*, nor in my own experience or judgment, do I realize that this state of

the Church, even though it existed to the full extent he declares, was to be met by the overthrow of God's order...»¹⁵⁹

So if elders are necessary for order within the assembly until the Church is fully perfected, how are they fully placed within the Body of Christ? It is to this we would now like to turn our attention.

¹⁵⁹ Anthony Norris Groves, Harriet Baynes Groves, ed., *Memoir of Anthony Norris Groves: compiled chiefly from his journals and letters; to which is added a supplement, containing recollections of Miss Paget, and accounts of missionary work in India, etc* (James Nisbet & Co., London, 1869) pg. 420-22

Elders

As we consider the unfolding function of elders within the assemblies, we shall first discuss the two other titles that have been assigned to them in Scripture, i.e. bishops and pastors. Then we will discuss the plurality of their governance, and, finally, the means by which elders are placed in the Church.

Additional Designations as Bishops and Pastors

Scripture tells us that an elder was the same person as a bishop and the bishop was same person as a pastor and so, the pastor was the same person as an elder and bishop. This Scriptural fact is brought together for us by the Holy Spirit in Acts 20: 17-28. I will add a couple of words in brackets (about which we will discuss later) to help clarify what Scripture is saying.

Acts 20: 17-18, 28 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders of the church**.¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time... Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the **Holy Spirit has made you overseers [bishops]**, to **shepherd [pastor] the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. NASB

In this portion of Scripture, the Holy Spirit begins with the fact that certain Christian men in Ephesus, who are identified by Paul as being "**the elders** of the Church," are asked to come down to meet with Paul in Miletus, a town about 50 miles south of Ephesus. At their meeting in Miletus, after a few words of exhortation, Paul reminds them they were made bishops by the Holy Spirit, telling them, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has "made you **overseers (bishops)**." Then, after calling them bishops, he tells them they were to be careful to "**shepherd (pastor)** the church of God."

Here we see all three names being applied to the same person in one chapter. The word translated "overseers" in many translations is the Greek word translated elsewhere as **bishop**—ἐπίσκοπος. The English, *overseer*, is a good translation for the word is made up of two Greek words—ἐπί, meaning "over" and σκοπέω meaning "to look." We are using the translation, *bishop*, however because that is the ecclesiastical translation of the word known by most and we wish to show later how that name was adopted from the elders as a whole, and ended up being

reserved for just one man from among them (in contradiction to Scripture). Nevertheless, an elder is one who is called to always be looking out over the saints for their mutual care and protection. One could say he looks out over all the flock, as a shepherd stands guard over the sheep, looking out for anything that might harm the flock. And that brings us to the final name applied to an elder—pastor. In Eph. 4:11, Paul says the Lord Jesus gave “**pastors** and teachers.”

The word translated “pastor” is the Greek word for shepherd— ποιμήν. Like, *bishop*, the English, *pastor*, has become an ecclesiastical title. But a *pastor* is a *shepherd* in Scripture, and, as such, he is expected to do the work of a shepherd, which is guarding the flock of God. In the verse before us, in Acts 20:28, it is the elders who are told to “shepherd” the flock, which shows us that an elder is a pastor, i.e. a shepherd. In fact, some modern translations actually translate this portion of the verse as “shepherds” (e.g. the New International Version) which, of course, could then be translated as “pastors.”

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. **Be shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. NIV

But the actual Greek word in the verse is not a noun, as shown in the NIV, but it is an infinitive. Now while sometimes in Greek an infinitive can be used as a substantive, it seems best to treat it as a simple infinitive of purpose. This is why most translations simply translate the word by the verbal phrase—“to shepherd.” In other words, Paul is saying to the elders that they were made bishops by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of doing the work of a shepherd in the midst of the flock. So, either way one translates the verse, we see that elders are being identified as the pastors or shepherds in the Church. This is why all admit that elders, bishops and pastors all refer to the same person in the New Testament. In the early Church there was no distinction of person between all three titles.

This fact is also demonstrated for us in Titus 1:5-7. In this portion of Scripture we see that Paul exhorts Titus to appoint elders in every city in accordance with certain qualifications.

Titus 1:5-7 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint **elders** in every city as I commanded you--⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.⁷ For a **bishop** must be blameless, as a

steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money. NKJV

In verse 5 Paul specifically tells Titus to appoint, or to establish elders in each city. However, two verses later, when he explains why such qualifications are necessary for the one so appointed, he says because a **bishop** must be blameless as a steward of God. This clearly shows that in Paul's mind an elder was the same as a bishop. This fact is self-evident in Scripture; it is even accepted by many who hold to the eventual view of the separation and elevation of a bishop from his fellow elders (presbyters).

Perhaps, we can conclude with a comment made by F. F. Bruce on Acts 20:28 with his footnote on the subject.

“There was in apostolic times no distinction between elders (presbyters) and bishops such as we find from the second century onwards; the leaders of the Ephesian church are indiscriminately described as elders, bishops (i.e. superintendents) and shepherds (or pastors).”¹⁶⁰

“...The verb ‘feed’ in this verse represents ποιμαίνειν, literally ‘tend as a shepherd,’ from ποιμήν, ‘a shepherd’ (cf. Eph. 4:11; I Peter 5:1-4). For other designations by which such men were known in NT times cf. Rom. 12: 8; I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17. The term ‘elder’ (Gk. πρεσβύτερος) has mainly Jewish antecedents, while ‘bishop’ (Gk. ἐπίσκοπος, ‘overseer’) has mainly Greek antecedents. Cf. Phil. 1:1, where ἐπίσκοπος in the plural (i.e. presbyter-bishops) are mentioned alongside διάκονοι ... In the Pastoral Epistles the terms πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος appear still to be used interchangeably...”¹⁶¹

And so we can see that the Holy Spirit set up Christians in the New Testament Churches to be elders—elders who were bishops (overseers) functioning as pastors within the assemblies. This was the will of the Chief Shepherd, established for the furtherance of His governance within each Church. And, since He was the Chief or Senior Shepherd (Pastor) of every Church, He would always establish His undershepherds (pastors) in each assembly, by a plurality, as we will now see.

¹⁶⁰ F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1956) pg. 415-416

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 415-416

The Plurality of Their Governance

As we briefly mentioned before, Scripture never indicates that a Church was to be governed by one individual elder; or we could say by one individual bishop, or one individual pastor. The Churches were always governed by a plurality of men whether they were known as elders, bishops or pastors (except in the case of Diotrephes, whose individual actions were severely censured—III Jn. 1: 9-10). In every instance of Scripture, Churches are shown with a plurality of elders governing the Church, never an individual elder.

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. NASB

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. NASB

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

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. NASB

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. NASB

I Pet. 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. NASB

And, in those few cases where elders are mentioned in Scripture as individuals, such as John in his general epistles (II Jn. 1:1), or Peter in his exhortation to fellow elders (I Pet. 5:1), they are never shown as ruling by themselves in a Church. They are simply identifying themselves as also being an elder as to their function. In other words, Peter was an elder and John was an elder. They, apparently, also had the title of elder in the Church of Jerusalem. In fact, John clearly identifies Peter as a pastor or elder when he writes about Peter's post-resurrection meeting with Jesus, where Jesus tells Peter to "shepherd (pastor) my sheep" (Jn. 21:16). But John and Peter never ruled the Church as a sole

elder; nor did they ever do so as apostles. They were always one among many.

The only other instance, where elders of the Church are spoken of in the singular, is where Scripture is dealing with certain matters having to do with an individual (e.g. I Tim. 5:9). But in all these cases the greater context always shows that the elder was one of many (e.g. I Tim. 5:17).

In the same way, Churches are always shown to be governed by a plurality of bishops.

Acts 20:28 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you **bishops**, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. ASV

Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the **bishops** and deacons: KJV

And, like with elders, whenever the word occurs in the singular, context demonstrates the reason for it. For example, while bishop appears in the singular in Titus 1:7, context shows that Paul puts it into the singular because he is speaking of those qualities which should characterize each and every one of the elders so established. He could have just as well substituted *elder* in the singular, rather than *bishop* so it would have read as follows—

Titus 1:5-7 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, ⁶ *namely*, 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~~ [**elder**] 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,

If Paul had written it that way, no one would have thought that Paul was indicating that one elder ruled over the Church. No one would think he switched from the plural in verse 5 to the singular in verse 7 because one of those elders was to be distinguished from the rest. They would understand that Paul was talking about an elder generically. Such is the case with the singular use of bishop. He is speaking of a bishop from a generic viewpoint. Sometimes in Greek this is called a “generic singular” (cf. Rom. 2:1; 9:20; I Tim. 5:9).

The same thing applies to I Tim. 3:2. Paul's uses *bishop* as a generic singular because he is explaining the common characteristics of any bishop. Again, context helps explain this fact, for we know from Acts 20:28 that the elders in Ephesus were known as bishops and together they formed a plurality ruling the Church; he even mentions the ruling of such elders (bishops) later in the same epistle in I Tim. 5:17. So Paul's use of the singular bishop in I Tim. 3:2 rather than bishops (plural) is because he is using a generic singular to make known to Timothy the qualities necessary for one who will be known as a bishop.

As far as our final designation of *pastor*, there is only one place where it is used substantivally of men within the Church and that is in Eph. 4:11 where it appears in the plural number.¹⁶²

Eph. 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, **pastors** and teachers. KJV

Eph. 4:11 and *he* has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some **shepherds** and teachers. (Darby)

And so we see that in every case, the Churches in the New Testament were always governed locally by a plurality of men known either as elders, bishops or pastors. One man rule was unknown in the early Church. So, if that is the pattern left for us by the apostles, are we not told to obey their injunctions and to follow the pattern they left for us?

Phil. 3:17 Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. NASB

¹⁶² The singular number of the verb is used in I Cor. 9:7 on one shepherding a flock, but, again, it is speaking generically of the function of a shepherd. In the context, the verse is being used as an analogy of Paul and Barnabas in their ministry as apostles of Christ and is not referring to elders within an assembly, although, in principle, bespeaking the care of any minister of God, it could be applied to all.

The Means by which Elders are Established

Scripture tells us that there are three ways whereby men can become elders in an assembly. First, they are made elders by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). Second, they are appointed and/or established to be elders by those in the work. In Scripture we see this by the example of Titus given to us in Titus 1:5-9, and then we see this by the example of the apostles Paul and Barnabas themselves in Acts 14: 22-23. And finally, men become elders when they are recognized by the Church itself as those having been made elders by the Holy Spirit. Scripture gives the Church the necessary qualifications to help discern the ones so gifted through the instructions given to us by Paul through Timothy and by the exhortation in Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians (I Tim. 3: 1-10 and I Thess. 5:12). Let's now look at each one of these means.

Acts 20:28

Acts 20: 28 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which **the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops**, to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood. ASV

The first means whereby a man becomes an elder is the primary way upon which the other two depend; it is that elders are first ordained by the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. As we saw above in Acts 20:28, Paul says that the elders from Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:17) were made “bishops” (overseers in KJV) by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used by Luke in this verse, translated “made,” is the Greek word ἔθετο. It is the same word translated in I Cor. 12:18 as “set” in the KJV, and “placed” in the NASB. The word carries the idea of being “set in place.” In I Cor. 12:18 it bespeaks the Father's sovereign will of assigning or placing every believer into the Body of Christ, just as He pleases.

I Cor. 12:18, 28 But now hath **God set** the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. ²⁸ And **God hath set** some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. KJV

This is the foundation of all service and ministry within the Church since our function is first and foremost determined by our placement or setting within the Body of Christ by the Father. Each member has a particular

function and that function is determined by one's placement. For instance, a hand cannot function as a foot even if it wishes, for it was not placed at the end of a leg, but was placed at the end of an arm. It can only function according to its placement. This same Greek word is also used a few verses later in verse I Cor. 12:28, showing that we are also gifted in accordance with our placement by God into the Body of Christ. Thus, we learn, for instance, that the gift of governments, a gift necessary for one who is an elder, is granted to one in accordance with their placement or setting by God the Father into the Body of Christ. So we can now see how the Father's will is the first step that is necessary for a man to become an elder in the Church.

Next we see the involvement of the Son. Ephesians 4:11 reveals that the placement of an elder must also be in accordance with the giving of the Son.

Eph. 4:11 And He Himself **gave** some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and **some pastors** and teachers. NKJV

Paul makes known that one of the gifts given by the Son for the perfecting of the saints is that of pastor (the gift being either the person himself or the gift given to the person). And since we know that pastors are the same as elders in Scripture, we see that the Son, as well as the Father takes a part in making one an elder within the Church. I Cor. 12:18 and 28 shows us the Father "sets," and Eph. 4:11 shows us the Son "gives."

And so, because of these two acts of the Father and the Son, the *setting* and the *giving*, respectively, we learn that the work of Holy Spirit in *making* one an elder within the Church (Acts 20:28) is based upon the work of not one, but all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

So Scripture reveals to us that the Holy Spirit has "made" men to be elders who were first chosen or set in place by the Father and who were first given to the Church by the Son. And since this word translated "made" is in reality the same Greek word that is translated "set" in I Cor. 12:28, it shows that the Holy Spirit also takes part in this placement or setting of elders into the assembly. In fact, Darby translates the verse as follows:

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore to yourselves, and to all the flock, wherein the Holy Spirit has **set you** as overseers, to shepherd the assembly of God, which he has purchased with the blood of his own. (Darby)

For this reason, the Greek word translated in I Cor. 12: 18, 28 as “set” or “placed,” and in Acts 20:28 as “made,” is in some cases also translated as “appoint,” for this “setting,” or “placement,” obviously, ends up being, in reality, a choice or appointment. The word is so translated as such in I Thess. 5:9 and II Tim. 1:11.

I Thess. 5:9 For God hath not **appointed** (ἔθετο from τίθημι) us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, KJV

II Tim. 1:11 Whereunto I am **appointed** (ἐτέθηγ from τίθημι) a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. KJV

If God the Father decides where to “set” us in the Body of Christ, He has chosen or appointed us. And, if the Son decides who to give as a gift, or He decides to whom to give a gift, He has made a choice. So, we see that the making of the Holy Spirit is in reality an appointment by the Holy Spirit of certain men to be elders.

In this fundamental sense, a Christian cannot really appoint another Christian to be an elder, not even an apostle of Christ can do such appointing. Nowhere is this verb τίθημι, in any of its forms, ever used of a Christian appointing another Christian to this function. Nor can men be trained for this function, even if such men possess certain leadership qualities, for eldership is not based upon one’s natural talents or any leadership qualities, but is only based upon the spiritual gifts given in accordance to our placement within Christ’s Body. Christians can only appoint men to be elders who have first been appointed to be elders by God. Man can only recognize what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have already done. It takes spiritual discernment to know whom the Lord has appointed. In fact, the Holy Spirit uses completely different Greek words when referring to the type of appointment of elders that men are called to do, and this leads us into the second manner in which men become elders in an assembly. We find this second manner in Titus 1:5-9 and Acts 14:23.

Titus 1:5-9

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination.⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not

violent, not greedy for money,⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled,⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. NKJV

The second means whereby a person becomes an elder is based upon the first means. Those in the work are given the discernment by the Holy Spirit to know whom He has made elders. As such, those certain men, made known by the Holy Spirit, are then appointed or chosen to be elders in the assembly.

In Scripture we have two examples. First, Titus was given discernment by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the verbal instructions of Paul before he left Crete, and also by the hand of Paul in his epistle to Titus (Titus 1:5). Second, the apostles Paul and Barnabas were given discernment, through prayer and fasting, after which, they “selected by a show of their hands,” those whom the Lord had made known to them were the ones who had been “made” elders by the Holy Spirit. Let us look first to Titus and then the apostles Paul and Barnabas.

In this passage of Scripture we are told that Titus was personally left by Paul in Crete. This is important for it tells us that Paul and Titus were in the work together. The usual interpretation of this verse is that Titus was acting as an “apostolic delegate” and thus had authority from Paul to appoint elders throughout the island of Crete. However, this designation is a misnomer.

There is no such thing as an “apostolic delegate” in Scripture. One will fail to find this title. This title presumes a structured hierarchy where one has authority to delegate to another the authority to represent that person. In other words, a delegate is one who operates “in the name” of another. Since we have no biblical word applicable to this designation in Scripture, we are left with an English definition of the word. Webster’s defines the word as “A person appointed and sent by another with powers to transact business in his stead.”¹⁶³

Thus, when this nomenclature is applied to Titus, people are saying that authority was given to Titus by Paul to act in his name. The term implies a transference of power or authority (much like was found with Moses

¹⁶³ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (J. P. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1857) pg. 275

and Joshua—Num. 27:20). Yet this notion is completely contradicted by Scripture.

Paul never implies that Titus was acting in Paul's name. In fact, the complete opposite is the truth. Paul sends Titus out in Titus' own name or authority. We see this by looking closely to Paul's instructions to Titus in the Epistle to Titus 1:5.

Titus 1:5 Τούτου χάριν κατέλιπόν σε ἐν Κρήτη, ἵνα τὰ λείποντα ἐπιδιορθώσῃ, καὶ καταστήσῃς κατὰ πόλιν πρεσβυτέρους, ὡς ἐγὼ σοι διαταξάμην·

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--NKJV

The key word in this passage is the Greek word ἐπιδιορθώσῃ (should set in order). This Greek verb is a second person subjective aorist middle verb, and it is this verb which negates any notion that Titus was an “apostolic delegate” sent out in the name and with the authority of the apostle Paul. Henry Alford in commenting on this verbal form states the following.

“...the middle implies that the subject uses his own agency: *facit per se*: see Kruger, *Griechische Sprachlehre*, p. 363, who calls this the *dynamic middle*...”¹⁶⁴

In this quote, Alford uses the Latin phrase, *facit per se* which means “does it himself.” In other words, to put it all into English, Alford would be saying: “the middle implies that the subject uses his own agency (i.e. does it himself).” More than likely, this phrase was taken from the well-known Latin legal term: *Qui facit per alium facit per se*, which is defined in various law journals and dictionaries as follows—

“He who does a thing through another does it himself. Cochran's Law Lexicon. We find in Judge Cooley's work on Torts (3rd Ed., p. 1016) a statement of the doctrine made with admirable simplicity. He lays as the foundation for the master's liability, the maxim: *Qui facit per alium facit per se*; which he renders freely as meaning that that which the superior has put the inferior in motion to do, must be regarded as done by the superior himself.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. III* (Rivingtons, London, 1865) pg. 410

¹⁶⁵ Fred P. Caldwell, *The Kentucky Judicial Dictionary: Being a Compilation of All Words, Phrases and Maxims which Have Been Defined, Construed, Interpreted Or Applied in Reported Kentucky Cases, and in Kentucky*

Now, if one wanted to adopt a term that would be applicable to the concept of an apostolic delegate, this would be the term. It would mean Paul was the one doing the appointing of elders, through Titus who was acting in his stead. That would, indeed define an “apostolic delegate.” But Alford does not quote the full maxim; he quotes only the last phrase, *facit per se*, because Paul uses a verbal form that disallows any thought that Paul was doing something through Titus, or that Titus was acting an apostolic delegate. This verbal form must explain why Alford chose to only quote the last part of the maxim, *facit per se*, “he does by himself,” for the first part cannot apply.

This verb—ἐπιδιορθώση (should set in order)—is the middle form of the verb, and, as Alford states above, it implies the subject is acting under his own agency. This type of middle, called by Alford a “dynamic middle,” is also sometimes called an “intensive middle,” or a “subjective middle.” James Robinson Boise, in his Greek Grammar, defines it as follows:

“The middle voice in Greek has three uses: It represents the subject as acting (a) upon himself directly (direct middle); (b) to or for himself (indirect middle); (c) **with his own means or powers (subjective middle)**.”¹⁶⁶

And James Hadley in his Greek Grammar said this.

“The Subjective Middle represents **the subject as acting with his own means and powers**, and differs but slightly from the active: παρέχειν to furnish in any way, παρέχεσθαι to afford from one's own property; ποιεῖν πόλεμον to make war simply, ποιεῖσθαι to make war with one's own resources...”¹⁶⁷

In addition, Ellicott says this about the dynamic (subjective) middle. (He is speaking in reference to another verse, but it is no less applicable, since he is still speaking of the Greek subjective or dynamic middle voice.

Constitution, Statutes and Codes of Practice, Volume 3 (W. H. Anderson Company, Cincinnati, 1916) pg. 2793

¹⁶⁶ James Robinson Boise, Judson Gregory Pattengill, *First Lessons in Greek: Adapted to the Grammar of Goodwin, and to that of Hadley as Revised by Frederic D. Forest Allen* (S. C. Griggs and Company, Chicago, 1889) pg. 36-37

¹⁶⁷ James Hadley, Frederic de Forest Allen, ed., *A Greek grammar for schools and colleges: revised and in part rewritten by Frederic de Forest Allen* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1884) pg. 261

“In this form of the middle voice, somewhat conveniently termed by Kruger (Sprachl. § 51. 8) the ‘dynamic’ middle,’ the reference to the powers put forth by the subject is more distinct than in the act[ive], which simply states the action. Such delicate shades of meaning can scarcely be expressed in translation, but no less exist.”¹⁶⁸

Ellicott makes an important statement when he says, “such delicate shades of meaning can scarcely be expressed in translation, but no less exist.” This is the difficulty of translation of one language into another. Many times this cannot be accomplished without further elucidation outside the actual translation. This, I believe, is true with Paul’s use of ἐπιδιορθώση (should set in order). It is the shade of meaning that is found in the dynamic middle, ἐπιδιορθώση (should set in order), that completely contradicts the whole concept of “apostolic delegate,” simply because Titus was “commanded” by Paul, by the use of the Greek middle voice, to act under his own power! There is no such “delegating” of apostolic authority to Titus in this verse. Titus was a fellow worker in the “work;” he possessed his own authority from the Lord to act apart from Paul. In fact, later Paul instructs Titus to not let anyone despise his authority which he received from the Lord.

Titus 2:15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. KJV

Titus was given his own spiritual authority from the Holy Spirit when he was set apart into the work. He needed no delegated authority from Paul. He functioned under the authority of the Lord and so appointed elders under his own “agency,” using Alford terminology. Yes, indeed, Scripture says Paul commanded Titus to appoint elders, but what most forget is that he commanded Titus to appoint elders **under his own power, agency or authority**. This is the significance of the Greek middle in this verse.

It is almost as if Paul was doing the same thing with Titus that he did with Timothy (cf. I Tim. 4:12-16; II Tim. 1:6-7). He was encouraging him to not ignore the gifts and authority which were given to him by the Lord; he was encouraging a young worker in the Lord to fulfill his ministry (cf. II Tim. 4:5).

¹⁶⁸ Charles John Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon* (J. W. Parker & Son, London, 1857) pg. 192

Yes, Paul would give commands in the work to both Titus and Timothy, but it was done with the spiritual authority given to Paul by the Lord, and not by a hierarchical or a formal ecclesiastical authority that he possessed. That type of authority structure was not introduced into the Church until after the death of the apostles. It did not exist in the early Church. The apostles would act with a spiritual or moral authority (which all would be wise to heed) but they never exercised a formal hierarchical authority. They never exercised an authority like that of *benefactors*, who would dole out measured benefits intended to indebt and control the ones receiving the favors, nor like that of *kings* who would not only make commands, but would also physically enforce those commands given (Luke 22:25). No, the authority of the apostles was a spiritual and moral authority.

The only formal, hierarchical, authority that the apostles ever trusted within the Church was that of the King of kings and Lord of lords; they trusted in Him to discipline His children, whenever their own spiritual injunctions and spiritual commands might be ignored. They could and would deliver one to Satan when needed (I Cor. 5:5), but if their injunction was ignored they would not tear out the tare by the roots (Matt. 13:28-29). Spiritual authority commands, but cannot physically enforce, whereas hierarchical authority, not only commands, it also physically enforces (and, indeed, has done so throughout Church history).

Paul was no autocrat, dictating commands; he understood the one who dictates is the Lord. Paul was given authority from the Lord to build up and not destroy (II Cor. 13:8). As such, Paul was humble and was very careful to not use this authority in an autocratic manner; he was careful to ever follow the command of his Master and not act with a dictatorial spirit—

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them.²⁶ “It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant. NASB

II Cor. 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

I Thess. 2:6-7 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷ But we

proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children. NASB

Phm. 1:8-9 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*-- being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— NKJV

In fact, Paul knew he could not act in an autocratic manner, for he had no authority in and of himself (II Cor. 13:2-3). It was the authority of the Lord working within him. (Oh, how this truth had been forgotten so many times by men who have been placed in positions of responsibility.)

So, in conclusion we see that there is no such thing in Scripture as an “apostolic delegate.” Titus acted under his own authority as a worker of God and, as such, was responsible for appointing elders within the Churches (by discerning the ones who had already been made elders by the Holy Spirit) which act was the outworking of his continued responsibility of “equipping the saints.”

We will go into more detail concerning the biblical basis of the “work” in a later chapter, but suffice it to say that now, those in the work like unto Titus, would be those who have been set apart into the work of the Lord to preach the gospel and establish Churches in places where none exist. In other words, a worker like Titus today would be called by some a pioneer missionary. And the same type of authority, that one like Titus possessed, would be possessed by the pioneer missionary. Such a missionary might be sent into a country or part of a country where no Church exists. He preaches the gospel and souls are saved. A Church is established and the missionary as an evangelist or teacher instructs the new Christians in the things of the Lord. Then, when the time comes and he recognizes that the Holy Spirit has made certain men into elders, the missionary “proves” such men by the instructions left by Paul (found in Scripture) and by the discernment of the Holy Spirit; and then, after proving, the missionary then establishes those men as elders in the Churches, just like Titus did in Crete.

This type of missionary is not an apostolic delegate, but is a worker set apart into the work with the gift and authority of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel, lay the foundation of a Church and then build up the saints in the Church. And, just like Titus before, such a worker has an extra-local authority and ministry given to him by the Holy Spirit and so is moved on to continue the spread of the gospel and then repeat the process all over again in another place, setting in order what is lacking,

making sure each assembly ultimately has godly men who are proved or recognized as elders after they have been made elders by the Holy Spirit.

There is no such thing as an “apostolic delegate” and to say that Churches no longer are able to have recognized elders today because we no longer have “apostolic delegates” is ignoring Scripture and is, unfortunately, an inadvertent acceptance of a hierarchical nomenclature that developed out of the clergy/laity system of the second century Church. Titus was acting with his own authority as a Christian who had been set apart in the “work” of establishing Churches in places where Christ had not been named. More than likely, he would have been considered to be an evangelist just like Timothy, but in either case, he was called to “set in order” what remained and that involved making sure each assembly had a set of elders in their midst. This was part of his ministry of equipping the saints.

And so Titus “set in order” what remained; he appointed elders in every city as Paul instructed him (apparently, this being a new work, there was at that time only one Church per city, so Paul could instruct him to appoint elders in every city, which, by definition, would mean in every Church). This “appointing” involved a process and it is to that we would now like to turn our attention.

The word translated “appoint” in most versions is the Greek word *καταστήσῃς*. However, “establish” seems to convey a better sense of the word since “establish” gives a slightly different nuance. “Establish” seems to speak more of the process, itself, whereas, “appoint” gives more the idea of a static, arbitrary action, without any thought to the process.

In other words, when a man is “established” as an elder, it involves a process whereby such a one is presented before the assembly as one called of Holy Spirit to shepherd the flock. The process involves the one appointing, and the Church accepting, or affirming that particular person. Thus, such a one is “recognized” as an elder by the Church, perhaps with prayer. Whereas, if a man was simply appointed, the act seems to be confined between the one appointing and the one appointed, without necessarily, bringing such a one before the assembly for recognition. This is, perhaps, why the KJV translates the word as “ordain,” since they assumed a hierarchical order in the Church at that time, but there is no thought of “ordaining” found in the word. Titus is not ordaining an elder; he is not conveying authority to another; he is simply presenting a man

before the assembly for his public recognition as one already made an elder by the Holy Spirit.

In this light, it is interesting to note that the word καταστήσης is a combination of the verb ἵστημι and the preposition κατά. The preposition κατά with a genitive bespeaks downward movement and the verb ἵστημι carries the idea of “standing.” In fact, the verb ἵστημι is also a part of the word ἀνάστασις, which is translated into English as resurrection (e.g., Acts 1:22; Rom. 1:4). W. E. Vine defines the word as follows: denotes (I) "a raising up," or "rising" (ana, "up," and histemi, "to cause to stand")...¹⁶⁹

Therefore, etymologically, the verbal part of the word, καταστήσης, used in Titus 1:5, carries the idea of “standing” and the prepositional part of the word carries the idea of “setting down.” If we apply it to a person, we could say (when the two words are used in contradistinction with each other) that someone is “standing” and “sitting.” In other words, in the case of our example in the epistle to Titus, we could say the word was chosen to reflect the process whereby Titus first took a Christian from the midst of the saints, having already discerned that he had been made an elder by the Holy Spirit. Then, after making this determination, the person was then presented to the assembly for recognition (giving the idea of standing before them). Then after their recognition or affirmation, the person was then “set down” in their midst as their elder (giving the idea of sitting). This is what gives the idea of “establishing,” rather than just “appointing,” as the word etymologically carries the idea of standing, and setting down (please see footnote below on etymology and meaning).¹⁷⁰ Webster’s defines the word “establish” as follows: “to set up in the place of another, and confirm.”¹⁷¹ And Oxford’s includes the following meanings: “set up on a firm or permanent basis,” and/or, “achieve permanent acceptance or recognition for.” So, it seems

¹⁶⁹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 290 (vol. 3)

¹⁷⁰ The meaning of words must be taken from context not etymology. Sometimes the meaning of a word is completely different than its etymological meaning. However, in this case the contextual meaning and the etymological meaning are one and the same.

¹⁷¹ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (J. P. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1857) pg. 368

καταστήσης would be better translated as “establish,” rather than “appoint.”¹⁷²

This same word is also used in Acts 6:3 where those selected by the assembly were “established” in their service by the apostles with prayer and laying on of hands (not that those two acts are included in the word itself). In fact, Darby translates the word as “establish.”

Acts 6:3 Look out therefore, brethren, from among yourselves seven men, well reported of, full of *the Holy Spirit* and wisdom, whom we will **establish** (καταστήσομεν) over this business. (Darby)

So we see the word simply means to “establish” and Scripture tells us that in regard to the Church this involved a process of recognition whereby certain ones were raised up and set down before the assembly.

Therefore, we see that one of the second ways a man was made an elder in the assembly was that a Christian worker made sure that each Church had things set in order by the “establishment” of certain men as elders, men who had been discerned as having already been made elders by the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. This was the blessed work of one like Titus and was the part of the second manner in which men were made elders in the assembly. Let us now turn our attention to Acts 14:21-23.

Acts 14:21-23

The next portion in Scripture that refers to Christians appointing men to be elders in the assembly is found in Acts 14:21-23.

Acts 14:21-23 And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed (χειροτονήσαντες) elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. NASB

¹⁷² Angus Stevenson, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010) pg. 598

As the apostles were leaving those cities (no longer being able to be present so as to personally lead the Churches they had founded) they made sure, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that each Church have elders appointed to shepherd the saints. This was the Divine means of keeping order within the assembly. The time had come (like was done in Jerusalem when the apostles found themselves more absent, than present) for elders to take over the day to day care of the Churches. The Churches constant oversight was now being turned over by Paul and Barnabas to a plurality of men known as elders—bishops— pastors. It is important to note that they did not appoint a plurality of elders with one being singled out to be above the rest as a first among equals; no, they simply appointed co-elders who were left under the one who was, indeed, the first over all—the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

However, there has been some dispute as to the means of this appointment and a difference of opinion regarding the actual meaning of this word translated “appointed” in verse 23—the Greek word χειροτονήσαντες. The word is made up of two Greek words—the Greek word for “hand” and the Greek word for “stretch.” W. E. Vine has a helpful comment on the word.

“CHEIROTONEŌ (χειροτονέω) primarily used of voting in the Athenian legislative assembly and meaning to stretch forth the hands (*cheir*, the hand, *teinō*, to stretch), is not to be taken in its literal sense; it could not be so taken in its compound *procheirotoneō*, to choose before, since it is said of God, Acts 10:41. *Cheirotoneō* is said of the appointment of elders by apostolic missionaries in the various churches which they revisited, Acts 14:23, RV, “had appointed,” i.e., by the recognition of those who had been manifesting themselves as gifted of God to discharge the functions of elders (see No. 2). It is also said of those who were appointed (not by voting, but with general approbation) by the churches in Greece to accompany the Apostle in conveying their gifts to the poor saints in Judea, 2 Cor. 8:19.”¹⁷³

So one can see that, even though W. E. Vine believes otherwise, the word was used of an election where people would vote by outstretched hands. Because of this some have translated the word accordingly.

Tyndale translated the word as, “by election,” as can be seen below—

¹⁷³ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 69 (Vol. 1)

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders **by election** in every congregation after they had prayed and fasted they commended them to God on whom they believed.

The Bishop's Bible, which predated the King James Version, translated it in the same way.

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them elders **by election** in every Church, and had prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

And the Geneva Bible which was translated just a few years before the King James Bible, and was the most popular English Bible of the 16th century, also translated the verse the same way.

Acts 14:23 And when they had ordained them Elders **by election** in every Church, and prayed, and fasted, they commended them to the Lord in whom they believed.

As one can see they all understood the Greek word in its primary sense of "election." Certainly, this is a possible translation, but it does have some problems. First and foremost, if one understands the participle χειροτονήσαντες as referring to the disciples in the Churches and not to Paul and Barnabas, in other words, if one takes the word "they," in the phrase "they ordained by election," to refer to those in the Church, one then has a problem with the participles attachment to the main verb within the fuller context. And when one takes into account the larger context, one sees this is untenable.

Participles are normally construed with a main verb. In this portion of Scripture, the text begins with Paul and Barnabas "returning" to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in verse 21. The main verb is the Greek word ὑπέστρεψαν (they returned). Thus, the first participles are construed with this main verb or action. The text first tells us "they" (Paul and Barnabas) returned doing two things. First, they were "strengthening" the souls of the disciples (the first participle). Second, they were "encouraging" them (the second participle). In Darby's translation these two participles are translated as "establishing" and "exhorting." But when we come to the next or third participle in the text, they were "appointing" we find a change. The first two participles were present participles, which tell the Greek reader their action is simultaneous (generally speaking) with the action of the main verb. But the third participle in the text, the Greek participle χειροτονήσαντες, switches from a present participle to an

aorist participle which, generally speaking, tells the reader its action should be considered as being antecedent to the action of the main verb. Now, of course, this becomes unlikely if we construe it with the verb ὑπέστρεψαν (they returned) for it would be saying the appointed elders before they returned! Thus, one would have to take it as also suggesting simultaneous action with that verb, which aorist participles sometimes do, but this seems unlikely since it would have been normal to simply continue on with a string of present participles. So, the question must be asked why switch to an aorist participle. I think the answer becomes clear when we see that this participle is construed, not with ὑπέστρεψαν (they returned), but with the next verb in the text, the verb παρέθεντο (they commended or committed) in verse 23. In other words, the aorist participle tells us that the action of appointing or choosing occurs before the action of commending. Thus the first two participles are construed with the main verb in verse 21 and the third participle is construed with the second verb in verse 23. This leaves us with one more participle in the text, which is also an aorist participle, the participle προσευξάμενοι (having prayed) which action also occurs before the verb “they commended, or “they committed”). Darby’s translation nicely brings out this distinction for the English reader. I have underlined the main verb and put in bold type the participles with which they are construed.

Acts 14:21-23 And having announced the glad tidings to that city, and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, ²² **establishing** the souls of the disciples, **exhorting** them to abide in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. ²³ And **having chosen** them elders in each assembly, **having prayed** with fastings, they committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.

So now that we know which verbs each participle is construed with let’s return to the concept of election. If one wishes to say that the “they,” in the third participle “they ordained by election,” refers to the disciples in the Churches, the “they” in the main verb must also refer to the disciples in the Churches, in which case, we then have the new believers being the ones who are commending either Paul and Barnabas or the elders to the Lord. The context of the text shows otherwise; the ones commending them to the Lord are Paul and Barnabas. Therefore, this understanding of “ordaining by election” by the disciples, themselves, becomes untenable. Is it possible grammatically? Yes, the Greek is a flexible language. But is it probable? No, the flow of the text suggests that the “they” would be Paul and Barnabas, and so, in those aforementioned translations, “they” must refer to Paul and Barnabas and not to the disciples in those Churches.

However, some admit the “they” in those versions does, indeed, refer to Paul and Barnabas, but they say the Greek word χειροτονέω, itself, carries the additional meaning of the election by the disciples with the appointing of the ones so elected—much in the way deacons were chosen in Acts 6:2-6. However, this too is highly unlikely for in the first place, the word does not include the thought that two different actions are taking place, one being based upon the other, in other words, the appointing by Paul and Barnabas, being based upon the electing by the disciples. The word simply does not carry a connotation of two actions. It either refers to choosing or electing, not both. Only one subject is performing the act; it has to be either the apostles or the disciples doing the appointing or electing; the Greek word does not indicate both.

If Luke was stating that two actions were being done in this appointment, he could have followed the same grammatical pattern he followed in Acts 6:3, where he already wrote about such a process. He wrote about how the Church elected or put forth certain men for consideration by apostles, who then gave their acceptance to their selection. In that verse Luke uses the Greek word ἐπισκέπτομαι, which carries the idea of “looking for” or “seeking carefully,” thus giving the idea of an election or selection by consensus. If this is what was occurring in Acts 14:23 he could have very well used the same word.

Or, if not, and he still wished to communicate to the reader that the elders were being elected by the assembly, he could have simply written in this way: χειροτονήσαντες δὲ **οἱ μαθηταὶ** αὐτοῖς κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν πρεσβυτέρους, προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν παρέθεντο αὐτοὺς τῷ κυρίῳ εἰς ὃν πεπιστεύκεισαν—and after the disciples elected elders for them in each Church, having prayed with fasting, they (Paul and Barnabas) commended them to the Lord on whom they had believed). By the inclusion of **οἱ μαθηταὶ** into the passage, the text would then clearly indicate that it was the disciples, and not Paul and Barnabas, who did the selecting of the elders, after which, the verse would then be saying Paul and Barnabas commended the selected elders and/or the entire Church to the Lord.

But since Luke did neither of these things, it seems the verse shows that Paul and Barnabas were, indeed, the ones who were doing the appointing of those elders, as per the New American Standard Bible, or the electing, as per the Geneva Bible, or the ordaining, as per the King James Version (depending on how one wishes to translate the Greek word χειροτονήσαντες). But, since the Greek word itself carries no thought of

“ordaining,” as intimated by the King James Version, it seems best to follow a translation more in line with the basal meaning of the word—stretching out the hand.

Therefore, even though “appointing” reflects the end result of “stretching out the hand,” and “electing” reflects the purpose of “stretching out the hand,” it seems a word that encompasses both would be “selecting.” Therefore, the verse would indicate that Paul and Barnabas were “selecting” certain men they had discerned from the Lord, with their praying with fasting, as being the ones chosen to be elders by God, having already been made so by the Holy Spirit.

With this understanding, the word still keeps the idea of “appointment,” but it shows that it was Paul and Barnabas who did the “electing” of those certain men who they had discerned were already made elders by the Holy Spirit. With this sense, one could retain the sense of electing, albeit with the understanding that the only ones doing the voting would be Paul and Barnabas! One could say that their “stretching out the hand” in affirmation of a person was a “selection” by their mutual consent and unanimity of the men they felt the Lord had chosen to be elders (perhaps the same way, earlier in their life, the Holy Spirit had told the prophets and teachers in Antioch to “set apart” Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He called them).

With such an understanding, it seems if there was no unanimity between Paul and Barnabas concerning a particular person, then it seems that person would not be “selected” or “set before” the Church as being an elder. Therefore, in one real sense, even though, they may have had private discussions about each person, the “election,” in reality, becomes an “appointment” or “choosing,” based upon the discernment they gained with their prayer and fasting of the ones whom the Holy Spirit had already gifted to be an elder.

Perhaps it would be helpful to include a quote by Henry Craik on this matter. However, it should be noted that he does make some slightly different conclusions (although he never fully explains his reasoning). Nevertheless, I still believe it would be helpful to include his thoughts upon this matter for all to consider.

“The term there rendered ‘ordained,’ has been the ground of a long and still unsettled controversy. There is no difficulty in determining its primary signification. It signifies literally, ‘to stretch out the hand,’ hence, ‘to vote ‘for,’ or, ‘to elect by votes.’ In the only other passage in which it occurs in its

uncompounded form (II. Cor. 8: 19) it is applied to a choice made by the church, and is obviously to be taken in its ordinary meaning.

Thus far the question would seem to be exceedingly simple, and many would be disposed to agree with the opinion of Dr. Alford, who, although by his very position not likely to be prejudiced in favour of popular election, says, in his note on Acts 14: 23., that there is 'no reason here for departing from the usual meaning of electing by show of hands. The Apostles may have admitted by ordination those Presbyters whom the churches elected.'

Still, there is something to be urged on the other side. The primary meaning of the word, which is also the usual one, undoubtedly would require us to understand that the appointment was by voting or popular election. But the term was also applied to any kind of appointment, and in Acts 10:41 we find it, in its compounded form, applied to a choice or appointment derived immediately from God Himself. How can we be certain that the sacred historian does not use it in this secondary sense in the passage before us? Again, had it been said that those who composed each particular church appointed or ordained elders over them, there would have been no room for doubt. But the statement is restricted to Paul and Barnabas. If, therefore, we will keep strictly to the force of the words actually used, and insist upon interpreting the verb as describing election by votes, we must render thus: 'And having elected, by votes, elders for them (*i.e.*, for the disciples) in every church, and prayed, with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.' But, thus translated, the construction of the language seems to me to require that the election by vote must be restricted to the votes of Paul and Barnabas, which is evidently unsuitable. The verb *χειροτονέω* so far as I am aware, is nowhere else employed in the sense of electing or appointing by the votes of others. Had the historian told us that the members of the Christian communities chose their elders by vote, we should have necessarily understood him to mean that they themselves voted for his appointment. No such statement is made in the passage under review. I cannot, therefore, rest upon this passage as evidence for popular election. I submit the difficulty to more qualified scholars, and I wait for further light.

Meantime, as so much depends upon the rendering of this brief clause, it may be interesting to enquire how it is found given in the two most valuable of the ancient versions. These are, unquestionably, the Latin and the Syriac, both of them reaching back, in the judgment of the best critics, to the second century. In neither of these versions is there the slightest reference to popular election; the term in Latin being *constituissent* (appointed), and the verb used in the Syriac being exactly of the same import. The distinguished scholar, Erasmus was one of the earliest of the modern Latin translators. His rendering, '*cum sulfragiis creassent*,' ('when they had appointed by votes') is found in many of the versions executed since his time. Beza and his followers, Diodati, the French Translation, and the English Geneva Version, all adopt the rendering of

Erasmus. The Geneva of 1857 'adds the following note: *'The worde signifieth to elect by putting up the hands, which declareth that ministers were not made without the consent of the people.'* Our own Tyndale and the Bishop's Bible give the rendering maintained by Erasmus, so that if a majority of Versions were to be allowed to decide the question, the rendering given in the Vulgate, Syriac, and Authorised English Translation might appear to be erroneous. Nevertheless, although I cannot approve of the very sweeping assertion made by Dr. Bloomfield, in his note on the passage, that no man of real learning, now-a-days, would uphold the rendering given by Beza, still, I do not think that there is sufficient ground to depart from the rendering of the more ancient authorities. Apart altogether from ecclesiastical bias, on one side or the other, were I to decide in accordance with the evidence before me, I should say that there is no proof, either in the 'use of the word itself or in the construction of the passage, 'to warrant the statement that the elders, there referred to, were appointed to their office by the votes of the people.'"¹⁷⁴

Therefore, when all things are considered, it seems self-evident from Acts 14:23, that elders were chosen by Paul and Barnabas, through a selection made by their outstretched hands. Yet, if some prefer to emphasize the idea of appointment instead, I still think it must be admitted that their appointment was based upon the previous choice of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

However, one more thing must be examined before we conclude this section (and forgive me for listing one more possibility) some have suggested that it was not Paul and Barnabas who did the "selecting," but the Churches themselves who did the selecting because the personal pronoun αὐτοῖς in verse 23 should be taken in a reflexive sense. Now, again, within the context, I do not believe this is possible, but some have suggested otherwise and so I felt it should be addressed, even if it is added after having made a conclusion of the whole matter!

If the pronoun αὐτοῖς is used in a reflexive sense then the passage would read this way (adopting the American Standard Version of the text): "And when they had appointed for **themselves** elders in every Church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed." Obviously, with this view, if the pronoun is understood in a reflexive sense, then it must be the Churches, or I should say, the disciples in the Churches, who appointed or elected the elders for themselves. Certainly, Paul and Barnabas were not appointing or electing

¹⁷⁴ Henry Craik, *New Testament Church Order. Five Lectures* (J. Snow, London, 1863) pg. 50-52

elders for themselves. They were not appointing men to be elders over themselves!

An early Christian document, written a few years later, suggests the same thing. It reads as follows—

“**Χειροτονήσατε** οὖν **ἑαυτοῖς** ἐπισκόπους καὶ διακόνους ἀξίους τοῦ Κυρίου ἄνδρας πραεῖς καὶ ἀφιλαργύρους καὶ ἀληθεῖς καὶ δεδοκιμασμένους ὑμῖν γὰρ λειτουργοῦσι καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν λειτουργίαν τῶν προφητῶν καὶ διδασκάλων.”

“Elect therefore for **yourselves** Bishops and Deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful, and approved; for they too minister to you the ministry of the Prophets and Teachers.”¹⁷⁵

Notice that the document uses the same Greek word χειροτονέω. However, notice that instead of the Greek pronoun αὐτοῖς, the text has the Greek pronoun ἑαυτοῖς. Now, while ἑαυτοῖς is clearly reflexive, αὐτοῖς is not, however, it is true that sometimes the Greek pronoun αὐτός is used with a reflexive sense (e.g. Mark 16:14; also see Fig.7).

Acts 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves (αὐτοὺς) with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. KJV
Acts 15:32 And Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves (αὐτοὶ) , encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. NASB
Acts 16:37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves (αὐτοὶ) and bring us out.” NASB
Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves (αὐτοῦς) from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. KJV
Acts 24:15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves (αὐτοὶ) also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. KJV

Fig. 7 Αὐτός used by Luke in Acts of the Apostles as a reflexive pronoun

¹⁷⁵ Philip Schaff, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 3rd Ed. (Funk & Wagnalls, New York, 1889) pg. 211-212

Thus, with a reflexive understanding of the pronoun, it is possible that Luke could be stating that the Churches were doing their own electing of elders and Paul and Barnabas were simply recognizing their choice, much in the same way the Church selected deacons, and the apostles recognized their choice as can be seen in Acts 6:2-6.

This then would be how the entire context would read, adopting Darby's translation—

Acts 14:19-28 But there came Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and stoned **Paul**, drew him out of the city, supposing him to have died. ²⁰ But while the disciples encircled him, he rose up and entered into the city. And on the morrow he went away with **Barnabas** to Derbe. And having announced the glad tidings to that city, and having made many disciples, **they** returned to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, ²² establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to abide in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. ²³ And [after **they** had elected for themselves] elders in each assembly, having prayed with fastings, **they** committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed. ²⁴ And having passed through Pisidia **they** came to Pamphylia, ²⁵ and having spoken the word in Perga, **they** came down to Attalia; ²⁶ and thence **they** sailed away to Antioch, whence **they** had been committed to the grace of God for the work which **they** had fulfilled. ²⁷ And having arrived, and having brought together the assembly, **they** related to them all that God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith to the nations. ²⁸ And **they** stayed no little time with the disciples.

I have put **Paul** and **Barnabas** in bold type, being the main subjects of the text and also the English pronoun “**they**” (which in Greek is understood in the inflected verb) to show the flow of the passage. The story is about Paul and Barnabas completing their first missionary tour. The focus is on them. Every English pronoun, “they,” is referring to them. This shows the flow of the text. But notice that if we adopt the reflexive use of αὐτοῖς, the first English pronoun “they” in verse 23 in the phrase “they had elected” cannot refer to Paul and Barnabas.

Thus, we end up with the antecedent of every other use of the English “they” being Paul and Barnabas, except the first “they” in verse 23, which would then refer to the disciples of those Churches. This would break up the entire flow of the passage. Every “they” in the passage is Paul and Barnabas, **They** returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. **They** established and exhorted the disciples. **They** came to Pamphylia. **They** came down to Attalia. **They** sailed away to Antioch from when they had been committed. **They** had fulfilled their work. **They** related all that God had done. And **they** were the ones who stayed with the disciples. But,

with the understanding of a reflexive αὐτοῖς this flow is broken and in the middle of it all, all of a sudden, with no explanation, the “they” in verse 23 now refers to the disciples, because of the supposed reflexive pronoun, and not to Paul and Barnabas.

This would be highly unlikely for a number of reasons. First, as we have already demonstrated, it does not fit in with the flow of the context of the passage. Secondly, because the subject of the participle must be the same as the subject of the verb with which it is construed, if we take implied subject in χειροτονήσαντες to be the Church, then the implied subject in παρέθεντο (they commended)—the verb with which it is construed—would also have to be the Church. However, it would be very unlikely for Luke to say that the Church would be doing the committing or commending, because the sense of the passage is that it was Paul and Barnabas who had the great concern and care for the new believers, and, as such, knowing they might not see them for some time, it would only be natural that Paul and Barnabas would be the ones doing the commending to the Lord. And, thirdly, since the ones who were commended, were the ones who “had believed” on the Lord that would not be Paul and Barnabas, for they had believed many, many years before.

The only other way some might still opt for this view would be that the subject of the participle is different than the same subject of the main verb. In other words, the subject of the verbal participle “they elected” would be the disciples, and the subject of the main verb, “they committed,” would be Paul and Barnabas. In this case, it might appear this way in English: “And after they had elected for themselves elders in each assembly, having prayed with fastings, they [Paul and Barnabas] committed them to the Lord, on whom they had believed.”

In English, this sounds reasonable enough, but in Greek, if this is what Luke was saying, it would have been normal for him to use, what is commonly known as a Genitive Absolute construction, which, of course, is not the case as χειροτονήσαντες is in the nominative case and not the genitive.

The Genitive absolute construction is used in a participle phrase when the subject of the participle is different than the subject of the main clause and the participle is anarthrous. Wallace, in his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* explains such a participial phrase structurally and semantically in this way.

Structurally, the genitive absolute consists of the following: 1) a noun or pronoun in the genitive case (though this is sometimes absent); 2) a genitive anarthrous participle (always); 3) the entire construction at the front of a sentence (usually).¹⁷⁶

Semantically, there are again three items to notice, once the structure has been identified (note that the above stated structure is not limited to the genitive absolute construction): 1) This construction is unconnected with the rest of the sentence (i.e., its subject—the genitive noun or pronoun—is different from the subject of the main clause); 2) the participle is always adverbial (circumstantial) or, at least, dependent-verbal (i.e., it cannot be an adjectival or substantival participle); 3) the participle is normally (about 90% of the time) temporal, though it can on occasion express any of the adverbial ideas.¹⁷⁷

So we can see this too is an unlikely understanding of the verse. The pronoun was not meant to be understood reflexively. But this possibility does bring us to the third manner in which men become elders in an assembly, wherein the Church does, indeed, play a large part even though such is not the case in this verse. And that manner is found in I Tim. 3:1-10 and I Thess. 5:12. Let us first look at I Tim. 3:1-10.

I Timothy 3:1-10

I Tim. 3:1-10 This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.² A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;³ Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)⁶ Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.⁷ Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.⁸ Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;⁹ Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.¹⁰ And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless.

¹⁷⁶ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996) pg.654-55

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 655

The first epistle to Timothy introduces us to the private conversation between an apostle and one of his co-workers regarding issues of ministry and the Church. As with the epistle to Titus, we find Timothy traveling with the apostle, engaging in the work of perfecting or equipping the saints. Part of this ministry of perfecting or equipping was to provide those things necessary for the proper working of each and every Church. Titus and Timothy were both engaged in this ministry. However, before we consider these instructions to Timothy, let us quickly review some of the main points of Paul's instructions to Titus, as his instructions lead us into these instructions for Timothy.

If we remember, Paul leaves Titus on the island of Crete, while he travels onward to another location, perhaps on to Nicopolis where we know he was planning to winter (Titus 3:12). For some reason, Paul was not able to remain on the island completing the ordering of the Churches in the same way he and Barnabas completed the ordering of the Churches of Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch before returning to Antioch in Syria, just as we just discussed above (Acts. 14:21-23). And, because of this premature departure, he encourages Titus to finish this "setting in order" of the Churches in Crete. This was accomplished by establishing elders in every city (apparently, this being a new work, there was at that time only one Church per city, so Paul could instruct him to appoint elders in every city, which, by definition, would mean in every Church).

We also suggested that the Greek word, *καταστήσης*, translated "appoint" in Titus 1:5 by some translations, is better translated, "establish," since "establish" gives a slightly different nuance than appoint. We said "establish" seems to speak more of the process, itself, whereas, "appoint" gives more the idea of a static, arbitrary action, without any thought to the process. This process, we said, was hinted at by the verbal and prepositional components of the word.

Therefore, we concluded that the word *καθίστημι* was chosen by Paul to reflect the process whereby Titus first took a Christian from the midst of the saints, having already discerned that he had been made an elder by the Holy Spirit, whom he then presented to the assembly for recognition.

We mentioned same word is also used in Acts 6:3 where those selected by the assembly were "established" in their service by the apostles with prayer and laying on of hands (not that those two acts are necessarily included in the word itself).

Acts 6:3 "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may **put in charge** (**καταστήσομεν**) of this task. NASB

Acts 6:3 Look out therefore, brethren, from among yourselves seven men, well reported of, full of *the Holy Spirit* and wisdom, whom we will **establish** (**καταστήσομεν**) over this business. (Darby)

So we concluded that the word simply means to “establish” and that Scripture indicates the Church had a part in this process of recognition. Why is this significant?—because it leads us into this final way whereby men are made elders in an assembly. This final way is found in Paul’s instructions to Timothy in I Tim. 3: 1-10. This portion of Scripture speaks to the Church’s part in this process. And so, it is to these instructions we would now like to examine.

We will look at this portion of Scripture from three perspectives. First, we will examine the meaning of verse 1, and then we will examine the overall context in order to determine how the passage should be applied, understanding who is involved in discerning of the one who has been made a bishop by the Holy Spirit, and finally, we will look at verse 10 in order to determine who has the responsibility of maintaining the proving of bishops and/or deacons and what exactly is entailed in such proving. Let’s begin with verse one.

Paul begins these instructions in I Tim. 3:1 with the following statement (taken from the King James Version)—“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” The New King James Version translates it this way—“ This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.” But with all due respect to both versions, I believe Darby’s translation is better—“The word is faithful: if any one aspires to exercise oversight, he desires a good work

Most versions, with their translations, convey the thought that seeking the office of bishop within the assembly is a good thing—and because Paul also says such seeking is a good work, they end up reinforcing the idea that such a spiritual ambition is a good thing and that it is one of the first qualifications of a true bishop or elder. However, in actuality, Paul is emphasizing the complete opposite. He is not praising such ambition.

In fact, such ambition would tend to disqualify one from being a bishop. Over the centuries this type of ambition has often been the plague of Church leadership in so many ways. Like the love money, it can be a root of all evil.

James says this concerning ambition: “Wherever there are jealousy and ambition (ἐριθεία), there are also disharmony and wickedness of every kind.” (Jam 3:16).¹⁷⁸ Even the world understood the ill-effect of such ambition. Aristotle uses the word in a negative way of one who is engaged in politics, seeking power and honour for himself.

Humility, not a desire for power, authority, or a position of honour, is one of the first qualifications of a bishop. Scripture is replete with examples of men who were chosen by God to be leaders because they were not seeking such positions. Moses deferred, but was made a prophet. David never sought to be king over Israel, yet God anointed him king. Scripture says, concerning a high priest like Aaron, that “...every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; and **no one takes the honour to himself**, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.” (Heb 5:1,4 NASB).

“No one takes that honour to himself” is the opposite of such ambition. In fact, when the disciples of the Lord exhibited such ambition (good though it might be to desire to sit and serve with Christ) he reproved them for their desire or ambition over and over, telling them that if they have a desire to be great, they **must** be the opposite, and be a servant (Mark 10:35-45). Verse 43 says this.

Mark 10:43 “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever **desires to become great** among you **shall be your servant**. NKJV

One does not see this in English but the verb “desire” is a verb in the subjective mood in Greek, which is a mood once removed from reality, being a mood of possibility. But the following verb “shall be” is in the indicative mood, which is a mood of fact. In other words, our Lord is reprimanding all such ambition and desire by stating that if one “desires” a place of honour (a mood of possibility), they automatically become

¹⁷⁸ Henry Wansbrough, ed., *New Jerusalem Bible*. Copyright © 1985, by Darton, Longman & Todd Limited and Doubleday. Published by arrangement with Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

disqualified and must, as a consequence, take the place of a servant (a mood of actuality), at least until such ambition is humbled.

In another place our Lord reproves such ambition with the following illustration.

Luke 9:46-48 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: **for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.** KJV

During our Lord's incarnation, He never sought a place of greatness or honour. In fact, he humbled himself, taking the place of a servant, becoming obedient in all things, even to the death upon the ignoble cross. He is the archetype of all who wish to serve, and it is His *mind* we are told to have in ourselves, especially in those who have a heart of ambition (Phil. 2:5-8).

So, if the Holy Spirit (the One who makes elders) is not stating that men should seek the *office* or *position of a bishop*, what is He then saying? Let me first give forth the verse in Greek and then quote a definition of the pertinent word used by Paul in this verse by W.E. Vine. The Greek verse reads as follows—

I Tim. 3:1 Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος· εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.

And W. E. Vine defines the pertinent word as shown below—

“ἐπισκοπή besides its meaning, visitation...[it] is rendered “office,” in Acts 1:20, RV (AV, “bishoprick”); in 1 Tim. 3:1, “the office of a bishop,” lit., ‘(if any one seeketh) overseership,’ **there is no word representing office.**”¹⁷⁹

Notice that Vine states that there is no word in I Tim. 3:1 representing “office.” (Nor, may I add, is there a word representing the New King James translation of “position.”) This is the reason why, with all due respect (because, generally speaking, both NKJV and the KJV are superb translations) I felt that Darby's version did a better job of translating the verse.

¹⁷⁹ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) Pg. 129 (vol. 1)

One must admit that there are a few things in the KJV that have been influenced by the ecclesiastical mindset of the 17th century. This is one of the few verses where this occurred. The word used by Paul in verse 1 is the Greek word ἐπισκοπή (in its genitive form, ἐπισκοπῆς). This is the word translated as “office of bishop” and “position of bishop” in the King James and the New King James Version. However, this word is a different word than the word translated as “bishop” in the next verse, verse 2. That word in verse 2 is ἐπίσκοπος in its accusative form (ἐπίσκοπον). These are two different words, the first being in the feminine gender and the second (in verse 2) in the masculine gender.¹⁸⁰

So, if ἐπισκοπῆς is a different word and carries no thought of “office” or “position,” how should the Greek word be understood?

Although Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker in their Greek Lexicon do list as a gloss, “*position or office as an overseer*,”¹⁸¹ the first meaning they provide for the word includes the following—“...*a visitation of demonstrations of divine power mostly in the good sense...the time of your gracious visitation...Lk. 19:44...The gracious visitation can manifest itself as protection, [and] care.*”¹⁸²

The word is used in this manner in the Greek LXX where we find the word in such verses as Genesis 50:24 which says—

Gen. 50:24 And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely **take care of you**, and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.” NASB

¹⁸⁰ No one should attach any significance to the fact that ἐπισκοπῆς is feminine and ἐπίσκοπον is masculine, except to show they are two different words, which while similar, are yet different. It should be noted that many words in Greek are feminine without any sense of biological gender. They have what is known as *grammatical gender*. For example, the Greek word faith, πίστις, and the Greek word righteousness, δικαιοσύνη, are both grammatically feminine. This should not surprise the reader for this is true in many languages. Even in English we sometimes assign the feminine gender to inanimate objects, even though, they are biologically neutral; for example, a *boat* or *ship* is sometimes referred to by the feminine pronoun *she*.

¹⁸¹ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Second Edition* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979) pg. 299

¹⁸² Ibid.

The idea conveyed in the Greek translation of this verse is that God will visit the children of Israel with His care and protection. The word, when used in a good sense (as it does in I Tim. 3:1) conveys this thought of watchful care or, one could say, “gracious care and protection.” In Job 10:12 it is used of God’s “gracious care” of our spirit. It reads in Greek as follows—ζωὴν δὲ καὶ ἔλεος ἔθου παρ’ ἐμοί ἢ δὲ ἐπισκοπή σου ἐφύλαξέν μου τὸ πνεῦμα. It could be translated as: “And you laid down before me life and mercy, and your **gracious care** guarded my spirit.”

In Job 29:2 the Greek translation of the Hebrew reads: “ὅτε ἤμην ἐπιβρίθων ὁδοῖς ὅτε ὁ θεὸς ἐπισκοπήν ἐποιεῖτο τοῦ οἴκου μου.” And Brenton’s translation reads in English as: “As when I steadfastly pursued my ways, when God **took care** of my house.” This is an interesting verse, for the Greek word is connected with the care of a household, and, of course, in the passage we are examining in First Timothy, Paul states a few verses later that a bishop must **take care** of his own household, as it is a sign that he can take care of the Church of God (I Tim. 3: 5) which Paul calls the “household of God” in I Tim. 3:15.

Therefore, when we realize this distinction between ἐπισκοπή and ἐπίσκοπος we can understand that Paul is not praising one’s ambition or desire to obtain the office of bishop. On the contrary, he is praising the **desire or ambition to take care of others**. Perhaps, the verse would be better understood if it was translated as follows.

I Tim. 3:1 “This saying is faithful. “If anyone **longs for gracious care**, he desires a good work.”

The focus by Paul is on one’s ministry, not on one’s ambition to be bishop. The focus is on serving, not on seeking a place of honour within the assembly. He is not calling a desire to be bishop a good work; he is calling **the desire to serve others** a good work! As such, one must ask oneself, “Why did Paul write it this way? Why did not Paul use the same word he used in verse 2 and simply write—πιστὸς ὁ λόγος. Εἴ τις ἐπίσκοπον εἶναι ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ (This saying is faithful, “If anyone desires to be bishop, he desires a good work)?

It seems the answer to that question is this. Part of the problem with the false teachers in Ephesus was that they brought their religious ambition and *desire* for power into the assembly, rather than a *true desire* for gracious oversight. This same ambition for power occurred wherever

they went. Remember in the book of Galatians Paul speaks about the same problem—men who carried with them an ambitious Pharisaical discipleship mentality that sought to subject others (Gal. 4:17). And in his epistle to the Corinthians he confronts the same kind of men as can be seen from his statements in II Cor. 5:12 and 10:12 and 11:16-23.

And so it seems in Ephesus, these same types of men were seeking to establish a foothold in the Church (I Tim. 1:7). In referring to them, Paul seems a little sardonic when he declares they want to be “teachers of the Law” in I Tim. 1:7.

I Tim. 1:6-7 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.

This phrase, “teachers of the Law” is a translation of one Greek word—νομοδιδάσκαλος. That particular Greek word is only used three times in the entire New Testament and is a catchword for those belonging to the sect of the Pharisees who followed rabbinical discipleship with its strict hierarchical mindset, and for those who were closely associated with their thinking. Besides its use in I Tim. 1:7, it is also used in Acts 5:34 which reads—

Acts 5:34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a **teacher of the law** (νομοδιδάσκαλος) held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. NKJV

And it is used in Luke 5:17.

Luke 5:17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and **teachers of the law** (νομοδιδάσκαλοι) sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. NKJV

Christians of the sect of the Pharisees continued to plague the ministry of Paul over and over, even though the council of Jerusalem ruled against them. They were Christians who took pride in their own righteousness and zeal for God and those who coveted places of honour and power to disseminate their false teaching. Apparently, their thinking was spreading more and more throughout Asia, ultimately, finding its way to Ephesus. Even before Paul departed to be with the Lord, he said that Christians in Asia were beginning to forsake him (II Tim. 1:15).

Therefore, in order to confront this false mindset of self-righteousness, which always seemed to produce this love for honour and power (as it did in our Lord's day when he said, "... they love the place of honour at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi) Paul changes the focus and says, "If anyone longs for gracious care, he desires a good work," rather than, "If anyone longs to be bishop, he desires a good work."

By using a different word, Paul is emphasizing a desire for *ministry* over a desire for *power* or *authority*. The former can occur without any recognition or authority (and is, indeed, a sign of a true elder), the latter can, and many times does, occur without the sincere desire for gracious care. The former cares for the people of God as a true shepherd, graciously leading and taking care of the sheep. The latter uses the people of God, carelessly subjugating and driving them as one drives a herd of cattle.

Remember, it was Paul who warned the Ephesian elders that trouble would come and that even among their own selves men would arise to draw disciples after them (Acts 20:28-30). Apparently, what was happening in Ephesus at this time was a fulfilment of that prophecy. Apparently those who practiced Rabbinical discipleship (as seen by the use of the phrase, "teachers of the Law—I Tim. 1:7) were seeking the prestige and authority in the Church in Ephesus as bishops, without ever having the true heart of a tender shepherd, and is because of this that Paul is purposely changing the emphasis. This, in and of itself, purifies those who would seek power.

We also know that this was probably the reason because we know from I Tim. 5:17 that there already were elders, and thus bishops, in Ephesus. Therefore, Paul's insertion of this passage into his epistle must have been to restrict the rise of unqualified men seeking power.

This situation in Ephesus is different than the situation in Crete, because in Crete Paul wrote to Titus to establish elders in Churches that had no elders. But in his epistle to Timothy, Paul is writing in regard to a Church already having elders, and so is writing in such a way to help Timothy and the Church discern any new elders the Holy Spirit might be raising up in their midst. Paul is writing to help them *prove* such men, for some, apparently, were falsely seeking to be a bishop or elder in the Church.

Obviously, this was the case; obviously there were men who were not made bishops by the Holy Spirit who were seeking to be bishops in the Church, otherwise it would make no sense as to why Paul would include this portion in his epistle. (In the same way, apparently women were seeking to teach in the assembly and so is the reason why Paul included the section in his epistle dealing with that problem—I Tim. 2:12). Paul was helping a co-worker protect the Church in Ephesus from machinations of unprincipled men. He was helping a co-worker in his ministry of equipping the saints.

So Paul wrote these instructions in order to protect the Church, and to help Timothy fulfill his ministry of equipping the saints by understanding that a true desire for gracious care is the first requisite in determining who the Holy Spirit has already made a bishop. But, it is important to note that nowhere does Paul then tell Timothy, himself, to *appoint* or *establish* those men in the assembly as elders, as he told Titus to establish elders in Crete. This is an important distinction to notice for some believe, as we have already discussed, that only an apostle or one delegated by an apostle can appoint an elder, and, as such, the Church as a whole is not involved in the process at all. It was J. N. Darby who once said the following.

“There is no authority competent to choose and establish official elders, nor a flock of God existing to which such official appointment could apply.”¹⁸³

But is this assertion so? Now, brother Darby was a godly man and said many things good for the Church. In fact, I will shortly quote some of his comments regarding this epistle (being of excellent character) but is his assertion above correct? No, I do not believe so. Now, if Scripture taught that only the original apostles could appoint elders, then, of course, he would have been correct. Or if there was such a thing as an apostolic delegate, then maybe he might have had a point, since by definition, without the original apostles, there could no longer be any “apostolic delegates!” But neither of these things is true, nor is the rest of his assertion true that certain types of flocks are necessary for official appointments to apply. Scripture never makes such a declaration. Where does Scripture ever teach this as a truth? What book of the Bible, what verse of Scripture ever says such a thing? There is none; that statement

¹⁸³ J. N. Darby, *What the Christian Has Amid the Ruin of the Church*, The Collected Writings Of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 3, Volume 14

of brother Darby is an opinion based upon his presuppositions derived from human logic; it is not derived from Divine revelation.

(Oh, how human logic has plagued the Church from the earliest days. Such a mindset will always take certain truths, which are, indeed, based upon Divine revelation, but then, it stretches them to logical conclusions which are not based upon Divine revelation. Oh, how we all need to learn not to exceed what is written [I Cor. 4:6 NASB]. Such opinions are nothing but man-made traditions taught as commandments of God [Mark 7:7]. Such, conclusions are nothing but an affront to the author of Scripture and are very harmful to the spiritual well-being of the saints. Theologies are a blessed study. But Divine theologies colored by human thought are a detriment to the health of the Body of Christ. We must not look at Scripture through the eyeglasses of our theologies, but our theologies through the eyeglasses of Scripture!)

However, we do have this Scriptural passage that says that the *official recognition of elders* is a function entrusted to both Timothy and the Church. But, before we look further into this, let us first look into the overall context of this passage.

It is important to realize that those epistles, normally called the Pastoral epistles, were not written directly to the Church, as was, let's say the epistles to the Corinthians or to the Philippians; rather they were written to individuals, to those who were in the work with Paul and Silas. As such, some of the things written to Timothy and Titus were not written by Paul with the thought that it would apply to every believer. Rather, they were written with the thought that it would apply directly to Timothy and Titus, his co-workers (and by example to future men who would be set apart to the "work" like them).

J. N. Darby in the periodical, *Present Testimony*, also speaks to the importance of this distinction and in this he was right. He states:

"The Epistles to Timothy and Titus have naturally a peculiar bearing and character, being addressed to persons deputed by the apostle to act in his name, or to care for the Churches during his absence. Their application to us is none the less direct on this account, because they not only instruct us with regard to the state of the Church and the pastoral care which the apostle bestowed on it, but the line of conduct in which Timothy is charged to lead the faithful, is that which the faithful ought always themselves to follow. **Nevertheless, to**

confound the directions given to Timothy and Titus, with the words addressed immediately to the faithful, would be to cast confusion upon ministry in its best sense.”¹⁸⁴

As such, one should realize that every believer is called to “rightly divide the word of truth.” While everything in God’s Word applies to every believer in a general sense, certain things in Scripture apply to certain Christians in a specific sense. Peter reveals this important biblical hermeneutic to us in Luke 12:41 when he says, “Lord, are you addressing this parable to us or to everyone else as well?”

Portions of Scripture must be understood within the context of the passage. Some portions might be applied to every believer in a “general” sense, but some portions were meant to “specifically” apply only to certain ones.

For example, Jn. 16:12-14 (KJV) is specifically spoken to the apostles and not to every believer.

Jn. 16:12-14 “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

At the time our Lord spoke, all things had not been spoken to the apostles because they could not bear them, but assuredly that does not apply to believers today, for all things have been spoken to us. There is no more revelation for the Church. All things have been revealed to us in Scripture. The promise specifically applied to the apostles, as ones who would be guided into all truth for the purpose of laying the foundation of the Church and recording for us those truths in Scripture. But that had not yet occurred when the Lord spoke these words to the apostles, for the Church had not begun and the New Testament had not yet been written.

Another example is Jn. 14:26, where Jesus promises the apostles “...He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Now obviously that cannot be applied to believers today because Jesus never spoke directly to us. We cannot have a memory recalled which was never a memory. We were never with the Lord by Galilee, or

¹⁸⁴ J. N, Darby, Synopsis of the Books of the Bible—I Timothy, *Present Testimony*, Vol. XI (R. Groombridge & Sons, London, 1860) pg. 1

present at the Sermon of the Mount. But who would deny that these two verses can be applied to every believer in a “general” sense—that the Holy Spirit will lead his people into the truth of the Scripture and bring remembrance to our mind of certain verses we have read in the past. Or who can deny that the Holy Spirit will guide His people into all truth and glorify Christ.

Take another example; in John 21: 15-17 our Lord specifically told Peter to “tend my lambs,” shepherd my sheep,” “tend my sheep.” Obviously, this command cannot apply to every believer or to the entire Church, because every believer is not called to be a shepherd (pastor) or elder. Certainly, it can apply to every believer in a “general” sense, in that we should all seek to minister and care for each other in love, but obviously it cannot apply to every believer in a specific sense, for every Christian is a pastor or elder.

Perhaps, one might use the example of a modern day CEO giving instructions to one of his branch managers in a business. If the employees of the company obtained a copy of those instructions, would anyone assume that he had the right to implement those instructions? Or would any employee assume that the instructions given to the branch manager were also instructions to them? If, for an example, the CEO told his manager to fire someone, would an employee think that he or she had the same right to do the same? Of course not. Why?—because it was written to the manager, not to the employees. (It is acknowledged that this might not be the best analogy to utilize, since Paul never exercised the authority like a CEO, nor was Timothy a manager or pastor (elder) of the Church. But it simply demonstrates, in modern parlance, the need to recognize – in our study of God’s Word—to whom is the portion of Scripture written?)

The Pastoral epistles were written to men who were co-laborers with Paul in his apostolic ministry. They were men who were uniquely gifted by God for that service. They are epistles for similarly gifted men today—men who are gifted like Timothy to do the work of an evangelist. They should not be used indiscriminately for any or all believers without regard to this distinction. If we were to do this, then we would also be guilty of using our human logic to exceed Scripture.

So, if this is true, how does one determine what applies to every believer, and thus, the Church as a whole, and what is written specifically to a worker like Timothy or Titus? If we are saying that this portion in

Timothy is laying the Scriptural foundation for the Church being entrusted with the recognition of elders within the assembly, how do we know this? The answer is context. There are certain verses which are clearly reserved for a worker like Timothy or Titus, and verses which are not. Now, of course we may always be able to glean general principles from verses reserved for them (even as we can from verses written specifically for Israel in the Old Testament) but we must never forget that some commands are given only to them and are not incumbent upon every believer to follow. For example, let's consider the following verses in the Pastoral Epistles.

I Tim. 4:11 These things **command and teach**.

I Tim. 1:3 As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou **mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine**. KJV

These verses cannot apply to every believer since everyone is not a teacher (I Cor. 12:29), nor are women called to teach (I Tim. 3:12), but who can deny that every believer is called to “contend for the Faith,” and every believer is called in a general sense to teach and admonish each other in a general way by singing with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). But these verses are reserved specifically for Timothy since he was the one so gifted by God and so the one called to teach with such authority. Let's look at the next example.

II Tim. 4:1-5 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine**. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴ and they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. ⁵ But watch thou in all things, **do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry**. KJV

These verses, obviously, cannot apply to every believer since every believer has not received the gift to be an Evangelist. Therefore, only those so gifted can “make full proof” of such a ministry. Yet who can deny that every believer is called to preach the Gospel (Luke 24:46-49).

Nor does every believer have the authority of a “worker,” set apart in the work, whereby to “reprove, rebuke *and* exhort” others “with all longsuffering and doctrine (teaching).” This command specifically

applies to Timothy, but who could deny that in a general sense we all are called to admonish each other in love (Rom. 15:14)?

II Tim. 2:1-4 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. NASB

These verses cannot apply to every believer, obviously, since every believer is not able to entrust to faithful men those things they audible heard from Paul! This was a unique command given only to Timothy, who personally heard him teach, having spent many hours conversing with him. This command was given to Timothy because all of Scripture had not yet been written and so some things had to be communicated verbally (as Paul mentions in II Thess. 2: 15—So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us—NASB). Yet, who can deny that every believer can now speak of the things of Paul, simply by reading all his epistles? But the specific command applied only to Timothy.¹⁸⁵

Nor is every believer called to suffer hardship with Paul, not entangling themselves in the affairs of everyday life, since every believer is not called to full time work in the Lord. Not every believer is called to be a foreign missionary. Some believers must, indeed, be involved in the affairs of everyday life, as many in the early Church were slaves; they had no choice (I Cor. 7:17-22). Additionally, when we see the meaning of the word translated “affairs,” in the phrase, “affairs of everyday life,” we see that elders had to be involved in this type of life (Acts. 20:35) as did Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3). W. E. Vine states that the Greek word translated *affairs*, denotes “a business, occupation, the prosecution of any affair,”¹⁸⁶ Obviously, Aquila and Priscilla had to be involved in this type of everyday life as they moved their business from city to city.

So we see, while Paul exhorted Timothy to not get involved with the affairs of everyday life, other believers were commanded to do the opposite—they were told they would be involved with the things of

¹⁸⁵ This is not a verse dealing with discipleship. For further study on this see: *What is Biblical Discipleship?* which is available from Assembly Bookshelf.

¹⁸⁶ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) Pg. 36 (vol. 1)

everyday life. Not only do we see this in I Thess. 4:11, where believers were commanded to be careful to attend to their own business, we also see it in I Tim. 2:2-12, where believers were exhorted to pray for those in authority so they could lead a “quiet life.” But, such was not the case with Timothy; he was called to leave behind *civilian life*, so to speak, and suffer hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Yet, in all this, who can deny that this verse could be applied in a general way to every believer, since every believer is called to stand and fight, putting on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6: 10-19).

We can see these same distinctions apply in the epistle to Titus.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city **as I commanded you.** NKJV

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

Of course, every believer is not commanded to establish elders in every city, nor to “exhort and reprove with all authority.” This was applicable only to Titus. Yet, as we already saw, every believer in the Church is involved in affirming the one Titus would put before the assembly, and, of course, in a general sense every believer is called to exhort those in need (Heb. 3:13; II Cor. 2:7).

Consequently, when we study the Pastoral Epistles, we must always be careful to observe context, recognizing that Paul meant certain things to be applicable only to Titus and to Timothy (and by application to other “workers” set apart by the Holy Spirit with the same type of ministry as they had) and not to every believer in the Church.

Yet with that being said, we must also recognize (equally by context) that Paul sometimes did intend certain things in the epistles to be applicable for every believer, i.e. the Church as a whole. For example, take I Timothy 2:8 and II Timothy 2:14.

I Tim. 2:8-9 I will therefore **that men pray everywhere**, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, **that women** adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. KJV

II Tim. 2:14 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. NASB

Obviously, these verses must apply to every believer since the verse specifically says so.

He also makes this clear in his epistle in another way. He says so directly in I Tim. 3:15.

I Tim. 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave **thyself** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. KJV

When we read this verse above, we see that the King James Version says that one of the reasons Paul wrote this epistle to Timothy was so he might know how to behave in the house or Church of God. Yet, when we read the American Standard Version we see something entirely different.

I Tim. 3:15 but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know **how men ought to behave themselves** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (American Standard Version)

We see that Paul says he wrote the epistle to Timothy so that Timothy might know how men ought to behave themselves in the house or Church of God. The King James Version states that the purpose so Timothy might know how to behave in the Church, and the American Standard states it was so men (meaning everyone in the Church) might know how to behave in the house of God. Why the difference? To answer that question we must look at the actual text Paul wrote beginning in verse 14.

I Tim. 3:14-15 Ταῦτά σοι γράφω, ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ τάχιον· ¹⁵ ἂν δὲ βραδύνω, ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι, ἥτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος, στῦλος καὶ ἑδραῖωμα τῆς ἀληθείας.

If one was to translate the first part in a quite wooden and literal manner, it would read: “These things to you I write, hoping to come to you shortly—but if I am delayed—so that you might know how it is necessary in the house of God to live...” The reason for the two different understandings of the text is found in the phrase: ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι (so that you might know how it is necessary in the house of God to live).

As one can see the phrase does not include the word “thymself” from the King James Version, or the word “themselves” from the American Standard Version. These are not in the Greek, but are supplied from the reflexive sense of the middle/passive infinitive. Therefore, the phrase could be understood reflexively of Timothy, as per the King James Version, or it could be understood reflexively of any believer, as per the American Standard Version. In other words, both views are possible grammatically when considering the verse in and of itself, since Paul wrote it in such a way where the subject needed to be inferred.

Now, Paul could have made it perfectly clear how he intended it to be taken, if he so desired; he could have written— ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ **σε** ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι (so that you might know how it behooves **you** to live in the house of God) adding the personal pronoun **σε** (you), then there would be no doubt—the King James Version would be the correct rendering. Or if Paul had written something like— ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ **πάντα** ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι (so that you might know how it behooves **everyone**, in the house of God, to live) or, perhaps, ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ **ἕκαστον ὑμῶν** ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι (so that you might know how it behooves **everyone of you** to live in the house of God) adding **πάντα** (everyone, each one), or **ἕκαστον ὑμῶν** (each one of you), then we would understand that Paul was referring to more than just Timothy, and so we might understand the text as translated by the American Standard Version. But it should be realized that in the Greek language, sometimes a lack of specificity, is actually revelatory, in and of itself. In other words, Paul purposely wrote this verse in such a way that it could be understood either way.

In other places, when Paul uses the verb δεῖ (it is necessary, it behooves) with the infinitive, he usually includes the subject of the infinitive, clearly identifying who performs the action. Consider the following examples. I will put the verb, the subject and the infinitive in bold type.

I Tim. 3:2 Δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, νηφάλιον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, φιλόξενον, διδακτικόν·

I Tim. 3:2 it behoveth, therefore, **the overseer to be** blameless, of one wife a husband, vigilant, sober, decent, a friend of strangers, apt to teach. (Young’s Literal Translation)

I Tim. 3:7 Δεῖ δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑξωθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὀνειδισμὸν ἐμπέσῃ καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου.

I Tim. 3:7 and **it behoveth him** also **to have** a good testimony from those without, that he may not fall into reproach and a snare of the devil. (Young's Literal Translation)

II Tim. 2:24 δοῦλον δὲ κυρίου οὐ δεῖ μάχεσθαι ἀλλὰ ἥπιον εἶναι πρὸς πάντας, διδακτικόν, ἀνεξίκακον

II Tim. 2:24 and a **servant** of the Lord **it behoveth** not **to strive**, but to be gentle unto all, apt to teach, patient under evil. (Young's Literal Translation)

I Cor. 15:25 Δεῖ γὰρ αὐτὸν βασιλεύειν, ἄχρι οὗ ἂν θῆ πάντας τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ.

I Cor. 15:25 for **it behoveth him to reign** till he may have put all the enemies under his feet --(Young's Literal Translation)

Col. 4:6 Ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χάριτι, ἅλατι ἠρτυμένος, εἰδέναι πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἀποκρίνεσθαι.

Col. 4:6 your word always in grace -- with salt being seasoned -- to know how **it behoveth you to answer** each one. (Young's Literal Translation)

I Thess. 4:1 Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον.

I Thess. 4:1 As to the rest, then, brethren, we request you, and call upon you in the Lord Jesus, as ye did receive from us how **it behoveth you to walk** and to please God, that ye may abound the more. (Young's Literal Translation)

In all these verses Paul includes the subject, but what is interesting is that Paul could have written the verses above without a subject of the infinitive because in each verse the context would still clearly indicate who was performing the action. Yet, in I Tim. 3:15, where the context is nebulous, and a subject would have helped the reader understand who was to perform such action, Paul leaves the subject out. Why?

We must remember that all Scripture is inspired by God. Every single aspect of a verse is significant. And so it is significant that in Greek one could understand this verse in one of two ways. In fact, this is not uncommon; many times in Greek a phrase may be taken in more than one way. When this occurs, if we believe in verbal plenary inspiration, we must believe it is because the Holy Spirit intended it to be that way. We must not conclude it was that way because Paul was being careless in his writing. No, he wrote it that way because the Holy Spirit intended him to write it that way.

As such, since either view of the verse is grammatically possible, both views were intended to be understood. In other words, the syntax of this

verse is no accident. When this type of grammatical ambiguity occurs in the Greek of the New Testament, I believe it is because the passage carries more than one level of interpretation. The Holy Spirit wants us to understand the verse both ways (i.e. unless the greater context makes clear one view or the other).

So in the verse before us, I believe the Holy Spirit is telling us that first, Paul wants Timothy to know how he, himself, is expected to behave in the house of God. For example, he has made clear he wants Timothy to know that a worker in the Church must always make sure strange doctrine is never taught (I Tim. 1:3). And he has made clear he wants Timothy to know it is necessary that a worker “keep faith and a good conscience” before all the saints (I Tim. 1:19). He has made clear he wants Timothy to know that a worker must remain “sound in doctrine,” always teaching the saints to hold to the same (I Tim. 4: 6, 11). He wants Timothy to know that a worker must always be respectful before the saints, never sharply rebuking an older man or woman (I Tim. 5:1-2). And we could go on. These are the things necessary for a worker in a local Church.

It is important to remember that Timothy was a co-worker of Paul. He was an Evangelist set apart for the perfecting of the saints. He was not the pastor of the Church, nor was he the first bishop of the Church, as the King James translators suggested by the subscript included at the end of the epistle. Timothy was a worker. Timothy was a worker who had certain responsibilities as a worker in a local Church, distinct from the responsibilities of the bishops or elders, and Paul wanted to make sure Timothy fully understood his responsibilities as such. (We will examine the significance of a worker later in our study, as well as the distinction between the “work” and the “local Church.”)

But the Holy Spirit is also telling us that Paul wants Timothy to understand how each believer in the Church must behave in the house of God. This is the second view. As we mentioned before, Paul wants Timothy to know how every believer should pray. Men should pray in the Church with holy hands, and women in modest apparel (I Tim. 2:8-9). He wants Timothy to know that women are not called to teach (I Tim. 2:12) but they are commanded to actively learn God’s Word, albeit with quietness—with tranquility (I Tim. 2:11). He wants Timothy to know how it is important that every believer in the house of God provide for their own (I Tim. 5:8). And he wants Timothy to know that it is important for believers to always be respectful, whether slaves to

masters, or masters to slaves (I Tim. 6:1-2). And, as with Timothy, we could go on and on.

So we see, that Paul is speaking to the responsibilities of all those involved in the Church. He is not just speaking of the behavior of Timothy in the house of God, nor is he just speaking of the behavior of the saints in the house of God. Thus, I believe the American Standard Version is closer to the correct understanding of this verse, for the American Standard Version *includes* everyone, which, obviously, would include Timothy, whereas the King James Version *excludes* everyone but Timothy. Most modern translations and modern paraphrases follow the basic understanding of American Standard Version as can be seen below.

I Tim. 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. (NASB)

I Tim. 3:15 but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know **how men ought to behave themselves** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (English Revised Version)

I Tim. 3:15 but if I delay, in order that thou mayest know **how one ought to conduct oneself** in God's house, which is *the* assembly of *the* living God, *the* pillar and base of the truth. (Darby)

I Tim. 3:15 but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know **how men ought to behave themselves** in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (American Standard Version)

I Tim. 3:15 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. (English Standard Version)

I Tim. 3:15 so that if I am delayed, you will know **how people must conduct themselves** in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth. (New Living Translation)

I Tim. 3:15 in case I am delayed, to let you know **how people ought to conduct themselves** in the household of God, because it is the church of the living God, the support and bulwark of the truth. (NET Bible)

I Tim. 3:15 if I am delayed, you will know **how people ought to conduct themselves** in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. (New International Version)

I Tim. 3:15 if I am delayed, you may know **how one ought to behave** in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. (Revised Standard Version)

So, getting back to our original question which we asked—“If we are saying that this portion in Timothy is laying the Scriptural foundation for the Church being entrusted with the recognition of elders within the assembly, how do we know this?” We can say we know this because Paul specifically says so in I Tim. 3:15 by indicating that “everyone” is involved in this conduct of recognizing men as bishops— both Timothy and the Church. Paul is saying how Timothy is to behave in this recognizing of a bishop and how the Church is to behave in this recognizing.

Paul is so concerned that each one in the assembly knows how to properly function in the Church, for such behavior or conduct is necessary for the ongoing spiritual well-being of a Church. Titus was dealing with Churches which had no elders, in need of everything being “set” in order. Timothy is dealing with Churches with elders, in need of everything being “kept” in order. Titus was dealing with new Churches. Timothy is dealing with older or established Churches.

God is a God of order and has provided for the ongoing maintenance of order within the assembly. As such, every believer must behave properly if this order is to be perpetuated. There is no such thing as “apostolic succession,” but there is such a thing as “apostolic maintenance.” The maintenance of order in the assembly is the responsibility of all, not just that of one man as in a monarchical bishop, nor that of a group of men, as in existing elders; it is the responsibility of all, and that requires the proper behavior of all. And this proper behavior is revealed to us in the verse by the Greek infinitive, ἀναστρέφεισθαι, which is variously translated as, “to live,” or “to behave,” or “to conduct.” W. E. Vine defines it this way:

“ἀναστρέφω to turn back, return” (ana, "back," strepho, "to turn"), hence, "to move about in a place, to sojourn," and, in the Middle and Passive Voices, "to conduct oneself," indicating one's manner of life and character, is accordingly rendered "behave" in 1 Tim. 3:15, lit., "how it is necessary to behave," not referring merely to Timothy himself, but to all the members of the local church (see the whole epistle)."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 112 (vol. 1)

In other words, it is as if Paul is saying that in your life of service to Christ in the Church, one must realize that the Church needs those who are made bishops or overseers by the Holy Spirit. Those who are made such by the Holy Spirit will always have certain characteristics which will help you discern who they are in the assembly; this will protect you from having false teachers gain a position of honour or authority within the Church. Part of your behavior and conduct in the house of God is to have a spiritual mindset for such discernment, since the house of God is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of all truth. This is part of your responsibility.

Consequently, we can see that this Scriptural passage makes clear that the *official recognition of elders* is a function entrusted to all, both Timothy and the Church, contrary to J. N. Darby's assertion above. But there is more; this is not the only way Paul makes this responsibility clear. He also makes this clear by his use of the phrase—"This is a faithful saying."

Paul utilizes this telling phrase five times in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, the first time with the added phrase, "worthy of all acceptance." This added phrase clearly indicates that the phrase, "this is a faithful saying," was intended for every believer (see I Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; II Tim. 2:11 and Titus 3:8). Its inclusion adds emphasis to its broad acceptance. But one should not think that its absence in some way negates the same.

For instance, the added phrase is not found in II Tim. 2:11-13 which reads as follows—

"This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" NKJV

Yet, most assuredly, even though the added phrase is not included, he meant the faithful saying to apply to all believers.

Or consider Titus 3:8 where Paul says to Titus—

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. NKJV

Obviously, this applies to the whole Church and not just to Titus, as every believer is called to maintain good works (also cf. Eph. 2:10).

So, if this is true in all the other places where this phrase is used, why then, when we get to I Tim. 3:1, where Paul begins with, “This is a faithful saying,” do we suppose that Paul never meant this portion to apply to the Church? On the contrary, when we examine the way the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use this phrase, we see that whenever Paul uses the phrase, πιστὸς ὁ λόγος (this is a faithful saying), he intends the whole Church to be involved.

So if this is the case, why does Paul wish the Church to understand this faithful saying in I Tim. 3:1 as being applicable to the whole Church? We have already briefly answered that question; it is because part of the conduct or behavior of Christians in the house of God is to realize that the house of God is the Church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of all truth. As such, it is the responsibility of all to make sure that only those who have been made bishops by the Holy Spirit are recognized as such in the Church. If every believer in the Church does not behave in this way, false teaches might gain positions of honor and power within the Church and soon the local Church will no longer be the pillar and ground of all truth, but rather might become a pillar and ground of all falsehood! This is a grave responsibility.

Hence, Paul is telling the saints that this is a faithful saying, pay attention—one of the first ways you can discern who has been made an elder by the Holy Spirit is that such a one will have no ambition for a place of honor in the assembly, but rather will be concerned for the gracious care of souls whether they ever have formal recognition or not. He is telling to them that they must “conduct themselves” in the house of God with this mindset, for part of the responsibility of all within the Church is to prove who has been made a bishop by the Holy Spirit. This was the responsibility of a worker like Timothy, whenever present, the responsibility of elders or bishops, if already existing, and the responsibility of every saint in the Church. The Church has been called to behave in this way. They are called to prove such men and it is that to which we would not like to turn our attention. What does this proving entail? Let’s look at I Tim. 3:10.

I Tim. 3:10 καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον, εἶτα διακονείωσαν, ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες.

I Tim. 3:10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. KJV

This verse shows that the Church is involved in the proving of bishops. Now, someone might ask, “Where does it say bishops? It speaks of deacons, not bishops.” This is true, but when we look at the Greek we see it also applies to the bishops.

We see this by the little Greek phrase, καὶ οὗτοι δὲ at the beginning of this sentence above. It is translated “and let these also.” Perhaps, it might be best to include this observation from Meyer’s *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus*.

“Verse 10. καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον. The particles καὶ ... δέ mean and also, καὶ being purely copulative; δέ, however, opposing and emphasizing something new. Since this new thing, which is necessarily emphatic, always stands between καὶ and δέ, οὗτοι, as van Oosterzee has rightly seen, must be opposed to those before named, i.e. to the presbyters; it is to be explained: “and these too, i.e. not only the presbyters, but also the deacons, are first to be proved.” It is wrong, therefore, to make δοκιμαζέσθωσαν emphatic, and to explain οὗτοι without reference to those before named (“and these are further to be proved”)...Had he wished to say that, the apostle could not but have written καὶ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν δὲ οὗτοι...It is true that nothing has been said hitherto about an examination in regard to the office of presbyter; but, of course, such an examination must have preceded the election...”¹⁸⁸

Consequently, a Greek reader, hearing this phrase, would naturally understand that Paul was assuming everyone knew that bishops were also “proved” by the Church, as were deacons. It does not matter that Paul does not actually use the word “prove” in regard to bishops, for this little inspired phrase at the beginning of verse 10 makes this proving clear. He takes it for granted they understood this. Perhaps, Paul had addressed this issue with them before. We do not know, so it is best to not conjecture. But the phrase καὶ οὗτοι δὲ shows they were well aware bishops were also proved. Sometimes Scripture records for us things that the author

¹⁸⁸ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Joh. Ed. Huther, David Hunter, tr., *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and to the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Funk & Wagnalls, New York, 1885) pg. 124

assumes is already known by the reader, even though, one fails to find in Scripture where such a statement was made known. For example, in his second epistle to Timothy Paul mentions two people known as Jannes and Jambres.

II Tim. 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. KJV

Paul assumes that Timothy knows who these two men were, but their names are never recorded for us in Scripture. Yet Paul writes as if their two names were commonly known, and so, what we have in this verse of Scripture is the Holy Spirit making known to us, by inspiration, this “fact of previous knowledge.”

In the same way, the Holy Spirit is making known to us in I Tim. 3:10 a “fact of previous knowledge,” i.e. the proving of bishops. Even though we have no other verse in Scripture where this fact is made known, the Holy Spirit is making it known in I Tim. 3:10 (just as we have no other verse in Scripture that makes known the names of Jannes and Jambres until the Holy Spirit makes it known in II Tim. 3:8). Perhaps, as we mentioned before, the Holy Spirit is using this verse to make known to us one of those oral traditions which had already been make known to the Church. Paul refers to these verbal traditions II Thess. 2:15. (Of course, now that the Canon of Scripture is complete, these verbal traditions are forever recorded for us in Scripture. There are no other.)

II Thess. 2:15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, **whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.** NASB

If not for this verse in I Tim. 3:10, we never would have known that Paul had previously somehow made known to the saints that elders were to be proven by the Church as a whole, just as deacons were to be proven by the Church. From the inclusion of this phrase by the Holy Spirit, there can be no doubt that this was the case. So, the question left before us is what does Paul mean by “prove.”

First we should mention that Paul never tells Timothy to do the proving despite the fact that he uses the imperative form of the verb. If he was telling Timothy to prove those men he would have used a second person, singular form of the imperative verb (you) in the active voice, rather than the third person, plural form of the verb (they) in the passive voice. Normally, we would not translate it this way in English, but quite literally, Paul is saying—“and these also, they must be proven first.” If

Paul wanted to make clear that Timothy, as an apostolic delegate (as some are wont to call him), was the one who was responsible for proving those men, he would have written: καὶ τοὺτους δὲ δοκίμαζε πρῶτον (and these also, **you** must prove first). But the fact is, Paul did not write it this way.

As an example, one can see how this form of the verb is used for the proving of one by another in the early Christian document, the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In this document, Hermas was personally called to do the proving. As such, a second person, singular, active voice of the verb δοκίμαζω was used. The verb is found in *Mandate* 11 1:7, and demonstrates how such a command would be written in Greek. It states—

Πῶς οὖν φημί κύριε ἄνθρωπος γνῶσεται τίς αὐτῶν προφήτης καὶ τίς ψευδοπροφήτης ἐστὶν Ἄκουε φησὶ περὶ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν προφητῶν καὶ ὡς σοι μέλλω λέγειν οὕτω δοκιμάσεις τὸν προφήτην καὶ τὸν ψευδοπροφήτην **ἀπὸ τῆς ζωῆς δοκίμαζε τὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν ἔχοντα τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ θεῖον**. *Shepherd of Hermas Mandate* 11 1:7

“‘How then, sir,’ say I, ‘will a man know which of them is the prophet, and which the false prophet?’ ‘I will tell you,’ says he, ‘about both the prophets, and then you can test the true and the false prophet according to my directions. **Test the man who has the Divine Spirit by his life.**’”¹⁸⁹

Literally, the last Greek phrase—ἀπὸ τῆς ζωῆς δοκίμαζε τὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν ἔχοντα τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ θεῖον, would read—“you prove, by his life, the man, the one having the Divine Spirit.” Now, normally we would not translate the personal pronoun in English for the passage makes it clear that Hermas was the one called to do the testing or proving, nevertheless, in Greek it is perfectly clear who is to do the proving. The verb δοκίμαζε is inflected as a present, active, imperative, second person, singular verb. The writer of this text makes it perfectly clear that Hermas was to do the “proving.” (This word, translated “test,” is the same word used by Paul in I Tim. 3:10 which is translated “prove.”)

So one can see that if Paul was saying that Timothy was to do the proving, or testing, he would have used a different form of the verb, but since he does not, we cannot say Paul is telling Timothy to “prove” those

¹⁸⁹ Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 1* (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1867) pg. 368

men who might be bishops or elders (let alone “appoint” them as elders). He is simply saying that those men must be proven.

Nor does it say, when we get to the second part of the verse (“then let them serve”) that Timothy was the one who was to “let them” serve. As with the first part of the verse, Paul is not using the second person singular present imperative form of the verb in this second part of the verse either. Paul writes διακονείτωσαν, a third person plural present imperative form of the verb. If he had used the second person singular form of the verb, then, indeed, Paul would have been telling Timothy that he was the one who was responsible to have them serve. He would have then been saying, “You let them serve!” But the fact of the matter Paul did not say such a thing.

It should be mentioned that our English translations are a little misleading in this verse because of the fact that most see Timothy as the one appointing elders, having some type of hierarchical authority—all because most see him either as an apostolic delegate, or they see him as the first monarchical bishop of Ephesus, or they see him as the pastor of the Church (e.g. Christians in some mainline and Evangelical Churches). But Timothy was none of these things. Timothy was a co-worker of Paul, an Evangelist, set apart for the work as Paul was an apostle set apart for the work.

Yes, Timothy is commanded by Paul to do certain things (since Timothy was with him in the work) but Timothy was not an “apostolic delegate” chosen by Paul to appoint bishops or deacons in Paul’s place or absence. Nor was Timothy the first bishop of Ephesus, nor the pastor of the Church. He was a worker called to equip or perfect the saints, and a distinction must be maintained between those in the work who have a circulatory ministry and those in the local Church who have a stationary ministry. (We will examine this in a subsequent chapter.)

However, since most see Timothy as one of those three things listed above, they assign Timothy a formal or official hierarchical standing above the rest, appointing and then granting elders and/or deacons permission to serve. (We are not speaking of spiritual authority, which Timothy does have, but we are speaking of a formal or official authority where arbitrary pronouncements are made.) Unfortunately, our English translations reinforce this idea by using the phraseology of “let these,” and “let them.” Now, it should be mentioned, if understood correctly this phraseology is perfectly fine. In English, a command can be given

utilizing the word “let,” but it can also be misunderstood, as it seems some are wont to do in this verse.

Perhaps, a quote from Daniel Wallace might help clarify this issue of using the English “let” for the Greek imperative mood.

“The imperative is most commonly used for commands, outnumbering prohibitive imperatives about five to one. As a command, the imperative is usually from a superior to an inferior in rank. It occurs frequently with the aorist and present (only rarely with the perfect tense).”

“The basic force of the imperative of command involves somewhat different nuances with each tense. With the *aorist*, the force generally is to *command the action as a whole*, without focusing on duration, repetition, etc. In keeping with its aspectual force, the aorist puts forth a *summary command*. With the *present*, the force generally is to *command the action as an ongoing process*. This is in keeping with the present’s aspect, which portrays an *internal perspective*....”¹⁹⁰

He then continues with a final note—

“...the third person imperative is normally translated *Let him do*, etc. This is easily confused in English with a permissive idea. Its force is more akin to *he must*, however, or periphrastically, *I command him to* . . . Regardless of how it is translated, the expositor is responsible to observe and explain the underlying Greek form.”¹⁹¹

—and then with that he also provides a helpful footnote.

“A number of passages could be easily misunderstood as mere permission in most English translations. (Some of these examples involve the ambiguity of who is being addressed, even though their imperatival flavor is still evident. For example, in I Tim 4:12 [“Let no one despise your youth”], does this mean “Don’t *you* let anyone despise your youth” or “I command *others* not to despise your youth”? The first translation would have a second person verb; the second would have a third person, as it does in the Greek [καταρρονεῖτω]). The Greek is stronger than a mere option, engaging the volition and placing a requirement on the individual: 1 Matt 5:31, 37; 11:15; 13:9, 43; 16:24; 18:17; 19:12; Mark 4:9; 8:34; Luke 16:29; Acts 1:20; 2:14; Rom 14:5; 15:11; 1 Cor 1:31; 3:18; 4:1; 7:3, 9 (probable); 11:6; 2 Cor 10:17; Gal 6:4; Eph 5:33; Phil 4:5, 6; Col 2:16; **1**

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996) pg. 485

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 486

Tim 2:11; 3:10; 4:12; 5:16, 17; Heb 1:6; 13:1; Jas 1:4-6, 9; 5:14, 20; Rev 2:7; 3:22; 13:18.”¹⁹²

But that is not all; many English translations are also a little misleading because of the way they also translate the second clause of the verse. Let me provide the full sentence again with the Greek.

I Tim. 3:10 καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον, εἶτα διακονεῖτωσαν, ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες.

I Tim. 3:10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. KJV

Such versions as the New American Standard Version and the New King James Version translate the second phrase as “let them serve as deacons,” and, as we can see above, the King James Version goes further including the word “office” in the phrase—“let them use the office of a deacon.” These are simply interpretive translations; the phrase does not contain the noun deacon, let alone the word office. (They assume the noun “deacon” from the verb.) The phrase reads in Greek as εἶτα διακονεῖτωσαν, which translated simply would read—*then serve*). The first word means “then” and the second word means “serve” or “minister.” This particular Greek verb appears in 32 verses of the New Testament. In the King James Version the Greek word is translated the majority of the times by a form of “minister.” It is translated, thus, in 20 verses. In 8 verses it is translated by a form of “serve.” In 2 verses it is translated as “administered” and in only 2 verses is it translated as “office of a deacon.”

And so we can now see this English translation might be a little misleading. Paul is not restricting the phrase “then let them serve” to just deacons as the NASB, the NKJV and the KJV imply by their inclusion of the noun “deacon.” That is not to say that they are not included in the serving, since Paul specifically mentions them by name in I Tim. 3:8. But the phrase, “then let them serve” is not being restricted to them. This, of course, is because Paul prefaces verse 10, concerning this *proving* and *serving* with the little phrase “and these also” (as we have already examined) and so he is equating both verbs, the *proving* and the *serving* not only to the deacons of verse 8, but also to the bishops of verse 1 and 2. In other words, Paul is saying, “Just as bishops must first be approved, then serve, so too, deacons must first be approved, then serve.”

¹⁹² Ibid.

So, if we translated the whole verse very literally, taking out the word “let” in English, since it can be misunderstood, and also the word “deacon,” since it is not included in the verse the phrase would then read,

I Tim. 3:10 “And these also—must first be proved, then serve—being blameless.”

This translation would better reflect the nuances of the Greek. Paul is simply revealing to Timothy and the Church that those men known as deacons, once proven, are then to serve, just as the men known as bishops, once proven, then serve. Below are some versions which translate this second phrase correctly. First, the Geneva Bible, which preceded the King James Version by a few years, clarifies it by not including the word “deacon” in the second phrase, but, unfortunately leaves out the word “also” in the first phrase, whereas the King James rightly includes it.

I Tim. 3:10 And let them first be proved: **then let them minister**, if they be found blameless.

And Darby, also correctly translates the second phrase in his version, but he also does not include “also” in the first phrase.

I Tim. 3:10 And let these be first proved, **then let them minister**, being without charge *against them*.

But I believe Young’s Literal Translation is the most accurate of all because not only does he translate the second phrase correctly, he also translates the first phrase in the verse correctly (unlike the Geneva Bible and Darby’s translation).

I Tim. 3:10 and let **these also** first be proved, **then let them minister**, being unblameable.

So, we see that Scripture never restricts the authority to “prove” (i.e. “approve”) bishops and deacons just to Timothy, nor does it ever give Timothy special permission to prove (and thus approve) bishops or deacons. Paul is simply leaving instructions, first for Timothy, as to how a worker should conduct himself in a Church where his only authority is spiritual, and also as to how the saints (including the existing elders) are to conduct themselves in this process of approval. Timothy was an Evangelist, gifted by God for the proclamation of the gospel and the

perfecting of the saints. He was not the pastor of the Church in Ephesus, nor the first monarchical bishop. He had no official authority in Ephesus.

Unlike Titus, Timothy He had a different role. Titus had authority as a worker to establish elders in Churches that had no elders, whereas Timothy was being shown how new elders must be proven with all the saints in a Church which already had elders. Therefore, what we see in I Timothy 3:1-10, is that the Church is instructed by Paul along with Timothy to approve anyone who manifests a gracious care for the saints and that once such a one is proven, he is then directed to serve as a bishop, or if a deacon, as a deacon.

Now, some may still dispute this point, even though they might admit the point that Paul is not directly enjoining Timothy to prove bishops and deacons. But they still insist that Paul is not commanding the Church, with direct words, to prove these men either. In other words, some might say, "Well, if Paul is not directly commanding Timothy to approve these men neither is he directly commanding the Church to approve them." Now, we could not argue with this point, if one wishes to discount the application of this section to the whole Church by Paul's use of "this is a faithful saying," and the implication of I Tim. 3:15.

However, equally, if one wishes to make the assertion above, not wishing to say what Scripture does not say, then they must be careful not to go too far the other way and forbid something that Scripture does not forbid. This too would be saying something Scripture does not say. In other words, if they say that Paul is not directly commanding Timothy to do the approving, and they equally say that Paul is not directly commanding the Church to do the approving, they must equally say that Paul is not directly "forbidding" Timothy from doing the approving, nor is he directly "forbidding" the Church from doing the approving (which some do assert).

If they wish to be literal and consistent, just as they cannot say this passage tells the Church to approve elders, so they cannot say that this passage denies a Church from approving elders in their midst. There is no such prohibition in Scripture that forbids the Church from doing so. As such, J. N. Darby is incorrect when he says, regarding the establishment of elders, "Churches had neither the authority nor mission

to do so.”¹⁹³ He is reading into Scripture something that is not there. The most he can say is that Scripture never “affirms” it, nor does it “forbid” it. But, is this really true? Is this all we are left with? Are we forced to say that the Church has no authority in Scripture to establish or prove elders? Let’s see.

First, let us state the bare facts— 1) Paul, an apostle of Christ, states that bishops and deacons must be proven. 2) Discounting the faithful saying application and I Tim. 3:15, Paul does not directly say who is to do the proving, but he does say proving is to be done. 3) He does not directly forbid the Church from doing the proving. 4) He does not directly forbid the existing elders or bishops from doing the proving. 5) He does not directly forbid Timothy from doing the proving. 6) Since the world or unbelievers cannot do the proving, and yet Paul does say proving must be done, the only ones capable of obeying Paul’s command, or I should say the Holy Spirit’s command for proving must be either Timothy, the existing elders of the Church, or the Church itself. 7) Thus, if any of these three choose to do the proving, they cannot be charged with the disobedience of Scripture since they are not forbidden by Scripture or Paul from doing so; they are simply obeying the Scriptural injunction that such men must be proven. How can one be charged with disobedience of Scripture when they are not directly forbidden by Scripture from doing so?

Thus, even if one disallows that this passage applies to every believer in the Church by Paul’s use of a “faithful saying” phrase, and by his revelation in I Tim. 3:15 that he is writing this epistle so everyone might know how to conduct themselves in the Church, they must still admit that the Churches are never denied the authority and mission to prove those men who have been made bishops in the Church by the Holy Spirit. And so, if any Church does the proving, they are doing so based upon the apostolic authority of Paul left in this epistle to Timothy that such men must be proven. Darby is wrong when he says a Church neither had the authority or mission to do so! What verse says so? There is no verse. If one insists upon such a thing, that one is adding to Scripture. And there is a verse that commands us not to do that (e.g. Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19).

¹⁹³ See, J. N. Darby, *Scriptural Views Upon The Subject Of Elders*, The Collected Writings Of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 2

Beloved, let us look at it from another perspective. Maybe this might help us. Why would we say that an assembly has the authority to make sure that women learn in quietness based upon the authority of the apostle Paul when says, “let a woman learn in quietness in all subjection (I Tim. 2:11), but we will not say the Church has the authority to prove bishops and deacons based upon the authority of the apostle Paul when he says, “And let these also first be proved; then serve?”

In both cases, Paul uses the same imperative mood of command. Paul is not directly telling Timothy in I Tim. 2:11, “**You** make sure a woman learns in quietness,” as if Timothy was the monarchical bishop, or the pastor of the Church who was delegated the authority to do so. No, the carrying out of the imperative is incumbent on the whole Church, **even though Paul does not directly say so in his epistle**. Well, in the same way the carrying out of the imperative in I Tim. 3:10 is also incumbent of the whole Church, **even though Pau does not directly say so** (if we discount the “faithful saying” phrase in I Tim. 3:1 and also I Tim. 3:15, which we believe shows it is directly incumbent)? If we want to say the first is the responsibility of the Church to maintain, we must also say the second is the responsibility of the Church to maintain.

Beloved, we must rightly divide the Word of God. We cannot pick and choose only those verses which support our view and then ignore the rest. That is not being spiritual. That is not being forthright and honest. **Truth must always be consistent**. If we say that only one like Timothy (what some call an “apostolic delegate”) can establish an elder in a Church, and, as such—since we no longer have apostolic delegates—elders can no longer be formally established in assemblies today. Then we must be consistent and say that only one like Timothy (an “apostolic delegate”) can maintain the injunction that a woman should learn in quietness, and so, since we no longer have apostolic delegates like Timothy, there is no one to maintain the injunction that a woman learn in quietness! Obviously, such a conclusion is not true, but if we admit the former, we must admit the latter.

If we do not restrict the application of I Tim. 2:11 to one like Timothy, then we cannot restrict the application of I Tim. 3:10 to one like Timothy. If the Church is expected to make sure the first is followed, even if one like Timothy is not present, then the Church is expected to make sure the second is followed, even if one like Timothy is not present. Thus if one believed I Tim. 2:11 is still applicable today, then

we must believe I Tim. 3:10 is still applicable today, even though we no longer have so-called apostolic delegates like Timothy.

So, the answer to our original question— “But is this conclusion really true? Can we say the Church has no authority to establish or prove elders?”—the answer must be no, it is not true! Existing elders and Churches do have a source for their authority to establish elders in the assembly, and it is found right here in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy!

Beloved, this is the overall context of the passage, when nothing is added or subtracted to what is written. So, if existing elders and the Church have the responsibility to maintain these apostolic injunctions, assuming we no longer have a so-called apostolic delegate like Timothy present, we are left with the task of understanding what Paul means by “proving.” Let’s now look at this Greek word.

The Greek word translated “proved” is, as we have already seen, the Greek word δοκιμάζω. The word is used in 20 verses in the New Testament. The basal meaning of the word is to *examine carefully*, or to *discern the nature of an event*, or to *ascertain the truth or genuineness of that which is examined for the purpose of approving or establishing*.

It is used once of inanimate objects (Lu. 12:56). It is used once of animals (Lu. 14:19). It is used four times of things having to do with God (Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; Eph. 5:10). It is used eight times having to do with our Christian walk (Rom. 14:22; I Cor. 3:13; 11:28; II Cor. 8:8; 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 1:10; I Pet. 1:7). It is used twice having to do with truth (I Thess. 5:21; I Jn. 4:1). And finally, it is used four times having to do with men who have been appointed to some type of service (I Cor. 16:3; II Cor. 8:22; I Thess. 2:4; I Tim. 3:10).

This last category is the category that interests us, for it helps one understand what Paul meant by proving someone, and it allows us to understand what was the purpose for such proving. Let’s look at the first three verses.

First it is used of men who had been “selected” by the Church of Corinth to take the collection for the poor unto Jerusalem.

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall **approve** by *your* letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. KJV

Then it is used of the brother who was “chosen” by the apostles to participate in administration of that gift, having been proven diligent many times.

II Cor. 8:22 And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes **proved** diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which *I have* in you. KJV

Then it is used of men who had been “appointed” or “set apart” by God for some service—

I Thess. 2:4 but just as we have been **approved** by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts. NASB

Obviously, in each of these *provings*, a choice or selection was made as a consequence. And, even though, it would be best not to translate the word as “choosing” or “selecting,” because the basal sense of the word should be retained in the translation, one could say that the “proving” was the act of “choosing” or “selecting.” In fact, because of this, some translations and /or paraphrases from the Greek (and the Syriac) actually chose to translate the word as *choosing* or *selecting*, rather than *proving*. Below are some examples.

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, I will send the **men of your selection** with letters to take the money you have got together to Jerusalem (Bible in Basic English)

1 Cor. 16:3 When I come, I will give letters of introduction to the **people whom you choose**. You can send your gift to Jerusalem with them. (God’s Word to the Nations)

1 Cor. 16:3 When I come, I will write letters of recommendation for **the messengers you choose** to deliver your gift to Jerusalem. (New Living Translation)

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, **those whom you shall choose**, them will I send with an epistle, that they may take your bounty to Urishlem. (Etheridge New Testament Peshitta)

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, **those whom ye shall select**, I will send with a letter, to carry your bounty to Jerusalem. (Murdock Translation of New Testament Peshitta)

So, one can see that when the Greek word δοκιμάζω is used of men, it bespeaks a “proving” that, in and of itself, is a “selecting” or a “choosing.” But the problem with “choosing” or “selecting” is it divorces the Greek word from its basal sense of “proving,” or “testing.” But, on the other hand, the problem with “proving,” is that it divorces the Greek word from the resultant idea of a “choice” or “selection.” So is there a better English word that reflects the underlying idea of δοκιμάζω? I believe there is and it is the word chosen by most translators in I Cor. 16:3, the word “approve.”

I Cor. 16:3 When I arrive, whomever you may **approve**, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem. (New American Standard Bible)

I Cor. 16:3 and whenever I may come, whomsoever ye may **approve**, through letters, these I will send to carry your favour to Jerusalem. (Young’s Literal Translation)

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, whomever you **approve** by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. (New King James Version)

I Cor. 16:3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall **approve** by *your* letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. (King James Version)

I Cor. 16:3 And when I am arrived, whomsoever ye shall **approve**, these I will send with letters to carry your bounty to Jerusalem: (Darby’s Translation)

I Cor. 16:3 Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you **approve** and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. (New International Version)

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the English word *approve* as follows: “To consent to officially or formally; confirm or sanction...”¹⁹⁴ And they present the following etymology of the word: [Middle English *apreven*, *approven*, from Old French *aprover*, from Latin *probāre* : *ad-*, *ad-* + *probāre*, **to test** (from *probus*, *good*...)”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright © 2011 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Approve is a great English word for the Greek word δοκιμάζω for it incorporates both nuances of the word—proving or testing and choosing or selecting.

J. H. Bass, understanding this nuance of δοκιμάζω, includes the word “prove” and the word “choose” in the meanings of the word, as well as “approve” in his *Greek and English Manual Lexicon to the New Testament*.

“Δοκιμάζω, *f.* άσω, *p.* δεδοκίμακα, *a.* 1. έδοκίμασα; (from δοκιμή) 1. **to try, prove**, assay, examine; 2. To know any thing by experience, (2 Cor. Viii. 22.) 3: **to approve**, allow, commend, **choose**; 4. To discern, distinguish.”¹⁹⁶

James Donnegan in his *New Greek and English Lexicon* does the same.

“Δοκιμάζω, *fut.* άσω, **to try**, *or* prove: to assay, to examine into the goodness, *or* fitness of any thing, *or* person; to verify; *hence*, **approve**, judge fitting (*examination implied*), *and so*, admit, **approve, choose**, elect. = Δοκιμάζομαι, *Pass.* To be admitted into a magistracy after undergoing an examination into the necessary qualifications.”¹⁹⁷

In addition, Liddell and Scott in their *Greek Lexicon* provide the following examples of the word used in secular writings where the process becomes an actual admittance or choosing.

“... *to be approved and chosen*, Plat. Legg. 765 B, cf. Herm. Pol. Ant. § 148: also *to admit a youth after trial*, εις έφήβους *or* εις άνδρας: *hence* δοκιμασθείς, **approved and admitted to the rights of manhood**, Isocr. 352 C. Herm. §123,12.”¹⁹⁸

And so, when we come to the last example in the New Testament, where it is used of men, we find that Paul is using this word in I Tim. 3:10 with this same nuance of “proving,” resulting in a “choosing.”

¹⁹⁶ J. H. Bass, *A Greek and English Manual Lexicon to the New Testament* (Baldwin and Cradock, London, 1829)

¹⁹⁷ James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon, principally on the plan of the Greek and German Lexicon of Schneider* ((Hilliard, Gray & Co., Boston, 1839) pg. 395

¹⁹⁸ Liddell, Henry George, Scott, Robert, Drisler, Henry, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Vol. 1* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1848) pg. 365

W. E. Vine defines it as—“to test, prove,” with the expectation of approving”¹⁹⁹

I wonder how different our views of this verse would have been if the translators had chosen the English word *approve*, just like they did in I Cor. 16:3? If we adapted Young’s translation of the verse, it would have then read as follows:

I Tim. 3:10 and let these also first be **approved**, then let them minister, being unblameable.

With such a translation one can see how the Church is involved in the establishment of elders in the assembly. With such a translation and understanding one can see how it is wrong to say the Church had neither the authority nor mission to do so, as brother Darby once said. The Church does, indeed, have the authority and mission to do so and it is found in I Tim. 3:10!

With the translation—*approve*, the basal sense of the Greek word is maintained in the English. It maintains the nuance of “testing” or “proving,” and maintains the nuance of “choosing,” or “selecting.” (If one approves a thing, one has, obviously, first proven the thing and so selected the thing). *Approve* would convey the meaning Paul intended.

If we put the entire context together it is as if Paul is telling Timothy—“I want you to stay in Ephesus so you can instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. Not only are they teaching false doctrine, but some also have ambitions for power, seeking to be bishops of the church. Therefore, it is important to discern those who have truly been made bishops by the Holy Spirit and those who have not. To do this, you must look for those who, because of love, seek to care for the saints, not those who simply wish to obtain power and rule over the saints. Thus, (and this is an important point to remember and so is a faithful saying for the whole church), “If anyone longs for gracious care, he desires a good work” (not one who longs for power or authority). Therefore, with this point in mind, all must remember that a bishop must be blameless; he must be the husband of one wife; he must be temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach; he must not be given to wine, nor be one who is violent, greedy for money; rather he must be gentle and

¹⁹⁹ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 226 (vol. 3)

not be a brawler or one who is covetous. He must be one who can manage his own household well, and be one who keeps his children under control with all dignity. (This is important for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of the church of God?). Finally, he must not be a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (Also a deacon, like a bishop must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to wine, not greedy for money, but one who is careful to hold to the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.) These are the things that will help you all discern who have been made bishops by the Holy Spirit and the things that will help you all discern those who have been made deacons. Deacons, like bishops, must first be approved, then serve, for those who serve or minister in this way obtain for themselves a good standing and great confidence in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. Prescribe these things. Remind them of these things.”

This approving of bishops is really is no different than Paul’s exhortation to the saints in Thessalonica “to know” those who labor and lead them in the Lord. It too is a form of selecting, similar to the approving of I Tim. 3:10. So with that in mind, let’s now examine that final portion of God’s Word that shows the Church’s part in the establishing of elders in an assembly, which, as we said at the beginning of this chapter is found in I Thess. 5:12.

I Thessalonians 5:12

I Thess. 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, **to recognize** those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, NKJV

I Thess. 5:12 Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, **εἰδέναι** τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ, καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς,

We see in this verse that Paul exhorts the Church to “know” those who were labouring among them and who were standing before them in the Lord. The word translated “to know” is the Greek infinitive εἰδέναι. The word is used in the sense of recognizing, honouring, or acknowledging one’s proper place.

Paul uses the cognate word ἐπιγινώσκετε in I Cor. 16:18 to essentially say the same thing.

I Cor. 16:15 I urge you, brethren-- you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints-- ¹⁶ that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with *us*.¹⁷ I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.¹⁸ For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore **acknowledge** such men. NKJV

One can see that this cognate word not only involves honouring such ones who are known, but also involves submitting to such ones because their gifted place within the Body of Christ is being *recognized*. The Greek infinitive εἰδέναι conveys a similar thought in I Thess. 5:12.

A quick perusal of modern translations will show the word in I Thess. 5:12 is variously translated as *know, appreciate, honour, respect, acknowledge*. Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker gloss εἰδέναι τινά “as recognize or honor someone.”²⁰⁰ Holman Christian Standard Bible gives an interesting translation, preferring to translate the Greek infinitive into English utilizing the usual preposition “to” within the infinitival phrase—to *give recognition*. (See footnote 28, pg.69 about this version.)

I Thess. 5:12 Now we ask you, brothers, **to give recognition** to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, HCSB

I Thess. 5:12 Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, **εἰδέναι** τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ, καὶ νουθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς, (1Th 5:12 BYZ)

So we must ask ourselves, “What is Paul asking the Thessalonians to do? We must remember that Paul only spent three Sabbaths in Thessalonica before he was driven away by persecution unto Berea (Acts 17:1-10). As such, he did not have much time to order everything in the newly formed Church. After all, they were all new converts. And we must also remember that after certain ones came down from Thessalonica to Berea to continue to cause problems for Paul, the brethren then sent him away to Athens. And so, Paul sends Timothy back to Thessalonica in order to establish them, doing what Paul did not have the time or opportunity to do (I Thess. 3:1-2).

²⁰⁰ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, Second Edition* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979) pg. 556

Presumably, at this time, Paul must have instructed Timothy regarding the importance of order within the assembly by “recognizing” those who manifested a desire for gracious care among the saints, much like he did with Timothy when he left him in Ephesus (although Ephesus was different, in that Thessalonica had no recognized elders at that time, whereas Ephesus did). We already know that Paul took great care in insuring that newly formed Churches had elders who had been discerned and approved (Acts 14:23) so it would be highly unlikely that Paul did not instruct Timothy to insure the same thing occurred in Thessalonica.

However, after Timothy returned to Paul (Acts 18:5; I Thess. 3:6) and informed him of the situation within the Church, apparently, among other things (like the reluctance of some to work, and the fear of some that they may have missed the day of the Lord) Paul found they were also reluctant, or at least slow, in giving recognition to those gifted men among themselves.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown make the following comment regarding this situation in Thessalonica.

“Timothy’s account of the Thessalonian Church was highly favorable. They abounded in faith and charity and reciprocated his desire to see them (#1Th 3:6-10). Still, as nothing human on earth is perfect, there were some defects. Some had too exclusively dwelt on the doctrine of Christ’s coming kingdom, so as to neglect the sober-minded discharge of present duties (#1Th 4:11, 12). Some who had lost relatives by death, needed comfort and instruction in their doubts as to whether they who died before Christ’s coming would have a share with those found alive in His kingdom then to be revealed. Moreover, also, there had been committed among them sins against chastity and sobriety (#1Th 5:5-7), as also against charity (#1Th 4:3-10 5:13,15). There were, too, symptoms in some of want of respectful love and subordination to their ministers; others treated slightly the manifestations of the Spirit in those possessing His gifts (#1Th 5:19). To give spiritual admonition on these subjects, and at the same time commend what deserved commendation, and to testify his love to them, was the object of the Epistle.”²⁰¹

The only point I might make to the comment above is I do not believe, as stated above, that Paul was admonishing them for their “want of respectful love and subordination to their ministers,” since such men had

²⁰¹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset; David Brown, *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary on the Whole Bible Vol. II* (S. S. Scranton and Company, New York, 1875) pg. 384

not been formally recognized (nor is there such a thing as a clergy class of ministers). That is the whole point of his admonition in verse 12. The problem was not that they were not being respectful to those gifted Christians in their midst, the problem was that they were not even being recognized at all.

Perhaps, some of those who were gifted to lead were those from among the Jewish believers who were in the synagogue (like that occurred at Corinth—see Acts 18:8). This is entirely plausible, since, as with Crispus in Corinth (who was a ruler of the synagogue before he was saved) there may have been some leading Jewish men from the synagogue in Thessalonica who believed at the same time the Gentiles believed. But maybe some Gentile believers in the assembly were suspicious or upset with them because the remaining Jews in the synagogue, who did not believe, were severely persecuting them, even enlisting their fellow countrymen in the persecution.

Acts 17:5-6 But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and coming upon the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. ⁶ And when they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also. NASB

I Thess. 2:14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews. NASB

Maybe, it was a few of those Jewish believers who had been prepared beforehand by God to be elders in the assembly because, at least, they were already knowledgeable of the Old Testament and so were immediately able, after being gifted by God when they were saved, to both exhort and teach many of the newly saved Gentiles who were not very long ago pagans and idol worshippers (I Thess. 1:9). But, this is simply conjecture; we do not know the reason for their reluctance, but we do know there was some reluctance to recognize such men.

J. Vernon McGee suggests their reluctance was the result of jealousy, and those gifted Christians were not Jewish believers, but fellow Gentiles.

“Know” or understand those who teach the Word of God. It means we should *recognize* them. When Paul wrote this, he was speaking to the local situation in

Thessalonica. He had been with them less than a month. He had won them to Christ and had taught them. A church had been started, we would say, “from scratch.” There wasn’t a believer there before Paul had arrived and presented the gospel to them (see Acts 17:2-3). So all the Thessalonian believers had come to know Christ at about the same time. Now among them certain ones would have been given the gift of teaching. Some would have the gift of preaching and some of helping. Every believer receives a gift when he is saved, and that gift is to be exercised in the body of believers to build up the body of believers. But I have a notion that among the believers in Thessalonica there could have been this attitude: *So-and-so and I were saved at the same time. I knew him before he was a believer: Where did he get the idea that he could teach me?*”²⁰²

In any case, the fact remains, after Timothy returned from Thessalonica to Paul, we find, for some reason, they had not yet “given recognition” to those who had been gifted by the Holy Spirit to lead, even though, apparently, they had already been exhorted to do so. But some may ask how we know they had already been exhorted to recognize such men. The answer is that we know this because Paul decides to use the perfect infinitive εἰδέναι in I Thess. 5:12 with the present verb ἐρωτῶμεν. Let me explain.

Regarding the perfect infinitive, William W. Goodwin explains the following.

“The Perfect Infinitive in indirect discourse represents a Perfect Indicative of the direct discourse, and therefore denotes an action which is finished at the time of the leading verb. E. g. Φησὶ τοῦτο πεπραχέναι, he says that he has done this; ἔφη τοῦτο πεπραχέναι, he said that he had done this.”²⁰³

And E. A. Sophocles says states this—

“The perfect infinitive, when not preceded by the article, is equivalent to ὄτι with the perfect indicative or optative, and is used after verbs signifying to say, think, hear, and their equivalents. Thus...Φασὶν ἐληλυθέναι...Φασὶν ὄτι ἐληλύθασι.”²⁰⁴

²⁰² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. V* (Thru the Bible Radio, Pasadena, 1983) pg. 402-403

²⁰³ William W. Goodwin, *A Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (Ginn and Heath, Boston, 1878) pg.22

²⁰⁴ E. A. Sophocles, *A Glossary of Later and Byzantine Greek* (Trübner & Company, London, 1860) pg. 102

We can see this usage demonstrated for us in Luke 22:34 where Jesus tells Peter that before the rooster crows three times he will deny that he knows Jesus.

Luke 22:34 Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.” NKJV

Luke uses the same perfect infinitive εἰδέναι in this verse. And so, what Jesus is really saying is that Peter will say that he never knew the Lord! The last part of the verse could be translated—three times you will deny that you have known me.

The same thing occurs in Titus 1:16 where the same perfect infinitive is used.

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. NASB

By the use of this perfect infinitive, Paul is saying more than just the fact that the false prophets are claiming to know God; he is saying they are professing that they have known God for some time. In other words, Paul is saying the empty talkers, the deceivers, especially those of the circumcision (Titus 1:10) are claiming to wise in their knowledge of God; they are claiming that they have known God for some time, and as such, they should be honored and respected. Yet this is hard to bring out in the English for if one translates the verse as—“They profess to have known God,” some might understand that to mean they once knew God in the past, but they no longer know him, which, of course, they are not doing, since they are claiming to have special knowledge of God. It would be as if someone might say, “I have known suffering,” as opposed to “I know suffering.” The former might lead some to think this person has suffered in the past, but he is not suffering now, whereas the latter communicates the fact that this person is suffering now. As such, so as not to cause confusion, most English translations, if not all, translate this perfect as a present. But a Greek reader would know the sense of the perfect infinitive and know that Paul was saying these false prophets and empty deceivers were claiming to have known God for a long time.

It is sometimes difficult to translate the Greek perfect into English, for the Greek perfect carries a different nuance than the standard English perfect. Generally speaking, a Greek perfect bespeaks an act in the past with emphasis on the present result or state from that act. Or, one could say, the Greek perfect bespeaks an act in the past which results in a

present reality. In other words, there are two ends of the spectrum to the Greek perfect—the past and the present. Some translations like to emphasize the present end of the spectrum, while others wish to emphasize the past end of the spectrum (assuming the reader will know that the result extends into the present). Sometimes it is difficult to express both in English.

A succinct example of this is found in the story of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:49.

Luke 8:49 Ἔτι αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος, ἔρχεται τις παρὰ τοῦ ἀρχισυναγώγου, λέγων αὐτῷ ὅτι **τέθνηκεν** ἡ θυγάτηρ σου· μὴ σκύλλε τὸν διδάσκαλον.

Luke 8:49 While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's *house*, saying to him, "Your daughter **is dead**. Do not trouble the Teacher." NKJV

Yet the NASB translates it this way.

Luke 8:49 While He was still speaking, someone came from *the house of the* synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter **has died**; do not trouble the Teacher anymore." NASB

Luke uses the Greek verb θνήσκω (die) in its perfect form—τέθνηκεν. The verb is a Greek perfect which means an act has occurred resulting in a present state. In this case, the daughter of Jairus died. However, in the examples above we can see that the King James Version preferred to emphasize the present result of that past act or occurrence, by translating the Greek perfect with the present form of the verb "to be," combined with the adjective "dead"—"Your daughter **is dead**." This, of course, emphasizes the present result of the Greek perfect. But, we can see that the New American Standard Bible preferred to emphasize the past act or occurrence—"Your daughter **has died**"—knowing that the reader would understand that the resulting state of the past occurrence obviously continues into the present. In other words, if someone died in the past, they are still dead in the present.

And so we see that, unlike the Greek language, the English language many times requires us to pick one end of the spectrum because in some cases both facets of the tense cannot be adequately conveyed into English. It may be awkward in English, but what Paul is saying is that he was asking the Thessalonian believers "to have recognized" those labouring in their midst. That brings out the past. In the present, we

would simply say that he was asking them “to recognize” those labouring in their midst, but that obscures the past framework of the infinitive. It is difficult to convey both facets in English. But, of course, this is not true in Greek; a Greek reader would naturally recognize both facets of the perfect tense.

Now, it should be mentioned that some believe that by the time of the New Testament this perfect infinitive came to be used only with a present or aorist sense in the Greek. Thus, if we were to adopt this view, we would have to say that the emphasis was on the simple act of recognition without any reference to a previous exhortation. But this seems unlikely, at least in this verse, because of Paul’s use of the present verb ἐρωτῶμεν with the overall context. Let me explain; I will include the previous verse for context. I will use Darby’s version.

I Thess. 5:11-12 Wherefore encourage one another, and build up each one the other, even as also ye do. But we beg you, brethren, to know those who labour among you, and take the lead among you in *the* Lord, and admonish you.

Paul begins with the conjunction “wherefore,” which concludes a section that began in I Thess. 4:1. In that verse Paul refers to those things they had already received by way of commandment from them, i.e. from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. Throughout that chapter he exhorts them to remember the past instruction they had received in regard to their sanctification (vs. 3-8), their ongoing love for each other (vs. 9-10), their responsibility to work with their own hands, minding their own business (vs. 11-12), and their security and hope in Christ Jesus (vs. 13-17). Then he pauses and encourages them to be comforted by his words in verse 13-17, but then in I Thess. 5:1 he continues with a reminder that they know full well the truths concerning the Day of the Lord (vs. 2-5). Then he exhorts them to be sober and alert because of those truths (vs. 6-8). Then he reminds them that as Christians we are not destined for wrath but for obtaining salvation (vs. 9-10). Then, after this litany of reminders, he then concludes that whole section with the verse before us. Let me now repeat the verse with paraphrasing (utilizing Darby and the NASB) to help bring out the nuances of Greek text.

I Thess. 5:11-12 Wherefore keep encouraging one another, and building up each other up, just as you also are doing. But, we are asking you, brethren, that you recognize those who diligently labor among you, and take the lead of you in the Lord and admonish you.

In verse 11, Paul praises them for doing two things—encouraging each other and building each other up, which would come from everyone using their spiritual gifts—but at the same time he has one thing against them, they had not yet “recognized” those Christians who were labouring among them and leading them. This contrast is made clear by the use of the adversative δὲ (but). (When the overall context is understood, I believe this conjunction should be taken with an adversative sense, rather than a continuative sense.) Such translations as Darby, the New American Standard Bible, the American Standard Version, the English Revised Edition and the Revised Standard Version all translate it as an adversative. W. E. Vine has a helpful comment regarding this overall context.

“**[I Thess.] 5:12 But**—lest the preceding words should be misunderstood to imply that churches can be maintained without leaders, the apostle proceeds to urge their recognition; this forms an introduction to the general instructions upon church life which follow.”²⁰⁵

And so, we see that even though he praises them in verse 11, Paul reiterates in verse 12 that they need to give recognition to those Christians in their midst who have already been made elders by the Holy Spirit.

If this was a continuative conjunction and this was simply a new request, then, perhaps, Paul could have simply used the aorist form of the verb to ask—ἠρωτήσαμεν (*we ask*), which would have supported this sense. Or, as we said before, if he had used a present infinitive with this present verb, it would not have given this impression and would have simply been seen as a new request Paul was making.

Not only that, if this was a new request and Paul was not inferring that this request had been made before, and he still wished to use the present verb, he could have left off the adversative δὲ, leaving only ἐρωτῶμεν (*we are asking*) and it would then clearly appear as a new request never made before—he does this in verse 13 when he writes: Εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς. (Be at peace with yourselves). He does use a conjunction with this exhortation. Notice below that the NKJV corrects, or maybe I should say clarifies the KJV by leaving out the added conjunction “and” that was added in italics in the KJV, showing it was not in the Greek.

²⁰⁵ W. E. Vine, *The Collected Writings of W. E. Vine, Volume 3* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996) pg. 83

I Thess. 5:13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. NKJV

I Thess. 5:13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves. KJV

Another reason a previous exhortation might be indicated is because in many of his other epistles, whenever Paul expresses a desire to the saints, many times he would use a first person singular verb (e. g. παρακαλῶ in ICor. 1:10 and 16:15 and θέλω in ICor. 11:3). He does this even though those epistles are addressed as coming from one other than just himself. Yet, in this epistle to the Thessalonians (which also is addressed as coming from one other than just himself, i.e. also Silvanus and Timothy) he uses the first person *plural* verb ἐρωτῶμεν rather than a first person singular verb as he did in his other epistles (cf. ἐρωτῶ in Phil. 4:3). In fact, this first person plural verb ἐρωτῶμεν is used only here and in I Thess. 4:1 and II Thess. 2:1.

Now, granted, perhaps this might simply reflect an earlier form of address that Paul used, but, maybe Paul used the first person *plural*, rather than the *singular* because, unlike in his other epistles, in this epistle he wanted to emphasize the fact that Timothy was still beseeching them to recognize those same Christian men. Perhaps he switched to the plural number because he wanted to emphasize the fact that just as Timothy had asked them to do so, when he was with them personally, he still was doing so now with Paul. So, it still seems that Paul is emphasizing more than just a present reality; he is gently reminding them by use of the perfect infinitive with the present verb and adversative conjunction that they should have already recognized those men.

And so, with this present verb, adversative conjunction, perfect infinitive and then a present infinitive the overall context suggests that this was something the Thessalonian Church should have already done—but had not done, or, at least was hesitant to do for some reason. So the view that this perfect infinitive came to be used only with a present or aorist sense in the Greek by this time in history becomes unlikely, at least in an absolute sense.

Finally, before concluding this first part of our examination of I Thess. 5:12, we might mention one other thing. Even if the perfect οἶδα and its infinitive εἰδέναι came to be understood as a present, we must not forget how that present sense came about. Liddell & Scott speak to this in their earlier Greek Lexicon. They state the following.

“to know: which signf. comes from the perf., for what one *has seen* or *observed*, that *one knows*...The tenses which belong to this signf. are these: perf. uses as pres., οἶδα (in Alcae. 94 e, p. 72, οἶδα) *I know*, c. part. εἰδώς, inf. εἰδέναι...”²⁰⁶

In other words, the basal sense of the perfect did not disappear; it simply was not emphasized, because that which has been *seen* becomes an ever present reality. So we see that the past act was still indicated in the verb, but it was simply overridden with the present reality.

On the other hand, others emphasize the fact that by the time of the New Testament was written the perfect was more associated with verbal aspect than simply with the tense of the verb. For example, Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed and Matthew Brook O'Donnell in their *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* state the following.

The perfect tense is used to depict an action or event as representing a complex state of affairs and hence is said to convey a stative verbal aspect. Thus the verb ἠλπικα can be rendered *I am in a state of hoping* or *I am hopeful* or *I have hoped*; and οἶδα as *I am in a state of knowing* or *I am knowledgeable* or *I know*.²⁰⁷

If we accept this understanding, then perhaps we might render the two verses as such: “Therefore keep encouraging one another, and building each other up, just as you also are doing. But, we are asking you to be in a state of recognition, brethren, concerning those who labour among you...” Either way, the perfective aspect of the infinitive is being emphasized, which, in turn hints that this was something they should have already done.

It is important in our study of the Scripture to try to understand these nuances of the Greek language. The Greek language was very precise in its uses of tense. This truth was addressed by Dana and Mantey in their *Greek Grammar of the New Testament*. In it they state:

“The development of tense has reached its highest in Greek, and presents its greatest wealth of meaning. ‘Among all known ancient languages, none

²⁰⁶ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Drisler, *A Greek-English Lexicon based on the German Work of Francis Passow* (Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, 1848) pg. 399

²⁰⁷ Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2010) pg. 319

distinguishes the manifold temporal (and modal) relations of the verb so accurately as the Greek'... And 'in the use of tenses the New Testament writers are by no means deficient in the requisite skill.' ²⁰⁸

And they go on and speak of the importance of understanding the reason behind the use of each tense (they are speaking of the distinction between the aorist and perfect tense, but it applies to the distinction between any tenses).

“We should certainly in fairness take it for granted that the New Testament writer intended the differentiation of meaning which is represented in this distinction [of tenses], whether we are able to understand fully his reason or not.... It is much more in keeping with a sound linguistic sense when the same writer insists that one 'ought,' in every case, to *look for* a reason for one tense being used rather than the other.”²⁰⁹

Of these different distinctions of tense they state (again they are contrasting the aorist and perfect tenses, but their observation is applicable to all tenses)—

“A Greek writer instinctively knew what tense to use in expressing an idea accurately. The more one studies Greek the more this conviction grows upon him. At times the same verb is repeated in succeeding clauses, but the tense is changed, because the writer was acutely conscious of the distinctive force of each tense in expressing the state of an action.”²¹⁰

So, with regard to the perfect infinitive used in I Thess. 5:12, we can now see that Paul is making a point that a Greek reader would naturally understand. By using the perfect infinitive εἰδέναι, with the present verb ἐρωτῶμεν (asking), Paul is revealing the fact that he wishes this act of recognition would have already taken place at the time of his entreaty. It is hard to bring out the thought into English, but in the Greek one realizes that Paul is emphasizing that this is something that they should have already done, resulting in a current state of recognition of those Christians.

Let us now continue to the second part of our examination of this verse. We mentioned that Paul switches to a present infinitive in the next verse. Let us now look at this.

²⁰⁸ H. E. Dana; Julius R Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1957) pg. 177

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pg. 200-201

²¹⁰ Ibid., pg. 194-195

Another way Paul intimates that he was referring to a previous exhortation is because he switches to the present infinitive, ἡγεῖσθαι (esteem) in verse 13, which specifically emphasizes a present state of being. Paul writes: καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτοὺς ὑπὲρ ἐκπερισσοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ διὰ τὸ ἔργον αὐτῶν (and to be regarding them very highly in love on account of their work). By switching from a perfect infinitive to a present infinitive he is emphasizing his point. Remember, as Dana and Mantey mentioned “A Greek writer instinctively knew what tense to use in expressing an idea accurately.”

The present infinitive, many times, emphasizes a state resulting from repeated actions rather than one like the perfect. Dana and Mantey share the following observation regarding this truth.

“...the present infinitive indicates a condition or process. Thus “pisteusai” [aorist infinitive] is to exercise faith on a given occasion, while “pisteuein” [present infinitive] is to be a believer; “douleusai” is to render a service, while “douleuein” is to be a slave; “amartein” [aorist infinitive] is to commit a sin, while “amartanein” [present infinitive] is to be a sinner. These distinctions are typical and basal, though plastic in actual usage.”²¹¹

If Paul was using the perfect infinitive in verse 12, without any sense of past completed action but rather with a present reality, and only wished to emphasize the present state, then why not just use a present infinitive in both places as the present infinitive does emphasize a present state of being? (By the way, this would have supported the meaning of “appreciate” for εἰδέναι.) Or, conversely, if only the present state of being was being emphasized in the perfect infinitive, then why not use a perfect infinitive in both places? No, by Paul’s use of two different infinitives, it seems that Paul meant to make a contrast.

Thus, when we compare the two infinitives we see that Paul seems to be exhorting the Thessalonians to no longer continue in a state whereby they fail to give their proper recognition to those who were laboring in the work of gracious care in their midst. He wants them to once and for all recognize those functioning as bishops or elders in their midst so that those Christians formally become known or recognized as their elders (perfect infinitive εἰδέναι). As such, he then tells them in verse 13 that

²¹¹ H.E. Dana, Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York, 1957) pg. 199

such a state of recognition should result in a continual esteem or regard of love for their work (present infinitive ἡγεῖσθαι).

Or we can look at this way. If Paul was not making such a contrast between an act resulting in a state of recognition (perfect infinitive), which became the basis for a continual process of esteem in love (present infinitive), he simply could have used an aorist infinitive in verse 12 rather than the perfect infinitive. With an aorist infinitive there would not have been a hint that the Thessalonians had failed to do something which they had previously been exhorted to do, or that Paul desired that they enter into a permanent state of recognition; rather, it would have simply emphasized Paul's desire that they perform the act at the time of their reading of the epistle without any reference to a permanent state of being. By using an aorist infinitive he simply would have been asking them, as if for the first time, to recognize certain men within their assembly. However, by using the perfect infinitive with the present he is able to remind them that this was something he thought they should have already done and that it should be an act which resulted in a permanent state of recognition of those Christians in the Church.

We should also mention that this use of these two different infinitives also helps us define the meaning of εἰδέναι contextually. If εἰδέναι simply meant *to appreciate* or *respect* without any sense of a previous act, then why not use a present infinitive like he did in verse 13 with ἡγεῖσθαι (esteem)? *Esteeming* refers to an ongoing process, meant to convey an action that should be repeated every day. It is an act that can occur or not occur. Once given one day, it might not be given the next. If εἰδέναι simply meant *appreciate* or *respect*, that too, like *esteem* would be an act that was meant to continue day by day. However, like "esteem," it might be given one day, but it might not the next. Yet, because Paul used a perfect infinitive as opposed to a present, it seems to indicate that Paul was referring to an act which once done resulted in a permanent state. As was just said, *appreciation*, *respect* or *esteeming*, do not refer, necessarily, to a permanent state. It could result in a permanent state, if those acts became habitual, constantly being repeated, but that is not guaranteed in and of itself.

But, on the other hand, once men are *recognized*, having been approved as being elders—that results in a state that once done cannot be undone. Now, of course, one could personally undo that recognition by a spirit of rebellion, but even that does not really undo the previous act of recognition by the assembly. Once done in time one cannot roll back the

event and undo the approval. So this helps us understand that Paul is using εἰδέναι with the perfective sense of a *formal* or *official* recognition of those men who were made elders by the Holy Spirit, and is not being used solely with the sense of *appreciation* or *respect*. Now, obviously, appreciation and respect would be an aspect of such recognition, but appreciation and respect cannot be divorced from that corporate act of recognition.

Thus, because of this contrast between the perfect and present infinitives, it seems Paul is using this word according to a Hebrew idiom bespeaking formal *acknowledgement, approval or recognition*. Hermann Olshausen addresses this in his Commentary on Thessalonians.

“Ver. 12. εἰδέναι is used, after the analogy of the Hebr. **עָדַן**, Gen. xxxix. 6,²¹² Prov. xxxi. 13, and the Latin *respicere*, in the sense of respectful acknowledgment.”²¹³

Alford also affirms this usage.

“The connexion (but, a slight contrast with that which has just passed) seems to be this: that, as the duty of comforting and building up one another has just been mentioned, the transition is now made to those whose especial work this is; and one part of forwarding the work is, the recognition and encouragement of them by the church... **to know** : i. e. favourably and honourably to recognize.”²¹⁴ — εἰδέναι in this sense is perhaps a Hebraism.²¹⁵

And Joseph Peter Lange says this.

²¹² Gen. 39:6 means that Potiphar did not consider himself to be in control of anything, but the bread which he ate; he left everything to be controlled by Joseph. Thus, he did not “acknowledge,” or “designate” (**עָדַן**) anything, of all his possessions, to be under his own control, except the bread he ate; he left everything under the control of Joseph. This shows how much he trusted Joseph. See the LXX καὶ οὐκ ἤδει τῶν καθ’ ἑαυτὸν οὐδέν (and he did not acknowledge for himself anything of the things. Cf. Gen. 39:8)

²¹³ Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1851) pg.452

²¹⁴ Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers, Vol. 2* (Rivingtons, London, 1865) pg. 493-494

²¹⁵ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. 3* (Rivingtons, London, 1865) pg. 279

“These men—such is his request—ye ought εἰδέναι, pregnant: respicere, *to recognize and acknowledge them as being what they are.*”²¹⁶

We can further understand this use of εἰδέναι with a sense of formal recognition or approval by considering its use by a later Christian named Ignatius, when he was writing an epistle to the Christian in Smyrna. He writes the following—καλῶς ἔχει Θεὸν καὶ ἐπίσκοπον εἰδέναι²¹⁷ (It is good **to recognise** God and the bishop.)²¹⁸ And if we emphasize the perfective aspect we would translate it as—“It is good **to have recognized** God and the bishop.”

This example is all the more significant when we understand the purpose of Ignatius’ exhortation. Ignatius was trying to institute a change of Church governance throughout Christendom (as we will examine in a subsequent chapter) whereby one of the elders would be elevated above the rest to take a position of a monarchical bishop. As such, he was seeking the *formal* and *official recognition* of this change by the Churches—the *formal* and *official recognition* of one man as a sole bishop over the Church in each city. He sought to accomplish this by intimating that if one recognizes the place of God in one’s heart, one should recognize the formal position of the bishop in the Church. He was equating the two acts of acknowledgment to emphasize the importance of the position of the bishop. He affirms this by next stating, “He that honoureth the bishop is honoured of God.”²¹⁹ And in another place he says—

Plainly therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself...to the end that **ye may obey the bishop and the presbytery** without distraction of mind. “²²⁰

Therefore, we can see how this Greek perfect infinitive, during the first century, came to be understood along the line of the Hebrew idiom of “to know,” meaning to recognize or approve in a formal manner. With God,

²¹⁶ John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, tr., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical* (Charles Scribner & Co., New York, 1870) pg. 90

²¹⁷ J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Macmillan & Co., London, 1898) pg. 130

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 158

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2, Part II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1889) pg. 544-45, 549-50

it meant to formally “recognize” His place of authority in the life of man, and with the bishop, it meant to formally recognize his place of authority within the Church. Its cognate word ἐπιγινώσκω (recognize) was used the same way in I Cor. 16:15-18.

I Cor. 16:15-18 Now, brethren, you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints;¹⁶ I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer.¹⁷ I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence;¹⁸ for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. **Give recognition** (ἐπιγινώσκετε) to such men.

The only difference is, in I Cor. 16:15-18 these men were recognized as “workers” (vs.16) whereas in Thessalonica the men were recognized as “elders.” Today, this formal recognition or acknowledgement of such workers is known as “commendation.” It too, is a formal or official recognition by the Church of certain gifted men who have been gifted by God to serve Him in the “Work” (e. g. the mission field).

Finally, one other point should be mentioned before we conclude this section on I Thess. 5:12. This point will tie together this passage with our passage regarding the “approving” of a bishop in I Tim. 3:10. When one reads this first epistle to the Thessalonians one realizes that Paul never mentions bishops or elders, as he does in other epistles. For example, when we read his epistle to the Philippians, we see he begins with a greeting to the saints along with the bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1), but with this epistle to the Thessalonians his failure to mention elders is very marked. He simply brings attention to “those who labour among you.”

Nevertheless, many expositors consider these ones mentioned in I Thess. 5:12 to actually be elders. But the fact of the matter is, they are never called elders, which would have been very simple for Paul to do so if that is indeed who they formally were in the Church. He could have said to the Thessalonians something similar to what he said in I Tim 5:17.

I Tim. 5:17 “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” NASB

Yet Paul did not say anything like that. He simply said to recognize “the labouring ones” among you. Why? This is another factor which confirms for us that Paul is not using the Greek word εἰδέναι in I Thess. 5:12 to simply mean “respect,” or “appreciate” as translated by the NASB. If

that is all he was saying he could have added the Greek word for *elders* and simply said,

“We ask you to appreciate those **elders** who are diligently labouring among you and are leading you.”

But the fact of the matter is, he does not.

Now, in and of itself, this does not prove anything, for the Holy Spirit may have simply been emphasizing the work done by an elder, as opposed to his recognition as an elder. But when we put everything into context, especially the pattern already shown to us in Scripture, when years before Paul and Barnabas “selected” or “appointed” elders in the Churches they established (Acts 14:23), we can see that this absence of mentioning elders is significant. And we also see that the approving or recognition of elders within an assembly is very important to Paul. It was something he expected the Church to do.

As we have already mentioned, Paul’s pattern was to make sure each Church had an established order of governance based upon the gifting of the Holy Spirit whereby men are made elders. This establishment was a process over time where such men were discerned by their labour, their character and their gift. In other words, such men would already be functioning as elders, since such functioning is simply the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their life (I Cor. 12:7). As such, if such men were walking by the Spirit, this act of shepherding would be occurring even without the formal recognition of the assembly. But that was not enough for Paul; Paul made clear that such men should not be left in an unrecognized state. Paul revealed through inspired Scripture that God desires their formal or official recognition. But, Paul also made clear that this recognition does not occur in a vacuum. This recognition was another facet of “approving.” In other words, the “approving of I Tim. 3:10 is similar to the “recognition” of I Thess. 5:12, whereby such men would then be held in high esteem and love.

Sometimes this “approving” (resulting in a formal recognition) was done by the apostles themselves, i.e. when they had the time and opportunity (Acts 14:23). Sometimes it was done by men who had been separated to the “work,” as was the case with Titus (and, potentially Timothy). And, finally, as we have been seeing, it was sometimes done by the assembly as a whole, as is the case before us in I Thess. 5:12, and as we saw in I Tim. 3:1-10.

This, I believe, is the reason why elders are not formally mentioned by Paul in his epistle to the Thessalonians. There were no official elders in the Church as of yet, because the Church was still involved in the process of approving those men. We must remember, the Church was newly formed by Paul from scratch; Paul had to flee Thessalonica after just three weeks or so; thus he did not have time to “discern” and “approve” such men. Nor did Paul send one like Titus to the city to make sure elders were established. As for Timothy, we are not told of the extent of his involvement in any such *approving*—that is, when Paul sent him back to the Church shortly after his departure; nor, indeed, do we know if he was told to do anything more than simply exhorting the saints to do the “approving” or “recognition” themselves. What we do know is that by the time Timothy rejoined Paul in Corinth, the Church had not recognized such men. Therefore, based upon the report of Timothy, regardless of whether he was involved in the process or not, Paul was told that the assembly had failed to recognize any bishops or elders, therefore, Paul could not address elders in the Church as he did with the Church in Philippi and with the Church later in Ephesus.

This same observation had been made by others. Charles A. Wannamaker in his *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* says this—

We can now come back to Paul’s use of **εἰδέναι**. From what has been said regarding the three participles in v. 12 we can conclude that Paul had in mind the leaders who had emerged in the church on the basis of their functions within the community. He makes no appeal to person appointed by himself, and thus it cannot be assumed that at this state in the Pauline mission, organized offices within the local church existed. Rather, as in v. 12, Paul calls on the community to recognize as their leaders precisely those people who functioned in such a way as to toil for them, to protect and care for them...²²¹

One comment I might make about the above quotation is that Wanamaker in another place identifies those to be recognized as being those Christians who were patrons within the community because of the Greek word **προϊσταμένων** in verse 12. While, that may be possible, I do not believe that Greek word should be understood with that sense, as we will see presently. It seems better to take the word to refer to those who

²²¹ Charles A. Wannamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text Volumes 13-14 of The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1990) pg. 193

were functioning as elders with the assembly without official recognition. As such, since the Church was still involved in a process that may have begun when Timothy was sent back to them, it seems the Christians in Thessalonica that Paul was referring to were those believers who were involved in the “gracious care” of the saints who had not yet been “approved” or “recognized” as elders or bishops by the assembly. Thus, Paul could only refer to the “labour” of such men, not the men themselves as elders, which in turn helps explain the remaining part of I Thess. 5:12, which we will now look at.

Paul asks the assembly “to give recognition” to the men who are characterized by the following three participles—1) τοὺς **κοπιῶντας** ἐν ὑμῖν, 2) καὶ **προϊσταμένους** ὑμῶν ἐν κυρίῳ, 3) καὶ **νουθετοῦντας** ὑμᾶς. Darby translates them as those who, 1) **labour** among you, 2) and **take the lead** among you in the Lord, 3) and **admonish** you. This contrasts with the KJV which translates the same phrase as ones who 1) **labour** among you, 2) and **are over you** in the Lord, 3) and **admonish** you.” I believe Darby’s translation is the better English translation for it emphasizes an ongoing function rather than a settled position, especially in reference to the second participle in the phrase— **προϊσταμένους**— which is translated as “over you” by the KJV, but by “take the lead” by Darby. By translating the participle as “over you,” the KJV implies that the Church already had official elders or bishops, and the saints were only being asked to appreciate them, whereas Darby’s translation of “take the lead” emphasizes certain men were involved in “gracious care” without any formal or official status. In other words, like the one’s referred to by Paul in I Tim. 3:1, these were men who were serving from the heart, functioning in the gracious care of the saints, but ones who had not yet been given official approval or recognition by the Church as bishops or elders.

Now, we will not need to much examine the other two participles as there is ample consensus between most translations in regard to the first and third participles—laboring and admonishing. Labouring, being a present participle, refers to those who were actively engaged in the work of ministry, labouring in the gracious care of the saints. Paul uses the same word of his ministry as an apostle (I Cor. 15:10) and he also uses it specifically of the labour of elders within an assembly.

I Tim. 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who **labour** (**κοπιῶντες**) in the word and doctrine. KJV

And, admonishing bespeaks those who not only taught and exhorted the saints, but also those who warned them against error or falsehood. And so most agree on those two participles. But it is this middle or second participle where disagreement reigns. The Greek word is the present participle form of προΐστημι. W. E. Vine relates the following regarding this word.

“PROISTĒMI (προΐστημι) lit., ‘to stand before,’ hence, “to lead, attend to” (**indicating care and diligence**), is translated “to rule” (Middle Voice), with reference to a local church, in Rom. 12:8; perfect Active in 1 Tim. 5:17; with reference to a family, 1 Tim. 3:4,12 (Middle Voice); 1 Tim. 3:5 (2nd aorist, Active).”²²²

Now, the reason many expositors believe this word refers to *official* elders within the assembly (ones who are already recognized as elders, and, thus, have already been approved) is because Paul uses not only the same participle labouring (κοπιῶντες) in I Tim. 5:17 of elders, as we already mentioned above, but he also uses the same Greek verb προΐστημι in participle form in I Tim. 5:17.

I Tim. 5:17 Let the elders that **rule** (προεστῶτες) well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who **labour** (κοπιῶντες) in the word and doctrine. KJV

Because of this duplicate usage of these two participles in a verse which, indeed, does identify recognized elders, they assume the ones referred to by Paul in Thessalonica must have also been recognized. But just because one is already labouring and leading in the gracious care of the saints does not necessarily mean they have already been formally recognized or approved as bishops or elders. We saw this in I Tim. 3:1. So the view that Paul was referring to men who had already been recognized as elders by his use of these two participles is putting the cart before the horse.

Obviously, when Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy, he knew there were men in Ephesus who were engaged in *gracious care* who, while doing the work of an elder or bishop, could not be designated an elder or

²²² W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 307 (vol. 3) [bold print mine]

bishop, that is, until they had been approved (I Tim. 3:10). Well, such is the case here in Thessalonica.

Now we are not saying that these men were not seen by Paul as men who may have already been gifted as elders by the Holy Spirit. Obviously, he did, as indicated by using the same two participles he used in conjunction with elders in I Timothy 5:17. In fact, besides using the same “participle” of “leading,” and the same participle of “labouring” (while not using the same participle of admonishing—νουθετοῦντας) he does use the word διδασκαλία (teaching) which is sometimes used in conjunction with the participle form of νουθετέω (cf. Col. 1:28; 3:16). So we can see that all three participles are directly or indirectly being used of elders. We are not denying this. In fact, we are affirming this fact. But we are saying it does not necessarily mean that those who are engaged in those things have already been formally recognized or approved.

This is one of the reasons why we think the KJV and the NASB may have things in the wrong order in thinking that these men were already recognized bishops in Thessalonica, and so simply needed to be appreciated.

Yet, no doubt, these participles do define these men as doing the work of an elder in an unrecognized state. The fact that this can be done by men in an unrecognized state is also confirmed in that Paul also uses the same Greek word προϊστήμι of those still being proved within the context of I Tim. 3:4-5.

I Tim.3:4 τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου καλῶς **προϊστάμενον**, τέκνα ἔχοντα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, μετὰ πάσης σεμνότητος

I Tim. 3:4 *He must be* one who **manages** his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity

I Tim.3:5 (εἰ δέ τις τοῦ ἰδίου οἴκου **προστήναι** οὐκ οἶδεν, πῶς ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ ἐπιμελήσεται;),

I Tim.3:5 (but if a man does not know how to **manage** his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?).

So we see that the three basic characteristics of labour, taking a lead and admonishing (in other Scripture conjoined with teaching) that are used by Paul in I Thess. 5:12 are used of those who had been made elders by the Holy Spirit in both a recognized state (I Tim. 5:17) and in a yet

unrecognized state (I Tim. 3:4-5). The only difference is that those functioning with these characteristics in I Tim. 5:17 are already recognized as elders or bishops, whereas those in I Thess. 5:12 (and I Tim. 3:4-5) are not because of contextual reasons.²²³

Consequently, we see that the men referred to in I Thess. 5:12 were indeed men made elders by the Holy Spirit, but were men not yet “recognized” or “approved” by the Church, and so they could not formally be called elders or bishops of the Church by Paul. They were engaged in “gracious care” of labouring, leading, and admonishing, being so gifted by the Holy Spirit, but they still needed to be “approved” by the assembly before they could “serve” as recognized bishops of the Church.

So in conclusion, we now can see how Scripture tells us that there are three ways whereby men become elders in an assembly. 1) First and foremost, they are made elders by the Holy Spirit. 2) They are established as elders by those in the work, whether by an apostle direct, or by others who are also in the work like unto Titus. 3) They become elders in a Church when an assembly discerns those who have been made elders by the Holy Spirit and so approves and/or recognizes the ones so gifted.

Now I know that there will still be ones who will deny a Church has the authority to establish elders. If one still wishes to deny that the Church has the Scriptural authority to “discern,” “approve,” and so “recognize”

²²³ It should be noted that despite the obvious connection of these characteristics to elders or bishops, these words are also used in a general sense of all saints. This is an important fact, for without it some have fallen into a clergy/laity mentality. All saints are called to “labour” (Rev. 2:3). We are all called “to lead,” in a general sense, i.e. by “leading in good works” (Titus 3:8, 14). And, finally, we are all called to “admonish” one another, i.e. those who are acting unruly (I Thess. 5:14). As such, we can see that pastors (i.e. elders, bishops) stand before the saints as examples of specific labour, leading and admonishing, so everyone can understand and apply these general characteristics of labour, leading and admonishing. As shepherds, such men are before the saints (sheep). As priests they are on the same level as every saint (priests), for we all are priests to God. There is not a clergy/laity system in Scripture.

men who are made elders by the Holy Spirit, simply because they believe that only an apostle can do this, that is fine. But, beloved, if you believe that, let me ask a question. Is not Paul still an apostle of Christ to us? Cannot an apostle give commands by writing? Those who wish to assert the above must also believe Paul's commands in writing are still in force, today, for all his apostolic commands are preserved for us in Scripture. If this is so, should we not obey every apostolic command of his?

We break bread every Lord's day by the apostle Paul's command in writing (I Cor. 11). We practice the liberty of the Spirit in ministry by the apostle Paul's command in writing (I Cor. 12-14). We observe Paul's apostolic injunction that sisters should not teach (I Tim. 2). If we follow the apostolic commands in all these other instances, why do we ignore the apostolic commands he left for us in establishing elders in assemblies, either by Christians in the work or on the mission field (Titus 1), or by the "approving" of bishops by an assembly (I Tim. 3), or the formal recognition of elders by the saints in the Church (I Thess. 5). These are all apostolic commands left behind by Paul for each assembly to follow. Why would we follow some but not others?

Dear brethren, if anyone seeks gracious care, being gifted by the Holy Spirit, who also meets the necessary qualifications in Scripture, that person is commanded by the apostolic command of Paul in the Greek "to serve" or "minister" as a bishop . In the same way, if one meets the qualification of a deacon, and is so gifted and proven, that one also is commanded by Paul to serve or minister. Paul's use of the imperative mood of command and not the subjective mood of possibility in I Tim. 3:10 confirms that bishops are still being made today and continue to be a part of the governmental order the Lord Jesus left behind for His Church. Darby was wrong when he said, "There is no authority competent to choose and establish official elders, nor a flock of God existing to which such official appointment could apply."²²⁴ There is such authority, and that authority is Paul the apostle through his written instructions in the Word of God. If we obey him in some things, why do we not obey him in all things?

At the minimum, one cannot deny that the authority that is still competent to choose and establish official elders today is none other than the apostle Paul himself through the written instructions he left for us. If we affirm, at the minimum, that one cannot deny that the authority

224

to allow open ministry is found in none other than the apostle Paul himself through the written instruction he left for us in I Cor. 14, then should be able to affirm the other. Consistency is an aspect of truth. Consistency is a safeguard. It is the opposite of man-made traditions. If we ever find ourselves not being consistent in our application of Scripture, we should pause and ask the Holy Spirit to search us and try us to see why.

The Lord Jesus Christ left us an example of following only the pure Word of God and not the Word of God as taught through the eyes of man-made traditions. The Lord said in John 14:16 that the Holy Spirit that would come would be another of the same kind (ἄλλον). As such, whatever the Son of God rejected, the Holy Spirit would reject. Whatever the Son of God opposed, the Holy Spirit would oppose, for they are consubstantial with the Father, possessing the one same and undivided substance of God. Man-made traditions angered the Son; man-made traditions will quench the Spirit and make void the Word of God. May God in His mercy protect us from them, for we all are liable to adhere to them without even knowing it. May we constantly have a spirit of supplication before the Lord that the Light of the Word would penetrate every thought and viewpoint we might have so that only that which is from God will remain and our own opinions will fall quietly by the wayside.

Paul's written instruction in the Pastoral Epistles shows us that he expected that recognized elders were always to be a part of the assembly. God is a God of order and the Church, no matter what the condition, is expected to always obey every apostolic injunction. (Apostolic injunctions in Scripture are the traditions of God, not the traditions of man.)

II Thess. 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and **hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.** KJV

If the Church of yesteryear was called upon by Paul to hold fast and obey his injunctions and traditions, is it any different today? Granted, no assembly can hold fast by hearing Paul's word in person, as could the Church of yesteryear, but we can hold fast today by hearing his word as recorded in his epistles. The Church of yesteryear ignored his commands at their own peril. The same applies today. An assembly that ignores his commands found in his inspired writings ignores his commands at their own peril and spiritual well-being. To ignore his continuing injunctions

to “establish,” “approve,” and/or “recognize” bishops today through his writings, ignores an apostle of Christ. Scripture is living! Paul’s epistles are living! It is no different than if we just received his instructions today through a trusted co-worker of his like Titus.

What if Paul wrote to us today these same instructions concerning men made known to be bishops by the Holy Spirit, would we ignore it and tell him, “I am sorry, Paul, we have no authority to choose and establish official elders. You must come and do it in person, for only an apostle can appoint elders.”

Beloved, God is a God of order, and he will always manifest His order within His Church. Paul’s epistle to Titus, the first epistle of Paul to Timothy, and his epistle to the Church of the Thessalonians is the Church’s authority today to continue to take part in the establishment of elders within the assembly. In Scripture the Church takes part in the establishment of elders in conjunction with a worker or missionary like Titus; they take part in approving a bishop with an evangelist like Timothy or with the faithful saying of Paul he left for the Church, and they take part as an assembly in recognizing those men who have been made elders or bishops by the Holy Spirit, those who are labouring, leading and admonishing the saints in the Lord. It can be done through apostles, or with those in the work, or through existing elders together with all the saints, or by the Church itself. The approving (or recognition) is not restricted by the Holy Spirit to a privileged few. It can, and, indeed, should still be practiced today under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the everlasting Word of God.

So we see that this third and final manner in which elders are made in the assembly, by the process of approving, is not restricted by the Holy Spirit to apostles, nor to so-called apostolic delegates. The Holy Spirit does not restrict this approving to a privileged few at all; it can also be accomplished by the Church itself. Thus, obviously, by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we see that 1) apostles are able to appoint men to be bishops by stretching out the hand (Acts 14:23)—2) workers in the work (like missionaries today) are able to establish men to be bishops along with the Church (Titus 1:5)—and, finally, the Church itself is able to approve and/or recognize men to be bishops in the assembly (I Tim. 3:1-10; I Thess. 5:12).

I think it would be *apropos* to close with some lengthy quotes by G. H. Lang concerning this issue.

“As to that first gathering in Dublin in 1829, J. G. Bellett wrote: ‘the settle order of worship which we had in Fitzwilliam Square gave place gradually. Teaching and exhorting were first made common duties and services, while prayer was restricted under the care of two or three, who were regarded as elders. But gradually all this yielded. In a little time, no appointed or recognized eldership was understood to be in the midst of us, and all service was of a free character, the presence of God through the Spirit being more simply believed and used.’”

“Thus a most blessed fact, the presence of the Spirit, was used both rightly and wrongly: rightly in that worship and ministry were left to His leading, as His word directs; wrongly in that the proper rule of the assembly by elders, which also His Word directs, was suffered to lapse. The mistake thus innocently made has worked incalculable harm to the Brethren assemblies ever since, by allowing, on the one hand, autocratic dictatorship where strong individuals have been present, and democratic disorder elsewhere...But in some other early centres more Scriptural ways obtained. In the first meeting in England, at Plymouth, there was a recognized eldership. Dr. Tregelles’ testimony is decisive as to this. He wrote: ‘At Plymouth Mr. J. N. Darby requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry...Mr. J. N. Darby addressed Mr. Newton by letter, *as an Elder*...it was written by J. N. Darby, from Dublin, and it is addressed to *B. Newton, Esq., Elder of the Saints Meeting in Raleigh Street, Plymouth.*’”²²⁵

“Both Muller and Craik were early and firmly persuaded that recognized rulers in a church are necessary and Scriptural. To quote what I wrote formerly: ‘they (Muller and Craik) were as necessarily the first rulers of that church as any apostolic evangelists were of churches they founded. But as the fellowship multiplied, and they saw the Spirit qualifying other brethren for oversight, and moving them to addict themselves thereto of their own will (I Cor. 16.15; I Tim. 3.1), they invited such formally to join them in the eldership, and then announced to the assembly the names of those thus invited, which followed the example of Paul’s exhortation regarding Stephanus. Thus there was no *selection of rulers* by the ruled—a principle contrary to the divine order, according to God’s mind, since all authority is by delegation from God, the sole Fount of authority, not by conferment from below, from the subjects; but there was *recognition* by the church, with opportunity for stating any valid objection to a brother entering that responsible position. This method has continued, with real advantage to that assembly...’”²²⁶

²²⁵ G. H. Lang, *Anthony Norris Groves, Saint and Pioneer, A Combined Study of a Man of God and of the Original Principles and Practices of the Brethren with Application to Present Conditions* (Thynne & Co. Ltd., London, 1939) pg. 195

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 197

“...Nor have there ever been wholly lacking other assemblies of Brethren who have followed the earliest practice as above outlined. But before long the view was urged, and became generally dominant, that elders cannot now be formally acknowledged. Two reasons were set forth. First, that there are now neither apostles nor their delegates, as Titus or Timothy, with authority to appoint such. This may be seen argued in Wm. Kelly’s in general helpful book *Six Lectures on the Church of God...*”²²⁷

“...This last point should be carefully noted as a warning. When in those early days in Dublin the eldership at first acknowledge was allowed to lapse, the brethren in question tacitly surrendered their primary and fundamental principle that the Word of God was their only guide and that all that it taught as to the church of God was to be practiced. They suffered, in fact, the reasonings of the human mind to lead, at the expense of the guidance of Holy Scripture, and certain portions of the New Testament became for the inoperative...”

“The second ground for not recognizing eldership in the churches was a theory that the church of God is in ruins, and that it is not the way of God ever to restore that which has been ruined to its former glory, but that He gives grace to a Nehemiah how to live and act amidst the ruin and rubbish. This was Mr. Darby’s special contribution to ecclesiastical thought. His reasons may be found in volume I of the *Collected Writings.*”²²⁸

“[But] in respect to Mr. Darby’s reasonings [Groves wrote]. ‘D____ seems...justified in rejecting all such helps as the way of obtaining proper subordination in the assembly of God’s saints, by saying the ‘Church is in ruins’; this is his *theory*; but neither in the *word*, nor in my own experience or judgement, do I realize that this state of the Church, even though it existed to the full extent he declares, was to be met by the overthrow of God’s order, and the substitution of one so exceedingly spiritual (if I may so use the term), as it seemed not good to the Holy Spirit to institute, when all things were comparatively in order.’”

Thus against all human theories, however well and earnestly urged, Groves adhered to this primary rule to appeal steadily and only to the Word of God...”²²⁹

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., pg. 198

²²⁹ Ibid., pg. 203

Questions Regarding the Proving or Recognizing of Elders Today

We saw in the last chapter that the approving or recognition of elders is not restricted to a few men, neither the apostles, nor to so-called apostolic delegates. Such thinking in reality reflects a clergy/laity mindset. Rather such approving or recognition is the responsibility of all. As such, some practical questions might arise in conjunction with this truth in today's world. We would like to briefly look at a few of these questions.

Q). Does it take an apostolic delegate like Titus to appoint elders today, and if so does such a person even exist?

A). This has already been addressed above, but suffice it to say again that an apostolic delegate is a misnomer. There is no such thing as an apostolic delegate in Scripture. This presumes a structured hierarchy where one has authority to delegate to another the authority to represent that person. In other words, a delegate is one who operates “in the name” of another. Since we have no biblical word applicable to this designation in Scripture, we are left with an English definition of the word. Webster's defines the word as “A person appointed and sent by another with powers to transact business in his stead.”²³⁰

Thus, when this nomenclature is applied to Titus, people are saying that authority was given to Titus by Paul to act in his name. The term implies a transference of power or authority (much like was found with Moses and Joshua—Num. 27:20). Yet this notion is completely contradicted by Scripture.

Paul never implies that Titus was acting in Paul's name. In fact, the complete opposite is the truth. Paul sends Titus out in his own name or authority. We see this by looking closely to Paul's instructions to Titus in the Epistle to Titus 1:3. The Greek structure of the verse will not allow any thought that Titus was an apostolic delegate. Therefore, any thought that elders cannot be appointed today because of a lack of apostolic

²³⁰ Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (J. P. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1857) pg. 275

delegates is an unfounded theory and is actually a contradiction of Scripture. (For the rest of this answer one can look above in the chapter on Titus 1:5-9.)

Q). Is it not true, because the Church is in ruins, elders can no longer exist in the Church? It was J. N. Darby that said: “There is no authority competent to choose and establish official elders, nor a flock of God existing to which such official appointment could apply.”²³¹

A). With questions like this, it is best to test the statements by the unadulterated Word of God. The first part of his statement has already been answered above, but what of the second part? Let us look closely at what he said.

First he says there is no “flock of God existing to which such official appointment could apply.” Does not that presuppose a flock of God does exist? Yes, it does! But brother Darby has made the conclusion that the flock was in such a ruined state that official appointments could not apply. Well, that is convenient. Where does God’s Word ever say this? It does not. He is adding his own ideas to the Word of God. The fact that a flock is called the “flock of God” means that the flock is God’s. God owns the flock! As such, if the Father owns the flock, the Son will ever faithfully shepherd the sheep! How could it be otherwise? Are we to believe that the Son will ever abandon the flock of God? It was Jesus himself who said he was the Good Shepherd.

When the Son was born of Mary in Israel, one could say the nation was in a ruined state. Yet, as long as there were sheep present, the Lord Jesus acted as a Good Shepherd in their midst. In the Old Testament, when Israel was brought out of Egypt corrupted with idolatry and sin, when they were intermingled together with a mixed company (Ex. 12:38), the Lord still shepherded His people (Ps. 78:12). Their ruined condition, the result of four centuries in Egypt, did not hinder His presence as a Shepherd. When Israel was characterized as being in *ruins* (the Hebrew word desolations in KJV version of Ps. 74:3 also means *ruins*) the Holy Spirit records for us that Asaph still recognized God to be the Shepherd of Israel, for he clearly calls Israel the sheep of His pasture (Ps. 74:1)! If a flock of God in a ruined state did not keep Asaph (and most assuredly

²³¹ J. N. Darby, *What the Christian Has Amid the Ruin of the Church*, The Collected Writings Of J. N. Darby, Ecclesiastical No. 3, Volume 14

others) from recognizing the Lord as their Shepherd, why would brother Darby say that a flock of God in a ruined state could not be one where official appointments apply. Would he say the official appointment of the Son as Shepherd over a ruined flock of Israel did not apply?

Or how about when Israel was abhorred by God because they rejected Him before and during the days of Saul, did not God still officially appoint David to be king (Ps. 78: 70-72)? Israel was said to be in a ruined and abhorred state at that time (Ps. 78:55-64). Did not that official appointment apply? According to brother Darby, somehow a ruined state disallows any official appointments from applying in the Church. Why? It did not disallow official appointments from applying in Israel? Now, of course, Israel is not the Church, but the righteous acts of God do not change. Anything done by God in one dispensation is righteous in every dispensation. If the ruined state of the flock of God did not hinder official appointments from applying in one dispensation, it cannot be said it hinders official appointments in another dispensation, as if God is too holy to countenance such dealings in such a ruined Church. In other words, God's holiness is not compromised by the failure and ruin of His people, who are known as the sheep of His pasture. God can, did, and will once again deal with his people when they are far away from Him. It is no different in the Church. We must not forget the things that happened to Israel were to be an example to the Church. Paul wrote that "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (ICo 10:11 KJV). We can learn how God deals with his people Israel when they were in a ruined state. We can learn how official appointments apply to a Church in a ruined state by seeing how official appointments applied to Israel in a ruined state.

Obviously, when we come to Israel in the New Testament, the ruined state of the flock of God did not prohibit His official presence in Israel as the Messiah. Did not that official appointment apply? Peter says that Jesus was made both Lord and Christ unto Israel (Acts 2:36). Obviously, that official appointment applied. Jesus plainly declared that He was sent to the **lost sheep of Israel** by God the Father (Matt. 15:24). Was that not an official appointment? And, did not the Lord Himself send out His disciples to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 10: 5-6)? Was that not an official appointment? And were not the lost sheep of Israel expected to officially recognize them when they came into their villages? The ruined condition of the sheep did not mean they could not officially recognize

the Lord as the Shepherd of Israel, or his disciples as his emissaries. The Lord Himself said that some of the sheep would recognize Him as Shepherd (Jn. 10:3-4). Obviously, that official appointment of God of His Son and the Son of His apostles was meant to officially apply. The flock of God that was Israel at that time ignored such an appointment at their own peril.

Even the nations of the world, which, obviously, are in a ruined state, will one day be expected to recognize the official appointment of the Son over all the earth. Is it right to say that because the nations are in a ruined state that official appointments cannot apply? Is it not the Holy Spirit who warns the kings of the earth to “kiss the Son, lest he be angry” (Ps. 2:11)? Where does Scripture ever say an official appointment cannot apply to those in ruin? Again, where does it ever say that official appointments cannot apply to a flock of God because it is in ruins? Where? There is not one verse which makes such a declaration. Any appointment made by God is official and is expected to apply.

When Israel was in a ruined state in Egypt the Lord came as their Shepherd to guide them, together with Moses as a shepherd (and if we take the Hebrew word as plural) with Moses and Aaron together as shepherds (Isa. 63:7-12; cf. Ps. 77:20). Obviously, even though Israel grumbled and sometimes rebelled, the official appointments of Moses and Aaron still applied. The sons of Levi followed Moses and Aaron as if it still applied. Joshua the son of Nun acted as if it applied. The ruined state of the flock of God did not hinder such official recognition. So why does brother Darby say that the ruined state of the flock of God, that is His Church, hinders such official recognitions? It is a false conclusion based on false reasonings based upon a false theory.

Consequently, if the Chief Shepherd, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is shepherding the flock of God, even in a fallen and ruined state, there is nothing in Scripture that would prohibit the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit, from also making men shepherds together with the Chief Shepherd, and then, after making them such, use them in the midst of the flock of God.

The Holy Spirit Himself says that elders are made bishops to shepherd the Church of God. To say that elders are no longer made bishops to shepherd the Church of God because it is in a ruined state contradicts the very Spirit of God! The Spirit of God does not say that they are made bishops for a “spiritual” Church of God, or for a Church of God that is

not in “ruins,” or a Church of God that is not divided. Where are any of these qualifications made in Scripture like brother Darby would have us believe? There are none. In fact, the only qualification is that it must be the Church of God *which He purchased with His blood*. In other words, if a Church exists which has been purchased by His blood, then one cannot say the Holy Spirit will not make bishops to shepherd that Church no matter what state it is in. If the Holy Spirit recognizes them as bishops, who are we to say they cannot be recognized as bishops? And if they are recognized as bishops by the Holy Spirit then we are responsible to officially recognize them also as bishops. The only qualification is that it is a Church *which has been bought by His blood*. If a flock of God exists today, by definition they must be purchased by the blood, otherwise they are not the flock of God. And if they are a flock of God, they are a Church which has been bought by His blood. They may be very carnal, full of divisions, in a completely ruined state, but if they are bought by His blood, the Holy Spirit has the right to make men bishops, and if He makes them bishops, the Holy Spirit expects his official appointments to apply. Brother Darby is just plain wrong. In this he has misled many Christians. In fact, it is a ruined Church which needs official elders even more so, for it is the sick that need the healing care of shepherds.

We also have the witness of Paul who specifically says that pastors are given to perfect the saints (Eph. 4:11-12). A perfect Church does not need to be perfected. But, obviously, a ruined Church is in special need of perfecting. Paul, himself, an apostle of Christ says that the Lord gives pastors for the perfecting of the Body of Christ until it becomes mature. The Lord is the faithful Chief Shepherd who will send His pastors to a ruined flock to bring them to spirituality and perfection. This responsibility does not cease once a flock becomes ruined. Where does Scripture ever say this? Neither does Scripture ever say that a Church is not expected to officially recognize such pastors sent into their midst.

Or to look at it in another way, where does Scripture say this responsibility to officially recognize men made bishops by the Holy Spirit ceases once they lapse into ruin? There is no such verse. Now, maybe they will not recognize them because of their carnality, but that does not mean they “cannot” recognize them. They still can and they should by the grace of God. The Church in Corinth was quite carnal, yet they still were exhorted to recognize workers in their midst (I Cor. 16:18). Obviously, the Holy Spirit did not think their divisions, their contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions,

backbitings, whisperings, conceits, and tumults kept them from such acknowledgment (I Cor. 11:18; II Cor. 12:20). Nor did it excuse them from officially recognizing Paul as an apostle of Christ (II Cor. 12: 11-13; 13: 3-6). Obviously, Paul expected them to be able to recognize him as such in the foregoing verses. This clearly tells us that Christians in a carnal, divided state still have the capacity to recognize the servants of God, and so, since pastors or bishops, or elders are also servants of God, they can and should be equally, officially recognized even as Paul and Titus were both eventually recognized by the carnal Church of the Corinthians (I Cor. 9: 1-3; II Cor. 7: 6-9, 14-15). Perhaps, such ruined Churches will not officially recognize the servants of God, including those who are made bishops in their midst by the Holy Spirit, *but that is not because they cannot, it is because they will not!* It is not because such official appointments by the Holy Spirit cannot apply. God forbid. Would we ever tell the Holy Spirit, *“Dear Holy Spirit, we are in a ruined and carnal state—so please excuse us—we are sorry—your official appointments cannot apply to us.”*

Now, some may say, you misunderstand brother Darby. He is saying such official appointments cannot apply because there must be a biblical Church to receive them and since there is not one Church per city there is no Church where such appointments can apply. Well, let me state again. Where does Scripture say this?

First of all, nowhere does Scripture say there must be one Church per city. Obviously, one Church per city is possible, and, indeed, there were such Churches in Scripture, but nowhere does Scripture say **it is a must**. Every Church when begun in a city will be the only Church in the city! And, in some cases, when there is a place to meet (as in Jerusalem with the Temple mount) even when such a Church grows into a great multitude it can still be the only Church in a city. But the Holy Spirit, by his use of the Greek preposition *κατὰ* (as we saw in the chapter on locality) also tells us that there can be many Churches in a city, as, indeed, there was in the city of Rome (and possibly in Laodicea).

So in Scripture, the Holy Spirit gives us an example of a small city in area, which had one large Church, i.e. Jerusalem, and an example of a large city in area, which had many small Churches, i.e. Rome. Both are biblical patterns. Nowhere does Scripture say there must be one Church per city and if there is not, the Church becomes a ruined Church which cannot officially recognize elders in their midst. What matters is if they are a flock of God bought by His blood. A divided Church is still part of

the flock of God if they are truly saved. And if they are saved they have been purchased by His blood, and if they have been purchased by His blood, the good Shepherd will shepherd them, even in their ruined state. And if they exist in a carnal and imperfect state the Chief Shepherd will send pastors and teachers into their midst to “perfect” them so they will no longer be like “children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (Eph. 4:14 KJV). What could be more ruined than a Church carried about by every wind of doctrine? And yet, the good Shepherd sends such Churches shepherds, servants of God, who he expects to be recognized as pastors (cf. II Kings 17:13; Jer. 29:19; I Cor. 4:16-17).

Beloved, brother Darby was just plain wrong when he said official appointments cannot apply to a ruined Church. He created a system of disorder among Churches which has harmed very many. However, there is no need to determine today the reason why he chose to create this system where official or recognized elders cannot exist. He did not believe in such a system at first. Plymouth did not have one Church in the city, and yet, as we saw above, the assembly in Plymouth officially recognized elders, and brother Darby officially recognized one of them also. Some have made conjectures as to why Darby created this system, but for us today, it should suffice to say it is not justified by Scripture. Unless “it is written,” we should reject it as a man-made tradition which, unfortunately, has made the Word of God of none effect (Mk. 7:13). If we claim to be spiritual, we should reject such thinking for the Holy Spirit will always act the same way that the Lord Jesus acted (for He is another of the same kind) and, as such, since the Lord rejected man-made traditions, so will we, if we are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. And this theory of brother Darby is a man-made tradition.

The Lord is the good Shepherd. He will never abandon the flock of God the Father. He will ever walk in the midst of the Churches, even Churches in a most carnal state, if they have truly been purchased by His blood. He will walk in their midst to shepherd, reprove, discipline and exhort. And, just as the Lord did in the carnal Churches in Scripture, the Chief Shepherd will still shepherd the flock of God along with Christians who have been made bishops (elders, i.e. pastors) by the Holy Spirit.

Once, Anthony Norris Groves, upon receiving a letter concerning the growing narrowness of many assemblies associated with brother Darby,

related the following regarding fellowship with Churches brother Darby considered ruined. It is most instructive; this is what he said—

“Yet as to our liberty in Christ to worship with any congregation under heaven where He manifests himself to bless and to save, can there be in any Christian mind a doubt? If my Lord should say to me, in any congregation of the almost unnumbered sections of the Church, "What dost thou here?" I would reply, "Seeing Thou wert here to save and sanctify, I felt it safe to be with Thee." If He again said, as perhaps He may among most of us, "Didst thou not see abominations here, an admixture of that which was unscriptural, and the absence of that which was scriptural, and in some points error, at least in your judgment?" my answer would be, "Yea, Lord, but I dared not call that place unholy where Thou wert present to bless, nor by refusing communion in worship reject those as unholy whom Thou hadst by Thy saving power evidently sanctified and set apart for Thine own.”²³²

May we have the same mindset, for it is the mindset of our good Shepherd.

Q). If an assembly already has elders, can an assembly bypass their counsel and appoint or recognize elders without them?

A). Unlike the example of Titus who established elders in assemblies which had no elders, this question would fall under the example of Timothy who was encouraged to make known to the Church the means whereby additional godly men become elders in assemblies where elders already exist. But to adequately answer this question we must first compare Scripture with Scripture.

As we have seen, Christians, neither apostles, so-called apostolic delegates, nor those within a Church can make elders. Men are only made elders by the Holy Spirit. Apostles, workers or missionaries and Churches can appoint, establish, approve and recognize men who are discerned to be elders by the Holy Spirit, but they cannot make elders.

When the Holy Spirit makes an elder they are gifted and given a spiritual authority of oversight over the Church.

Acts 20:28-30 “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

²³² A. N. Groves, *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves: containing extracts from his letters and journals* 2nd edition, (James Nisbet, London, 1857) pg. 535

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.

This oversight entails the “guarding” and “protecting” of the saints from any threat or danger from within or without. This is a spiritual responsibility which is given to such men and is called “shepherding” by the Holy Spirit. As such, it should be remembered that sheep do not shepherd the shepherd, but the shepherd shepherds the sheep. Thus, an assembly with existing elders cannot recognize other men as elders without the oversight and shepherding of the existing elders or pastors (bishops).

We know that the Holy Spirit says that savage wolves in sheep’s clothing will always be ready to harm the flock (Acts 20:29; Matt. 7:15). We know that false teachers will find their way into the Church, misleading the saints (II Pet. 2:1-2). We also know the Holy Spirit says that the Church will gather to themselves teachers to tickle their ears (II Tim. 4:3-4). Obviously, the Holy Spirit clearly says that the discernment of the saints within the Church will “wane.” And, during this time of “waning” the Holy Spirit makes clear that the elders are the ones to guard the flock and shepherd the Church, having been given the spiritual authority and the spiritual discernment to do so.

So, to answer the question poised above, the answer would be no. Perhaps, this explains why Paul does not directly tell Timothy, himself, to “prove” or “approve” those seeking to be bishops, simply because, Timothy was not an elder. He was not given the authority to shepherd the flock. Paul knew this, having met with the existing elders of the Church of Ephesus in Miletus, and so Paul, as a servant of God, was always careful to respect this spiritual authority wherever he found it. However, Titus, another co-worker of Paul, unlike Timothy, took a more direct role simply because the Churches of Crete had no existing elders.

Thus Paul instructed Timothy to have such men seeking to be bishops in a Church where elders already existed—to be approved. By whom, Paul does not say, which as we saw means it could be done by either Timothy, himself, the existing elders, or by the Church. But one thing we do know, when we compare Scripture with Scripture, it cannot be done absent the authority and discernment of the existing elders for that would contradict the injunction of Scripture to obey those who lead.

As such, if Timothy did the approving, we know that he would submit it to the existing elders for their agreement, for if Timothy, like Paul, would not “lord” it over the saints, neither would he “lord” it over existing elders (cf. II Cor. 1:24; I Cor. 11:13,16).

If the Church did the approving, we know it had to be done in conjunction with the elders, for sheep are not called to shepherd themselves but are called to follow the guidance of the shepherds (Heb. 13:17; I Cor. 16:15-16; I Pet. 5:5).

And if the elders did the approving themselves we know that it would be done in conjunction with the assembly, for elders are not the ones called “to know,” or “to recognize” those who are “taking the lead” among themselves. In other words, other elders are not “taking the lead” of other elders. There is no hierarchical structure within the leadership of the Church. Therefore it must be the Church that is called to recognize the ones labouring among them and taking the lead among them (I Thess. 5:12-13) which would mean that any new elders who are “approved” by existing elders need to have the recognition of the Church. Existing elders cannot directly appoint other elders without the formal recognition of the Church, for that would contradict the admonition of Paul for the Church to know, or to recognize those labouring in their midst.

So we see when a Church has existing elders their oversight cannot be ignored in the ultimate recognition of new elders, neither by an apostle, a worker (missionary), nor by the Church itself. But equally, neither can existing elders ignore the “recognizing” responsibility of the Church, for the assembly is called “to know,” or “to recognize,” those who take the lead among them, which, therefore, becomes an additional witness to the witness of the existing elders.

Q). If it is the responsibility of the assembly “to know” or “to recognize” those who have been made elders or bishop by the Holy Spirit, what guidelines are they given to follow to aid them in their recognition?

A). The guidelines given to the Church are the guidelines revealed for us in Scripture. The Holy Spirit leaves the Church with objective guidelines to follow so as to not be misled by subjective feelings or by men who are very convincing, having a natural charisma to their personalities. However, it should also be noted that these are general guidelines; they are not, necessarily indicative of a true elder. A man may outwardly

possess all these characteristics by the strength of his own personality and still not be an elder, for as we said before, an elder is only made by the Holy Spirit, one who has been gifted with the gift of governments to perform that function within the assembly.

So, while it is true that a man is not necessarily an elder simply because he possesses these characteristics, it is equally true that a man cannot be an elder if he does not possess these characteristics! If a man has been made an elder he will manifest all of these qualities. This is the safeguard given to the Church. Now, he may not manifest them all as fully as he ought (for no man is perfect and sinless) but manifest them he will to some degree or the other, for they are qualities that come with the gift of being an elder. They are characteristics of the gift and so if one has the gift, they will and must be manifested for the gift of eldership is unchanging in nature. Everything in the universe acts according to its nature. An apple seed will manifest an apple tree. A lamb will manifest the nature of a lamb. An apple tree cannot manifest an orange tree, for an orange tree is different in nature. A lamb cannot manifest the nature of a lion, for a lion has a different nature. In the same way, these guidelines reflect the nature of one who is gifted to be an elder or bishop. If a man manifests anything different, he does not possess the nature of the gift.

So with that in mind, realizing that all these qualities may be manifested to a greater or lesser degree in different men, but realizing that manifested they must be, let's now turn our attention to the guidelines given to an assembly to "recognize" who has been made an elder in their midst.

Characteristic of a Man Made an Elder by the Holy Spirit

Motivation
<p>Longs for gracious care: I Timothy 3:1—The word used here, ἐπισκοπή (gracious care), is different word than the word ἐπίσκοπος (bishop) in the next verse. The word bespeaks, “visitation,” “watchfulness,” “gracious care.” The emphasis is on one’s desire to take care of others, not on one’s desire to obtain a position of honour or authority as is implied by the KJV translation of “office of a bishop.” It is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew תָּרַב (translated as “take care” in the NASB) in Gen. 50:24 and is used in the LXX translation of Job 29:2 translated by Brenton Version as “take care.”</p>
Reputation
<p>Above reproach: I Timothy 3:2—The word used here is ἀνεπίληπτος (above reproach), which literally means “not” to be” laid hold of.” In other words, there is nothing in the person’s life that allows someone to “take a hold of” it in order to make a charge of reproach.</p>
<p>Blameless: Titus 1:6—This is a different word than above. It is the word ἀνέγκλητος (blameless), which carries a slightly different nuance. Whereas the word above meant that there was nothing in the person’s life that allowed someone to make a charge of reproach against, this word means there are not actual charges made against the person. W.E. Vine defined it as— “nothing laid to one's charge (as the result of public investigation).”²³³</p>
<p>Must have a good testimony among unbelievers: I Timothy 3:7—This phrase, μαρτυρίαν καλὴν (good testimony) simply means, even unbelievers think well of the person; he has a good reputation among all.</p>
Spiritual Characteristics
<p>Temperate: I Timothy 3:2—This word, νηφάλιον (temperate), literally means “free from the intoxicating influence of wine.” But its use here, in light of the coming characteristic of “not being given to wine,” implies one who is not easily influence by external factors or pressures (i.e. peer pressure) and so is seen as one who is “sober” (the opposite of one under influence of some external thing), clear-headed, not being controlled by others or by other external things. In the context, it carries a more general meaning, than just one who is temperate in drink. An elder must be one</p>

²³³ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 131 (vol. 1)

who can withstand the vicissitudes of life, being able to hold firmly to the principles of God's Word when others might falter.

Sober-minded: I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8—This word, σόφρονα (sober-minded), is similar to the word above, except that this has more to do with being clear-headed, or sober within oneself, i.e. from inward influences, rather than from outward influences as seen above, and so has the general meaning of “self-control.” Thus an elder must be one who is careful to fulfill his responsibilities in good times or bad because of an inward self-control or discipline.

Respectable: I Timothy 3:2—This Greek word, κόσμιον (respectable), is actually the same word used in I Tim. 2:9 regarding the modest adornment by women in their dress—i.e. not being immodest, vain, extravagant or flashy in one's dress. Thus, when not used of dress, but rather of one's character, the word carries the idea of being measured, moderate and balanced in one's deportment. An elder must be one who acts in a dignified and measured tone, coming from a balanced Christian life. It does not mean “stolid” or “sour,” but “purposeful” and “reliable.”

Is not quick-tempered: Titus 1:7—This word in Titus 1:7, ὀργίλον (angry), means one is not easily given to outbursts of anger. Thus, such a one would be long-suffering, willing to overlook (where possible) those things that are not always in line with one's own wishes or desires. An elder must be patient with the foibles of others.

Gentle: I Timothy 3:3—This word, ἐπιεικῆ (gentle), carries the idea of forbearance, one who is willing to see the other side, one who is fair, willing to yield wherever possible. It bespeaks one who looks for a way to compromise without sacrificing truth or principle. W. E. Vine likens it to one who does not insist upon “the letter of the law.”²³⁴ Its cognate word, ἐπιείκεια (kindness), was once defined by Matthew Arnold as “sweet reasonableness.”²³⁵

Is not self-willed: Titus 1:7—This word, αὐθάδης (self-willed), is defined by Vine as one who is “self-pleasing” (*autos*, self, *hedomai*, to please)²³⁶—the word being made up of two words, the first meaning “self” and the second taken from “hedomai” (ἡδομαι), which is where we get the English word “hedonism.” An elder must not be “self-pleasing.” One who is self-willed or self-pleasing believes his way is the only way; he will usually be inconsiderate of others, not even trying to see the other

²³⁴ Ibid., pg. 144 (vol. 2)

²³⁵ Matthew Arnold, *Passages from the Prose Writings of Matthew Arnold* (Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1880) pg. 207

²³⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 342 (vol. 3)

side. An elder or bishop must never have this characteristic.

Self-controlled: Titus 1:8—ἐγκρατής (self-control). This word shows the opposite of one who is self-pleasing and bespeaks one who is disciplined, having strength to deny himself, and thus is one who is able to give up his own rights.

Loves goodness: Titus 1:8—This word, φιλάγαθον (lover of goodness) is self-evident and bespeaks the love of all good things. It is made up of two Greek words—φίλος (loving) and ἀγαθός (good). Such a one will rejoice in things decent, thoughtful, loving, and kind (cf. Phil. 4:8).

Devout: Titus 1:8—This word, ὅσιος (devout), is commonly translated as “holy.” In Rev. 15:4 it is used of the Lord. The word is slightly different than the common word for holy (ἅγιος) in that it bespeaks the holiness that is expressed outwardly in relationships, whereas ἅγιος bespeaks the holiness that is intrinsic of separation. It commonly is used to translate the Hebrew word “chased” which bespeaks grace, mercy, and kindness. Thus, one who is “devout” acts with a holiness that is based upon the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God. Its expresses, not only righteousness, but also mercy. In the LXX, it is combined with the righteousness of God in Ps. 145:17 (translating the Heb. *chased*, which is translated in English as “kind”—NASB, and “gracious”—NKJV). Thus, one who is devout is careful to act in a gracious, yet righteous spirit toward others. Such a one is characterized by a humility which forgives, rather than a sternness which rejects. An elder must be devout, righteous in every way, yet also gracious and ready to forgive.

Social Characteristics

Hospitable: I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8—This word, φιλόξενος (hospitable), bespeaks one who loves strangers, being made up of two words— φίλος (loving) and ξένος (stranger). Thus, one who is hospitable will be the first one who will greet a visitor in the assembly. He will have a desire to make such a one feel welcome. Such a one has an open heart to all people. In Scripture, this spirit was many times shown by a willingness to entertain strangers, as can be seen in the case of Abraham (Gen. 18:1-5).

Not violent: I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7—This word, πλήκτης (striker), bespeaks one who will resort to physical violence in situations of disagreement; but it also applies to one who will attack another verbally in a harmful manner. In other words, it also bespeaks one who can be a bully. A bishop should never be pugnacious, physically or verbally.

Not quarrelsome: I Timothy 3:3—This word, ἄμαχος (uncontentious) would be the opposite of one who is violent and is one who would rather walk away than let things escalate into a violent confrontation, verbal or

otherwise. An elder should be one who is always trying to conciliate.

Just: Titus 1:8—This word, δίκαιος (just), bespeaks one who acts “justly” and “fairly” in his relationships. It would be one who is honest in his business dealings and one who is fair and objective in disputes. It bespeaks one who is driven by a sense of fairness, not just by one’s own feelings in a situation. It is used in this way in such verses as Jn. 5:30; 7:24; Col. 4:1; and I Jn. 1:9. An elder must be fair and just when dealing with others.

Regarding Alcohol

Not given to wine: 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7—This word, πάροικος (addicted to wine), basically bespeaks one who is controlled by a desire for alcohol to the point where one becomes dependent upon it in one’s life. It not only bespeaks one who might allow himself to become actually drunk, but also one who might allow himself even to become intoxicated to the point where his soberness disappears.

Family Life

Monogamous: I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6—There are many views regarding this phrase, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα (lit. of one wife, man), but in its primary and plain sense, the phrase disallows one from being an elder or bishop who is married to more than one woman (as was still practiced in those days), i.e. a polygamist. Even if there are different interpretations regarding the meaning of this phrase (e. g. an elder must be married, an elder must not be a widower, an elder must never have been divorced, etc.) all would agree this phrase prohibits an elder from having more than one wife.

One who rules his own house well: I Timothy 3:4—This, participle, προϊστάμενον (rules, standing before) means such a one must be the “head” of his household. The word means “to stand before,” thus, to take the lead, which means such a one is willing to accept all responsibility. It carries the idea of being willing to sacrifice for the good of the entire household since he is the one who stands at the forefront to take and to blunt any attack that may come. But it also carries the idea that it is done harmoniously and in love with a mutual respect for all, since the “rule,” or “lead” is deemed “well.”

Having faithful children: Titus 1:6—This naturally follows a household’s rule that is deemed “well,” since the children are seen as faithful. The Greek word is πιστός (faithful) and sometimes means “believing, as in John 20:27 and sometimes means “faithful,” as in Heb. 10:23. If the former it would mean having children who are believers, if the latter (while not discounting the former) would emphasize having children who are faithful to the parent’s expectations. The NASB

translates the word as “believing,” while the KJV translates it as “faithful.” It seems within the context the KJV is the better translation for it fits in better with the following context. The children are faithful for they are not accused of dissipation or rebelliousness. Therefore, it seems the emphasis is on faithfulness of the child rather than just the faith of the child. Many times one may see a household where the father may be a good Christian, but his children are not, being rebellious. Paul is saying such a scenario means such a one has not been made an elder by the Holy Spirit for, obviously he is not one who rules his own house well if his children are not faithful.

Having his children in submission with all reverence: I Timothy 3:4—These two words, ὑποταγή (submission) and σεμνότης (reverence) bespeak having children, who not only obey, but who are children obeying with a sense of reverence, i.e. respect. The word reverence in the Greek bespeaks having a seriousness of purpose, so that the one who is showing reverence, is one who acts in a purposeful way out of an inward sense of respect for right and wrong. Such a one is not acting out of a blind obedience. The idea is that the children are ones who have been taught the reason for the rules of the household, and are ones who have been taught the reason why some things are right and some things are wrong. In other words, it manifests a father who tries to explain to the child the reason why some things are wrong and is not one who simply demands blind obedience. Rather, the father desires a child who obeys openly and in the light, freely submitting out of love and a mutual respect from within. An elder must not be one who demands blind obedience, but rather must be one who is able to instruct the saints in the things of the Lord, dealing with patience and love with the ones still learning (cf. II Tim. 2:24-26).

Having children not accused of dissipation: Titus 1:6—This word, ἀσωτία (unrestrained), bespeaks children, who lack reverence and so live a life without submission. Because they fail to understand the fullness of what is right and what is wrong, they abandon the restraint of their godly parents and pursue a course of riotous behavior. A man who has such children cannot be an elder or bishop.

Having children not accused insubordination: Titus 1:6—The word here, ἀνυπότακτα (rebellion), bespeaks one who is completely rebellious, one who does not even pretend to obey. In other words, there are some children who pretend to obey their parents, while disobeying secretly. These children do not even pretend to obey. They defiantly refuse all submission. Such children disqualify a man from being an elder.

Assembly Life

Takes care of the Church of God: I Timothy 3:5—The word translated

“take care” (ἐπιμελήσεται) bespeaks one who meets the needs of those in need, one who has a concern for their suffering, whether physical or spiritual. The same word is used in the parable of the Good Samaritan who took care of the wounded stranger— “and [he] brought him to an inn, and “took care” (ἐπεμελήθη) of him” (Luk 10:34). It is likened by Scripture to a parents concern for a child, a concern that is based on love, self-sacrifice and protection.

Shepherds the flock of God: I Peter 5:2—Like a parent who cares for a child, this common word for shepherding, ποιμαίνω, bespeaks a shepherd who cares for his sheep. It bespeaks one who will protect the sheep from all evil, one who will ever look out for a wolf in sheep’s clothing who might come to harm the flock with false doctrine, or might come to oppress and use the sheep for his own purposes, and/or personal aggrandizement (cf. Ezekiel 34: 2-4).

One who oversees: I Peter 5:2—This word, ἐπισκοπέω (exercising care and oversight), refers to one who is always careful to oversee the things occurring within the flock. The word is made up of two words, ἐπί (over) and σκοπέω (to watch). Thus, it bespeaks one who is ever vigilant to always be looking over those in his care. The second part of the word, σκοπέω (to watch), is used in Rom. 16:17 and literally means “to watch” those who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.

Oversees willingly, not by compulsion: I Peter 5:2—This is based upon the concept that such a man will be gifted to be an elder, and so, is one who “longs for gracious care” from a desire placed within his heart by the Holy Spirit. As such, he freely serves out of love, not by a “forced obligation” (ἀναγκαστῶς).

Equips the saints: Ephesians 4:11-12—This bespeaks the fact that pastors (elders) are gifted by the Lord to “perfect” or “equip” the saints unto maturity. The Greek word, καταρτισμὸν (perfecting), used in Eph. 4:12, bespeaks “mending” or “keeping something in good working order.” A pastor will be one who makes sure the Church remains in the condition originally intended by the Lord, which, in part, will mean that each member will have the freedom to function within the body as moved by the Head, so that the Church can grow spiritually strong and grow unto full maturity. An elder will always teach “sound doctrine” to keep the Church pure before the Lord (cf. II Cor. 11:2-3).

Does not lord it over the flock: I Peter 5:3—This participle, κατακυριεύοντες (lording over), bespeaks a domineering spirit that “demands” submission, sometimes with a threat of God’s judgment upon the one not submitting. It betrays a lack of faith in the “lordship” of Christ Jesus and a total lack of understanding (and faith) that the Lord

Jesus, as the Chief Shepherd, still actively shepherds His flock. It is a presumptuous spirit that is filled with oneself, and is an indication that such one is obsessed with power. It is the type of governance that Jesus forbids (Matt. 20:25).

One who leads by example: I Pet. 5:3—This word, τύπος (example), bespeaks one who understands the power and authority of the Lord Jesus to “shepherd” His flock. It bespeaks one who refuses to “lord” it over the saints, one who is humble and meek, and one who believes in the power of the Lord, who knows He is the only one who has the right to “lord” it over the saints (see LXX Ps. 109:2). Paul is one who refused to “lord” it over the Church (II Cor. 1:24); he submitted himself to the Lordship of Christ, allowing Him to be the One living in his daily life so he could be an “example” to all the saints (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:17; II Thess. 3:9).

Vigilant for yourself and flock: Acts 20:28—This word, προσέχω (vigilant), is made up of two words, πρὸς (towards) and ἔχω (to hold). It bespeaks one who holds himself, or his attention toward an object. In other words, such a one is “focused” and “alert.” An elder must be focused and attentive to the needs of the assembly, realizing that since he is to be an example to the flock, he must also be focused and attentive on his own spiritual needs before the Lord.

Alert for the Church: Acts 20:31—This word, γρηγορέω (alert) is derived from a word which means simply, “to be awake.” It has a similar meaning of “alertness,” as does the word used above, but this word emphasizes the discipline of the spirit that allows one to be watchful even in times of weariness. It is the word used by the Holy Spirit when the Lord wondered why Peter could not stay awake for even one hour in the garden of Gethsemane (Mk. 14:37-38). It requires a discipline of spirit and a denial of self.

Willingness to lead: I Timothy 5:17—This word, προεστῶτες (rule), is the same verb used of one who rules his house well (I Tim. 3:4). Consequently, as with the head of a household, an elder must be one who is willing to lead or rule, knowing that he is responsible for the well-being of others. The word carries the idea of “standing before” others. It means an elder leads, by taking his stand before the saints, in order to make decisions regarding the direction and well-being of the assembly.

Not desirous to be someone’s discipler or master: Acts 20:30—The phrase in this verse, τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὀπίσω αὐτῶν (in order to draw away disciples after them) bespeaks one who elevates himself for the purpose of having disciples look to him as the one to disciple them in the place of the Lord Jesus. The word ὀπίσω (after) is a word that is only used of disciples who follow “after” the Lord (Matt. 4:19; 16:24; Mk. 1:20; Lu. 14:27); it is never used in a positive sense of disciples

following another believer. An elder must not be one who desires to have disciples following him, calling them his disciples. An elder is one who honours and respects the only one who is a Christian's Disciple, Rabbi, and Master—the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 23:8). When one "lords" it over the saints (which is only rightfully done by the Lord Jesus himself) one is, in reality, drawing away disciples "after" oneself (who should only be following "after" one Rabbi, Disciple and Master—the Lord Jesus Christ).

The Word of God

Holds to the faithful teaching: Titus 1:9—The participle used here, ἀντεχόμενον (hold firmly), is a middle form of the verb which emphasizes the person, himself, is clinging firmly to the truth. A bishop (elder) must be one who is firm in his conviction of the truth. He must be one who clings to the Historic Christian Faith, which is the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3), the Faith that has been affirmed by the faithful from the very beginning (I Jn. 2:24; II Tim. 1:13; II Pet. 1:12).

Does not speak perverse or distorted things: Acts 20:30—The word translated "perverse," or "distort" διαστρέφω (twist), bespeaks a twisting of the plain sense of Scripture to support a particular viewpoint. An elder must be one who follows a literal, contextual hermeneutic, so as to not twist or force-fit a verse. He must be one who "rightly divides the Word of God" (II Tim. 2:15), realizing that God's Word is profitable for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16-17).

Apt to teach: I Timothy 3:2—This word, διδακτικός (one characterized by teaching), does not refer to the quality of teaching, since an elder serves by spiritual gifts, not by natural talent. It rather characterizes one who is always "ready" to teach. Modern English translations that use "able to teach" can be misleading, as if the qualification is that one has the "ability" or "skill" to teach. That makes it seem as if it is based upon natural talent. The word does not mean that at all. The King James Version's use of "apt to teach" is much better, for it indicates that an elder or bishop must always be "ready" to "teach." "Apt" is a word that means "being ready or predisposed," whereas "able" is a word that means "being capable," or "having the skill." The emphasis in I Tim. 3:2 is on one's readiness to teach, not on one's the ability to teach. It is an adjective that describes a characteristic of the elder; he is one who is always teaching. It presupposes that the elder already has the gift of teaching (cf. Rom. 12:7). There is no thought in the word of one's skill, for the efficacy of teaching does not depend on the natural talent or skill

of the man, but rather on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the elder. Spiritual gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit; thus, an elder who teaches by the spiritual gift of teaching is manifesting the power of Holy Spirit in the words he speaks, whether he speaks well or not. Whereas one who speaks by natural talent, manifests the power of his own charisma in the words he speaks. This is why it mattered not to Paul if he was unskilled in speech (II Cor. 11:6), or if his speech was contemptable (II Cor. 10:10). He knew what mattered was the presence of the Holy Spirit in the words spoken (I Cor. 2:4). An elder is not one who hones his teaching or preaching by some homiletical course, but, rather is one who is trained in denying his natural self or talent in order to be trained by the Lord to speak by the burden, the moving, the power, and the words given by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2:13).

One who exhorts: Titus 1:9—This phrase, παρακαλεῖν ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ τῇ ὑγιαίνουσῃ (exhort by sound doctrine), bespeaks one who comforts, exhorts, and encourages the saints by teaching those things that are sound, true, and healthy (i.e. doctrines that are free from anything that weakens or destroys the truth). Thus, an elder must be one who discerns the need of the moment by the discerning power of the Holy Spirit, and so, is able to apply sound doctrine to any given situation, unto the comfort and encouragement of the saints.

One who refutes: Titus 1:9—This word, ἐλέγχω (reprove), carries the nuance of “bringing to light,” or “exposing” (Eph. 5:11-13), as well as the nuance of “reproving,” i.e. proving wrong. An elder or bishop must be one who, by the fullness of the Spirit, exposes error, being able to “bring to light,” the error of any false teaching that might come into the presence of the saints, especially in regard to the “Faith,” and so by such a process, he is able reprove those who oppose.

Attitudes toward Money

Not greedy or have a love for money: I Timothy 3:3—This word, ἀφιλάργυρος (free from the love of money), is made up of two words, negated by the alpha—φιλέω (to love) and ἄργυρος (silver). It bespeaks one who does not covet money and so is not controlled by its influence. An elder must be one who is free from such inordinate desire, being content with what God allows or provides as can be clearly seen in the only other place in the New Testament where this word is used—Heb. 13:5.

Not greedy for profiteering: I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7—This word, αἰσχροκερδής (free from shameful profit) is made up of two words, αἰσχρός (disgraceful) and κέρδος (profit). It bespeaks profit that is made in a shameful way. The two words that make up the one word, αἰσχροκερδής, are actually used apart in Titus 1:11—αἰσχροῦ κέρδους

(shameful profit)—giving us an example of what type of profit is considered shameful (since profit in and of itself is not shameful, it is profit made in certain ways that is shameful). The type of profit that is called shameful in that verse is the profit that is made by those who teach for money. Thus αἰσχροκερδής (free from shameful profit) indicates that an elder must never turn God’s Word into a means of making money. Paul makes clear in II Cor. 2:17 that peddling the Word of God is shameful. Making money off of spiritual things is shameful. When certain men made profit from selling things in the Temple of God, the Lord rebuked the practice severely (Jn. 2:16). Such a mindset also prompted a rebuke from the prophet Micah (Micah 3:11). An elder or bishop must be free from the temptation to make money off the things of the Lord, even if it is justified by saying it is for the Lord’s work. The Lord freely provides for the work He orders. He does not need to resort to “making merchandise” to fund His work. False teachers routinely “make merchandise” of spiritual things (II Pet. 2:3). An elder or bishop must not emulate such a practice.

Serves voluntarily, not for shameful profit: I Peter 5:2—This word, αἰσχροκερδῶς (shameful profit), is the adverbial form of the above word. It clearly states that an elder must not serve as a shepherd for money made by profit. An elder is content with what God provides and either will work with his own hands (as below) or will live by faith, trusting in God provision (Matt. 6:24-34); he never will ask for any money or salary for himself (I Cor. 9:12-18; II Thess. 3:6-9; Phil. 4:10-12) but will rather trust in God’s provision through the saints or through his own working with his hands.

Works with their own hands: Acts 20:34-35—The participle used here, κοπιῶντας (labouring), means more than simple “working.” The word “toiling” would be a better English word to bring out the fuller meaning of the Greek word. Paul is saying that an elder must be one who “toils” to the point of weariness, if necessary, in his desire to freely serve the saints of God. He will work hard to provide for his own needs and for the needs of others. This is the example provided by Paul, himself, who, though an apostle of Christ, used more widely by God than most, sometimes worked “night” and “day” when necessary, not just the day, so that he could provide his ministry free of charge, and not be a burden to anyone (II Thess. 3:8). This willingness to provide for one’s own needs and for the needs of others is reflective of the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ who said that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.”

Christian Walk

Not a novice: I Timothy 3:6—This word, νεόφωτος (novice), is made up of two words, νέος (young) and φύω (to grow). It is a common word that

is used of young plants. The second part of the word, φύω (to grow) is used in the parable of the sower and the seed. It is used of the seed that “springs up” (Luke 8: 5-15). Thus the word carries the idea of “newly sprouted.” It bespeaks one in whose heart the “word” has recently sprouted up (I Pet. 1:23). An elder must be one in whom the “seed” has grown unto maturity, having produced a crop of a hundredfold, so to speak (cf. Luke 8:8).

The Historical Change of Governance in the Church

So far in our study we have seen that God is a God of order and not of confusion. All that He has ever done is always done decently and in order. We are called to do things decently and in order within the assembly because the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity have always acted as such among themselves, and we are called to become partakers of the Divine Nature (Being). Governance within the Church is an expression of this eternal aspect of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, and so it should ever be within the Church, especially until that time comes when the Church has grown into a perfect man, unto the measure of stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

We have also seen that governance in the Church began with the apostles and has continued through gifted members of the Body of Christ called pastors, elders, bishops. This was the pattern given to us in Scripture. We have demonstrated that Scripture never teaches that this recognized governance can be ignored because we perceive the Church is in ruins or because there are not any apostles or so-called apostolic delegates present to appoint or establish elders.

But as with most spiritual truth, if the enemy of our souls cannot keep the Church from embracing the wisdom (cf. Prov.4:8) and truth of God's pattern of governance within the Church, he will try to get us to add to that truth. He never wants the Church to follow the pattern as given to us in Scripture, for that pattern will always glorify Christ and the enemy of our soul hates Christ and any glory He might receive.

And so, since the enemy could not convince the Historic Church to abandon the formal and official governance of elders within the Church, even in the days of the seven Churches in Asia as seen in the book of Revelation, he went to the other extreme and convinced the Church it needed to change the pattern of governance. As such, the Church soon abandoned the pattern set up by the Holy Spirit in Scripture and, instead, created their own order, based upon their own thoughts regarding governance. They added to the pattern in Scripture because of a pragmatic mindset, rather than a spiritual mindset. We will now look at

these new orders created in the Church by Christians over the centuries of her existence.

Today the governance of the Church is completely different than it was in the beginning. Today we find bishops separated from and elevated above the elders or presbyters. We find archbishops elevated for certain purposes over other bishops and in the Catholic Church, cardinals, who are called the princes of the Church, elevated above the archbishops, possessing certain privileges not available to the archbishops. And then above everything, the Catholic Church has a Pope.

Now we are only speaking of these new distinctions and positions of authority in very general terms. For example, cardinals do not control archbishops, per se. But in others cases, these new levels of authority are direct; for instance, bishops do have direct authority over the elders (priests). But whether the authority of these positions is direct or indirect, formal or informal, it is all defined and now controlled and limited by Canon Law, and not simply the everlasting Word of God. Human tradition has become a defining feature of these new positions or orders.

In Eastern Orthodoxy one finds many of the same orders, but since they do not recognize a Supreme Pontiff, they do not have cardinals in their governance. Basically, they would recognize the Pope simply as being the Patriarch of Rome, or as the Patriarch of the West. In Orthodoxy a Patriarch is considered above other bishops and the Patriarch of Constantinople is considered to be the highest and most honoured of all, being the first among equals. Again, we are only speaking in very general terms.

In Protestant Churches, we have the Church of England, wherein we find the same pattern of bishops over elders or vicars (parish priests) and Archbishops over the bishops—the Archbishop of York (over the north) and the Archbishop of Canterbury (over the south and over the entire Church of England). And, uniquely to the Church of England, the King or Queen has a position above the Archbishops, in that he or she appoints the Archbishops and bishops and is considered the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. As with Orthodoxy and the Catholic Church we are speaking in very general terms.

As for other Churches who consider themselves Protestant, we can find Senior Pastors with and/or above associate pastors, or Senior Pastors with and/or above others called elders, or one elder who has been separated in the mind of the saints from other elders, becoming a first elder among equals. And then, of course, in other so-called Protestant Churches one can find single Pastors governing by themselves without associate pastors or elders, or in some Churches, particularly the Baptist Churches, one can find a single Pastor governing, not with elders, but simply with deacons.

All of these general examples are deviations from the pattern given to us in Scripture, although some are closer than others, but, nevertheless none of them are according to the pattern left for us in the New Testament. One will not find any of the above examples operating in any Church found in Scripture.

In one sense, we can see a progression above. The oldest and earliest form of governance, subsequent to the pattern given in Scripture, would be some of the Protestant examples given above. Beginning in the second century a form of government similar to the Baptist model of one single Pastor over the elders/and or deacons in each church would be the earliest form. Then the Eastern Orthodox model would follow, with one bishop per city, potentially being over all the Churches in the city. Then out of that form, archbishops were added to the governance, and then Patriarchs, including the Patriarch of Rome. And then later, when the Roman Catholic Church in the West, and the Orthodox Church in the East, slowly began to drift apart, the Roman Church developed further and added the governance of a Supreme Pontiff.

Then with the Reformation the pattern began to revert back to the earlier models, doing away with later developments, but never quite being able to return all the way to the beginning, i.e. to the Scriptural model. The furthest it seemed to return was the Baptist model of one Pastor over each Church, which, unfortunately, retained the basic form of one man above others, at least, in practice and mindset. Ultimately, in many Baptist Churches a board of deacons, along with the rest of the Church actually controls governance of the Church, but in day to day practice most look up to the Pastor as the leader of the Church. Of all the patterns of Church governance mentioned above this one is the closest to the Scriptural pattern, in that each Church is governed autonomously. But, unfortunately, it still retains the remnants of that principle of Church governance that originated in the second century, i.e. the elevation of one

man over others to be the leader in the Church.²³⁷ Of course, the ultimate form of this type of Church governance was that in the Roman Catholic Church where the Pope was deemed the leader of all Churches.

Despite the Reformation, this principle of Church governance has persisted in most Churches in Christendom. Orthodoxy still has the Patriarch above other priests (presbyters). The Church of England still has the Archbishop over vicars or parish priests. Many Protestant Churches still have a Presbyter above other presbyters (in day to day practice), or they have a Senior Pastor above other pastors, or a Pastor over deacons, or an elder above other elders. This is the one feature that has persisted in all the forms mentioned above and is a remnant of that departure than began in the early part of the second century as we will now see.

As we said earlier, it was given to Paul to reveal what the administration of the Church should be and so every Church should be faithful to the pattern revealed, instituted, and practiced by him, and yet over the centuries men have changed and altered that pattern. How did this departure from the order revealed in the New Testament come about and when did it begin?

The departure from the Divine Pattern began in earnest after the death of the last apostle of our Lord, that being the apostle John. As one examines the historical documents of the early Church one can trace this departure to the Churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In fact, one can trace it to those Churches in close fellowship with the Churches most influenced by those men of the sect of the Pharisees who claimed to speak for the apostle James in the Church in Jerusalem. As we have already written, this was a false claim made mostly by Pharisaical Christians who wished to create Jerusalem hegemony over all Churches. Along with that desire, this early change also developed from Christians who wished to continue the discipleship mentality carried on by those

²³⁷ This type of governance actually reflects the other extreme of Church governance where the Church is governed by a “democratic” principle. The good part of this is that it retains the New Testament principle of autonomy. The bad part is that it ignores the Biblical pattern of governance by a plurality of men known as elders who lift up only one Man before the flock to be seen by them as their leader in both practice and mindset—the Man Christ Jesus. Unfortunately, even with this “democratic” principle, in both practice and mindset, many still focus on one Christian man to be the leader within the Church, i.e. the Senior Pastor.

same Pharisaical Christians, in contradistinction to our Lord's forbiddance in Matt. 23: 8-9.²³⁸ By the time we get to the second century we routinely see Christians calling themselves *disciples of other men*; this phenomenon never occurred in the New Testament. The Lord forbids such practice and the apostle Paul bewails such a mindset (I Cor. 1:11-13; 3: 1-7).

As an example of this departure in the second century, we find the writer of the *Epistle to Diognetus* labeling himself as a “disciple of the apostles” (Ep. Dio. 11:1). We find Irenaeus called a “disciple of Polycarp” in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (Martyr. Pol. 22:2), and we find Ignatius called a “disciple of the apostle John” in the *Martyrdom of Ignatius* (Martyr. of Ign. 1:1). This unfortunate attachment to men, rather than to Christ, led to all sorts of errors. Never in the New Testament, after the resurrection of our Lord, do we find Christians calling themselves a disciple of another man. Never do we find in the New Testament a designation like “disciple of Paul,” or a designation like “disciple of John,” or a designation like a “disciple of Peter.” Rather they are known as “disciples of Christ” and whenever Christians began to attach themselves to men other than Christ (even though they were spiritual men such as Paul or Peter) they are labeled in Scripture as being carnal (I Cor. 3: 4 KJV). To be a disciple of someone, means you are disciplined by that one, and the one who disciplines another person is known as the Discipler of that person, and in the Bible a Discipler is by definition that person's Rabbi. Thus, when one calls themselves a disciple of so and so, they are saying that person is their Rabbi, which is a direct disobedience to the command of the Lord who said, “But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren” (Matt. 23:8 NKJV). If one is forbidden to be a Rabbi of another, such a one is being forbidden to be a Discipler of another. It was the Lord Jesus, Himself, who put an end to that system of discipleship where one human being disciplines another human being. Why? Because just as the Law was brought to an end in Christ Jesus, so too, man-made discipleship was brought to an end. Why? Because Christ said, “One is your Teacher, the Christ. Christ Jesus is our Rabbi; Christ Jesus is our Master; Christ Jesus is our Discipler. He has never relinquished that title and responsibility. It is no different than Jesus being our sole High Priest. He never relinquished that title and responsibility. Thus, if no one would ever dream of usurping His role as High Priest, why would one presume to usurp His role as Discipler or Rabbi?

²³⁸ For a fuller treatment see *What is Biblical Discipleship?* by same author.

Yet this is exactly what happened with those Christians in Jerusalem who sought to maintain circumcision and the Law for the Gentiles. They sought to maintain the Jewish system of discipleship because that system was considered to be part of the Law (see page 243-248 above). Most believe discipleship was instituted under Ezra upon the return from captivity (although some believe it could be traced back to Moses). It was appropriate for that time. John the Baptist had disciples. But we are no longer under Law of Moses. The Law has been fulfilled in Christ and so has the discipleship practiced in that Law. We are now are under the Law of Christ, and so follow the discipleship of Christ. A greater than Moses is now with us! We should walk in newness of the Spirit following the discipleship of Christ, not walk by the oldness of the letter with its form of discipleship by other men. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus and so should leave behind the things of the old creation.

Paul continued through his whole life in combating the old rabbinical system of discipleship under the Law. When the concept of rabbinical discipleship first appeared in Corinth it almost split the Church. All of a sudden many believers were turning away from the Lord Jesus as their sole Master and Rabbi and began viewing Apollos, Peter, and Paul as their Rabbis or Teachers. They said, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Apollos." They were boasting to each other that they were the disciples of Paul, or of Apollos, but Paul called such behavior carnal and told them "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (I Cor. 1:31). He is your Teacher and Master.

This system of rabbinical discipleship continued to plague the early Church, and unfortunately, (even though Paul was able to keep it in check during his lifetime), soon after his life the system completely pervaded the Church. Christians became known, more and more, as the disciple of some other named Christian. **And since rabbinical discipleship involved a hierarchical system, it was not long until it gave impetus to the creation of the monarchical bishop form of Church government, and with it, the Church took one of the first steps of departure from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ** (II Cor. 11: 1-3). Simplicity and devotion to Christ soon became interposed with the devotion and a veneration of different Christian men.

This was based, of course, upon the Christian Pharisaical mindset prevailing in those days that was based upon the old Jewish Sanhedrin

model with a presiding president to which all looked up to, as we mentioned before. Perhaps it would be good to go over it again.

Those Christians from the sect of the Pharisees in Acts 15:5 sought to extend to the Church of Antioch their view of keeping the Law of Moses which included their Pharisaical practice of discipleship. They, of course, were overruled by the apostles who remembered the Lord's summing up of the Law within Himself with that practice of discipleship. But that decision of the council of Jerusalem did not stop them. They continued to put forth their view of Church governance with its view of one man being elevated as Rabbi or Disciple over others, who was called the *Nasi*. Their cry continued to be the same cry of Rabbi Hillel, "Raise up many disciples." In those brother's mind, that meant that ultimately every disciple was accountable to the equivalent of the *Nasi* in the Christian Church, who was accountable to Christ.

As I said before, the *Nasi* found its origin in the old Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. William Brown spoke of this in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*.

"But we cannot leave the chamber, where the great council of the nation assembled, without at tending a little to its history. It received its name ... from the Greek word συνέδριον, a sitting together, or an assembly; and it consisted of seventy-one members, answering to Moses and the seventy elders, whom he chose, when God, in the wilderness, first appointed it. These members were composed of priests, Levites, and Israelites; or, as they are called in the New Testament, chief priests, scribes, and elders... The most eminent person among them, for worth and wisdom, was chosen *Nasi*... that is, prince, or president."²³⁹

And Herbert Danby in his book on the Mishnah said this.

The Roman authorities appear to have acquiesced to this court's exercise of some measure of control and supervision over its co-religionist, and its **Nasi** (**'President' or 'Patriarch'**) became the nation's accredited representative. [footnote] This system of a Patriarchate of Palestinian Jewry was destined to continue for some 350 years. After the retirement of Johanan ben Zakka the office became hereditary in the Hillel family. Tradition makes Hillel the Elder himself *Nasi* of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, as also his son (Simeon I, c. A.D. 15), grandson (Gamaliel I, c. A.D. 35, the Gamaliel mentioned in the Acts of the

²³⁹ William Brown, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Volume 1 (Waugh & Innes, Edinburgh, 1826) pg. 98-99

Apostles), and great-grandson (Simeon II, ben Gamaliel, c. A.D., one of the leaders in the revolt against the Romans)...²⁴⁰

And now let me repeat exactly what I said before about this mindset.

Many of the early Christians in Jerusalem were of the Pharisaical party and after their salvation they unfortunately continued on in their Pharisaical mindset which culminated with this idea of a Nasi or Patriarch of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish council of elders with its head Rabbi. Part of their system was to create this discipleship hierarchy with their supreme Nasi or Rabbi that inculcated the observance of the Law according to their interpretations. The concept of discipleship, traditionally, is said to have been begun by Ezra. He set up this system, after their return from their Babylonian captivity to help insure that the Israelites would never disappoint and grieve the heart of God by returning to their idolatrous ways. The thought behind discipleship was good, and it was practiced in a godly way by many Israelites and in the New Testament by John the Baptist, and, of course, by our Lord Jesus Himself. But when the Law ended, being fulfilled in Christ, that discipleship system ended, also being fulfilled in Christ. Our Lord ended rabbinical discipleship among men, forbidding His disciples continuance of the system, because He declared that He was the sole Rabbi or Discipler. He promised to disciple each new believer personally in the Church Age, because he promised to be with us until the end of the age. The role of Rabbi is now His alone and it is nothing but presumption to decide to usurp His role as such, just as it would be presumptuous to usurp his role as High Priest. Why would we desire to do such a thing when He forbid the practice.

This is what was happening in the Church of Jerusalem. There were certain Christians in the Church that thought God wanted them to continue this practice, which, in their eyes, included the practice of circumcision and observance of the Law, not only among their fellow Jews in the Diaspora, but also by Gentile believers.

This is what was really behind this disturbance in Antioch. Those Christians who continued with a Pharisaical mindset, apparently believed that Church was the new Israel, and as such should have its own Sanhedrin, which, by definition, would have authority over every other

²⁴⁰ Herbert Danby, tr., *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 2012) pg. xx

Church, as the Great Sanhedrin of the nation of Israel had authority over every Jewish community in the Diaspora. They sought to establish a system of authority within the Church of Christ equal to that in the nation of Israel, for in their mind, they believed they were the true and new Israel of God. As such, they felt that all spiritual and doctrinal decisions must be made by those in Jerusalem. And, in their mind, apparently, James was the *Nasi* of the Christian community and they went out in his name trying to enforce their view of salvation, practice of righteousness, and the accountability of every community of Christians to Jerusalem. Why?—Because in their mind the Law was still in force, and, as such, if any believer, Gentile or otherwise, was circumcised, such a one became bound to keep the whole Law of Moses, which meant every believer would be accountable to a Christian Sanhedrin in Jerusalem with its *Nasi*, as every Jew throughout the world was bound to the Great Sanhedrin of the nation of Israel in Jerusalem.

The Law taught that all those “under the Law” are bound to a council of priests and Levites, with its head judge, which by the first century became known as the Great Sanhedrin and its head judge became known as the *Nasi* (Deut. 17:8-9).

“If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses. ⁹And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.” Deuteronomy 17:8-9 NKJV

This is what the Law taught and these brothers from the sect of the Pharisees were insisting that this aspect of the Law now resided in the Church in Jerusalem with its own council made up of the apostles and elders with James as its head—*Nasi* (although James never claimed such authority).”

And also let me repeat the following.

Throughout Paul’s life, he stood fast against this mentality so prevalent among those Christian from the sect of the Pharisees in Jerusalem that sought to subjugate other Churches to the supposed authority of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:5). Those brethren continued with a Pharisaical Rabbinical mindset that sought to raise up many disciples unto themselves, continuing the tradition of Rabbinical discipleship

where ultimate authority resided in a centralized council with its *Nasi*, or head Rabbi.

Paul, who once was a part of that system, indeed, one who was advancing in Phariseism more than any of his peers, completely abandoned that system, following the Lord's injunction to not be called Rabbi.²⁴¹ In Paul's mind, Rabbinical discipleship practiced by other men, ended in Christ, the one and only true Rabbi. The whole system was replaced with a new creation which was the Church, distinct from Israel, composed of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians who were baptized into one body, answerable to one Rabbi, Discipler, or Master—the Lord Jesus Christ. And, in Paul's mind, each Church became a distinct and local manifestation of that universal Church, and, as such, was accountable to the Husband to which Paul had espoused each Church—Christ (II Cor. 11:2).

Even Paul, himself, understood that that special relationship between the local Church and Christ superseded even his authority as an apostle, so much so that he put an anathema on himself if he preached a different gospel to a Church (Gal. 1:6-8). Part of that alternate gospel had more to do than just preaching salvation by works. It also included things meant to cover every aspect of salvation (i.e. in their eyes), not only the means of our justification, but also the means of our sanctification—which they thought included the continuation of Rabbinical discipleship as a means of sanctification along the lines of Pharisaical thinking. In Paul's mind, Christ, Himself, was the sole Rabbi. Christ, Himself, was the Chief Shepherd. Christ, Himself, was the first Apostle sent by God. Christ, Himself, was the Husband of the bride. Christ alone retained sole authority in the midst of the Churches, chastening those whom He loved. In Paul's mind, because of his great faith, Christ was a living Master, Chief Shepherd and sole Rabbi and just as he never relinquished his High Priesthood, after His ascension, neither did he relinquish those other offices and for any believers to attempt to act like the vicar of Christ upon the earth, whether as an individual, or as a Church, to Paul was a great and presumptive usurping of the authority of Christ. Paul fought hard for the autonomy of every local Church that was answerable only to the Son of God.

²⁴¹ For future study, see author's book entitled, *What is Biblical Discipleship?* available from Assembly Bookshelf.

Now that did not mean Paul could not exercise a spiritual authority within the Churches as an apostle of Christ. He could and he did on more than one occasion. But he never saw that authority as a replacement of the ultimate authority of the Son. Paul exercised spiritual authority, yes—with all command—but always recognizing the ultimate autonomy of every local Church to Christ; he never lorded it over their faith. If they refused Paul’s exhortations, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of their souls would deal with the situation. Paul knew that a Church might refuse his exhortations; but he never threatened them with excommunication if they refused his exhortations; he did not see himself as their Master. Paul could do so because he knew that ultimately every Church was under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, the One who was walking in their midst with all wisdom, chastising those who disobeyed, even with a removal of their lampstand if necessary (Rev. 2:5). Paul had great faith in the real presence of Christ shepherding His sheep. If a Church disobeyed Paul, Paul knew the Lord would deal with the situation. Paul knew that his commandments were the commandments of the Lord (e.g. I Cor. 14:37), but he also knew that when a Church might ignore those commandments, it became the responsibility of the Chief Shepherd to deal with the situation. (Of course, we are not talking about sin, as in I Cor. 5. In those cases, Paul, as an apostle of Christ, had the authority to deliver such a one to Satan.)

Yet our Lord did allot in each local Church certain men to be under Him as undershepherds, that is, pastors, elders, or bishops to the flock as can be seen in I Peter 5:2-4.

1 Peter 5:2-4 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.” NASB

The elders were to shepherd the flock of God, i.e. the Church that was *among them*. The phrase “among you” is the Greek phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, which literally carries the idea “with you,” or “in the midst of you,” meaning the sheep were moving about and within the circle of elders. Peter is saying the elders or shepherds were on the outer edge of the circle of sheep, so to speak, overseeing them.

Thus, we see that the Holy Spirit assigns elders to their own particular assembly. It limits and defines the extent of their responsibility to the one particular Church or flock which is found within their midst. Elders are

appointed “according to” a Church. This is similar to what Peter says when he tells elders that certain ones are allotted to their charge.

I Pet. 5:3 Nor yet as lording it over **those allotted to your charge** (τῶν κληρῶν), but proving to be examples to the flock. NASB

The New American Standard Bible nicely brings out the meaning of the word used by the Holy Spirit in this verse. Peter uses the phrase τῶν κληρῶν to refer to those of the flock who have been “allotted to the charge” of the elders. The KJV translates it as “heritage.” W. E. Vine defines it as “a lot, allotment, heritage.”²⁴² And he defines the verbal form of the word as “to cast lots” or “to choose by lot,” then, “to assign a portion.”²⁴³

The same word in I Pet. 5:3 is also used in the LXX in Deut. 19:14 in speaking of the land allotted to the Israelites. Each tribe’s inheritance remained inviolate (Num. 33:54) and it was a crime to move someone else’s landmark in order to encroach upon the “allotment” given to others.

The Book of Job also speaks of those who do such a thing, those who do not respect the ancient landmarks, those who seek to make that which is allotted to someone else their own.

“Some remove the landmarks; they violently take away flocks, and feed *thereof*.”
Job 24:2 KJV

So we see all these verses helps us understand this word which, when used by Peter, gives evidence of the autonomy of every individual assembly. Each Church is autonomous because it has been assigned or allotted to a particular group of elders or shepherds as the heritage of God that has been allotted to them for care. It is a great responsibility. As such it is wrong for others outside that Church, or for other elders in other Churches, to ever seek to usurp the boundaries of oversight that have been set up by the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

In addition, we see in this verse that the elders were to rule by example, not their lording over the flock. This word translated “lording” is the participle form of κατακυριεύω, the same word used in Matt. 20:25—

²⁴² W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 181 (Vol. 1)

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, pg. 217-218 (vol. 2)

Matt. 20:25 But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles **lord it** (**κατακυριεύω**) over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.” NASB

And the same word used in Ps. 110:2 (109:2) in the Greek LXX.

Ps. 110:2 (109:2) The Lord shall send out a rod of power for thee out of Sion: **rule** (**κατακυριεύω**) thou in the midst of thine enemies.” Brenton’s Translation

What this shows us is that such an exercise of authority over others can only be done by the Lord Jesus Christ. He will “lord” it over others. Indeed, it says he will “lord” it over all his enemies, which we know from Rev. 11:15 includes the whole world. He will do so for He, indeed, is Lord of lords. The Lord Jesus is the only one in Scripture who can “lord” it over the saints. He is the only one in Scripture ever allowed to exercise such authority. The Lord Jesus has no “vicar” on the earth in the person of a man. Scripture never allows such a thing. And yet this is exactly what happened in the Historic Church beginning after the death of the last apostle. The Pharisaical mindset with the sole exercise of one man over others began to spread, first, apparently, from that old battleground of Antioch. What those Christians from Jerusalem could not obtain in Church in Antioch (or anywhere else as recorded in Acts 15) they soon obtained after the death of the last apostle in the Church in Antioch under one Christian called Ignatius. And it is to that we would now like to turn our attention.

Ignatius was a genuine Christian who gave his life for His Master. He was martyred in Rome. His epistles are well worth reading being in many ways similar in style to the writings of the apostles, which should not surprise us for Ignatius is said, by tradition, to be one who personally knew the apostle John, being taught by him. But Ignatius became a monarchical bishop in Antioch during the first part of the second century.

Now, we know that heresies and/or schisms were already beginning to spread amongst the Churches in John’s day, as can be seen in the seven epistles to the Churches in the book of Revelation, also in John’s three epistles, and in his Gospel. John’s solution was to point Christians to the deity of Christ, to the revelation of Him as the Only-Begotten Son of God the Father, to the all-sufficiency of Christ for all their needs, to a direct reliance upon the Saviour in all things, to the anointing of God in their hearts, to love for the brethren, and to a knowledge of Christ and the eternal life we have in Him.

Yet, Ignatius, solution was different. Somewhere Ignatius lost his way; perhaps, he lost it because the apostle John was far away from Antioch in Asia and soon was passed away. In any case, Ignatius, in good faith I am sure, sought to maintain the purity of the Church against all the rising heresies and/or schisms infiltrating the Church by following the Pharisaical concept of a Nasi over a council of elders, which translated into a monarchical bishop over a presbytery.

Ignatius was the foremost spokesman for the change of Church governance from the shepherding and oversight of many, i.e. a plurality of elders, to the elevation of one of those elders to a position of Bishop over the rest. His epistles to various Churches reinforced the need for this type of governance. What was reserved for the Chief Shepherd under the ministry of the apostles became the possession of one man within the Church—the sole bishop. Under the apostles every elder was a bishop, being a pastor. Under Ignatius only one elder was a bishop.

When Paul addresses the Church in Philippi he began his epistle as follows.

Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with **the bishops and deacons:** KJV

Every elder was a bishop. Each Church was governed by a plurality of bishops, as can also be seen in Acts 20:28.

Acts 20:28 Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath **made you bishops**, to feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. English Revised Version

And who was Paul addressing in Acts 20:28? He was addressing the elders of the Church in Ephesus, as can be seen in the beginning of the passage.

Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called to him the elders of the church. English Revised Version

Thus, when Paul and Barnabas recognized and affirmed elders in every Church (Acts 14:23) they were recognizing and affirming a plurality of bishops in every Church. Not only that, this verse in Acts 20:28 also reveals the fact that the elders, who were the bishops, were also the pastors, for they are told to shepherd the Church in Ephesus. We will

look into this in more depth later, but the English word “pastor” is a translation of the Greek word for shepherd, and the elders were told to “shepherd.” The New American Standard Version brings this out nicely.

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. NASB

Consequently, we see that the pattern set up by the apostles, the administration or household management of the Church that was revealed by Paul for the Church (Eph. 3: 8-9) was that God desired each Church to be governed by a plurality of elders, i.e. a plurality of bishops, which was also known as a plurality of pastors. Each of these three titles referred to the same group of men. This is God’s way. This is God’s command. This is the pattern left for the Church. God in his wisdom set up this method of Church governance—a plurality of elders, not an elder set up above the others, or an elder recognized as the first among equals. No, he set up a plurality of elders. God in His wisdom ordained that each Church be governed by a plurality of bishops—not one bishop above the others. God in His wisdom decided that each Church be governed by a plurality of pastors—not a senior pastor among associate pastors. No, he set up a plurality of pastors (for He was the Senior Pastor, the Chief Shepherd). This was God’s pattern in Scripture, yet in the second century this model was abandoned and one of the elders in each Church was taken out from among them and elevated to the sole bishop of each Church. The other elders were no longer known as bishops; they became simply designated the presbyters (ultimately priests). The apostles never instituted this; it was the Church in the second century that instituted this. Jerome testified to this in his writings. He says the following.

“Hence a presbyter is the same as a bishop, and before ambition came into religion, by the prompting of the devil, and people began to say: ‘I belong to Paul: I to Apollo; I to Cephas,’ the churches were governed by the direction of presbyters, acting as a body. But when each presbyter began to suppose that those whom he had baptized belonged to him, rather than to Christ, it was decreed in the whole Church that one of the presbyters should be chosen to preside over the others, and that the whole responsibility for the Church should devolve on him, so that the seeds of schism should be removed.”²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Henry Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (Oxford University Press, London, 1974) Pg. 189

But this was man's solution not God's and certainly not the apostles. Should they not have trusted in God's pattern instead, knowing that all He instituted through the apostles was done according to His wisdom? Do we claim to know better than God as to how the Church should be governed? But some might say, as Jerome said, "But this was done to preserve the unity of the Church; men began to draw other Christians around themselves, in some cases based upon heresy. By doing this the unity was preserved for one man was elevated as the sole center of the Church." Well and fine, but let me ask, "Does Jerome or should I say Ignatius or any other Christian know better than the apostle Paul, the one appointed by God to show the Church how she should be governed. Does Ignatius or any other Christian have more authority, unto the edification of the Church, to alter the pattern left by Paul?"

When Paul was ready to depart the last time from Ephesus, he thought he no longer would see those saints or elders of the Church again. He was leaving them to God and His care. He warned them that after his departure savage wolves would enter the flock. He even warned them that even among themselves elders would arise to draw off disciples after themselves, the very thing Jerome mentioned above as the reason for the change of Church governance, the very reason Jerome gave for elevating one elder above the rest as the sole bishop of the local Church. This what Paul said.

Acts 20:17-32 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;²⁰ **how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable**, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.²² "And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.²⁴ "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.²⁵ **"And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.**²⁶ "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men.²⁷ "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.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. NASB

Paul was an apostle sent by God. It was given to him to make known to the Church the household management of the Church. He received instructions from the Lord, as a wise masterbuilder, as to how the Church should be governed. As such, he directed that elders be appointed in every Church as can be seen when the following two verses are compared.

Acts 14:23 So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. NKJV

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders in every city** as I commanded you-- NKJV

These are the commands of an apostle of Christ for the Church, and Paul made known to the saints that the commandments given by him were, under inspiration, the commandments of the Lord.

I Cor. 14:37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. NASB

Thus, it is the Lord Himself, as the Chief Shepherd, as the Bishop of our souls, as the Head of the Church that directed that the Church be governed by a plurality of elders (bishops) with Him retaining the title of Chief Shepherd (and therefore, by implication, although this title is never applied to Christ in Scripture, the Head Bishop of the Church).

Paul never told them to them to appoint one elder (presbyter) to preside over the others as bishop of the Church! Paul never gave that command. So the question that should be asked is this, “Who should we obey? Should we obey the apostle Paul or a subsequent elder known as Ignatius?”

Paul very clearly stated that, as far as he knew, he would never see them again in Ephesus (verse 25). If he was going to institute any changes in

Church government, this would have been the time to do so. He clearly knew that men would draw disciples after themselves as he stated in verse 29 and 30 which, of course, would cause the schism Jerome talked about in the quote above, yet Paul did not remedy that eventuality by choosing one elder to preside over the others, “so that the seeds of schism should be removed,” as explained by Jerome.

If Paul knowing of the same danger that Ignatius and Jerome knew of, did not change the way the Church was governed, why should Ignatius or any other Christian leader or leaders do so. Do they think Paul did not appreciate the danger that would arise from this? Nonsense! Paul well recognized the danger posed by unprincipled and carnal men, Christian or otherwise. And yet he did not change the governance of the Church to solve this eventual problem. Why? Obviously because the Chief Shepherd did not change the governance of the Church and for Paul to do so would have been utter presumption and lack of trust in the wisdom and power of the Lord to order his Church.

Paul told us all to follow the pattern left by him. It is unfortunate the Church did not do so after the death of the last apostle. Those Christians motivations may have been good (seeking to protect the unity of the Church) but their changes led Christians into eventual error. It detracted the focus of Christians off of Christ and His sufficiency and centered it on mere men representing Christ. It caused the eventual closing of Christians spiritual ears, and it opened wide their fleshy ears. See how this change changed the mindset and focus of the saints.

As we said before, this change began in the Eastern Churches and spread to the Western Churches with Ignatius being one of the earliest proponents of this change (dear Christian man that he was). These are some of the things he said—

“So then it becometh you to run in harmony with the mind of the bishop; which thing also ye do. For your honourable presbytery, which is worthy of God, is attuned to the bishop, even as its strings to a lyre. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. And do ye, each and all, form yourselves into a chorus, that being harmonious in concord and taking the key note of God ye may in unison sing with one voice through Jesus Christ unto the Father, that He may both hear you and acknowledge you by your good deeds to be members .of His Son. It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, that ye may also be partakers of God always...**Plainly therefore we ought to regard**

the bishop as the Lord Himself...to the end that **ye may obey the bishop and the presbytery** without distraction of mind. “²⁴⁵

Beloved, is this the type of advice that would come of the Holy Spirit? Are we not told to “test the spirits?” Up to this time Christ was the focus of every individual Church, not another man no matter how spiritual that man might be! Christian leaders changed this causing the saints to look to a man rather than to Christ as the focus of each assembly. This was a departure from the pattern given in Scripture by God. All that the Holy Spirit does is to glorify Christ. The pattern given to us in Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was given to lift up and glorify Christ alone. This change did the opposite; it caused man to be lifted up in the place of Christ, causing Christians to focus and listen to man, not the Lord. The Holy Spirit would never tell a Christian **to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself!** God forbid! Yet this is what Ignatius counseled. Again, his motives might have been pure, but this was man’s solution to a problem, not God’s. Nor was it a solution given by Paul the apostle when he saw that this eventual danger of schism and error would arise in the Church. Nor was it a solution of the apostle John when dealing with similar situations. Can you imagine the apostle John saying a Christian was to regard a bishop as the Lord Himself! Our loyalty must be first to the Lord, not man, even a man like Ignatius, who truly loved the Lord, who personally knew the apostle John, and one who gave his life as a martyr. He was a godly man who died for the Lord, but on this he misled the Church.

Consider how beautiful this admonition of Ignatius would have been if he had not changed the pattern of Church governance. If he had not told Christians to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself, but had rather told them to regard Jesus as Lord and Head of the Church, if he had told them to hold fast to the Head as Paul did in Col. 2: 5-10, 19. This then would be how it would have read, unto the spiritual well-being of every Christian. The words in bold type are the words I have altered.

“So then it becometh you to run in harmony with the mind of ~~the bishop~~ **Christ**; which thing also ye do. For your honourable presbytery, which is worthy of God, is attuned to ~~the bishop~~ **Christ**, even as its strings to a lyre. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. And do ye, each and all, form yourselves into a chorus, that being harmonious in concord and taking the key note of God ye may in unison sing with one voice through Jesus Christ unto

²⁴⁵ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2, Part II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1889) pg. 544-45, 549-50

the Father, that He may both hear you and acknowledge you by your good deeds to be members .of His Son. It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity, that ye may also be partakers of God always...Plainly therefore we ought to regard **Jesus as Lord**...to the end that ye may obey the **bishop Lord** and the presbytery without distraction of mind. “

If it had read thus, then it would have been advice that none could argue with for it would have been in line with Scripture and with the ministry of the Holy Spirit to glorify and lift up the Son. But that is not what Ignatius wrote. Rather, he began to lift up a sole bishop (elder) in the place of the Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God. Listen to another admonition given by Ignatius.

I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, **while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles**, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed.²⁴⁶

Plainly Ignatius is equating a man on earth, the bishop, to be sitting in the place or position of God in the assembly. This is not right. It betrays a Pharisaical discipleship mentality of man and of a head Nasi. In another place he writes...

“... shun divisions, as the beginning of evils. Do ye all **follow your bishop**, as Jesus Christ **followed the Father**, and **the presbytery as the Apostles**; and to the deacons pay respect, as to God’s commandment. Let no man do aught of things pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that be held a valid Eucharist which is under the bishop or one to whom he shall have committed it. Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church. It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize or to hold a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve, this is well-pleasing also to God; that everything which ye do may be sure and valid.”²⁴⁷

In this quote we can see how the discipleship mentality forbidden by the Lord, but promoted first by those Pharisaical Christians from Jerusalem had gained the ascendancy in the Church, leading to this departure of

²⁴⁶ Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325, Vol. 1* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1905) pg. 61

²⁴⁷ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2, Part II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1889) pg. 569

Church governance. As was said before, our Lord forbid the continuation of discipleship by other men. He summed up all discipleship in Himself, becoming the sole and final Rabbi or Discipler. Nowhere in Scripture is a Christian called a disciple of another Christian.²⁴⁸ They are only known as a disciple of the Lord. As such, we are never told to follow another man. We are told *to follow Christ*. Yet Ignatius, in this epistle, tells Christians to do the opposite and *follow a man*—the bishop. He says, “Do ye all follow your bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father.” This is how the phrase reads in the Greek—...πάντες τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ ἀκολουθεῖτε, ὡς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς τῷ πατρί...²⁴⁹ “Be sure all follow the bishop, just as Jesus Christ *followed* the Father.”

Now some may read this and say, “How does this reflect a false discipleship mentality? Did not Paul advise the same thing when he said, “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye **followers of me**” (I Cor. 4:16 KJV), or when he said, “Be ye **followers of me**, even as I also am of Christ” (I

²⁴⁸ The one exception some may point to is a variant with the pronoun αὐτοῦ in Acts 9:25 (see NASB and KJV for comparison). I believe the Byzantine Text, minus αὐτοῦ, is the original reading, but how beautiful is the verse if the αὐτοῦ is part of the original. Paul was trained as a young man in Jerusalem according to Rabbinic thinking.. He was a disciple of Gamaliel; he was discipled by Rabbi Gamaliel himself, and, as was common, he was expected to afterwards to become a Rabbi himself and raise up his own disciples. Paul would have been one of the great Rabbis of the first century. And if this variant is the original text, we can see that by the time he went to Damascus, as is recorded in Acts 9:25 NASB, he had already become a Rabbi with his own disciples. It says that “his disciples” took him and let him down in a basket through the wall in order to escape capture. Apparently, Rabbi Saul, as he would have been known then, had already raised up some disciples around himself. And, apparently, some of the men who accompanied him to Damascus (Acts 9:7) were some of his “own” disciples. But something changed his life. Something caused him to cast away all his ambition and fame. On the road to Damascus he met a Rabbi much greater than Rabbi Gamaliel. He met Rabbi Yeshua, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul, thinking he was finished with his education, now being a Rabbi himself, all of a sudden realized that he was just beginning all over as a disciple with a new Rabbi who would be his Master for the rest of his life. It is interesting to note, that after Paul left Damascus and was brought to the apostles in Jerusalem, we never hear of Paul’s disciples anymore. Most assuredly the apostles would have told Paul of the Lord’s command, “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher and you are all brothers,” and Paul from that day determined never to raise up disciples unto himself anymore. He determined to not “disciple” another human being, but instead he determined to “make disciples” unto his new Rabbi – the Lord Jesus Christ who would then disciple them.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., pg. 309

Cor. 11:1 KJV)? Is not Paul simply asking Christians to be his disciples and follow him just as the Lord called men to be his disciples and follow Him in such verses as Matthew 16:24 (KJV) where he said, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and **follow me**.” Or when he said in Matthew 4:19-20 (KJV) “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and **followed him**.”

The answer is no; Paul was not advising the same thing, for even though the King James Version translates those verses with the same English word “follow,” the Holy Spirit uses an entirely different word in the Greek. The newer translations, as the NKJV and the NASB bring this out. The New King James Version translate the verses as follows (the NASB being similar) “Therefore I urge you, **imitate** me (ICo 4:16 NKJV) and “**Imitate** me, just as I also **imitate** Christ.” (ICo 11:1 NKJV) The Greek word is an entirely different word than that which is used by the Lord in His invitation to “follow me.” The two words do not mean the same thing (it should be noted that Paul uses the substantive μιμηταί in I Cor. 4:16; 11:1 and the verbal form μιμέομαι in II Thess. 3:7,9; Heb. 13:7). The word used by the Lord in His call to discipleship does, indeed carry the connotation of discipleship within the context, but the word is never used that way with men. In other words, the Holy Spirit never used that word, exhorting Christians to follow in discipleship another Christian. Paul never used that word as an exhortation to Christians to follow him! Paul always used a different word which was better understood as “imitate” as was shown above in the NKJV (or, since it is a substantive, “be imitators”). In fact, the Greek word that Paul uses is where we get our English word “mimic” from. He is saying “imitate” me, “mimic” me. As I only follow Christ, you follow only Christ—mimic me.

So, Paul was not saying, “follow me and be my disciple” (as did our Lord), but, instead, he is saying, “imitate me as I imitate the Lord.” He is saying, “The Lord ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit, and I seek to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. Mimic me! The Lord blessed when He was reviled. I seek to bless when I am reviled. Mimic me! I have no other Master or Disciple, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Mimic me! Imitate me! Paul refused to be any one’s Disciple or Rabbi, he was just simply encouraging the saints to follow his faith and manner of life (cf. II Tim. 3:10-11). He desired that all would imitate his love for the Master. The newer translations clarify this distinction of words.

Paul never practiced the discipleship of other men. He would be no one's Rabbi, and he was the disciple of no other man, but was the disciple only of the Lord (Gal. 1: 1, 10-12). If we desire to "mimic" him, then we must never be the Disciple of someone else, and we must never be the disciple of someone else. We must be true to the Lord, our only Rabbi and Master – our only Disciple – that is true imitation.

So now we can see how the discipleship mentality fostered by certain men in the Church led to this first departure of Church governance, for Ignatius, unlike the apostle Paul, uses the same Greek word used by our Lord in His call to discipleship. Ignatius does not tell the saints to "imitate the bishop" but he tells them to "**follow** the bishop," as they were told to "**follow** the Lord." He uses the same Greek word used by the Lord Himself, and that word was the Greek word ἀκολουθέω. W. E. Vine defines the word as follows:

"AKOLOUTHEO (ἀκολουθέω) to be an *akolouthos*, a follower, or companion (from the prefix *a*, here expressing union, likeness, and *keleuthos*, a way; hence, one going in the same way), is used (*a*) frequently in the literal sense, e.g., Matt. 4:25; (*b*) metaphorically, of "discipleship," e.g., Mark 8:34; 9:38; 10:21. It is used 77 times in the Gospels, of following Christ, and only once otherwise, Mark 14:13."²⁵⁰

As such, the word became a technical word for the discipling of men by the Lord. It was never used in the New Testament of Christians discipling other Christians.

This becomes significant for Ignatius wrote in Greek and he read the New Testament in Greek. He would have been well aware that Paul used the Greek substantive μιμητής and the verbal μιμέομαι, and that Holy Spirit only used the Greek word ἀκολουθέω of the Lord. As such, he is making a definite command to the saints (using the imperative mood) to follow the bishop as one would follow the Lord. By using that word he was, in reality, elevating one elder to be above the other elders and to be followed as if he was the Lord Himself (he said that very thing in his epistle to the Christians in Ephesus, "Therefore we ought to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself.")

²⁵⁰ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 111 (vol. 2)

Our brother allowed pragmatism to overrule the wisdom of Scripture in this instance. If an the apostle Paul never exhorted Christians to “follow” (ἀκολουθέω) him as an apostle, why would Ignatius ever think it was alright to exhort Christians to “follow” (ἀκολουθέω) a bishop? I think the answer is because Christians over the years had forgotten the Lord’s admonition not to be called Rabbi. They had forgotten that only He was allowed to disciple another believer. (We saw earlier that Christians had begun to develop this mentality in the second century because they began to use such phrases as “disciples of the apostles,” disciple of Polycarp,” the “disciple of John.”)

Apparently, the constant pressure from Christians following the mindset of those early brethren from the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15: 5), those who sought to set up a type of system similar to a Jewish Sanhedrin with its *Nasi* (in contradistinction to everything the apostles decided, taught and practiced) soon overwhelmed the leaders of the Churches in the East and they set up a similar system of oversight, having lost their faith in the wisdom of our Lord’s governance through a plurality of elders.

In light of this, it is important to note that when we look at all seven extant epistles of Ignatius, more particularly, the six that were written to Churches, i.e. Philadelphia, Tralles, Magnesia (on the Maeander), Ephesus, Smyrna, and Rome, we find that one Church is different than the rest. If we look at their geographical locations, we find that it follows an eastern to western progression, ending with the western most Church, which, of course, is the Church in Rome. What is so interesting when we look at it this way, is that one finds that Rome is the only Church where Ignatius does not exhort the saints in the Church to follow their one bishop! In fact, he mentions nothing about a sole bishop in Rome (like he did in all the other Churches), he only references himself in the epistle as a bishop from Syria and once he uses the word of Christ, but never does he use it of any one particular person in Rome. Apparently, despite the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, Rome, at the time of this epistle, still followed the pattern revealed by the apostle Paul—a governance of a plurality of elders.

We find confirmation for this in an earlier letter called the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written around 90 A.D. to one in the Church of Rome. In the letter we find the following witness—

“γράφεις οὖν δύο βιβλαρίδια, καὶ πέμπεις ἐν Κλήμεντι καὶ ἐν Γραπτῇ. πέμπει οὖν Κλήμης εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις, ἐκεῖνον γὰρ **ἐπιτέτραπται** Γραπτῇ δὲ

νουθετήσει τὰς χήρας καὶ τοὺς ὀρφανούς. σὺ δὲ ἀναγνώσῃ εἰς ταύτην τὴν πόλιν μετὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τῶν προΐταμένων τῆς ἐκκλησίας.”²⁵¹

“You will write therefore two books, and you will send the one to Clemens and the other to Grapte. And Clemens will send his to foreign countries, for **permission** has been granted to him to do so. And Grapte will admonish the widows and the orphans. But you will read the words in this city, **along with the presbyters [elders] who preside over the church.**”²⁵²

This shows that Rome was still following the pattern given by Paul regarding the oversight of the Churches in that it shows the Church in Rome was still being governed by a plurality of elders in the latter part of the first century.

Also, we have confirmation (contrary to the claims by the Roman Catholic Church regarding apostolic succession from Peter) that Clement was not considered a monarchical bishop either. Some may ask how—well, it is because the epistle states that Clement *required permission* to send a book to foreign countries. The word translated “permission” was the Greek word ἐπιτέτραπται, which some have translated as “duty,” or “business.” But I believe the word is properly translated “permission,” as coming from ἐπιτρέπω, as was translated above in the quote from the *Ante-Nicene Christian library: translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. This very same word is used by Paul in I Cor. 14:34 where he says—

I Cor. 14:34 αἱ γυναῖκες ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις σιγάτωσαν· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτέτραπται αὐταῖς λαλεῖν ἀλλ’ ὑποτάσσεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει

I Cor. 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not **permitted** unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. KJV

In this verse, however, ἐπιτέτραπται is negated by οὐ, and so carries the idea of “not being permitted,” but in Hermes, ἐπιτέτραπται is not negated but affirmed, and so carries the idea of “being permitted.” The entire phrase from Hermes reads this way in the Greek: πέμψει οὖν Κλήμης εἰς

²⁵¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1898) pg. 302-303

²⁵² Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, Frederick Crombie, tr. & eds., *Ante-Nicene Christian library : translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Vol. 1* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1867) pg. 331

τὰς ἔξω πόλεις ἐκεῖνῳ γὰρ ἐπιτέτραπται.²⁵³ Perhaps, we might get a better understanding of what is being said if we translate εἰς τὰς ἔξω πόλεις as “unto the cities abroad.” The idea is that Clement was given “permission” to correspond with other Churches away from Rome (represented by cities abroad); in other words, he was given “permission” to speak for the Church in Rome. This Greek word routinely carries this idea of “permission” in in the New Testament. For example, it is so translated in such verses as Acts 26:1, I Cor. 16:7 and Heb. 6:3. Obviously, in these verses the one given permission did not have authority over the one granting the permission. As such, this shows that Clement was not a monarchical bishop, for, according to the words of Ignatius, in his six other extant epistles, a bishop would never need to have such permission because the bishop was considered to be the sole authority in an assembly, being recognized by all as Jesus Christ Himself.

This conclusion is all the more confirmed because just a few years earlier than Ignatius’ epistle to Rome, Clement (who Rome claims was the fourth pope or bishop of Rome)²⁵⁴ when writing to the Corinthians Church, never referred to himself as a bishop in his epistle, but rather clearly states that according to his view (which seemed to prevail in the West) the apostles planned that the governance of the Churches should continue by a plurality of elders, not by one bishop over the elders. This is such an important piece of evidence concerning the governance of the early Churches subsequent to the time of the apostles that I will quote in in length. In chapter one of his epistle to the Corinthians, Clement writes.

“And who did not rejoice over your perfect and well-grounded knowledge? For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments

²⁵³ J. B. Lightfoot, *Op. Cit.*, pg. 302

²⁵⁴ “According to Tertullian, writing c. 199, the Roman Church claimed that Clement was ordained by St. Peter (*De Prescript.*, xxxii), and St. Jerome tells us that in his time “most of the Latins” held that Clement was the immediate successor of the Apostle (*De viris illustr.*, xv). St. Jerome himself in several other places follows this opinion, but here he correctly states that Clement was the fourth pope. The early evidence shows great variety.” (Charles George Herbermann, Edward Aloysius Pace, Condé Benoist Pallen, Thomas Joseph Shahan, John Joseph Wynne, Eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, Volume 4* (Robert Appleton Company, New York, 1912) pg. 13

of God, **being obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honour to the presbyters among you.**²⁵⁵

And, in a subsequent section of the epistle he continues.

“The apostles have preached the gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, **they appointed the first fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe.** Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning **bishops and deacons.** For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, **“I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith...”**”

“...Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. **We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or after wards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ, in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world]; for they have no fear lest anyone deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that ye have removed some men of excellent behaviour from the ministry,** which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honour.²⁵⁶

Thus, with the witness of Hermes, coupled together with the silence of Ignatius in his epistle to Rome regarding any bishop, and the witness of Clement himself in his epistle to the Corinthians concerning the governance of elders, we see that the Church in Rome continued to

²⁵⁵ Alexander Roberts, Sir James Donaldson, Frederick Crombie, tr. & eds., *Ante-Nicene Christian library : translations of the writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, Vol. 1* (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1867) pg. 8

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 36-39

follow the pattern left by Paul well into the beginning of the second century.

But what is also interesting, is that we also see that the Corinthian Church, which was east of Rome, but still further west than the other five Churches mentioned by Ignatius (Smyrna, Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Philadelphia) was also governed by a plurality of elders and not, as Ignatius wished, by a single bishop set above the rest. And when we examine the epistle of Polycarp written to the Philippians we find another western Church still governed by a plurality of elders, just like Corinth, and just like Rome.

In his epistle to the Philippians, Polycarp wrote the following regarding the responsibility of all Christians in Philippi. He told them in Greek—“...ὑποτασσομένους τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις καὶ διακόνους ὡς θεῷ καὶ Χριστῷ.”²⁵⁷ When this is translated, it would read: “...being subject to the elders and deacons just as to God and Christ.” Obviously, at this time in Philippi, the Church continued to adhere to the apostolic pattern established by Paul himself. They were still governed by a plurality of elders, which of course, would be the same as a plurality of bishops, since elders and bishops are one and the same (see Phil. 1:1).

Rome, Corinth and Philippi still followed the apostolic pattern, whereas Smyrna, Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Philadelphia followed a pattern championed by Ignatius. Those Churches across the Bosphorus straits in Europe remained faithful to the apostolic pattern of Paul, whereas those Churches in Asia altered the Pauline pattern, adopting the pattern affirmed by Ignatius.

So we see this impetus to change the governance of the Church came from the East, and not from the West. The question that must be asked, of course, is, “Why?” What was the reason for changing the pattern established by the apostles? We have already touched upon two possible reasons.

1) Pragmatism—the reason mentioned beforehand by Jerome. It was changed because Christian leaders determined it was a logical way to preserve the unity of the Church.

²⁵⁷ Kirsopp Lake, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 1 Loeb Classical Library* (William Heinemann, London, 1919) pg. 290

“Hence a presbyter [elder] is the same as a bishop, and before ambition came into religion, by the prompting of the devil, and people began to say: ‘I belong to Paul: I to Apollo; I to Cephas,’ the churches were governed by the direction of presbyters, acting as a body. But when each presbyter began to suppose that those whom he had baptized belonged to him, rather than to Christ, it was decreed in the whole Church that one of the presbyters should be chosen to preside over the others, and that the whole responsibility for the Church should devolve on him, so that the seeds of schism should be removed.”²⁵⁸

The problem with this view, as we have said already, is that it relies on the wisdom of man, rather than a trust in the wisdom of God. Pragmatism is always a danger when it contradicts Divine Revelation. It betrays a Christian life that has fallen to a level of soulical Christianity which relies on a life patterned after the natural man, a life patterned after the first Adam (thinking Christians are saved to walk as Adam walked in his innocence with all his natural strength, wisdom and ability) rather than a life patterned after the last Adam, our resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

2) The resurgence of the Pharisaical Christian mindset with its Rabbinical and hierarchical structure with a *Nasi* at the top. This viewpoint explains the change occurring first in the East (e. g. Antioch, which was always an area under the sway of Jerusalem), then in those Churches in Asia—an area frequented, from the earliest days, by Christians from the East, from those of the sect of the Pharisees, as can be seen in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, and Paul’s exhortations to Timothy regarding those false teachers in Ephesus who desired to be “teachers of the Law” (I Tim. 1:7).

I Tim. 1:5-7 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. NASB

As was said before, this English phrase “teachers of the Law” is a translation of one Greek word—νομοδιδάσκαλος. That particular Greek word is only used three times in the New Testament and is a catchword in the New Testament for those belonging to the sect of the Pharisees who followed rabbinical discipleship with its strict hierarchy mindset,

²⁵⁸ Henry Bettenson, *The Later Christian Fathers* (Oxford University Press, London, 1974) Pg. 189

and/or, for those who were closely associated with such Pharisees. Besides its use in I Tim. 1:7, it is also used in Acts 5:34 which reads—

Acts 5:34 Ἀναστάς δέ τις ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ Φαρισαῖος, ὀνόματι Γαμαλιήλ, **νομοδιδάσκαλος**, τίμιος παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, ἐκέλευσεν ἔξω βραχὺ τι τοὺς ἀποστόλους ποιῆσαι.

Acts 5:34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a **teacher of the law** held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. NKJV

And it is used in Luke 5:17.

Luke 5:17 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν μιᾷ τῶν ἡμερῶν, καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν διδάσκων· καὶ ἦσαν καθήμενοι Φαρισαῖοι καὶ **νομοδιδάσκαλοι**, οἳ ἦσαν ἐληλυθότες ἐκ πάσης κώμης τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ Ἱερουσαλήμ· καὶ δύναμις κυρίου ἦν εἰς τὸ ἰᾶσθαι αὐτούς.

Luke 5:17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and **teachers of the law** sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. NKJV

These Christians of the sect of the Pharisees continued to plague the ministry of Paul, even though the council of Jerusalem ruled against them. Apparently, their thinking spread more and more throughout Asia. Even before Paul departed to be with the Lord, he said that Christians in Asia were beginning to forsake him, which, apparently, included the pattern of Church governance (II Tim. 1:15). They were Christians who believed that all believers (including believers from among the Gentiles) should keep the Law of Moses. They thought this way because they did not see a distinction between Israel and the Church. They believed the Church was the New Israel and, as such, should have its own form of a Sanhedrin governing the Church, as the Old Israel had its council or Sanhedrin with one elevated to be a President or *Nasi*. The only difference between the two was that the Christian Sanhedrin of the true Israel of God (in their mind) was ruled not by one known as a *Nasi*, but one known as a Bishop over a council of presbyters (elders).

But there may have been two other reasons, which we will now briefly touch upon. First, which we might label the third reason was this—

3) Christians trusted in Ignatius's claim of Divine guidance. Ignatius very clearly said that he was personally guided by Divine Revelation of God. In his epistle to the Philadelphians he said:

For even though certain persons desired to deceive me after the flesh, yet the spirit is not deceived, being from God; for it knoweth *whence it cometh and where it goeth*, and it searcheth out the hidden things. **I cried out, when I was among you; I spake with a loud voice, with God's own voice, Give ye heed to the bishop and the presbytery and deacons.** Howbeit there were those who suspected me of saying this, because I knew beforehand of the division of certain persons. **But He in whom I am bound is my witness that I learned it not from flesh of man; it was the preaching of the Spirit who spake on this wise; Do nothing without the bishop;** keep your flesh as a Temple of God; cherish union; shun divisions; be imitators of Jesus Christ, as He Himself also was of His Father.

I therefore did my own part, as a man composed unto union. But where there is division and anger, there God abideth not. Now the Lord forgiveth all men when they repent, if repenting they return to the unity of God and to the council of the bishop. I have faith in the grace of Jesus Christ, who shall strike off every fetter from you; and I entreat you, Do ye nothing in a spirit of factiousness but after the teaching of Christ. **For I heard certain persons saying, 'If I find it not in the charters, I believe it not in the Gospel.'** And when I said to them **'It is written,'** they answered me **'That is the question.'** But as for me, my charter is Jesus Christ, the inviolable charter is His cross and His death and His resurrection, and faith through Him; wherein I desire to be justified through your prayers.²⁵⁹

We notice that Ignatius is very firm regarding his Divine leading. He clearly states it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to him, saying, "Do nothing without the bishop." Yet when this guidance and Divine Revelation is questioned, and he is asked where in Scripture "it is written" (which I believe the word translated "charters" refers) notice he does not answer the question. He claims it is written, but when challenged, he ignores the question and simply claims Jesus Christ is his charter. Of course, that is true and everyone would agree with that, but if He is our charter, then we must give heed to Him who always appealed to Scripture. It was Jesus who repeatedly said, "It is written," and whenever He was questioned, He would always give the portion where it was written. Thus, these certain persons were not wrong in challenging Ignatius, asking him where "it is written concerning your claim to Divine

²⁵⁹ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 2, Part II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1889) pg. 565

guidance regarding this new form of Church governance. (It matters not who these Christians were or what was the condition of their spiritual walk, nor if they were wrong themselves. When they asked Ignatius why he was right in what he said, he should have answered their question, for even the Lord Jesus, when confronted by the devil, responded with an answer from Scripture—Matt. 4:1-11).

It seems that Ignatius may have seen himself as a prophet, one who saw visions, and so had the authority to change the governance of the Churches by Divine guidance. Consider an observation regarding this mindset of Ignatius that was made by J. B. Lightfoot.

“Of his administration, as a bishop, only one tradition has been preserved; and this refers to a matter of ritual. The historian Socrates (H. E. vi. 8) relates that Ignatius 'saw a vision of angels, praising the Holy Trinity in antiphonal hymns, and left the fashion of his vision as a custom to the Church in Antioch ... A tradition which appears so late does not deserve consideration, as containing any element of historical fact; but it is a matter of some little interest to speculate on its origin. **It seems then to be founded partly on the boast of Ignatius (Trail. 5) that he 'could comprehend heavenly things,** yea the arrays of the angels and the musterings of the principalities,' and partly on his directions (not however intended in this literal sense) to one and another church (Ephes. 4, Rom. 2), that they should 'form themselves into a chorus' and chant to the Father through Jesus Christ. Antiphonal singing indeed did not need to be suggested by a heavenly vision. It existed already among the heathen in the arrangements of the Greek chorus.²⁶⁰

This is not meant to impugn the character of Ignatius, for he was a martyr for Christ. We should honour him for this. Could we have been as faithful as he? Yet, at the same time, we must realize that being a martyr does not guarantee spirituality (cf. I Cor. 13:3). There is no such thing as infallibility in a man, unless such a man was inspired to write Scripture. Even the apostle Paul, who was one chosen to write Scripture (and so was infallible in what he wrote as Scripture) questioned himself sometimes as to whether what he said was of the Spirit, that is, when he was not sure that what he was writing was being inspired as Scripture (cf. I Cor. 7:40—of course, now we know it was inspired!).

Ignatius believed he had Divine authority to change the governance of the Churches as established by the apostles, yet we was not an author of Scripture. As such, Ignatius should have tested any perceived guidance

²⁶⁰ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. 1, Part II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1889) pg. 30-31

he might believe he had received, by the unchanging Word of God. It is the Holy Spirit who commands all Christians, which would include Ignatius, to test the spirits by the Word of God. He did not.

Additionally, what do we do when an equally respected and godly Christian claims the opposite of what Ignatius claimed? Clement in his epistle to the Corinthians says this regarding Church governance.

“ The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. **So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.** And this they did in no new fashion; **for indeed it had been written** concerning bishops and deacons from very ancient times; for thus saith the scripture in a certain place, *I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.*”

“...And our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that **there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office. For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons, and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration.** Those therefore who were appointed by them, or afterward by other men of repute with the consent of the whole Church, and have ministered unblameably to the flock of Christ in lowliness of mind, peacefully and with all modesty, and for long time have borne a good report with all—these men we consider to be unjustly thrust out from their ministration. **For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop's office unblameably and holily. Blessed are those presbyters who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe: for they have no fear lest anyone should remove them from their appointed place.** For we see that ye have displaced certain persons, though they were living honourably, from the ministration which they had respected blamelessly.²⁶¹”

Unlike Ignatius, Clement claims the apostle themselves, foreseeing the condition of the Churches after their departure, provided that the Church should continue to be governed by a plurality of bishops (elders). And not only that, also unlike Ignatius, he claims the apostles based their

²⁶¹ Saint Ignatius, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers, First Part, Vol. II, Second Edition* (Macmillan and Co., London, 1890) pg. 293-94

decision upon what is written, i.e. upon Scripture. Clement's appeal to what "had been written" was based, in part, on the Greet text of Isaiah 60:17b—"And I will appoint your rulers in peace and your overseers [bishops] in righteousness."^{262c}

So the question must be asked, "Whom do we believe?" Here we have two Christians, one in the East and one in the West. Both say they received their view of Church governance from God—Clement through the apostles, and Ignatius from a direct revelation of the Holy Spirit. When two men of God claim Divine guidance in the truth, but both disagree, which one do we believe? Of course, we know the answer—we believe the apostles in their writings that they left for us under the Divine Inspiration of God, and, being apostles, we imitate their ways, their life, and the practices of the Churches they established. We go to the Word of God! Of the two, it was Clement who appealed to Word of God as explained by the apostles. It matters not whether Clement was right or wrong in his assertion of these lists of qualified leaders left for the Churches. The point is that we have two Christians of equal stature who disagree with each other. (We must remember that this Clement was in all probability the co-worker mentioned by Paul in Phil. 4: 3.) Clement asserts that God desires the Church should be governed by a plurality of bishops and Ignatius asserts that God desires the Church should be governed by one bishop separated from and set above the other elders.

Perhaps, this explains why this new form of Church government did not take immediate hold in the Western Churches and might also explain why Ignatius seemed so forceful in his assertions; he was so insistent on his views because he was receiving resistance from those Churches established by Paul in the West who felt they should follow the Divine guidance received by Paul from the Holy Spirit regarding the governance of the Church, and not Ignatius' so-called Divine guidance.

In commenting upon this point, F. F. Bruce makes the following comment.

"The first unambiguous witness to the emergence of the single bishop is found in the correspondence which Ignatius sent to various quarters in 115 when he was on his way to martyrdom in Rome. Ignatius was himself bishop of Antioch in this sense, and he insisted that the institution of the single bishop was essential in the church and that his authority was paramount. To Ignatius, the

²⁶² Moisés Silva, tr., *Esaias, A New Translation of the Septuagint*, (Oxford Univ. Press, New York, 2007) pg. 871

bishop or someone delegated by him was the only church official who could conduct a valid baptism or Eucharist; even an *agape* must not take place without him. ‘Six out of the seven letters are filled with exaggerated and passionate exaltation of the authority and importance of the bishop’s office...To Ignatius the monarchical episcopate is literally an *idée fixe*. [B.H. Streeter, *The Primitive church* 1959, pp. 164,173)]’ **The vehemence of Ignatius’s protestations, in fact, is the plainest evidence that his view of the indispensable and supremely authoritative character of the office was far from being universally shared.** The one letter out of the seven in which Ignatius does not enlarge on the unique dignity of the bishop’s office is the letter which he wrote to the Roman church. This church is saluted in the most unqualified terms as pre-eminently worthy, but there is no hint that it enjoys the blessing of a monarchical bishop...No doubt these writings, belonging to the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, reflect the brief period of transition which very soon gave place to the universal institution of the single bishop; **but they do suggest that, when Ignatius wrote his letters, the situation was not such as he would have liked to see—hence the vehemence with which he urged his view.** But by the middle of the second century we may take it that the Ignatian ideal had prevailed almost everywhere.²⁶³

And rightly so did Ignatius receive resistance, for we are told to obey the apostles through their writings and examples they have left us in Scripture.

II Pet. 3:2 That ye may **be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles** of the Lord and Saviour: KJV

When we do this, being mindful of the words of the apostles and prophets, we find that the apostles established that the Churches should be governed by a plurality of bishops over each Church and not by one bishop over the others. The apostles, themselves, made sure that such governance was established in the Churches they founded.

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. (Act 14:23 NAS)

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and **appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--**⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not

²⁶³ F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1979) pg. 203-205

accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷ **For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God**, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

As such, we are called by God to obey the apostles, not Ignatius, no matter how godly he might have been. Our first loyalty and love is to the Lord; he must ever be our first love. It was our Lord who told us to obey those whom he sent out. It matters not that the Church was being attacked by heresy and false teachers causing division. That does not alter his command that we obey the apostles. Our Lord knew the future when He left us that charge. In fact, even the apostles knew beforehand such things would happen, yet that did not cause them to change the form of Church governance, all so that the unity of the Church might be preserved. The unity of the Church is inviolate; it cannot be destroyed, for the unity of the Church is the unity of the Spirit. Spirituality will preserve the unity of the Church, not a new form of Church governance envisioned up by the wisdom of man and human pragmatism.

Spirituality will always lead to the obedience of Scripture in faith. It will trust in the wisdom of Scripture even if in our soul we fear the worst. Faith will trust that our Chief Shepherd knows the best path for the Church, not a Christian leader set up to take His rightful place within the assembly, nor one who tells us “to regard the bishop as the Lord Himself.” Dear brethren, the only vicar of the Lord on earth is the Holy Spirit of God, not a man, no matter how godly such a one might be.

So when we look to Scripture and the instructions of the apostles, what do we find? We find them setting up a plurality of elders over the Churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) and we find that when Paul thinks he will never see the faces of the elders in Ephesus again (Acts 20: 25) he does not set up a bishop in place of himself, but leaves in place the governance of the Church by a plurality of bishops or elders. Moreover, even though he states that savage wolves will come to the Church, threatening its peace and unity, and even though he states that even among themselves elders will seek to destroy the unity of the Church, drawing away disciples after themselves (foreseeing the ultimate victory of Pharisaical discipleship) he does not counsel that they set up one bishop above the rest in order to preserve the blessed unity. But what does he counsel them when this occurs? He counsels them to go to the Word of God!

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. KJV

Paul's solution was fidelity to God's Word, not a change in the pattern of Church governance established by him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ignatius was simply wrong in his counsel to the Churches.

So these first three points may be the reasons why this change to a monarchical bishop began first in the East, in Antioch (where Ignatius was bishop and where the influence of Pharisaical Christians from Jerusalem was the greatest) and then in Asia, where those same Pharisaical Christians labored intently causing many to forsake the guidance of the apostle Paul; and it may explain why the change had not reached to the Churches in the West who remained firm in the apostolic example and command, and firm in their fidelity to Scripture. But there may have been one more reason, a fourth, which we now consider.

4) A misunderstanding of the role of the apostles as bishops within the Church at large because of a loss of spirituality among Christian leaders, which in turn lead to a failure of keeping the distinction between the work and the local Church.

But, dear brethren, before we continue, it should be mentioned that this loss of spirituality does not, necessarily, negate the fact that many of these leaders were still godly Christians, ones who greatly loved the Lord, willingly dying a martyr's death; it simply means, in this one point, they lost their way. It should not surprise us that such a thing could happen so quickly after the death of the apostles. Many Christian leaders were already going astray, losing their spiritual discernment in the things of God, even when the apostles were alive. When the apostle Paul was still alive, many were teaching justification by works of righteousness. When John was still alive, many were enamored with teachings of Balaam and the teachings of Jezebel (Rev. 2:14, 20). If there was a lack of spiritual discernment in some things when the apostles were alive, is it no wonder that there was a lack of spiritual discernment in some things after the apostles were dead? But we should not be overly righteous against them regarding this lack of discernment in the pattern of Church government. Are we not all sinners saved by grace? There may be many things we are doing because we have lost our way in like manner; we just

do not see it (e.g. man-made traditions set up in the assemblies in contradiction to the Word).

But, some may object and say that surely Christians who are persecuted cannot possibly be considered to be less than spiritual. In many cases, I would agree; as such, we should be careful to not look down on our brethren so persecuted. The Spirit of grace rests on them and we should never presume that we would fare any better than they, but being persecuted, by definition, does not, necessarily make them spiritual Christians, thereby, not liable to make mistakes. Obviously, that is not the case, for the Corinthian Church was a persecuted Church (see Acts 18), but that does not mean they were not carnal in many areas. Even some of those who sought preeminence in the Church were still carnal (II Cor. 10: 1-12). Indeed, Paul even says that one persecuted could still be less than spiritual. He wrote: And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (ICor. 13:3 NASB).

It is possible in Scripture for one to be right in many things but wrong in other things. Consider the example of King David, a prophet of God! He was right in many ways, yet in one point he lost his way; he lost his trust in the power of God when he decided to number Israel (II Sam. 24:10). Or we could consider Abraham, the father of us all, a friend of God, right in so many ways, but wrong when he lost his way and trust in the power of God, when he decided to deceive Pharaoh (Gen. 12: 8-20). None of us are impervious to losing our trust in Scripture and our faith in the wisdom and power of God. Too many times our own creativity and logic are used to solve our problems rather than a trust in God and a trust in wisdom of his Word. Too many times we rationalize away Scripture because we fear the future. We should not be too hard on those early Christians who lost their way in this matter; there is no guarantee that given the similar circumstances, we might not do the same thing!

But, in all of this, we must remember, if the Lord in his mercy sheds light on our own failures and departures from His Word, we then become responsible to repent and return to God's ways, just as David and Abraham repented and returned to God's way when the Lord showed them the error of their way.

However, sadly enough, the Church of the second century did not do this when light was shed on their way regarding this matter by the resistance of those Christian leaders in the West. Instead, they plowed forward with

their plan to protect the Church from evil—to such an extent that soon they overwhelmed all resistance, establishing this new form of Church governance even in the West, resulting, ultimately, in what we have today—a mere bishop in Rome claiming to be the vicar of Christ, not just over the local Church in a city (as Ignatius envisioned) but over the entire earth! Oh, the heartache and darkness that descended upon the Church because of this early departure by Christians who refused to trust in the Word of His grace.

So with this special plea to God for humility within our own hearts (by the grace of God) let us consider the fourth and final reason that may have led to this change in Church governance. We will present it as its own chapter in order to make a transition into the importance of maintaining a distinction between the work and the local Church.

We have already established that fact that the apostles were considered bishops. We have already mentioned that the apostles seemed to possess every spiritual gift needed for oversight and, as such, they were the only bishops in the Church in the beginning. We do not dispute that fact (see chapter on Apostles). But it must be understood that the apostles were given a unique place within the early Church. There is no such thing as apostolic succession in that the office of an apostle as bishop where it is passed on to another. Theirs' was a unique bishopric. Their work or ministry was not meant to become a localized ministry or oversight over just one local Church in a particular city. So, in order to understand why this is so, we must examine the nature of apostolic work from the perspective of their individual qualifications and characteristics and from the perspective of the purpose of their gift and work.

III Church and the Work

The Work of an Apostle

In Scripture it seems there are three types of apostles—the Twelve who were chosen by the Lord before His resurrection (with the exception of Matthias)—a secondary group of apostles chosen by the Lord after His resurrection (like Paul and James, the brother of our Lord), and a third group chosen by the Holy Spirit through the Church (like Epaphroditus, who is called an apostle in Phil. 2:25, as well as, perhaps, some pioneer missionaries even unto modern times). Others, who might have fallen into this third category, are Andronicus and Junias, i.e. if Junias is a man (see Rom 16:7), perhaps, Timothy, who we do know was an evangelist, but may also have been known as an apostle of Christ (cf. I Thess. 1:1 and 2:6), as well as and others sent out by the Church (II Cor. 8:23).

It is not seen in our English translations, but Paul says that certain ones were sent out as apostles from the Church in II Cor. 8:23. In fact, Henry Alford provides his own English translation of the verse in II Cor. 8:23 as follows—“Whether concerning Titus,—he is my partner and fellow-worker toward you: or our brethren,—they are apostles of the churches, and the glory of Christ.”²⁶⁴ And in his Greek New Testament he provides the following comment on this verse—

“**they are Apostles** (in the more general sense of Acts xiv.14; 1Thess. ii. 6; Phil. ii. 25) **of the churches** (i.e. ‘are of the churches, what we are of the Lord’—persons sent out with authority), **the glory of Christ** (i.e. men whose work tends to Christ’s glory).”²⁶⁵

The first group was a closed group never to be repeated during this dispensation of grace. They had a unique responsibility that was different from the other two groups. The Twelve were specifically chosen to bear witness to “that which was from the beginning,” as the apostle John specifically declares in his first epistle.

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have

²⁶⁴ Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1955) pg. 1132

²⁶⁵ Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament, Vol. II* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1958) pg. 684-685

handled, concerning the Word of life—² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

None but a small group of men could fulfill this commission. The main qualification was that they witnessed all that Jesus said and began to do from the beginning of His work until the time of His ascension to the right hand of God on high. Obviously, Paul would not have qualified for that ministry, for he was a unbeliever when Jesus began his ministry at the baptism of John, nor could even James, the Lord's brother, qualify for such a ministry for he was not with the Lord during this time; he was with his mother Mary in Nazareth (cf. Mark. 3:31-32; Matt. 13:55-56). Peter speaks of this qualification in Acts 1:21-26.

Acts 1:21-26 **“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. KJV

Additionally, there could never be others like the Twelve, for they were given foundational responsibility in the Church, represented by there being only twelve foundation stones in the New Jerusalem which is called the Bride of Christ—the Church (Rev. 21:14). Also the Twelve are given places of authority over the twelve tribes of Israel during the Millennium unlike any of the other apostles (Matt. 19:28).

And, finally, the Twelve were given a specific commission not given to others, as found in Matt. 28:19-20. They were called to “go into all the world” (unto foreign countries, which every Christian is not called to do); they were called to make disciples of all nations, i.e. to preach the gospel, to make converts (which every Christian is called to do). They were called to personally baptize those they led to the Lord (which every Christian is not called to personally do, it being done sometimes by others in the Church). And they were called to teach them all things Christ commanded them (which every Christian is not called to do since everyone is not gifted to be a teacher and, obviously, everyone could not

do so because they were not there to hear all that Christ had personally commanded them).

So we see that the Twelve had a unique place in the Church never to be repeated by others. But Scripture shows us that there were a secondary group of apostles which were sent out by the Lord Jesus. This secondary type of apostle was, indeed, open to others so gifted, and Paul speaks to the signs of one so gifted.

First and foremost, it seems apostles had to be ones who had seen the Lord, at least those apostles in the first and second grouping; they either saw the Lord in His incarnation before His resurrection (as the Twelve) or in a post-resurrection appearance (as Paul). Paul states the following in I Cor. 9:1.

I Cor. 9:1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? **have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?** are not ye my work in the Lord? KJV

The Twelve, of course, as we already mentioned, saw the Lord at the beginning of His ministry, and also saw Him after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). But those apostles in the secondary group were not with the Lord from the beginning, but they did see the Lord in His post-resurrection glory.²⁶⁶ Paul states this in I Cor. 15:3-9.

I Cor. 15:3-9 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: ⁵ And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: ⁶ After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. ⁷ **After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.** ⁸ **And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.** ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

In these verses, Paul clearly says that the Lord appeared first to the Twelve (which obviously must include Matthias as one of the Twelve, for Judas Iscariot was dead at this time) and then, not only to him (Paul), but also to James, the Lord's brother, who, while not being one of the Twelve, was still called an apostle (Gal. 1:19) and so would have been included in this secondary group of apostles who had seen the Lord.

²⁶⁶ This does not mean, of course, that some like James, the brother of the Lord, might not also seen the Lord before His resurrection.

Equally, since Barnabas and Silas were called apostles (Acts 14:14; also cf. I Thess. 2:6 with Acts 17:4, 10), they also must have seen the Lord in a post-resurrection appearance. (Perhaps, they were within the group of five hundred brethren to whom the Lord appeared—I Cor. 15:6). In any case, it seems that the first qualification of an apostle within this secondary grouping was that they must have seen the Lord.²⁶⁷

This fact, in itself, more than likely, was a safeguard against claims made by many that they also were apostles. It states that the Church in Ephesus used to try those who said they were apostles and were not, finding them to be liars (Rev. 2:2). How could they be found liars? Perhaps, some of them claimed to see the Lord after His resurrection, yet, maybe, there was a list with the names of all those five-hundred disciples to whom the Lord appeared. It would not be abnormal for a Jewish Christian to keep such a list with all the names of the five-hundred or so who saw the Lord (as they were meticulous in keeping lists, such as their genealogies, as well as making a list of the names of the Twelve, and according to tradition, there was a list of the seventy disciples of the Lord²⁶⁸) and so it may have been as easy as checking a list of names for those who had seen the Lord. If a false apostle claimed to be part of that group, one had to simply check a list of names.

Now, of course, if knowledge of such a list became commonplace it would be easy to prove or disprove a claim made by someone. But if a list was not commonplace amongst all the Churches (which is very likely, because of the lack of mass communication) it might take months, if not years, to send a letter to a distant Church, asking for confirmation. Therefore, this may be why Paul lists other qualifications of a genuine apostle. He was helping Churches who had to try those who said they were apostles and were not (Rev. 2:2). In I Cor. 4:9-11 and in II Cor. 1:24 he relates a number of these characteristics.

²⁶⁷ Of course, they must have also been gifted to be an apostle. Over five hundred people saw the Lord after His resurrection, yet, obviously, that in itself did not make one an apostle.

²⁶⁸ See the *Extant Works and Fragments of Hippolytus of Rome: The Same Hippolytus on the Seventy Apostles*. The point with this traditional list of names is not whether this list is correct. Obviously, much of it was made up. The point is it implies that the concept of keeping a list of names was not unusual. Perhaps, such lists existed in those early days and subsequent lists, such as this one by Hippolytus, were poor attempts to restore the original lists to the church.

I Cor. 4:9-13 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a **spectacle** to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ We are **fools** for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are **weak**, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are **without honor**. ¹¹ To this present hour we are **both hungry and thirsty**, and **are poorly clothed**, and are **roughly treated**, and are **homeless**; ¹² and we **toil, working with our own hands**; when we are **reviled**, we bless; when we are **persecuted**, we endure; ¹³ when we are **slandered**, we try to conciliate; we have become as the **scum of the world**, the **dregs of all things**, *even* until now.

II Cor. 1:24 **Not that we lord it over your faith**, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

Paul says man that is an apostle is a spectacle to the world, a fool for Christ; he is weak; he has no honour; many times he is hungry and thirsty; he is poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, and one who toils, working with his own hands to support himself and others. He is reviled, persecuted, and slandered, treated as the scum of the world, the dreg of all things. And, finally, he is humble, never “lording it over” the lives of other Christians.

These are the words that describe a true apostle. Compare these to some today who claim to be an apostle. Compare the characteristics of a first century minister with that of those of a twenty-first century minister. Let's consider a few of these characteristics.

A true apostle is not distinguished, but lives without honour and prestige. A person today who claims to be an apostle but thrives upon recognition of his position is not a true apostle, for the Holy Spirit does not appoint men to be apostles who do not know how to take up their cross, despising the shame, just like their Master before them. The word “despising” means to “disregard,” “take it not into account.” In other words, our Lord did not think of Himself and the honour that was due Him, as King, as being more important than His work upon the cross. He was willing to undergo the shame and dishonour so that others might live. A true apostle will never seek his own honour. If such a one does, he is not an apostle of Christ.

A true apostle never demands submission; he never lords it over the faith of others. Paul clearly said that he did not set himself over the Church as a lord in II Cor. 1:24.

II Cor. 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

The Greek word translated “lord it over” is κυριεύω. The Lord Jesus used the same word in Luke 22:25-26.

Luke 22:25-26 And He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'²⁶ “But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. NASB

Men love to exercise authority having others look up to them. It flatters their pride. A true apostle will never love such a thing, but will rather seek to serve by example, exercising a spiritual authority over others by putting themselves under others as servants. This does not mean that they will acquiesce in submission to the wishes and thoughts of others; they will not. They can never compromise the truth by acquiescing to men rather than God the Holy Spirit. They will boldly proclaim the truth. That is their spiritual authority. But they will never demand submission, punishing those who oppose them by putting them out of the Church because they simply disagree with them regarding some matter that has nothing to do with the Faith or an essential doctrine, or because of some lack of respect. That is what the Rabbis would do, but not an apostle.

John 9:32-34 “Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered and said to him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?’ **And they put him out.**” NASB

False apostles or leaders love to “lord it over the saints,” demanding submission.

Gal 2:4 But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

II Cor. 11:20 “For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face.” KJV

Gal. 4:17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. NASB

A true apostle respects every believer’s liberty in Christ Jesus for they own Jesus as the only Lord, so they never would presume to “lord” it

over others (Gal. 5:1). They believed there was only one who could rightfully “lord it over others,” and that was Jesus Christ, for He was King of kings and Lord of lords. In fact, the apostle Paul uses the very same Greek word, κυριεύω, in Rom. 14:9, of the Lord, for which he would not use of himself in II Cor. 1: 24, and which the Lord would not allow his apostles to do in Luke 22:25.

Rom. 14:9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. NASB

A very literal rendering of this verse would read as follows

“For unto this, Christ also died and rose and lived, so that He might **lord it over** *the* dead and *the* living.”

Only one Person in the entire universe has the right to “lord it over” another and that is the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ignatius was wrong to suggest that a bishop should be treated like the Lord. No one deserves that honour; no one should ever expect that honour, and no one should ever demand that honour. False apostles, however, demand it all the time, but a true apostle of Christ would never dream of doing such a thing, nor would he ever dream of “lording it over” another human being, for that right belongs only to his Lord.

A true apostle of Christ is poor, working with their own hands before making merchandise of their ministry. A person who charges money for the things of his ministry or for his ministry in seminars or conferences is not an apostle. How shameful it is today, some men, claiming to be an apostle of Christ, take money for the books they write, or money for recordings of their teaching, or they charge someone money to attend a seminar or Bible conference. Such men are false apostles. A true apostle will never “peddle” their teaching (II Cor. 2:17).

II Cor. 2:17 For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. NASB

The Greek word καπηλεύω in II Cor. 2:17 is better translated “peddling” as in the NASB and the NKJV than “corrupt” as in the King James Version. The word simply means to sell things as in a retail trade, and does not, necessarily, mean to sell by deception. It was used of the legitimate selling of goods, either as a retailer or by a peddler who takes his goods from town to town selling his wares in order to make a living.

It is unfortunate that sometimes the word is limited only to dishonest selling, as if Paul was saying that selling or peddling the things of God is all right as long as one does not markup things exorbitantly, thus making dishonest gain, or, as long as it is marked up fairly, then there is nothing wrong in charging for the ministry of the Word. Dear brethren, the Greek word was never limited to dishonest gain. It simply meant making any gain, honest or otherwise.

Even the Jewish Rabbis had a moral and virtuous mindset regarding the use of the Word of God to make money. One of their sayings, commonly practiced by the Rabbis of Paul's day, was "turn not the Torah into a spade to dig with." Jewish writer Solomon Schechter said this regarding this common saying of the time in which Paul wrote.

This very R. Zadok, whom I have just mentioned, says: "Make not the Torah a crown wherewith to aggrandise thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig;" while Hillel considers it as a mortal sin to derive any material profit from the words of the Torah."²⁶⁹

Maimonides, writing even later in the Middle Ages, but still preserving this tradition, went even further saying this.

"He who resolves upon occupying himself solely with the study of the Divine law, not to attend to any business or trade, but to live on charity, defiles the sacred name, heaps contumely upon the Divine law, extinguishes the light of the law, causes evil to himself, and forfeits his claim to future life. Because it is not permitted to draw any worldly advantage from the law. Our sages remark: "Whoever draws worldly advantage from the words of the Divine law forfeits his life." Our sages further enjoin: "Do not make them [the words of the Divine law] a crown for the sake of aggrandisement, nor a spade to dig therewith." They still further enjoin: "Love labour and shun rank;" and every occupation in the Divine law, unaccompanied by trade is ultimately sure to become futile and cause iniquity. The end of such a man will be to waylay people."²⁷⁰

It must be remembered that Paul was writing from a Jewish perspective being educated under Gamaliel as a Pharisee. A Rabbi never would dream of selling the truth of God's Word for money. Paul, as an apostle

²⁶⁹ Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (Macmillan, New York, 1909) pg. 154

²⁷⁰ Moses Maimonides, Elias Soloweyczik, tr., *Yad-Hachasaka, Or Mishne Torah Hilchoth Melahim, Containing Laws Concerning Kings, and Their Wars* (Thos. William Nicholson, London, 1863) pg. 123-24

of Christ, never used his ministry as a means of livelihood; he offered his ministry for free.

Paul followed this practice throughout his life (Acts 20: 33-35) earning his way with his trade—a tentmaker. During the times when he was not able to do so, for one reason or the other, he would live by faith, trusting in the provision of God (II Cor. 11:7-9; Phil. 4: 10-19). He would never ask for money, either for himself or for his ministry. Such a thought was anathema to him. Like his Lord, he never asked for money or charged for his ministry.

He imitated the Lord in this. The Lord never charged anyone for his ministry. He gave all things freely! And He is the archetype of every man who claims to be an apostle, for He is the true Apostle (Heb. 3:1). Can one imagine our Lord charging money for someone to come and hear His Sermon on the Mount? False apostles never can trust in God for their support. They cannot live by faith; they must ask for offerings and money for themselves, and/or for themselves and their ministry (of which they then will take a salary). They constantly make known their needs in order to be supported rather than relying only upon God in prayer to move the hearts of His people to give freely as the Holy Spirit moves them.

This was such a gauge of truth that, during the last part of the first century, a prophet, let alone an apostle, was considered false, if such a one ever asked for money. The *Didache*, known as the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, written at that time had this to say regarding this subject.

“But concerning the **apostles and prophets**, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do. Let every **apostle** that cometh to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle goeth away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodgeth; **but if he ask money, he is a false prophet**...whoever saith in the Spirit, **Give me money, or something else, ye shall not listen to him**; but if he saith to you to give for others' sake who are in need, let no one judge him.”²⁷¹

²⁷¹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, et al, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, Volume 7 (Christian Literature Company, Buffalo, 1886) pg. 380-81

A true apostle was poor, not rich. It was Paul that said apostles were known as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things. They were rich spiritually, but they were poor materially like their Saviour.

Now, of course, many point to I Cor. 9:13-14 to justify their asking for money in ministry or the peddling of their works for profit. The portion of Scripture they appeal to says this.

I Cor. 9:13-14 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. NASB

A couple points said, will disabuse anyone from thinking this justifies the current mindset of making merchandise in the things of God. First, the Holy Spirit compares the Lord's statement that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel with the priests in the Old Testament eating food of the sacrifices within the Temple, not to the tithes that were due them. Thus, the Holy Spirit limits this comparison to that which had to be eaten within the Temple. It is important to understand that this verse refers only to the priests and not to Levites. Alford, rightly observes—

“Meyer rightly remarks, that οἱ τὰ ἱερὰ ἐργαζόμενοι can only mean the *priests*, *not including the Levites*: and therefore that both clauses apply to the same persons.”²⁷²

Paul is not talking about the tithes that were due the Levites (Num. 18:21). These were different from the tithes that belonged to the priest; but he is not talking about those tithes either, i.e. the tithes of the tithes that were given by the Levites to the priests (Num. 18:26-28). Nor is he talking about money that might be made from the sale of the skins of a burnt offering that belonged to a priest (Lev. 7:8), nor to the priests portion from the presentation of the first fruits, nor to the priests portion from vows (Lev. 27:21). He was only referring, broadly speaking, to those portions of sacrifices brought by the children of Israel that could be eaten—he was referring to the grain offerings, the peace and thanksgiving offerings, the sin offerings, and the trespass offerings. It was these offerings to which the priests had a right to eat. The grain offering is referenced in Lev. 6:16, the peace and thanksgiving offering

²⁷² Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol.II* (Rivingtons, London, 1863) pg. 545

in Lev.7: 11-15, 31-34, the sin offering in Lev. 6:25-26, and the trespass offering in Lev.7:5-7.

This distinction is important for it defines for us what the Lord meant by the phrase “live from the gospel” It simply meant having food and covering, for the food of these sacrifices was only eaten in the house or Temple of God, not in the houses of the priests, which, in some cases, might be outside of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 1:23, 39-40). Thus, “food” was represented by the priest portion of the sacrifices and “covering” was represented by the house or Temple of God.

This certainly reminds us of Paul’s exhortation in I Tim. 6:8 that we should be content with “food” and “covering” (the word covering, more than likely, refers to a shelter or a dwelling, but some believe it refers to clothing and some believe it refers to both).

I Tim. 6:8 And if we have **food and covering**, with these we shall be content.
NASB

This thought is all the more confirmed for us, because the Lord referred to “food” and “covering” (meaning a meal and a house or shelter) in his instructions to the seventy in Luke 10:1-9. In fact, this portion of Scripture is the only Scripture that approximates Paul’s assertion that the Lord commanded those who preach the gospel to live from the gospel. This is what He said:

Luke 10:1-9 “Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come.² And He was saying to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.’³ ‘Go your ways; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.’⁴ ‘Carry no purse, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way.’⁵ ‘**And whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace *be* to this house.’**’⁶ ‘And if a man of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him; but if not, it will return to you.’⁷ ‘**And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages.**’⁸ Do not keep moving from house to house.’⁸ ‘And whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you;’⁹ and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” NASB

Thus we see that what the Lord meant by “those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” was that provision should be made for their “food and covering.” I Timothy 6:8 and Luke 10:1-9 taken together with Paul’s example of the priests in the Temple would seem to confirm this.

Thus, Paul was declaring that apostles, who preached the gospel, had the expectation that the necessities of life would be provided for by those who believed. But, by the use of the example of the priests in the Temple and by reference to the Lord's command, Paul is saying it has to do with basic necessities of life, not with large salaries meant to support a well-to-do lifestyle.

And, most certainly, a genuine apostle, being content with food and covering, would never would ask for money for themselves or their ministry, or live off the Word of God. Can you imagine Paul charging money for his epistles, some which are no longer extant? Or can you imagine Paul asking ones to copy his writings and then taking royalties from their sale? No doubt he would not begrudge those who copied or printed those writings, reimbursement, but I cannot imagine Paul himself would take a portion from the sale. A genuine apostle trusted in the provision of God to move the peoples heart just as the Old Testament priests trusted in the people to offer up their grain, peace and thanksgiving offerings in sacrifice to God (aside from the sin and trespass offering that were required when sin and trespass occurred).

But we know that sometimes Israel neglected the things of God, going after idols. And we know that sometimes they neglected the tithe, robbing God. But, beloved, did God ever give a command in the Law that the priests were to ask for peace offerings or grain offerings for their support when this happened? In fact, when the spiritual life and faith of the priests was so low that they resorted to supporting themselves by taking money for their service, they were justly condemned by God.

Micah 3:11 "Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us."
NASB

This was the mindset of the early Church. An apostle of Christ was known by his attitude toward money and by his faith in the provision of God. He would accept an offering if given, but he would never personally ask for an offering or money, nor do I believe he would demand royalties from books he might have written, for that would be a sign of a lack of trust in God. (I know this is an acceptable practice today and I do not want to blindly judge one today who takes royalties. That must be between them and the Lord. But it seems in the first century a Christian minister would never dream of doing such a thing.)

It is sad that this mindset has been lost today. Christian leaders routinely ask for money for their ministry or they charge money for materials or other things to support their ministry. Many websites have an online store where they sell things to support their work. They have no trust that if their work is of God, that God will provide for all their needs as he did for the priest of the Old Testament and as the Lord did for his apostles and for the seventy. They have turned the work of the Lord into a place of marketing and business—a house of merchandise, the very mindset that prompted the Lord’s righteous anger toward those in the Temple (John 2:14-17).

Dear brethren, God always provides for that which He orders. We must only have faith and a submissive heart to God’s will. Consider the testimony of this elder or pastor, which, if true of him, would certainly be true of one who claims to be an apostle. George Muller, who served as an elder in an assembly in Bristol, said this—

“About this time I began to have conscientious objections against any longer receiving a stated salary... For these reasons I stated to the brethren, at the end of October 1830, that I should for the future give up having any regular salary. After I had given my reasons for doing so, I read Philippians iv., and told the saints, that if they still had a desire to do something towards my support, by voluntary gifts, I had no objection to receive them, though ever so small, either in money or provisions. A few days after it appeared to me, that there was a better way still; for if I received personally every single gift, offered in money, both my own time and that of the donors would be much taken up; and in this way also the poor might, through temptation, be kept from offering their pence, a privilege of which they ought not to be deprived; and some also might in this way give more than if it were not known who was the giver; so that it would still be doubtful whether the gift were given grudgingly or cheerfully. For these reasons especially, there was a box put up in the chapel, over which was written, that whoever had a desire to do something towards my support, might put his offering into the box. At the same time it appeared to me right, that henceforth I should ask no man, not even my beloved brethren and sisters, to help me, as I had done a few times according to their own request, as my expenses, on account of travelling much in the Lord's service, were too great to be met by my usual income. For unconsciously I had thus again been led, in some measure, to trust in an arm of flesh; going to man, instead of going to the Lord at once. To come to this conclusion before God, required more grace than to give up my salary.”

“We leaned on the arm of the Lord Jesus. It is now twenty-nine years, since we set out in this way, and we do not in the least regret the step we then took. Our God also has, in his tender mercy, given us grace to abide in the same mind concerning the above points, both as it regards principle and practice; and this

has been the means of letting us see the tender love and care of our God over his children, even in the most minute things, in a way in which we never experimentally knew them before; and it has, in particular, made the Lord known to us more fully than we knew him before, as a prayer hearing God. As I have written down how the Lord has been pleased to deal with us since, I shall be able to relate some facts concerning this matter, as far as they may tend to edification..."

Nov. 18th, 1830.—Our money was reduced to about eight shillings. When I was praying with my wife in the morning, the Lord brought to my mind the state of our purse, and I was led to ask him for some money. About four hours after, we were with a sister at Bishopsteignton, and she said to me, "Do you want any money?" "I told the brethren," said I, "dear sister, when I gave up my salary, that I would for the future tell the Lord only about my wants." She replied, "But he has told me to give you some money. About a fortnight ago I asked him, what I should do for him, and he told me to give you some money; and last Saturday it came again powerfully to my mind, and has not left me since, and I felt it so forcibly last night, that I could not help speaking of it to Brother P." My heart rejoiced, seeing the Lord's faithfulness, but I thought it better not to tell her about our circumstances, lest she should be influenced to give accordingly; and I also was assured, that, if it were of the Lord, she could not but give. I therefore turned the conversation to other subjects, but when I left she gave me two guineas... On January 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1831, I had repeatedly asked the Lord for money, but received none..."

On the evening of January 8th I left my room for a few minutes, and was then tempted to distrust the Lord, though he had been so gracious to us, in that he not only up to that day had supplied all our wants, but had given us also those answers of prayer, which have been in part just mentioned. I was so sinful, for about five minutes, as to think it would be of no use to trust in the Lord in this way. I also began to say to myself, that I had perhaps gone too far in living in this way. But, thanks to the Lord! this trial lasted but a few minutes. He enabled me again to trust in him, and Satan was immediately confounded; for when I returned to my room (out of which I had not been absent ten minutes), the Lord had sent deliverance. A sister in the Lord who resided at Exeter, had come to Teignmouth, and brought us £2. 4s.; so the Lord triumphed, and our faith was strengthened. Jan. 10. To-day, when we had again but a few shillings, £5. was given to us, which had been taken out of the box. I had, once for all, told the brethren, who had the care of these temporal things, to have the kindness to let me have the money every week; but as these beloved brethren either forgot to take it out weekly, or were ashamed to bring it in such small sums, it was generally taken out every three, four, or five weeks. As I had stated to them, however, from the commencement, that I desired to look neither to man nor the box, but to the living God, I thought it not right on my part, to remind them of my request to have the money weekly, lest it should hinder the testimony which I wished to give, of trusting in the living God alone. It was on this account that

on January 28th, when we had again but little money, though I had seen the brethren on January the 24th open the box and take out the money, I would not ask the brother, in whose hands it was, to let me have it; but, standing in need of it, as our coals were almost gone, I asked the Lord to incline his heart to bring it, and but a little time afterwards it was given to us, even £ 1. 8s. 6d. I would here mention, that since the time I began living in this way, I have been kept from speaking, either directly or indirectly, about my wants, at the time I was in need. But whilst I have refrained, and do still habitually refrain, from speaking to my fellow creatures about my wants at the time, I desire to speak well of the Lord's goodness, after he has delivered me; not only in order that he thus may get glory, but also that the children of God may be encouraged to trust in him. On February 14th we had again very little money, and, whilst praying, I was led to ask the Lord, graciously to supply our wants; and the instant that I got up from my knees, a brother gave me £1., which had been taken out of the box.”²⁷³

A true apostle of Christ will be content with food and covering, trusting only in the provision of His heavenly Father to provide for all his needs without asking for money or support for either himself, or for his ministry (that is, if he receives any remuneration from such ministry, such as an expected salary) nor will he ever demand money for his services or for any ministry he provides, which today might be like demanding royalties from any book offered for the spiritual well-being of the flock. We are not talking, of course, about any freewill offerings given, as Paul sometimes received, but are talking about things like an expected remuneration that is given for any type of ministry. I know some will disagree with this, and that is fine; each one must decide in his own heart before the Lord (Rom. 14:5). But at the minimum, I would hope, one would pause and make sure that one's living off the gospel follows the pattern of the Lord and His apostles. I do not think the Lord would ever require money for any type of ministry, nor do I think Paul the apostle would ever offer ministry for money, as he was intent on providing all things freely as his Lord. The point in all this is that contentment and trust is surely a true sign of an apostle of Christ.

As Paul the apostle said—” The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the Churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for

²⁷³ George Muller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lords Dealings with George Muller* (J. Nisbet & Company, London 1860) pg. 68-73

their children. And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? (II Cor. 12:12-15 NASB).

In this context, this verse references another aspect of an apostle, which we will briefly mention before speaking of the final sign of a true apostle. An apostle will have his ministry confirmed by God with signs, wonders and miracles. Such signs and wonders always accompanied Paul, Peter and other apostles (Acts 5:12; 14:3). God would perform miracles through them. Now, this is thought by many to be the most important sign of a true apostle; men will emphasize this sign more than any other, but, in reality, this sign should be emphasized the least for even Satan can appear as an angel of light doing supposed miracles and wonders (cf. II Cor. 11:13-14; II Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13-14). What is more important is the character of an apostle's life, especially when it comes to money, not the presence of miracles or wonders. What is more important is a character which reflects the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, for us became poor, suffering for us with all long-suffering and tender love. Below is a picture of a true apostle. I will string a number of different verses of the Bible together, written by the apostle Paul, to show forth the true nature of an apostle of Christ. One who claims to be an apostle or a servant of God should always be measured against this.

“And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power... that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you... so that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonour, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet

always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things... For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now... Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." (A stringing together of—I Cor. 2:4; II Cor. 4:7-12; 6:3-10; I Cor. 4:9:13 NASB; II Cor. 12: 9-10 NKJV; Heb 13:13-14).

The final sign of an apostle we would like to look at is that spoken by Paul in Rom. 15:20.

Romans 15:20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation. KJV

A true apostolic work will always be a pioneer work. An apostle by definition is one sent. He is one who is led by God to "go into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature." His purpose is to bring light to dark places, just like our Master, the very first Apostle (Heb. 3:1 with Matt. 4:13-16). But the work of an apostle is not just to preach the gospel, an apostle is also called by God make sure that those who believe are built into a Church in each locality. Their purpose is to lay a foundation that others are then able to build upon; their primary purpose is not to build upon a foundation that others have already laid. Thus, the ministry of an apostle is extra-local, not local, and this is what Ignatius and other leaders in the early Church apparently forgot. Yes, an apostle was a bishop, but his oversight was not confined to one locality but was extra-local (even James, as an apostle of Christ in Jerusalem, wrote to the twelve tribes scattered abroad). God never intended those who followed in their footsteps to ever become solitary bishops restricted to one locality like Ignatius desired. When apostles finished their ministry of oversight within one locality, after laying the foundation of a Church, the

governance of their bishopric would be turned over to a plurality of men who had been established as bishops or elders within the assembly, never to one man who would take a place as a sole bishop over the Church. There was always a plurality of bishops within each Church; it was never restricted to one man (Phil. 1:1).

It seems the final reason the governance of the Church was changed, was because Christian leaders did not understand the true nature of the work of an apostle in relationship to the local Church. If they truly understood that relationship, they never would have taught “apostolic succession.” Scripture makes a distinction between the “work” and the “local Church,” a distinction which is little understood today, but a distinction absolutely necessary for the proper well-being of the Church and the proper well-being of God’s Work. It is not enough that we pattern our Churches after a New Testament Church; we must also pattern our work after the New Testament Work, and it is that to which we now wish to turn our attention.

If the second-century Church would have understood and maintained this pattern, I do not believe they ever would have thought a change in the governance of the Church was good or necessary. They would have understood an apostle’s work was never intended to be localized, nor was it ever intended to be transferred to another Christian bishop who was then restricted to one locality. The whole concept of apostolic succession was derived from this mindset and a misunderstanding of the nature of apostolic work. That is why we have been focusing so much upon the nature of a true apostle. His work was always intended to be a pioneer work. Paul was always looking for new fields of endeavour (Rom. 15:18-24). An apostle never gave up his extra-local work for a restricted local work. As such, there is no such thing as an apostolic succession of bishops within a locality. If apostolic succession ever did exist (which it did not) it would have been an apostolic succession in an extra-local work, not in a local work. This was the purpose of a true apostle’s gift and work; it was so ordained by God in this way for it brought about the health and the perfecting of each and every Church they oversaw in love. So with that in mind, let us look at this final point which many forget in the second century.

The Work and the Local Church

Ephesians 4:7-16 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. ⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: ¹⁴ That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: ¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. KJV

Paul declares in these verses that the Lord Jesus Christ has given gifts to men. Some take this to mean that Christ gave certain men the gift of apostleship, the gift of being a prophet, evangelist, etc. Others take it to mean that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, etc. are themselves the gifts that were given to men. Either way, the point is that gifts were given so that Christians could be perfected or equipped unto two functions—the work of ministry and the building up of the Body of Christ.

The word translated “perfecting” in the KJV, and “equipping” in the NASB is the Greek word *καταρτισμός*. The word carries the meaning of “perfection.” It bespeaks a state where everything is brought into “perfect working order,” a state wherein everything is seen as “functioning normally.” This is the only place this word is used in the entire New Testament. And what is so interesting (because Paul used this word with those who lived in the city of Ephesus) is the fact that this same word is used in extra-biblical literature of a Greek physician from Ephesus! His name was Soranus (c. 100 A.D.) and he uses the word for the “setting of a bone.” ²⁷⁴ In other words, he was using the word of the

²⁷⁴ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian*

state of a bone, having been reset after being broken, which, of course bespeaks the bone being reset to its original condition.

Another extra-biblical usage of the word, which will help us understand the intended meaning of the word as used by Paul, is given by Liddell and Scott in their lexicon. The first gloss they give for the word in this usage is *restoration*—

καταρτισμός, ὁ, *restoration, reconciliation*, Clem. Al. 638.²⁷⁵

If we were to use that gloss, Ephesians 4:11-12 would then read as follows—

Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;¹² For the **restoration** of the saints, unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ:

This brings us to a cognate usage of this noun, its verbal form, καταρτίζω; it is used by Matthew in his Gospel in 4:21. Additionally, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker define it in their Lexicon as—to “restore to its former condition, put to rights...”²⁷⁶ Moreover, the King James Version renders the verse reads as follows—

Matt. 4:21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, **mending** (καταρτίζοντες) their nets; and he called them. KJV

Matthew uses it for the “mending” of nets. In other words, the nets were being mended or repaired by James and John. They were being “restored” to their former condition, making sure they were being kept in good working order, i.e. in the condition they were in before they became altered or damaged by that day’s fishing. One could say they set time aside for the “perfecting of their nets” for the next day’s fishing.

So, when Paul uses its cognate in Eph. 4:12, and says that God gave gifts for the perfecting or equipping of the saints, he is saying they are given for “restoring,” for the “mending,” or the “resetting” of the saints so that

Literature, Second Edition (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979) pg. 418

²⁷⁵ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Seventh Edition* (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1883) pg. 771

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 417

they can operate and remain as they were originally intended by God. This is why it is so important to follow the pattern given by God for His Church. If the pattern is altered or changed, one destroys the proper function intended by God for the Church. Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor and teachers to maintain and protect this order and function by the maintenance of the Truth, allowing the saints as the body of Christ to minister to one another in love, to build each other up in love unto a perfect man, a mature Church that is sound in the Faith.

So when Christian leaders think they know of a better way for the Church to function or be governed, and so change its governance, they are saying that they know better than God as to how the Church should function properly. It would be no different (if we might make up an story) of a servant, let's say by the name of Joseph, who having joined the disciples James and John in their fishing business, one day decided to change the manner in which they both taught him to mend their nets. He did so simply because he thought he knew of a better way than they (even though the business was not his, but theirs, and he was just a servant, not a partner). And so, during the next fishing expedition, something happens. The fish that were caught escaped from the net because the net broke under the great weight of so many fish. And it broke because Joseph had repaired the net incorrectly. He did not restore it to its original condition.

What happened was that Joseph thought it would be better to weave more netting than James and John had instructed him to weave; he thought by having more netting, thus having smaller open spaces in the net, the net would become more effective in catching more fish. But what Joseph did not understand, which James and John did understand from their many years of experience gained from fishing the Sea of Galilee, was at that particular time of the year a smaller fish would be in abundance which they did not want to catch—thus the reason for their use of the wider netting. So because Joseph increased the weave into a finer netting, the smaller fish (which James and John did not want to catch at that time) were not able to escape and thus the weight of all those smaller fish with the larger fish broke the net. The servant did not realize James and John wanted a wider netting so all those smaller fish could escape, leaving only the larger fish. But it was not for the servant Joseph to know this. If he had simply trusted his employers and done what he was told to do, the net would not have broken. (Of course, not being a fisherman, I am not sure if such a scenario is even possible, but I simply postulated such a scenario to illustrate a point.)

Obviously, in this example the servant was presumptuous because he did not trust in the experience, knowledge and wisdom of James and John, let alone, respect their right to decide as to how to keep their own nets in good working order.

Well, dear brethren, if such a thing can be true in everyday life, how much more is such a thing true in the things of the Lord? Our Lord commanded that certain things be done a certain way in regard to the Church and He revealed those things to us through the apostles. It is not up to us to change things; it is not right for future servants to decide they know better than our Master, and so decide to “perfect” or equip the saints in a different manner. We may not understand why God ordained that the Church should function in a certain way, but it is not up to us to know; we are simply called to obey.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor and teachers are told to keep the Church in proper working order according to the original plan. They are to “repair,” “restore,” or “mend” the saints, so to speak, back to the original condition or pattern given to us by the Master in the New Testament. It is not up to them to change things because they believe there are better ways to do the work of the Lord. Their responsibility is to be faithful to the pattern, as Moses was faithful to the pattern given to him and Solomon was faithful to the pattern given to him by David.

But in this “perfecting,” or “restoring,” we find that Paul makes a distinction between those given this responsibility, between the apostles, prophets, evangelists and the pastors and teachers. He does this by the Greek construction of Eph. 4:11. In Greek he writes: “Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν **τοὺς μὲν** ἀποστόλους, **τοὺς δὲ** προφήτας, **τοὺς δὲ** εὐαγγελιστάς, **τοὺς δὲ** ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους.” He sets apart each group with τοὺς μὲν and then τοὺς δὲ. This Greek combination of μὲν... δὲ is a common Greek construction indicating distinctions (cf. Matt. 13:8; Acts 14:4). But notice when he gets to the pastors and teachers he does not set apart the teachers from the pastors with an additional τοὺς δὲ as he set apart the evangelists from the prophets and the prophets from the apostles. Rather, by omitting τοὺς δὲ from before διδασκάλους (teachers) and including the conjunction καὶ after ποιμένας (pastors) he is setting apart pastors and teachers as a group unto themselves. Why? Some believe it is because elders or pastors are also teachers (that being one of their qualifications—I Tim. 3:2) and so elders should be known as pastors/teachers. Thus Paul would be speaking of four categories of leaders and not five.

It is possible that Paul might be making this distinction, but I do not think so since in other places “teachers” are seen as a distinct category in and of themselves without necessarily being pastors or elders (cf. Acts 13:1; I Cor. 12:28; II Tim. 1:1; James 3:1). So the question remains, “Why would Paul grammatically set apart pastors and then teachers from the apostles, prophets and evangelists, for he is certainly making a clear distinction.” The answer, I believe is found in understanding the true relationship of *the work* in contrast to the *local Church*.

In Scripture, the *work of the Lord* is presented with two aspects—the local and the extra local work. If we forget this distinction confusion will result. There is only one work of God today in this dispensation (as we have already seen) and that is the work of “building the Church.” The work of redemption is done; our Lord died, once and for all, for all men. That work is done. But, now, our Lord is engaged in the work of “building His Church” with all that entails. That is the work of the Lord and every Christian is called to abound in that work.

I Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, **always abounding in the work of the Lord**, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. KJV

But it is important to understand that this work has two aspects, and each Christian should abound in this work according to the gift he or she has received and his or hers’ place in the Body of Christ. And when it comes to Christian men it is especially important to understand this distinction of ministry and work in relationship with the Church—as Paul said in I Cor. 12:28—“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” The answer, of course, is no. Each one is called to a specific ministry and function within the Body of Christ. And this means we must understand that some Christians are called to abound in the work of the Lord in a different way than others. This, I believe is the reason for Paul’s distinction between apostles, prophets, evangelists, and then, pastors and teachers. Paul is not combining pastors and teachers into one gift by his lack of τῶν δὲ before διδασκάλους (teachers). He is, however, grammatically setting apart pastors and teachers from the other three categories. In other words, he is creating two groupings of gifts. The first grouping is apostles, prophets and evangelists, and the second grouping is pastors and teachers. All are given for the perfecting of the saints, but each group performs that responsibility differently. And this involves

understanding the work of the Lord from the perspective of both its aspects—the **local** and the **extra-local** aspect of the **work of the Lord**.

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit tells the prophets and teachers in Church in Antioch to “set apart” Barnabas and Saul for the work to which they had been called.

Acts 13:2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul **for the work** to which I have called them.” NASB

This work is not a different work of the Lord but it is a different aspect of the one work. The Lord only has one work and that is building His Church, but Barnabas and Saul were being separated from that local work of the Lord that was in Antioch unto the extra-local work of the Lord in many different places. Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen continued to abound in that work locally, but Barnabas and Saul were being separated from that local work unto an extra-local work.

The word translated “set apart” or “separate” means to “mark off” or “set a boundary.” For example, the Greek word is used in the LXX Version of the Eze. 45:1, where it speaks of land being marked off for the Lord.

Ezekiel 45:1 And when ye measure the land for inheritance, ye shall **set apart** first-fruits to the Lord, a holy space of the land, in length twenty and five thousand *reeds*, and in breadth twenty thousand; it shall be holy in all the borders thereof round about. Brenton’s Version

So, what we see, in Acts 13:2, is that the Holy Spirit is marking off a boundary sphere of labour for Barnabas and Saul that included a wider area than the labour or work that was marked out for those who remained in the local Church in Antioch. In fact, the book of Acts identifies the locations and the boundary of that work that was given to them during their first and second missionary tour.

Act 13:4-7; 13-14, 49-51 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto **Seleucia**; and from thence they sailed to **Cyprus**.⁵ When they reached **Salamis**, they *began* to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as **Paphos**, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus,⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.¹³ Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and

came to **Perga in Pamphylia**; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.¹⁴ But going on from Perga, they arrived at **Pisidian Antioch**, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was being spread **through the whole region**.⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.⁵¹ But they shook off the dust of their feet *in protest* against them and went to **Iconium**.

Acts 14:1,5-6; 21, 24-26 In **Iconium** they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.⁵ And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them,⁶ they became aware of it and fled to the **cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region**;²⁰ But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe.²¹ After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, **they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch**,²⁴ They passed through **Pisidia and came into Pamphylia**.²⁵ When they had spoken the word in **Perga**, they went down to **Attalia**.²⁶ From there they sailed to **Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished**.

Act 16:6-12⁶ Now when they had gone **throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia**,⁷ after they were come to **Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not**.⁸ And they passing by Mysia **came down to Troas**.⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.¹⁰ And after he had seen the vision, immediately **we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them**.¹¹ Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next *day* to Neapolis;¹² And from thence to **Philippi**, which is the chief city of **that part of Macedonia, and a colony**: and we were in that city abiding certain days.¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a *Roman* colony; and we were staying in this city for some days.

This was a specific work given only to them. It was not given to Simeon, or Lucius, or to Manaen. It was given to Barnabas and Saul for they were gifted as apostles for that “work.”

So what we see in these verses is a marking off or setting apart of an extra-local work that was given to those gifted as apostles and a local work that was given to those of the Church in Antioch. The Scripture makes this “distinction of work” by using (in Greek) the definite article

when speaking of this work given to Barnabas and Saul. In the Greek this distinction is plain.

Acts 13:2 Λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ νηστευόντων, εἶπεν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, Ἀφορίσατε δὴ μοι τὸν Βαρνάβαν καὶ τὸν Σαῦλον εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ προσκέκλημαι αὐτούς.

Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for **the work** whereunto I have called them. KJV

Acts 14:26 κάκειθεν ἀπέπλευσαν εἰς Ἀντιόχειαν, ὅθεν ἦσαν παραδεδομένοι τῇ χάριτι τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ ἔργον ὃ ἐπλήρωσαν.

Acts 14:26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for **the work** which they fulfilled. KJV

Acts 15:38 Παῦλος δὲ ἠξίου, τὸν ἀποστάντα ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Παμφυλίας, καὶ μὴ συνελθόντα αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ ἔργον, μὴ συμπαραλαβεῖν τοῦτον.

Acts 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to **the work**. KJV

By using the Greek definite article the Holy Spirit is drawing attention to this specific work that had a beginning and an ending which was different or marked out from the work of the Lord in Antioch. There is much more we can learn from these verses but we shall look at that later. But for now, we wish to emphasize that apostles had a different sphere of work that was given to them than the work that was given to the local Church.

Paul refers to this sphere of work in II Cor. 10:13-16

II Cor. 10:13-16 But we will not boast beyond *our* measure, but within the measure **of the sphere which God apportioned to us** as a measure, to reach even as far as you. ¹⁴ For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; ¹⁵ not boasting beyond *our* measure, *that is, in other men's labors*, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, **within our sphere**, enlarged even more by you, ¹⁶ so as to preach the gospel **even to the regions beyond you, and** not to boast in what has been accomplished in the **sphere of another**. NASB

Paul speaks of his work as the “sphere apportioned to us.” The phrase in Greek reads: τοῦ κανόνος οὗ ἐμέρισεν ἡμῖν (the sphere apportioned to

us). The word translated “apportioned” is the Greek word ἐμέρισεν which is aorist indicative of μερίζω which is defined by Louw and Nida as follows—”μερίζω...to divide into separate parts”²⁷⁷ In other words, Paul is recognizing that God had apportioned or assigned to him and his co-workers a sphere of labour and influence; he understood that he was “separated” by the Holy Spirit unto a work that was assigned to him as an apostle of Christ, which, generally speaking, meant a work in areas where Christ had not been named (Rom. 15:20). He recognized this as his “sphere” of labour, all the while recognizing that other men had their own sphere of labours. This is the distinction between “the work” and the local Church. The local Church was under the elders, but the separated work given to Paul and Barnabas was directly under the Lord. They answered directly to the Lord, for the Holy Spirit separated them from the authority of the local Church, and thus the elders of that Church.

Each sphere of labour is divinely supervised, if you will, by the Holy Spirit of God. Thus, Paul can identify himself, and those with him, as fellow workers with God in contradistinction to the local Church (I Cor. 3:9).

I Cor. 3:9 For **we** are God's fellow workers; **you** are God's field, God's building. NASB

In this verse above we can see this distinction by the use of a first person plural verb, “we,” with a second person plural verb, “you,” that shows this contrast between “we” (Paul and those with him in the work) and “you,” (the local Church).²⁷⁸ Paul also shows the contrast between the work and the local Church by the use of the personal pronoun ἡμεῖς (we) and the personal pronoun ὑμεῖς (you) in I Cor. 4:9-10.

I Cor. 4:9-10 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. ¹⁰ **We** are fools for Christ's sake, but **you** are prudent in Christ; **we** are weak, but **you** are strong; **you** are distinguished, but **we** are without honor. NASB

²⁷⁷ J. P. Louw, E. A. Nida, Eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, New York, 1989) Pg. 616 (Be wary, though, of their unfortunate dynamic equivalence view of translation.)

²⁷⁸ Some might believe this is a use of a literary “we,” but normally this is not the case when a second person plural is used in the same sentence and when contextual considerations are taken into account (especially I Cor. 4) it clearly excludes any idea of a literary “we.” Paul is, indeed, making a distinction between himself (and his co-workers) and the local church.

And again, Paul makes this distinction with the dative use of these same pronouns in II Cor. 4:12.

II Cor. 4:12 So death works in **us**, but life in **you**. NASB

Throughout his epistles Paul makes a distinction between those in the work and those in the local Church. Of course, Paul is not saying that he and his fellow workers are not in the Church. When they visit the different Churches they founded they are a part of that local Church, the Body of Christ as long as they are gathering with them, and, most assuredly, they are always a part of the universal Church with every believer in Christ no matter where they are. No, what he is saying is that in the work of the Lord, where every believer is called to work and minister, each one has his particular sphere of labour assigned to them by the Lord. With some it involves, an extra-local work, which some have called, a *circulating ministry*, and with other it involves a local work, which some have called a *stationary ministry*. But each aspect is distinct and must be recognized as such because the Holy Spirit *marks off as a boundary*, or divides up among labourers, *the work* as He wills.

A Failure to Recognize This Distinction

This distinction between **the work** and **the local Church**, or we might say between **the *extra-local work*** and **the *local work*** of the Lord is a distinction that has become somewhat ignored by many today. This failure to recognize this distinction has not only brought about confusion regarding the structure and governance of the Church, it has also led to a confusion of the responsibilities of each and every believer in the Body of Christ. But it is a distinction that must be maintained, especially if we desire to fully understand Eph. 4:11.

You see, the reason why Paul grammatically sets off pastors and teachers, from the apostles, prophets and evangelists is because he is speaking to the distinction between the work and the local Church, or between the extra-local and local work of the Lord, or as some early brothers were wont to say, the *circulating or migratory* work of the Lord, and the *stationary* work of the Lord. The apostles, prophets and evangelists were grouped together because they primarily belonged to the *circulating work* and the pastors and teachers were grouped together because they primarily belonged to the *local or stationary work* in the Church.

One early brother from Plymouth, from the first part of the 19th century, J. Lamdon Harris, said it this way—

“In the Ministry of the Spirit there are **two distinct departments, that which is within the Church, and that without**. It is indeed true that the same individual may be, but is not necessarily, qualified for both; but the ministry of the pastor would not be required in the world, nor that of the Evangelist in the Church. The command is, *Go and preach the gospel to every creature*—here is the Evangelist sent forth into the world. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*—here is the Church ‘come together in one place’... [However,] with respect to the Ministry in the Church, it is not as that of the Evangelist, **migratory**, but [it is] **stationary**...²⁷⁹

This is the divine pattern given of the work given by God to the Church. Christ ascended on high and gave gifts to the Church. Their purpose is to perfect the saints, to ever keep them in proper working order as the Body of Christ. These five gifts have never disappeared, nor has their place in the overall work of the Lord. The Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelist ministered, primarily, in a *circulating ministry*, being sent by the Holy Spirit to various Churches repeatedly to exhort, admonish and to teach them the whole counsel of God, reminding them to be faithful to the Faith once and for all delivered to the saints. They functioned by a spiritual authority, not a formal authority within the Churches.

The bishops in the Churches were the pastors, which we given by Christ to the Church, to oversee, protect and shepherd the flock of God. And, along with the pastors, were the teachers who were given by Christ to teach the saints the doctrines of God. Sometimes the pastors would also be teachers, but teachers were not necessarily pastors, but together, whether combined in one person or separate persons, they would work together to also perfect the saints in the local work of the Lord.

Of those in the circulatory work, the first of the three, the Apostles, would be sent to lands where Christ had not been named in order to preach the gospel and to lay the foundation of a Church. After a Church had been founded, they continued in ministry *circulating* between the Churches so founded, and then, after a time, they would continue on to other unevangelized places to repeat the process all over.

²⁷⁹ J. Lamdon Harris, “On Christian Ministry,” *The Christian Witness*, Vol. I (January, 1834) pg. 10-11

The Prophets, like the apostles, would also *circulate* among the Churches in order to exhort the saints by giving forth the “mind of the Lord,” and sometimes by making known a future event (cf. Acts 11:27-28; 15:22, 32; 21:10-11). Thus they also circulated among the Churches with a spiritual authority speaking in the name of the Lord. The Lord also used them, like the apostles, to lay the foundation of a Church (Eph. 2:20). For instance, Silas, who was a prophet, and who traveled with Paul, helped lay the foundation of such Churches as the Church in Philippi, and the Church in Thessalonica (Acts 15:32, 40; 16: 12-15; 17: 4).

Their ministry, like the apostles, was primarily a *circulating ministry*. Like the apostles, they too would remain in one location for a time, and like the apostles, it seems they too would eventually move on to another location. For example, we know from Acts 13:1 that there were prophets and teachers in the Church in Antioch—Barnabas, Saul (Paul), Simeon, Manaen and Lucius. Scripture does not tell us who was who, but we do see that Lucius was later in the city of Rome, who, if it was the same Lucius, may have been a prophet who was sent on by the Lord to also exhort the saints in Rome (Rom. 16:21). And, of course, Paul may have been a prophet, as he clearly was used by the Holy Spirit to speak to the saints of future things as in I Cor. 15: 51-54 and II Thess. 2: 1-12, and he calls himself not only an apostle, but also a “preacher,” which may indicate a prophet because the Greek word translated “preacher” in I Tim. 2: 7 (κῆρυξ), is sometimes used of prophets in its participle and verbal form in the Greek Scriptures, e. g. Micah 3:5 LXX; Jonah 3:1-2 with Matt. 12:39; and Matt. 3:1 with Matt. 21:26.

It should be noted that the prophesying done by a prophet, was a different type of prophesying than that done on the Day of Pentecost and that done with prayer in I Cor. 11:4-5. Paul clearly says that not all are prophets (I Cor. 12:29), yet the prophesying done in thanksgiving was done by all under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 17-18). Scripture tells us there are three types of prophesying—future telling, forth telling, and praise. The first, future telling is self-explanatory. The second type of prophesying, forth telling or what we might call preaching, was only done by men in the assembly (not by women). And, finally, the third type of prophesying (done by both men and women in Scripture) was simply praise and thanksgiving in worship. For example this type of prophesying is found in the Old Testament in I

Chron. 25:3, and in the New Testament on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:17 as can be seen below.²⁸⁰

1 Chronicles 25:3 Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun, who **prophesied** with a harp, **to give thanks and to praise the LORD.** KJV

Acts 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: KJV

This type of prophesying did not entail the forth telling (preaching), or the future telling but simply speaking in praise and thanksgiving of God and His wonderful works (cf. Acts 2:11; 10:46; 11:15).

It is also interesting that this circulatory ministry of prophets in the New Testament was similar to the circulatory ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we are told that Samuel the prophet would travel in a circuit.

I Sam. 7:15-16 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year **in circuit** to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. KJV

And that Elijah traveled to many places: Gilead, Zeraphath, Jezreel, Samaria, and, of course, on top of Mt. Carmel (I Kings 17:1; 17:9; 18:19; 21:18; 18:19).

As for the next group, the Evangelists, we are told in Scripture that they were “primarily” gospel preachers who would travel from city to city bringing the good news of salvation to all. Phillip the evangelist is an example of this as is related in Acts 8:4-40, especially verse 40.

²⁸⁰ It should be noted that the prophesying referred to in Acts 2:17 was not the gift of tongues. Tongues were a different gift. The sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not tongues according to Scripture. The sign of the baptism of the Spirit was prophesying, i.e. speaking of the mighty deeds of God in both praise and thanksgiving as foretold by Joel the prophet in Joel 2:28. It just so happened that the prophesying done on the Day of Pentecost was done through tongues in order that all who were present could hear the prophesying each in their own language. Tongues are never said to be a sign of the baptism of the Spirit. Prophesying is said to be a sign of the baptism of the Spirit.

Acts 8:40 But Philip found himself at Azotus; and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea. NASB

Many times an evangelist would work in conjunction with the apostles and prophets, as with the case of Timothy, who worked in conjunction with Paul, an apostle, and with Silas, a prophet (Acts 16: 1-3; II Tim. 4:5).

Timothy is found traveling throughout the Roman Empire during his lifetime after he joined Paul and Silas in Derbe. An evangelist, however, as one involved in a *circulating ministry*, would also make known the will of an apostle, like Paul, to those who strayed from the Faith. Consequently, an additional aspect of the work of an evangelist was to teach sound doctrine (I Tim. 1:3-4). This part is sometimes forgotten with today's concept of an evangelist, but in the New Testament an evangelist was well grounded in the Faith, able to instruct in sound doctrine.

As for those in the *local* or *stationary work*—pastors and teachers—they were entrusted with the local care of the Churches. Generally speaking, they were not sent from Church to Church like the apostles, prophets and evangelists; however, sometimes in Scripture they might be, especially when those gifts were combined with a gift that was circulatory. For example Paul was not only an apostle, he was also a teacher (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1: 11). In those cases, one could say a teacher was sent to other locations, However, in most cases, teachers, in and of themselves, would remain local, working together with pastors in a local Church (cf. I Cor. 12:28; 14:26; Heb. 5:12; James 3:1; II Tim. 4:3; II Pet.2:1).

Likewise, even though pastors were localized in one Church, sometimes they might be sent to other cities, especially when that gift was combined with one of the circulatory gifts. For example, Scripture tells us that Peter was an apostle, but he was also an elder or pastor (Jn. 21:15-17; I Pet. 5:1). So, in the same way, one could say that sometimes a pastor would be sent by the Lord to other locations. But, again, as a general rule, pastors, along with teachers remained in one location doing the work of the Lord, although, sometimes their ministry might extend to other locations when so moved and gifted by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20: 28-35; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; I Pet. 5:1-4; cf. Gal. 6:6; II Tim. 4:3; Jam. 3:1).

J. N. Darby speaks to these five categories of gifts in his writings. Regarding the gift of apostleship, he says:

“As to apostles, what has been observed will partly lead us to some distinction in this office. Primarily, they are no part of the body properly speaking; they gather it. The house is built on them. Thus the twelve were sent as Jesus was sent of the Father. Paul was sent of the Lord directly. But in another character they had a place in it, in the continual exercise of their functions. In the former character they stood alone, save in one particular which they possessed in common with prophets. But, as authoritative regulators of the Church by revelation, they had a peculiar and definite place. In the one particular of revelation of the mind and will of Christ and of God, the prophets might be associated with them; but these had no authority delegated of the Lord in their office as sent forth. The holy beneficence of this arrangement, I think, is evident. Thus while the Church was regulated and ordered responsibly and authoritatively by an apostle, yet they had to say, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” In the sense of revelation, as laying down the foundation, their work is complete and fulfilled. The word of God is written for us. The fruits of authoritative regulation were left (as every dispensation had been) in the responsibility of man, and men have entirely failed. But the revelation of the will of God is complete, and is there for us to refer to by the Spirit, according to the light of the word in our present condition, not by imitation, but by obedience. Hence tradition disappears; for at best that is imitation, not obedience; a very important distinction, as will soon be found in its application.”²⁸¹

“...In this sense, while **the authoritative primary revelation** of God's will, gathering and regulating the Church, **has clearly closed in the scriptural record** to apostolic ministry, **I do not see but that apostolic service may still subsist, and probably has been exercised, though the name may not have been attached; men raised up and sent by God for a certain mission, to effect a certain result in the Church, or on sinners, though with no fresh revelation,** but with a special energy in which to fulfill it, beyond the bounds of mere circumscribed gift as members within, but special in its relation to Christ.”²⁸²

We talked earlier about the characteristics of one sent out as an apostle of Christ. I do not believe there are any more apostles like the Twelve or like Paul, who had seen the Lord, but I believe God has raised up some from the third category of apostles over the centuries, who have been set apart by the Church unto a migratory or circulatory work. And since God gave apostles to labour where Christ has not been named, it would be

²⁸¹ John Nelson Darby, “Operations of the Spirit of God,” *Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Doctrinal 1*, <http://bibletruthpublishers.com/operations-of-the-spirit-of-god/john-nelson-darby-jnd/collected-writings-of-j-n-darby-doctrinal-1/la62245> accessed on 5/8/215

²⁸² *Ibid.*, accessed on 5/8/215

most unusual for an apostle to be raised up to labour in existing Churches. Therefore, I believe apostles are always found in pioneer missionary works. If one was to ask me if I believe anyone in modern times has done the work of an apostle, I would mention two (with the same caveat that Darby mentioned when he said, “I do not see but that apostolic service may still subsist, and probably has been exercised, **though the name may not have been attached**; men raised up and sent by God for a certain mission...”). Under that caveat I would say, perhaps, Hudson Taylor might have done the work of an apostle in China, and in Africa, perhaps, C. T. Studd could be considered as one of apostolic stature, and in Burma, God sent Adoniram Judson.

As for prophets, Darby said the following.

“...In the same way, **prophets, who were associated with apostles as the foundation, because they revealed the mind of God, may, it appears to me, in a subordinate sense, be believed to exist. It is not that they now reveal fresh truths not contained in the word (or the foundation would not be completely laid-this, I hold, never can be touched), but that there may be those who not merely teach and explain ordinary and profitable doctrine—truths, and guide by the Spirit into present truth, but who by a special energy of the Spirit can unfold and communicate the mind of Christ to the Church** where it is ignorant of it (though that mind be treasured up in the scripture)—can bring truths, hidden previously from the knowledge of the Church, in the power of the testimony of the Spirit of God, to bear on the present circumstances of the Church and future prospects of the world, showing the things to come; only that these things are all actually treasured up in Scripture, but they can give them present application and force according to the mind, intention, and power of God, and thus be practically prophets (though there be no new facts revealed, but all are really in the word already), and thus be a direct blessing and gift of Christ to the Church for its emergency and need, though the word be strictly adhered to, but without which the Church would not have had the power of that word.”²⁸³

If one wished to recognize a Christian in modern times that may have acted as a prophet of God in the manner described above I would certainly mention, Anthony Norris Groves, and, perhaps, A. W. Tozer, who, although he was a pastor, certainly ministered in a circulatory manner through his writings to other Churches.

In regard to the evangelists, Darby mentions the following.

²⁸³ Ibid., accessed on 5/8/2115

“...Evangelists were of another character, the natural and constant testimony to sinners of the grace that was revealed in their good news of God, in what we call the gospel. Any saint had to tell it, **but there were those specially gifted to proclaim the glad tidings.**”²⁸⁴

Most have no problem recognizing the continuing gift of evangelists among us all. We all could list a number of evangelists in modern times, the foremost being, D. L. Moody, and Billy Graham.

And, finally, Darby said the following about the last two gifts, which he brings together.

“The next class—for they are brought together as one—is pastors and teachers; for watching and feeding, and that with the word, are most clearly united and identified: only pastorship includes guidance in holy wisdom and grace, and applying teaching to the state of the saints. We have seen the subordinate part of this distributed by itself—‘he that teacheth on teaching.’ But the gift here is guiding as pastor; shepherding and feeding the flock, applying the word in wisdom, watching against intruding heresies, building up by the word, guarding and securing from evil, guiding the feet of the saints into straight paths; in a word, the care of the saints. It is not here, as was remarked, government controlling the flesh, but the ministration of grace, nourishing and cherishing, guiding and feeding: some were “pastors and teachers.”²⁸⁵

“Pastor and teacher are distinct things, but they are in Greek, and indeed in English, joined. They are connected, but not absolutely one, because a pastor includes in a certain sense the other; whereas a teacher has nothing to do with the office of pastor, as to care for souls. I might expound the scripture, and yet not really have wisdom to deal with individual souls as a pastor has to do. That of pastor is a wider gift. Still they are closely connected, because you could hardly profit an individual without teaching him in a measure. A person may teach without being a pastor, but you can hardly be a pastor without teaching in a certain sense. The two gifts are closely connected, but you could not say they are the same thing. The pastor does not merely give food as the teacher; the pastor shepherds the sheep, leads them here and there, and takes care of them. I think it is a thing greatly wanted, but I believe it is a rare gift and always was. Pastors must have a heart for the sheep. There are degrees of completeness in it, but that is what the pastor has to do. The testimony is in the evangelist, but his work is simpler. He carries the gospel to the poor sinner, whereas the pastor has saints on his heart and cares for them.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Ibid., accessed on 5/8/215

²⁸⁵ Ibid., accessed on 5/8/215

²⁸⁶ John Nelson Darby, Substance of a Reading on Ephesians, *The Bible Treasury*, Volume 10, <http://bibletruthpublishers.com/substance-of-a-reading-on-ephesians/john-nelson-darby-jnd/bible-treasury-volume-10/1a67539> accessed 5/8/215

Of course, we all have examples of the presence of pastors and teachers in our midst today. It is a blessed and good work they do. We should all highly honour them for their work, especially those who labour hard in word and doctrine.

I Tim. 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. KJV

And so now we can begin to understand why the second century Church lost her way in changing the governance of the Church. Our Lord intended that the Church be perpetuated by the five-fold gifts given by Christ upon his ascension. The apostles, prophets and evangelists never had a localized formal ecclesiastical authority over each local Church (i.e. after they were separated unto their circulatory work). Theirs was a spiritual and moral authority. They never tried to “lord” it over the Churches, exercising a local power and rule like was commonly done by worldly men in authority. They refused to operate that way because their Master forbid that type of governance (Matt. 20:25-26). The spiritual oversight of an apostle extended over many Churches. It was never meant to be restricted to one locality; rather, it was to be a spiritual and moral authority that was exercised in a circulating ministry between many localities. It was the spiritual oversight of pastors and the doctrinal admonition of teachers that was meant to be exercised in a stationary local ministry.

When the apostles of our Lord exercised their authority, they would do so from the perspective of a servant. A servant cannot demand submission, whereas one who exercises authority as a benefactor or king can and does demand submission. But the Lord Jesus told the apostles not to act as “benefactors,” or “kings.”

In Luke 22: 25-26 He says the following.

Luke 22:25-26 And he said unto them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called Benefactors. ²⁶But ye *shall* not *be* thus; but let the greater among you be as the younger, and the leader as he that serves.” KJV

A Benefactor was one who controlled the lives of the people through the exercise of power and their control of money. It was a position of vanity applied to men who would lord it over others in order to maintain their positions of authority, and who would bestow vast sums of money for public works, all in order to receive the flattery of those whom they controlled. In reality, their beneficence was another means of control.

Our Lord told the apostles they must not exercise authority in that way. Benefactors and kings would punish or banish those who might resist or challenge their positions of authority. They would use politics and political intrigue to safeguard their measure of control. Thus, they would never countenance opposition. They would demand submission and penalize those who refused. They ruled in an autocratic manner. However, our Lord was careful to tell the apostles that they should rule in a different manner. They should serve. A servant does not penalize. A servant cannot bribe. A servant cannot punish. A servant will not use politics or political maneuvering to achieve his ways. A servant does not rule autocratically. Rather a servant is meek and lowly.

Thus, since the apostles were never called to lord it over those under their oversight, they would speak and teach with a spiritual authority without any compromise or apology, but they would never enforce their viewpoints on others by political or physical means (i.e. physical removal, or by the means of money, etc.). They recognized that each Church was autonomous, under the oversight of their bishops or elders, and if their apostolic authority was dismissed, they would entrust it to the Lord of lords and King of kings. They would not excommunicate the one opposing them; they would not use political machinations to achieve their way. They would recognize the correctness of their positions, but like David, in his turmoil with King Saul, they would never usurp the authority of those elders or bishops over the local Church. They would exercise their authority by example, not force, for they had no formal or structured ecclesiastical authority over the local Churches who were under an appointed eldership.

They could command; they could rebuke; they could admonish; but it was all a spiritual and moral authority. And if those who were commanded and rebuked, or entreated and admonished, ignored their authority, the apostles would entrust their souls to the Chief Shepherd, trusting in His Sovereign rule and guidance over the Churches. They recognized that while the Churches were under their spiritual care, they were first under the care and oversight of the Chief Shepherd and then

the local bishops, who, of course, were the pastors or elders of the assembly. As such, they would not usurp their rightful place as bishops, and if those bishops disagreed with them, they would remain firm in their convictions, but would realize that it was not their place to override the local authority. In those cases, they entrusted the outcome to the Lord.

David was one who understood this respect of other spheres of authority even when he was in the right. During the days of Samuel in Israel, Saul was rejected by God as being king. In his place David was anointed, as can be seen in the verses below.

I Sam. 16:1, 11-13 Now the LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.”¹¹ And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all the young men here?” Then he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.”¹² So he sent and brought him in. Now he *was* ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him; for this *is* the one!”¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah. NKJV

It was God’s will that David, not Saul should be king. But there was a problem. Saul would not relinquish his power. In fact, he tried to kill David, in order to thwart the will of God. But what did David do in this circumstance. Did he exert his authority as the anointed king and depose Saul? No, he entrusted that eventuality to the true king of Israel—the Lord God.

When David had a chance to bring about the will of God—his rule as king over Israel—by political and physical means, he refused to do so because it would entail usurping the authority of Saul. Even though God had rejected Saul as king over Israel, he still held the office of king and David respected that and trusted that God Himself, the true ruler over his people would exercise His authority as King of kings to solve the situation of Saul, and thus pave the way for David. Verse 10 of I Samuel 26 speaks to this faith and trust that David had in the authority of God. David did not need to demand acquiescence to the obvious will of God—that David was the chosen one, the anointed of God. Rather, he exercised faith in the ultimate authority of God, the true King of Israel.

I Sam. 26:6-12 Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, “Who will go down with me

to Saul in the camp?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.”⁷ So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him.⁸ Then Abishai said to David, “God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not *have to strike* him a second time!”⁹ And David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless?”¹⁰ **David said furthermore, “As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.”**¹¹ “The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD’S anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go.”¹² So David took the spear and the jug of water *by* Saul’s head, and they got away; and no man saw *it* or knew *it* or awoke. For they *were* all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them.^{NKJ}

This restraint requires a level of spirituality that understands and trusts in the true authority of the Lord.

We find this same spiritual understanding when those in Corinth were questioning the guidance and teaching of the apostle Paul. He made it known that he was not one to lord it over their faith (II Cor. 1:24 NASB

II Cor. 1:24 Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm. NASB

As such, Paul was not sure if they would obey his admonitions or not. In fact, he stated that he wrote to them in order to test them, to see if they would obey (II Cor. 2:9). This implies that he recognizes their free will in the matter. Paul said,

II Cor. 2:9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

It reminds us of the testing of Abraham by God.

Gen. 22:1 Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” NASB

Heb. 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten *son*; NASB

Now, of course, God at any time can enforce His will, but He has chosen to honour the free will of man. Notice that God did not force Abraham to obey, nor did Paul force the Corinthians to obey, nor did any apostle

force obedience for they were following the example of their Master. The Lord Jesus never enforced His will upon others. He respected the free will of all, although He would ever chastise the sinful attitudes of those who disobeyed. An apostle can do the same thing. He can speak with all authority and power, but he would never demand submission as a benefactor nor exercise physical authority as an earthly king. Kings and benefactors might do so, in fact, that is actually what they are called to do as ministers of God, executing wrath on those who practice evil (Rom. 13:4); but an apostle does otherwise, he does not exercise authority in that way.

Another example of this recognition of local authority is the interchange between Diotrephes and the apostle John.

III John 1:9-11 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.¹⁰ Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. NKJV

Diotrephes ignored the will and spiritual authority of the apostle John, but John does not exercise his authority like an earthly king would. If an earthly king gave forth a decree and someone, who also held a measure of authority himself, ignored his decree, the king would demand submission, which if not given, would result in the punishment and/or removal of that person. That is how, “the kings of the Gentiles exercised lordship,” but that is not how the apostle John exercised authority. In his earlier days, being called “a son of thunder” (Mark 3:17), John, more than likely, would have called down fire upon Diotrephes for his lack of respect and obedience. Remember the story of James and John and the Samaritans?

Luke 9:51-56 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,⁵² And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.⁵³ And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.⁵⁴ And when his disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?⁵⁵ But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. 56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” And they went to another village. KJV

But not only did our Lord rebuke the zeal of James and John in this incident, he left an example for His apostles to follow. If people ignore your authority, make known your case before the Lord, but leave the outcome to Him (as did David with Saul).

This is the means of Church governance the Lord ordered for His Church. When the spiritual or moral authority of an apostle is ignored, the apostle cannot remove the one's ignoring him; they are left to the digression of the Chief Shepherd. He may not act as quickly as we would wish, but he will act. The Church in Thyatira, ignored the injunctions of the apostle Paul found in Scripture, and, more than likely, the injunctions of the apostle John, who would have taught the same things. The Church allowed a woman to teach, contrary to the command of Paul in Scripture (I Tim. 2:11-12). They ignored the authority of the apostles in this manner. And it was not just that she was teaching, she was teaching Christians to commit fornication. What an awful thing. It would not surprise me if the apostle John, before his imprisonment, might have delivered such a one to Satan, telling the Church to remove her, as did Paul to the sinning brother in Corinth, but, apparently, the Church did not respond like Corinth did; they did not remove the wicked person from their midst, but rather allowed her to continue teaching. They refused, apparently, to obey the apostle John. But notice the apostle could not physically remove the person, nor did he excommunicate *the entire Church* for not heeding him or the Scriptures.

Rev.2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

John waited and trusted in the Lord, who finally, warned the Church in Thyatira with no mincing of His words—

Rev.2:21-23 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. ²² Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. ²³ And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

This was the authority and discipline of the Lord as the Chief Shepherd over His Churches.

But when the second century changed this order of Church governance, it betrayed a lack of belief in the ongoing shepherding, authority and discipline of the Chief Shepherd, thinking it all depended on a monarchical bishop who was to be seen as the Lord Himself, as we saw Ignatius state. They failed to maintain the distinction between the extra-local work and the local work of the Lord. This change laid the basis for the eventual rise of archbishops, and ultimately, the Supreme Pontiff who is also known as the Bishop of Rome and the Vicar of Jesus Christ. From this one change to the pattern left for the Church by the Apostle Paul, subsequent Christian leaders, who see themselves as successors to the apostles, do things the original apostle would never dream of doing. Contrary to the commands of the Saviour they have exercised lordship exactly as the Lord warned them not to—as the kings of Gentiles, and they exercised their authority exactly as Benefactors, contrary to the direct command of the Master.

A quick perusal of Church History will show that those who obtained such power were soon punishing and excommunicating those who might oppose them, not for sin, but for simply disagreeing with their views. In some cases, such punishment even included physical death. Obviously, such exercise of authority in the Church was a usurpation of the Head of the Church. They disobeyed their Lord, taking power as a king of the Gentiles might take power.

Inevitably, when Christians lose their spirituality, when they will ignore God's pattern, it seems they inevitably return to the things of the Old Covenant, for the Old Covenant on the surface is easier to follow; one simply needs to have a discerning mind and not a discerning spirit trained by the denial of self and the work of the cross. It is a walk of the letter as opposed to the Spirit, and consists of things physical and soulical and not things spiritual. It is always easier for man to walk by the Law, than the Spirit (although a man can never keep the Law, but in his own eyes he think he does), for to walk by the Spirit requires the work of the cross in one's heart. With the Law one can be soulical, with the Spirit, one needs to be spiritual.

As the Church continued her departure from the commands of the apostles left for us in the Word of God, and as they continued to abandon the pattern for the Church they left behind, the Church became more and more enmeshed in the ways of the Old Testament, not only in the adoption of the use of vestments and prescribed liturgy (rather than

trusting in the guided liturgy of the Spirit, manifested in the proper working of each individual part of the Body of Christ), but also in the adoption of magnificent cathedrals to emulate the Temple of old, and, as was mentioned before, in the exercise of authority in emulation of secular governments. (In fact, the Roman Catholic Church has so ignored the Master's admonition that the Roman Pope is now in charge of its own secular government. The Vatican is its own secular nation or city state in the world.)

This early departure of the Church, championed by Ignatius, led to much heartache within the Church. They sought to protect the unity of the Church against heresy and division by this change in governance, but in the end, even though at first they may have preserved the outward unity, they destroyed the very heart and soul of the Church. Her spirituality descended into crass soulishness and in some cases outright carnality. They sacrificed the inward for the outward.

Now, does this mean that God left us no recourse against the various sins and heresies that Ignatius so feared, those false doctrines the enemy of our souls ever seeks to inflict upon the pure of heart? No, not at all, but God's remedy was so much better than man's. God combatted the heresy with spiritual weapons not earthy and carnal weapons. It was the apostle Paul who said—

II Cor. 10:3-8 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.⁵ *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,⁶ and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.⁷ You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.⁸ For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame,

And,

Eph. 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

All punishment was spiritual, not temporal or physical. Even in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10) it was the Lord who inflicted physical death upon them, not Peter. It appears that Peter did not even know the Lord would inflict such a punishment (vs. 5). It was only after the Lord acted that Peter made known that the Lord would do the same to Sapphira. But it is important to note that Peter never exercised his authority in such a way that resulted in physical death. In other words, Peter never commanded that those who sinned be put to death. Peter simply made a spiritual affirmation of truth regarding their lie; it was the Lord who decided to directly take their life.

Nevertheless, spiritual authority does exist. It is real and the apostles did exercise it when needed. With the apostles, it seems that the fullest expression of their spiritual authority was delivering a person to Satan; this seems to be a special authority given to apostles in those early days and to no one else. There is no indication given in Scripture that this authority was ever given to elders, or to the Church. This miraculous power was given to apostles and was, more than likely, one of the true signs of an apostle. It would be presumptuous to pretend to have this authority today. Only an apostle had the authority from God to deliver the person to Satan as can be seen in I Cor. 5:3-5 (also cf. Luke 22:31-32; I Tim. 1:20). Let me provide the King James Version and the New King James Version.

I Cor. 5:3-5 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. KJV

I Cor. 5:3-5 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. NKJV

It seems the New King James translation might be a little misleading by their use of a period at the end of verse 3. I believe the King James Version is more accurate with their use of the comma. The controlling verb in the text is the verb κέκρικα (judged) in verse 3. It is a 1st person singular perfect verb, showing that it is only Paul that is making the

judgment to deliver such a one to Satan, not the assembly; indeed, by the use of the perfect, he is showing he had already made the decision. As far as the word translated “deliver” in the New King James Version in verse 5, it is an infinitive and not a second person plural verb as suggested by the New King James translation. Therefore, I believe it would be better to translate the verbal infinitive as “to deliver,” in order to complete the periphrastic thought with the main verb, which I take as being κέκρικα, “I have decided (judged),” in verse 3. Therefore, I believe the idea in the Greek is “I have decided to deliver.” That is the decision Paul had already made. He is not saying to the assembly, “Deliver such a one, etc.” as the New King James version has it. He is saying he has decided to deliver such a one, etc. The King James Version rightly shows this, and even the New American Standard clarifies this point by adding the main verb “I have decided” again to verse 5 in italics.

I would render the verse as follows—

For **I**, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already **have**, as if I was present, **judged the one doing** this thing **as follows** (when in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ you have been gathered together, you and my spirit together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ): to deliver such a one to Satan unto the destruction of the flesh, in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.

In this sense, τὸν κατεργασάμενον (the one doing, or, in KJV, hath done this deed) is construed with κέκρικα (I have judged), and οὕτως (thus, or as follows) is construed with κέκρικα (I have judged) rather than being construed with κατεργασάμενον (the one doing). The judgment made by Paul was “to deliver such a one to Satan.” But it would be made known in a public assembly gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The adverb οὕτως (thus, or as follows) introduces this decision (similar to its usage in Matt. 6:9 and Luke 19:31). With this sense, the phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ (in the name of our Lord Jesus) is being construed, not with κέκρικα (I have judged), but with the participle συναχθέντων (when you have been gathered).

Here is another way it might be rendered into English with the last part of verse 3 being parenthetical, as well as verse 4 being rendered parenthetical in order to lay out the venue in which the pronouncement will be made.

For **I**, indeed, as being absent by the body, but present by the Spirit, already have (as if I was present) decided as follows (*concerning* the one doing this

thing)—to deliver such a one to Satan unto the destruction of the flesh (when, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have been gathered together, you and my spirit together with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ) in order that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord

It is as if Paul is comparing the proceedings to a court of law, where a verdict is made known once the court is in session. The spiritual judgment is Paul's, but the carrying out of that judgment is left up to the assembly. They were still admonished, based upon Paul's judgment, to remove the wicked one from their midst. Therefore, he exhorts to do so in an assembly gathered in the name of the Lord, as that was the proper venue in which his judgment should be made known and the wicked person should be removed from their midst (I Cor. 5:13).

This exacting judgment of Paul with its detailed instructions on how to carry it out seems to be Paul's way of chastising them for not removing the sinning Christian themselves before Paul even had to get involved. He reminds them that they are responsible for judging those within the Church based upon the instructions Paul had left them in verse 11 and 12.

But, because, they did not follow those instructions, which in turn caused a leavening to already begin, he had to make an immediate and drastic judgment that only an apostle could make. The seriousness of their lapse of judgment and the darkness of their moral understanding required that Paul, an apostle of Christ, needed to deliver the sinning Christian to Satan. But that is all an apostle could do. He could not force them to follow his advice and remove the wicked man from the Assembly, not keeping company with him, nor not to even eat with him. If they refused, it was up to the Lord to handle the situation as the Chief Shepherd. There was no way for Paul as an apostle to enforce his decision as an earthly king might do. This was according to the wisdom and guidance of God. Men need to learn that our Lord is not a mere figurehead in the Church. He takes care of those things he has not given us to do. The final arbitrator in discipline is the Lord himself when Christians and/or Churches fail to do so. He intended it that way, for it teaches us to trust in His presence and forces us to deal with Him personally.

But man is impatient; leaders are too ambitious, seeking to build their own little kingdoms to prop up their own spiritual pride. We need to be humble and realize God's way is the best way. It may seem ineffective and sometimes slow to us, but it is always the best in the long run.

Perhaps, it might be helpful to include a quote by Benjamin Newton regarding this truth. But before we quote it should be mentioned that Benjamin Newton was a godly man and one of the early leaders of the brethren in Plymouth in the 1830's. He was the one that J. N. Darby specifically labeled an elder of the assembly in Plymouth. In the beginning both were good friends. However, later in life Newton made a mistake concerning the humanity of Christ and so was rightly censured by brother Darby. Later he was forced out of the assemblies because of a perceived lack of repentance regarding his erroneous views, although, to some, he did recant and repent. And what is so ironic in this history of dispute is that J. N. Darby was later accused of making a very similar error concerning the humanity of Christ.

Now, it must be admitted that Benjamin Newton, subsequently, after leaving the assemblies, became too restrictive in his view on ministry, but he was correct (before his falling out with J. N. Darby and his subsequent excommunication from the assembly—i.e. when he was still respected by Darby) in seeing that the apostles, prophets, and evangelist held not a local but a circulating ministry. With that being said, we are including this quote to show what the early views of the brethren were on this issue when the first began to meet according to New Testament Church Principles.

“It is in the service and writings of the Apostle Paul that we learn the principles of government that were intended for the regulation of the Churches of the Gentiles. The Churches which that Apostle was the chief instrument of gathering were not left uncared for by him after they were gathered. He speaks of the “care of all the churches coming upon him daily,” and his epistles are the record of his continual anxious watchfulness for their welfare. In order to lighten this burden God supplied some to share the labour with him.

Timothy and Titus and St. Paul whilst they yet lived remained unlocalized, “having no certain dwelling place,” and exercised a general authoritative superintendence over all the churches; whereby a practical bond of union (invisible perhaps to the world, but cognizable by those who had the eye of faith), was drawn around all who were gathered in the name of Christ.

The ministerial relation which Timothy, Titus, and others with and under St. Paul held to the Churches was different from that of those who, as elders or bishops (for elder and bishop were different names of the same office) exercised a stationary oversight over the various Churches in their several localities. The elders or bishops were always localized; the specific sphere of their pastoral rule was the Church with which they themselves were locally connected. Thus the Churches in Philippi and at Ephesus each had their own localized elders. But the

ministry of Timothy, Titus etc. was not localized. Theirs was a *circulating* ministry extending over all the Churches; and by them elders were appointed (see Titus 1:5). If any false doctrines threatened to come in at Ephesus, Timothy was to stay there and check it (see I Tim 1: 3). If evil appeared in Create, Titus was desired by the Apostle to remain there and restrain it (see Titus 1:7). The ministry, therefore, that they exercised was of a special kind. It had an authority that was peculiar to itself, and drew around all the Churches a practical bond of union, which prevented their being independent one of the other.”²⁸⁷

“Thus then, the local superintendence of the elders [pastors and teachers] and the circulating ministry and rule of others [apostles, prophets, evangelist] afforded the means whereby the early Churches were governed and preserved in doctrine and in morals. It was not by creeds, nor by the Holy Spirit acting apart from human instrumentality, but by living men qualified by the Holy Ghost, that the doctrine and order of the Churches were preserved.”²⁸⁸

And so, in concluding, we see that one of the biggest reasons this change of Church governance became acceptable in the second century was because Christians forgot this distinction between the work and the local Church. Ignatius, who championed this change, believed that the gift of apostles, along with their authority, was meant to be localized and formalized into a permanent, hierarchical authority that ruled over not only every local Church, but also over the elders. Thus, one of the elders was set apart from the other elders and then elevated to a position of bishop to be like an apostle. God never commanded this, nor did the apostles before their death. It was an idea created by Christian leaders who wished to solidify the unity of the Church through the creation of a clergy/laity system, set up to prevent discord and division. However, even though their motive may have been good, it was a presumptuous decision that in reality manifested a lack of trust in the wisdom and care of the Chief Shepherd who personally warned the apostles from following such a means of rule.

And so, this is the fourth and final reason this change in Church governance occurred. Men had forgotten the true nature of God’s Work. So to recap; it seems the reason the governance of the Church changed in the second century was the following—

²⁸⁷ B. W. Newton, *Ministry and Order in the Church of Christ*, Edited by C.W.H. Griffiths, (Pearl Publications, Middlesex, England), 1997, pg. 67-69

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 72 [brackets were mine]

1) Pragmatism—the reason mentioned beforehand by Jerome. It was changed because Christian leaders determined it was a rational and logical way to preserve the unity of the Church.

2) The resurgence of the Pharisaical Christian mindset with its Rabbinical and hierarchical structure with the *Nasi* (President) at the top. This viewpoint explains the change occurring first in the East (e. g. Antioch, which area was under the sway of Jerusalem), then in those Churches in Asia—an area frequented, from the earliest days, by Christians of the sect of the Pharisees, as can be seen in Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, and Paul’s exhortations to Timothy regarding those false teachers in Ephesus desiring to be “teachers of the Law” (I Tim. 1:7)—and then finally, in those Churches in the West.

3) Subsequent Christians and Churches trusted in Ignatius’s claim of Divine guidance. Ignatius very clearly said that he was personally guided by Divine revelation of God regarding this change of Church government.

4) A misunderstanding of the role of the apostles as bishops within the Church at large because of a loss of spirituality among Christian leaders that led to a failure to recognize the importance of maintaining a distinction between the *work* and the *local Church*, between the *extra-local work* and the *local work*, between a *circulating ministry* and a *stationary ministry*. Their merging of the two aspects of the Lord’s work, their combining the extra-local work with the local work into one structured hierarchical authority within the Church led to the clergy/laity system so prevalent today. And, with the introduction of apostolic succession, its continuance was guaranteed.

The Circulating Work and the Local Church Today

As we saw in the previous chapter the distinction between the work and the local Church should never have been blurred. The Lord expected the five gifts of Eph. 4:11 to continue until the end of the Church Age for the “perfecting,” or “equipping” of the saints, or, we might say, for the “restoration,” or “maintenance” of the saints, necessary for keeping the Church in perfect working order as God originally intended. The apostles, prophets and evangelists were given to the saints as workers of the Lord, set apart in a *circulating ministry*, and the pastors and teachers were the ones given to the saints in the *local work* of the Lord, i.e. the local Church. The two spheres of labour should never have been mixed. So, if that is the case, how should these two aspects of the work operate today?

As for apostles, after a local Church became established in a given locality, an apostle was meant to continue on to distant lands, always preaching Christ where He has not been named. Then after completion of such missions, he might return to the Churches he established, exhorting, and admonishing them in the Lord with a spiritual and moral authority, until the time came for him to once more depart on another mission tour. But he never exercised a local and formal authority in the Churches that he established. He always made sure that the bishops (that is the elders) were appointed for such purposes. This is the way God intended; an apostle would always be moving between the Churches, overseeing their spiritual well-being with a moral and spiritual authority, until the time came for their next missionary journey unto distant lands.

As for today, it seems this gift might still be exercised in limited ways with the following qualifications. First and foremost, as we have said before, an apostolic work will always be exercised in places where Christ has not been named (Rom. 15:20). This alone, disqualifies most so-called apostles, today, from ever really being true apostles. Those who call themselves apostles today, who do not serve in remote places where Christ is not named, are not apostles according to Scripture. Why is this important? Because we are still called by God to try those who claim they are apostles.

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

How awful it is that this sacred ministry and gift has been abused over the centuries by carnal Christians who claim this title for themselves, who seek to have this prestige and power over fellow Christians, all in order to create their own Christian fiefdoms in the name of Christ. It is interesting to note that those in the first group of apostles, i.e. the Twelve, never presumed to name themselves apostles. They never were so presumptuous to adopt that title for themselves, for it was Jesus, Himself, who gave them that name.

Luke 6:13 And when it was day, he called *unto him* his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, **whom also he named apostles.** KJV

Equally, those in the secondary group of those called apostles, represented by the apostle Paul, never adopted that title for themselves. Paul says it was Jesus Christ who first called him an apostle.

I Cor. 1:1 Paul, a called apostle of Jesus Christ, by God's will, and Sosthenes the brother (Darby's Version)

Paul clearly says that he was named an apostle by God. He did not take or presume to take that title for himself. Even, James the Lord's brother never used that title for himself in Scripture, although, he was a true apostle (Gal. 1:19) and he had seen the Lord (I Cor. 15:7). He simply calls himself a servant of God (James 1:1). Now, of course, after the Twelve and those like Paul were named apostles, they would identify themselves by that gift (cf. Titus 1:1; I Pet. 1:1), but that was not until the Lord Jesus Christ first appeared to them and named them, and/or a Church would separate them unto such a work. It is truly presumptuous for Christians to name themselves apostles today—they truly need to be tried. Their character needs to be tested against Scripture. And in most, if not all cases, when this is done, such Christians will be found out to be false.

No doubt, the Holy Spirit can still give the gift of apostleship to men during and up to the end of the Church Age, but it is important to remember that the gift today carries certain distinctions, unlike first century apostles, as J. N. Darby mentioned when he said the following—

“...In this sense, while the authoritative primary revelation of God's will, gathering and regulating the Church, has clearly closed in the scriptural record to apostolic ministry, **I do not see but that apostolic service may still subsist, and probably has been exercised, though the name may not have been**

attached; men raised up and sent by God for a certain mission, to effect a certain result in the Church, or on sinners, though with no fresh revelation, but with a special energy in which to fulfill it, beyond the bounds of mere circumscribed gift as members within, but special in its relation to Christ.²⁸⁹

Any Christian in this category, of course, I would say, would fall into the third class of apostles as mentioned above. They would be apostles sent out by the Holy Spirit through the Churches. They would be men so gifted like Barnabas, who was set apart from the Church of Antioch by the Holy Spirit for an apostolic work (Acts 13:1-4). We know this work was apostolic in nature because the Holy Spirit designates them both as apostles in Acts 14:4. Or, perhaps, they might be like Epaphroditus who was called by the Holy Spirit an apostle of the Church of Philippi (Phil. 2:25 see Young's Literal Translation), or, perhaps, they might be like those unnamed apostles of the Churches mentioned by Paul in II Cor. 8:23 (see Young's Literal Translation). In any case, it is interesting to note that we have no example in Scripture where such men in this third category of apostles ever presumed to take that title for themselves. Other Christians may have called them apostles, but they never called themselves apostles, unlike those apostles from the first and second group who sometimes did, as we already mentioned (i.e. Peter in I Pet. 1:1 and Paul in Titus 1:1).

So, perhaps, following the same Scriptural pattern, it would be best in modern times to simply use the title of "missionary." Of course, such a missionary would have to be known as "pioneer" missionary since he would be one who was preaching the gospel in a remote part of the world, like unto Hudson Taylor in China in the 19th century, or C. T. Studd shortly thereafter in Africa. All other missionaries, not preaching the gospel in such remote parts of the world would more than likely be those gifted by the Holy Spirit as evangelists and not as apostles.

It should be mentioned that the apostles were few and far between, even in the Early Church. It seems in the Church pastors and/or teachers would be the most plentiful. Then would come evangelists, who while being less in number than pastor/teachers would be greater in number than the prophets. And, then, of course, prophets would be greater in

²⁸⁹ John Nelson Darby, "Operations of the Spirit of God," *Collected Writings of J.N. Darby: Doctrinal 1*, <http://bibletruthpublishers.com/operations-of-the-spirit-of-god/john-nelson-darby-jnd/collected-writings-of-j-n-darby-doctrinal-1/la62245> accessed on 5/8/215

number than the apostles, but less in number than evangelists. The apostles, of course, being a foundational gift, would be the fewest of all. In all of Church History there probably have only been a handful of apostles, when compared to prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Yet, the gift is still important and even today God may still give the gift when the gospel is carried to distant and unevangelized land.

However, with that being said, in all likelihood (since the gift is rarely given today) most Christians all over the world will never come face to face with such a gifted Christian. It is interesting to note that Adoniram Judson, who some might consider an example of a modern day apostle, returned to America only once in his some 37 years of labour in Burma. Most of his countrymen never saw him once the Holy Spirit had sent him out as a “pioneer missionary.”

But the thing to remember in all this, is if someone claims to be an apostle today, adopting this honor for himself, he more than likely is a false apostle. If someone, ministers only in “evangelized” areas and not “unevangelized” areas, he, more than likely is a false apostle. If such a one asks for money, either for himself, or his ministry, he is a false apostle. If such a one does not know or contend for the Historic Christian Faith, such a one is a false apostle. And, if such a one “lords” it over the saints, demanding submission, instituting system of strict accountability, such a one is a false apostle.

A true apostle today will work with his own hands when needed, never asking for money for himself or his ministry. He will search out areas where Christ has not been named in order to share the good news of Christ. He will more than likely be unknown to many. He will suffer greatly. He will pour himself out for the lost, taking up his cross, ever denying himself. He will be as Paul says, a spectacle to the world, a fool for Christ; one who is weak and has no honour; one who might be hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed. He will, in all likelihood, be roughly treated, sometimes homeless, and most certainly reviled, persecuted, slandered, and treated as the scum of the world, the dreg of all things (see I Cor. 4:9-13 NASB). These are the signs of one who is truly gifted by God to be an apostle. He will live like his Master did in His humiliation, not like his Master does in His glorification. He will always know the cross must come before glory. And, like his Master he will never seek the prestige and honor of his position, but will gird a towel and wash the feet of the disciples. Anyone who resists this, and

prefers a position of honor and glory instead should be immediately held suspect.

As for prophets, they also were meant to continue a *circulating ministry*, traveling and visiting different Churches. They too are given until the end of the Church Age. Their work would involve the application of the mind of God (through Scripture) to current problems and situations. Sometimes, perhaps, they might discharge their ministry through their writings, as it seems they did not travel as much as the apostles, but their ministry in many cases was also an extra-local work to the saints at large. Their ministry was always a ministry of comfort and encouragement (Acts 15:32).

Acts 15:32 Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message. NASB

Today, such men with this gift might travel and speak in different Bible Conferences, but their authority, like the apostles, will always be spiritual and moral. They will not exercise any official authority within the local Churches they visit. They will respect the formal and localized authority of the elders within every assembly, yet still speak boldly in the name of the Lord. Some might feel that J. N. Darby fulfilled this role in modern times. Whether he did or not is beside the question. At the minimum, surely we can say he was a “worker” in the Lord and was involved in an extra-local work when he first returned to Plymouth. His untiring labour in the Lord is well attested. He faithfully served the Lord in many cities. He truly was a fellow-labourer in Christ. But as a worker, if only he had respected these two distinct spheres of labour in God’s work, the local and the extra-local, he might never have caused the heartache and division that came from his “lording” it over the assemblies. For those who wish to see him as a modern day prophet, he certainly, did not act like a prophet in the New Testament sense of the word, i.e. by being one who would never presume to act beyond the authority granted him by the Lord. His actions showed he did not fully trust that the Chief Shepherd of the assemblies was the One to discipline those assemblies in toto, rather, he sought to enforce his authority with assembly-wide excommunications which was completely unbiblical.

Excommunication in the Bible was always local, with a specific procedure to insure it was not abused. Only individuals were excommunicated in the Bible, never Churches. For an entire Church to be excommunicated, every individual within the Church must be

excommunicated, one by one; and that would mean following the biblical procedure many times over and over for each and every individual. That would be the biblical way. But J. N. Darby never followed such a procedure. He simply determined that an entire assembly was guilty, without ever examining every brother and sister individually. Where was the biblical basis for such an act? (Let alone the fact that he had no authority to excommunicate another Christian who was in another assembly besides his own. Nor, besides the fact that only a Church can excommunicate an individual. A Christian individual never has the authority to excommunicate another Christian individual.) Perhaps, he thought it would be too tedious to examine each and every individual one by one, but when is our aversion to tedious labour an excuse to ignore the commands of Scripture? Laziness in the things of the Lord can never be justified or excused. Peripheral casualties, resulting from corporate excommunications, all because individual examination is considered impractical, or too time consuming, can never be acceptable. It betrays a spiritual laziness, a lack of faith in the Chief Shepherd, and a false zeal for the Lord. One who is truly a prophet, pleasing to his Lord, will never act in such a way, exceeding what is written.

But with that being said, the true ministry of a prophet is needed in today's Church. As Paul warned, many are falling away from the Faith; a prophet would contend, courageously for the Faith, without apology. Many are following the ways of the world; a prophet would boldly declare that whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jam 4:4 NASB). Many are abandoning the Scriptural patterns of the Church governance of a plurality of elders, substituting, instead a Senior Pastor or an elder considered first among many; a prophet would declare the Divine pattern should remain inviolate, being given for by God for the lifting up of His Son as the Chief Shepherd of the Sheep. And, finally, with all of today's problems confronting the Church a true prophet of God would make known the mind of the Lord as laid out in God's Word in confirmation that the Holy Spirit has given to us all things necessary for life and godliness in the Sacred Scripture. A prophet would make known there is no truth outside the Divine Scriptures. Salvation or sanctification cannot be found in the psychologies and philosophies of the world. A prophet would continually warn the saints with the same admonition of Paul—

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. NASB

Evangelist, are perhaps, the most easily discerned today. It is the one aspect of the work that seems to have readily continued into modern times. They are usually called missionaries today. But like the apostles and prophets, their authority is also spiritual and moral. It is never formalized in a local Church. An evangelist is always traveling, preaching Christ Jesus to lost souls. However, a missionary or evangelist will always have a spiritual authority in newly formed Churches, teaching the saints the things of the Lord until the time comes that the Holy Spirit establishes elders in the Church. An evangelist in the work will many times, especially in foreign lands, travel between various Churches exercising a spiritual and moral authority yet always respecting the authority of the bishops or elders in each Church. Their ministry involves, not only the preaching of the Gospel, but also the teaching of sound doctrine. This is what Timothy did in Ephesus.

Timothy preached the Gospel, in season and out of season as is seen in II Tim. 4:1-5.

II Tim. 4:1-5 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.

And in I Tim. 6:2-4 and I Tim. 1:3 we clearly see the work of an evangelist involved teaching and charging men not to teach doctrines that were false.

I Tim. 6:2-4 And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. **Teach and preach these principles.** 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,

I Tim. 1:3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine (ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν—i.e. heterodox). NKJV

In this sense, this aspect of the ministry of evangelist is no different than that of the prophets or apostles, or for that matter, pastors or teachers. All those gifted men in Eph. 4:11-12 are given a responsibility to guard the flock against heresy and any dilution or falling away from the Historic Christian Faith.

Additionally, this teaching of evangelist would also include the conveyance of those “faithful sayings” of Paul that were intended to insure a Church’s proper mindset and functioning, as well the conveyance of Paul’s desire that proper respect and honour be shown to those elders ruling within the assembly.

I Tim. 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. KJV

This is such an important aspect of the ministry of an evangelist for a lack of respect will always be a seed that ends in sin. An evangelist, being a worker in a *circulating ministry*, and thus having no official authority in the local affairs, is a perfect candidate for this type of encouragement since he would be able to say things an elder might be hesitant to say, not wishing to appear autocratic. Paul knew this and so had Timothy make sure that this truth was taught in the assembly. Today missionaries can do the same thing once they leave a Church in the hands of local elders.

In addition, we see that Timothy as a worker and evangelist would also be an arbitrator in local issues having to do with any charges brought against an elder. As one who exercised an extra-local, spiritual, and moral authority, he would be the perfect one to arbitrate in such issues.

I Tim. 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. NKJV

So we see some of the responsibilities of an evangelist. Those who do not understand the distinction between the *work* and *the local Church*, between a *spiritual* and *formal* authority, between a *circulatory* and *stationary* ministry between *extra-local* work and a *local work*, have misunderstood these verses in the epistles to Timothy, thinking that they

should apply to every single believer, or that it should apply to Timothy as the first monarchical bishop, and/or pastor in the Church.

Such misunderstandings result from the departure of Church governance and the pattern left for us in Scripture. Once one understands the biblical pattern, one can see Paul's epistle to Timothy and/or Titus in no way establishes a hierarchical authority structure within the Church. Paul was simply discussing matters of the circulating work and the local Church with some of his fellow workers.

If these epistles did reveal the presence of a hierarchical authority structure within the Church with Timothy and Titus as its single bishop or its senior pastor, Paul would never have worried that their authority might be ignored or despised, for their authority would have already been formalized into an official and recognized structure within the Church. But since they were from outside the local Church, having no formalized authority within the Church, it makes perfect sense for Paul to be concerned that Timothy and Titus know how to exercise their spiritual authority with all command, allowing none to ignore their place as servants of Christ, yet at the same time be careful not to lord it over the Churches operating in an autocratic manner.

I Tim. 4:12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. KJV

Titus 2:15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee. KJV

The exercise of spiritual authority is never feeble or wavering; it simply is not autocratic. Timothy was an evangelist. He was in the "work," and so was known as a "workman," a "worker." He was not a bishop or pastor.

II Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, **a worker** who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. NKJV

Rom. 16:21 Timothy, **my fellow worker**, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you. NKJV

I Thess. 3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's **fellow worker** in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith. NASB

A bishop or pastor would be involved in a *stationary ministry*, but Timothy was a “worker,” set apart to the “work,” and so was involved in a *circulatory ministry*. Scripture confirms this by showing that he traveled from Church to Church prescribing the things mentioned above. But he always did so as a “worker.” Notice all the back and forth travel Scripture assigns to him. A bishop or pastor of a Church would never be involved in such constant back and forth travel between Churches, but a “worker” or an “evangelist” would. We must remember travel was slow in those days; it could take weeks to move from Church to Church. I do not believe a pastor or bishop, that had local responsibilities, would undertake such continuous travel. But an evangelist could undertake such continuous travel because, according to the biblical model, the Church was cared for by the local bishops, not by one like Timothy.

Consider the witness of Scripture concerning the continuous travel of Timothy.

Acts 17:15 Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; **and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.** NASB

Acts 19:22 **And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus,** he himself stayed in Asia for a while. NASB

I Cor. 4:17 For this reason **I have sent to you Timothy,** who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. NASB

Phil. 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. NASB

I Thess. 3:2 and **we sent Timothy,** our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith. NASB

II Tim. 4:21 **Make every effort to come before winter.** Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. NASB

And, so today, we can see that when the distinction of the circulating work and the local Church is observed, an evangelist, as well prophets (and in some cases apostles) all have a special ministry to fulfill for the overall spiritual well-being of the Churches as they travel from Church to Church with their spiritual and moral authority of perfecting the saints. When Churches respect their place and authority in the Body of Christ

and take heed to their spiritual exhortations and admonitions much blessing can be gained in the life of the Church (II Cor. 13:10).

May the Lord so reestablish this distinction between the work and the local Church today unto the building up of the Body of Christ until that day comes when our Saviour returns from heaven and makes us all into a mature man unto the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ. Amen.

End of Volume I

Scriptural Index

A

Acts 1: 5.....	15, 16, 19	Acts 9:7.....	433
Acts 1: 7.....	289	Acts 9:31.....	290
Acts 1:12.....	169	Acts 10: 40-42.....	24
Acts 1:13-15.....	264	Acts 10:38-39.....	23
Acts. 1:15-2:1.....	266	Acts 10:41.....	314, 319
Acts 1:20.....	280, 291	Acts 11:1.....	289, 290
Acts 1:20-25.....	291	Acts 11:26.....	321
Acts 1:21-26.....	453	Acts 11:27-28.....	481
Acts 1:22.....	312	Acts 12:1.....	108
Acts 2:1.....	19, 264	Acts 12:1-2.....	291
Acts 2:3-4.....	280	Acts 13:1.....	474, 481
Acts 2:8-10.....	171	Acts 13:1-4.....	503
Acts 2:14, 37.....	60	Acts 13:2.....	475, 477
Acts 2:16-18.....	280	Acts 14: 3.....	467
Acts 2: 17-18.....	481	Acts 14:19-28.....	322
Acts 2:22-23.....	23	Acts 14:21-23.....	313, 316,325
Acts 2:24-36.....	23	Acts 14:23.....	238, 299, 304, 317, 365, 380, 426, 429, 447
Acts 2:33.....	96	Acts 14:26.....	477
Acts 2:36.....	393	Acts. 15:1-2.....	209
Acts 2:38.....	60	Acts 15: 1-2, 5.....	187
Acts 2:42.....	280	Acts 15:1-21.....	241
Acts 2:46.....	148, 207	Acts 15:2.....	291
Acts 2:47.....	17, 18, 19, 147	Acts 15:13.....	251
Acts 3:4.....	60	Acts 15:19.....	249, 250
Acts 3:6-8.....	280	Acts 15:5.....	209, 419, 421
Acts 4:10-12.....	91	Acts 15:21.....	159
Acts 4:34-35.....	291	Acts 15:22.....	299
Acts 5:1-10.....	495	Acts 15:22, 32.....	481
Acts 5:3.....	442	Acts 15:24.....	247
Acts 5:12.....	467	Acts 15:32.....	321, 505
Acts 5:14.....	17, 19	Acts 15:38.....	477
Acts 5:14-15.....	280	Acts 16:4.....	249
Acts 5:34.....	331	Acts 16:14-15.....	177
Acts 5:42.....	207	Acts 16:37.....	321
Acts 6: 1-4.....	291	Acts 17:1-10.....	364
Acts 6:2-6.....	317, 322	Acts 17:2-3.....	367
Acts 6:3.....	313, 325	Acts 17:4, 10.....	455
Acts 6:9.....	188	Acts 17:5-6.....	366
Acts 7:38.....	15, 147	Acts 17:15.....	510
Acts 8:1.....	18, 207, 289	Acts 18:2.....	195
Acts 8:3.....	207	Acts 18:2-3.....	338
Acts 8:4.....	276	Acts 18:5.....	365
Acts 8:25.....	290	Acts 18:5-8.....	171
Acts 9:1-2.....	253	Acts 18:7.....	204
		Acts 18:8.....	366

Acts 18:22.....	152
Acts 19:9.....	204
Acts 19:10, 26.....	199
Acts 19:15.....	60
Acts 19:22.....	510
Acts 19: 29-41	143
Acts 19:39.....	144, 145
Acts. 20:6-9	204
Acts 20:7.....	145
Acts 20:7-9	181
Acts 20: 17-28	296
Acts 20:17-32	428
Acts 20:27-30	236
Acts 20:28.....	18, 294, 297, 300, 301, 302, 303, 408, 426
Acts 20:28-30	332, 398
Acts 20: 28-35	483
Acts 20:30.....	408, 409
Acts 20:35.....	338
Acts 20:31.....	408
Acts 20:32.....	449
Acts 20:33-35	280, 460
Acts 20:34-35	411
Acts. 21:8.....	276
Acts 21:10-11	481
Acts. 21: 18-24	247
Acts 21:20.....	208
Acts 21:25.....	250, 321
Acts 21:39.....	224
Acts 22:3.....	242
Acts 22:4.....	253
Acts 22:17-21	25
Acts 22:19.....	162
Acts 22:25-28	224
Acts 23:11.....	25
Acts. 23:16.....	189
Acts 23:20.....	60
Acts 24:12.....	161
Acts 24:15.....	321
Acts 26:1.....	58
Acts 26:14.....	25
Acts 28:15-16	164
Acts 28: 30-31	193

C

Col. 1: 6-7.....	199
Col. 1:15.....	95
Col. 1:15-17.....	264

Col. 1:16	39, 95
Col. 1:28	384
Col. 2:21-23	215
Col. 2:8	209, 506
Col. 2:9	95
Col. 3:4	116
Col. 3:11	91
Col. 3:16	337, 384
Col. 3:22-23	281
Col. 4:6	342
Col. 4:12-13	212
Col. 4:13	201
Col. 4:15	155, 204, 215
Col. 4:15-16.....	201, 203, 218
Col. 4:16	201, 204, 211, 219, 226

D

Deut. 12:5	136
Deut. 12:11	29
Deut. 13:4	17
Deut. 16:11	136
Deut. 17:8-9.....	246, 421
Deut. 19:14	239, 424
Deut. 21:23	88
Deut. 32:4	72

E

Eph. 1:9.....	33
Eph. 1:18-23	265
Eph. 1:22-23	96
Eph. 2:10.....	347
Eph. 2:10-15, 19-21	91
Eph. 2:13-16	7
Eph. 2:19-20	96
Eph. 2:20.....	81, 86, 481
Eph. 2:20-22	32
Eph. 2:21-22	43
Eph. 2:22.....	132
Eph. 3:1-9	20
Eph. 3:3-11	26
Eph. 3:3-4	33
Eph. 3:4-11	32
Eph. 3:8-9	21, 427
Eph. 3:9.....	36, 37

Eph. 4:11	40, 276, 297, 298, 301, 303, 473, 479, 501
Eph. 4:3-4	132
Eph. 4:7-11	293
Eph. 4:7-16	470
Eph. 4:8-16	293
Eph. 4:11-12	395, 407, 471, 508
Eph. 4:12	471
Eph. 4:14	397
Eph. 5:11-13	410
Eph. 5:23-32	108
Eph. 5:29-30	152
Eph. 5:30	7
Eph. 5:31-32	19
Eph. 5:32	33, 35, 108, 152
Eph. 6: 10-19	339
Eph. 6:10-12	494
Eph. 6:19	35

Ex. 12:38	392
Ex. 16:29	169
Ex. 25: 8,30	30
Ex. 26:1	30
Ex. 27	30
Ex. 35:30-33	46
Ex. 36:1-2	46

Ezra 5:16	81
-----------------	----

Ezekiel 10:19	30
Ezekiel 43:10-11	38, 39
Ezekiel 45:1	475

G

Gal. 1	21
Gal. 1:2	154
Gal. 1: 1, 10-12	435
Gal. 1:13	18
Gal. 1:14	242
Gal. 1:16-17	242
Gal. 1:19	454, 502
Gal. 1:22	18, 19, 154
Gal. 1:6-8	234, 422
Gal. 2:1-10	21

Gal 2:4	457
Gal. 2:4-6	243
Gal. 2:6	247
Gal. 2:9	251
Gal. 2:11-14	232
Gal. 2: 11-13	209
Gal 2:12	253
Gal. 2:20	408
Gal. 3:13	88
Gal. 3:16	223
Gal. 3:28	91
Gal. 4:4	87
Gal. 4:4-5	83
Gal. 4:9-19	210
Gal. 4:17	331, 457
Gal. 5:1	232

Gen. 2:8, 24	29
Gen. 2:15	30
Gen. 12: 8-20	450
Gen. 17:5	65, 110
Gen. 21:33	73
Gen. 22:1	490
Gen. 32:28	65, 110
Gen. 49:2	110
Gen. 50:24	329

H

Hab. 1:12	73
-----------------	----

Heb. 1:8	95
Heb. 2:11	84
Heb. 2:11, 14-17	83
Heb. 2:12	41, 83
Heb. 2:9	95
Heb. 3:1	82, 460, 468
Heb. 3:13	339
Heb. 4:15	78
Heb. 5:1,4-5	327
Heb. 7:26	87
Heb. 8:4-5	31
Heb. 8:5	8, 47
Heb. 10:1-14	89
Heb. 11:17	490
Heb. 13:5	410
Heb. 13:7	434

Heb 13:13-14..... 468
 Heb. 13:17 298, 400

I

I Chron. 17:21-22..... 110
 I Chron. 21:18, 26-30..... 49
 I Chron. 22:1-2 49
 I Chron. 25:3..... 482
 I Chron. 28:10-13..... 45
 I Chron. 28:11-12..... 8
 I Chron. 28:11-13, 19..... 31
 I Chron. 29:1..... 44

II Chron. 5:7 29
 II Chron. 13:10-11 31

I Cor. 1:1..... 200, 502, 503
 I Cor. 1:4-7 278
 I Cor. 1:10..... 372
 I Cor. 1:11-13 137, 417
 I Cor. 1:12..... 40, 106
 I Cor. 1:15..... 133
 I Cor. 1:2..... 18, 153, 219
 I Cor. 1:26-29 277
 I Cor. 1:27-29 275
 I Cor. 1:31..... 418
 I Cor. 2:4..... 409, 468
 I Cor. 2:13..... 409
 I Cor. 3: 1-7 417
 I Cor. 3:3, 11-15..... 120
 I Cor. 3:4..... 106, 417
 I Cor. 3:4-5 137
 I Cor. 3:9..... 478
 I Cor. 3:9-11 79
 I Cor. 3:10-11 46
 I Cor. 3:10-17 47
 I Cor. 3:11..... 105
 I Cor. 3:16..... 138
 I Cor. 3:16-17 9, 29
 I Cor. 4:6..... 334
 I Cor. 4:9:13..... 468
 I Cor. 4:9-10 478
I Cor. 4:9-13 279, 456, 504
 I Cor. 4:16..... 433, 434
 I Cor. 4:16-17 397
 I Cor. 4:17..... 510
 I Cor. 5..... 423
 I Cor. 5:3-5 495

I Cor. 5:4..... 138
 I Cor. 5:5..... 309
 I Cor. 5:13..... 497
 I Cor. 7:17-22..... 338
 I Cor. 7:40..... 444
 I Cor. 8:6..... 95
 I Cor. 9:1..... 454
 I Cor. 9: 1-3 396
 I Cor. 9:12-18..... 411
 I Cor. 9:13-14..... 461
 I Cor. 9: 24-27..... 270
 I Cor. 10:11..... 393
 I Cor. 10:32..... 18, 122
 I Cor. 11:1..... 434
 I Cor. 11:3..... 372
 I Cor. 11:4-5 481
 I Cor. 11:13..... 229
 I Cor. 11:13,16..... 400
 I Cor. 11: 17-18..... 144
 I Cor. 11:18..... 396
 I Cor. 11: 18-20..... 145
 I Cor. 11:18-22..... 273
 I Cor. 11:22..... 149
 I Cor. 11:32..... 18
 I Cor. 12:4-7 281
 I Cor. 12:7..... 380
 I Cor. 12:7-13..... 132
 I Cor. 12:13..... 14, 16
 I Cor. 12:18..... 302
 I Cor. 12:18, 28..... 293, 304
 I Cor. 12:22-26..... 274
I Cor. 12:28..... 267, 275, 474
 I Cor. 12:29..... 337, 481
 I Cor. 13: 3-6..... 396
 I Cor. 14:6, 18-19..... 149
 I Cor. 14:18..... 280
 I Cor. 14:18-19..... 151
 I Cor. 14:33..... 265
I Cor. 14:37..... 28, 229, 423, 429
 I Cor. 14:40..... 266
 I Cor. 13:3..... 450
 I Cor. 15:3-4 96
 I Cor. 15:3-9 454
 I Cor. 15:6..... 455
 I Cor. 15:7..... 502
 I Cor. 15:9..... 18
 I Cor. 15:25..... 342
 I Cor. 15:51..... 34
 I Cor. 15:51-54..... 481
 I Cor. 15:58..... 474
I Cor. 16:3..... 358, 359, 362
 I Cor. 16:15..... 364, 372

I Cor. 16:15-16	266, 400	I John 2:10	69
I Cor. 16:15-18	379	I John 2:24	97, 409
I Cor. 16:18.....	363, 395	I John 4:2	23
I Cor. 16:19.....	154, 173, 204	I John 4:2-3.....	85
II Cor. 1:24.....	228, 240, 309, 400, 408, 456, 457, 490	I John 5:11	116
II Cor. 2:3	261	I John 5:12	116
II Cor. 2:7	339	I John 5:18.....	95
II Cor. 2:9	490	I John 5:20	95
II Cor. 2:17	410, 458	II John 1:1.....	299
II Cor. 3:6.....	96	III Jn. 1: 9-10	299
II Cor. 3:17	96	III John 1:9-11	491
II Cor. 4:7-12.....	468	I Kings 3:2	137
II Cor. 4:12	479	I Kings 5:17	81
II Cor. 5:12	331	I Kings 6:33-35.....	30
II Cor. 6:3-10.....	468	I Kings 8:18	136
II Cor. 6:16	79	II Kings 17:13.....	397
II Cor. 7: 6-9, 14-15.....	396	II Kings 19:15.....	29
II Cor. 8:1	154	I Pet. 1:1.....	503
II Cor. 8:19	314, 319	I Pet. 1:23.....	411
II Cor. 8:22	359	I Pet. 2:4-9	92
II Cor. 8:23	452, 503	I Pet. 2:21.....	96
II Cor. 10: 1-12.....	450	I Pet. 2:22.....	86, 87, 286
II Cor. 10:10	409	I Pet. 2:25.....	40, 292
II Cor. 10:12.....	331	I Pet. 2:6-7	87
II Cor. 10:13-16.....	477	I Pet. 2:8.....	68, 69
II Cor. 10:3-8.....	494	I Pet. 4:14.....	63
II Cor. 11	21	I Pet. 5:1.....	280, 291, 299, 483
II Cor. 11:2	231, 234, 422	I Pet. 5:1-4	252, 298, 483
II Cor. 11:2-3.....	212	I Pet. 5:2.....	407, 411
II Cor. 11:4, 13,20-23	248	I Pet. 5:2-3	237
II Cor. 11: 4, 13-15	212	I Pet. 5:2-4	423
II Cor. 11:6	409	I Pet. 5:3.....	240, 407, 408
II Cor. 11:7-9.....	460	I Pet. 5:4.....	40, 292
II Cor. 11:13-14.....	467	I Pet. 5:5.....	400
II Cor. 11:16-23.....	331	II Pet. 1:3	292
II Cor. 11:20	457	II Pet. 1:4	16
II Cor. 12:3-4.....	26	II Pet. 1:12	409
II Cor. 12: 11-13	396	II Pet. 1:21	96
II Cor. 12: 9-10.....	468	II Pet. 2:1-2.....	399
II Cor. 12:1	26	II Pet. 2:3	410
II Cor. 12:12-15.....	467	II Pet. 3:2	105, 447
II Cor. 12:16	287	II Pet. 3:15-16.....	21, 26
II Cor. 12:20	265, 396	II Pet. 3:16.....	187
II Cor. 12:21	261		
II Cor. 13:2-3.....	310		
II Cor. 13:8	309		
II Cor. 13:10	235, 262, 280, 511		
I John 1:1-3.....	452		
I John 1:5	95		

I Sam. 2:2.....	74	I Tim. 1:4-5.....	276
I Sam. 7:15-16.....	482	I Tim. 1:5-7.....	441
I Sam. 8:7.....	265	I Tim. 1:6-7.....	331
I Sam. 16:1,11-13.....	489	I Tim. 1:7.....	331, 332, 500
I Sam. 25:31.....	69	I Tim. 2: 7.....	481
I Sam. 26:6-12.....	489	I Tim. 2:11.....	343, 357
II Sam. 3:24-25.....	247	I Tim. 2:11-12.....	492
II Sam. 3:39.....	246, 247	I Tim. 2:1-15.....	276
II Sam.18:11-14.....	247	I Tim. 2:12.....	333, 343
II Sam. 19:13.....	247	I Tim. 2:2-12.....	339
II Sam. 19:22.....	247	I Tim. 2:7.....	483
II Sam. 20:4-10.....	247	I Tim. 2:8-9.....	339, 343
II Sam. 22:2.....	71	I Tim. 3:1	328, 330, 346, 402
II Sam. 24:10.....	450	I Tim. 3: 1-10.....	302, 324, 326
I Thess. 1:1.....	219	I Tim. 3:2.....	301, 341, 402, 404, 409, 473
I Thess. 1:9.....	366	I Tim. 3:3.....	403, 404, 410
I Thess. 2:3.....	287	I Tim. 3:4.....	405
I Thess. 2:4.....	359	I Tim. 3:4-5.....	384
I Thess. 2:6.....	455	I Tim. 3:5.....	330, 406
I Thess. 2:6-7.....	309	I Tim. 3:6.....	411
I Thess. 2:14.....	18, 366	I Tim. 3:7.....	341, 402
I Thess. 3:1-2.....	364	I Tim. 3:8.....	353
I Thess. 3:2.....	509, 510	I Tim. 3:10	348, 353, 354, 362, 379, 384
I Thess. 3:6.....	365	I Tim. 3:12.....	337
I Thess. 4:1.....	342, 370, 372	I Tim. 3:15.....	37, 330, 340, 344, 355
I Thess. 4:11.....	339	I Tim. 3:16.....	85
I Thess. 5:9.....	304	I Tim. 4: 6, 11.....	343
I Thess. 5:11-12.....	370	I Tim. 4:9.....	346
I Thess. 5:12.....	298, 302, 363, 372, 374, 379, 380	I Tim. 4:11.....	337
I Thess. 5:12-13.....	400	I Tim. 4:12.....	509
I Thess. 5:13.....	372	I Tim. 4:12-16.....	308
II Thess. 2: 1-12.....	481	I Tim. 5:1-2.....	343
II Thess. 2:1.....	372	I Tim. 5:1-16.....	276
II Thess. 2:9.....	467	I Tim. 5:8.....	343
II Thess. 2:15.....	338, 349, 387	I Tim. 5:9.....	300
II Thess. 3:6-9.....	411	I Tim. 5:17.....	298, 299, 300, 301, 332, 379, 382, 384, 408, 487, 508
II Thess. 3:7, 9.....	434	I Tim. 5:17-19.....	276
II Thess. 3:8.....	411	I Tim. 5:19.....	508
II Thess. 3:9.....	408	I Tim. 6:1-2.....	344
I Tim 4:12.....	352	I Tim. 6:2-4.....	507
I Tim. 1:15.....	346	I Tim. 6:8.....	462
I Tim. 1:19.....	343	I Tim. 6:9.....	187
I Tim. 1:20.....	495	II Tim. 1:1.....	474
I Tim. 1:3.....	276, 337, 343, 508	II Tim. 1:6-7.....	308
I Tim. 1:3-4.....	483	II Tim. 1:11.....	280, 304, 483
I Tim. 1:4-5.....	276	II Tim. 1:13.....	97, 409
I Tim. 1:5-7.....	441	II Tim. 1:15.....	331, 442
I Tim. 1:6-7.....	331	II Tim. 2:1-4.....	338
I Tim. 1:7.....	331, 332, 500		
I Tim. 2: 7.....	481		
I Tim. 2:11.....	343, 357		
I Tim. 2:11-12.....	492		
I Tim. 2:1-15.....	276		
I Tim. 2:12.....	333, 343		
I Tim. 2:2-12.....	339		
I Tim. 2:7.....	483		
I Tim. 2:8-9.....	339, 343		
I Tim. 3:1	328, 330, 346, 402		
I Tim. 3: 1-10.....	302, 324, 326		
I Tim. 3:2.....	301, 341, 402, 404, 409, 473		
I Tim. 3:3.....	403, 404, 410		
I Tim. 3:4.....	405		
I Tim. 3:4-5.....	384		
I Tim. 3:5.....	330, 406		
I Tim. 3:6.....	411		
I Tim. 3:7.....	341, 402		
I Tim. 3:8.....	353		
I Tim. 3:10	348, 353, 354, 362, 379, 384		
I Tim. 3:12.....	337		
I Tim. 3:15.....	37, 330, 340, 344, 355		
I Tim. 3:16.....	85		
I Tim. 4: 6, 11.....	343		
I Tim. 4:9.....	346		
I Tim. 4:11.....	337		
I Tim. 4:12.....	509		
I Tim. 4:12-16.....	308		
I Tim. 5:1-2.....	343		
I Tim. 5:1-16.....	276		
I Tim. 5:8.....	343		
I Tim. 5:9.....	300		
I Tim. 5:17.....	298, 299, 300, 301, 332, 379, 382, 384, 408, 487, 508		
I Tim. 5:17-19.....	276		
I Tim. 5:19.....	508		
I Tim. 6:1-2.....	344		
I Tim. 6:2-4.....	507		
I Tim. 6:8.....	462		
I Tim. 6:9.....	187		
II Tim. 1:1.....	474		
II Tim. 1:6-7.....	308		
II Tim. 1:11.....	280, 304, 483		
II Tim. 1:13.....	97, 409		
II Tim. 1:15.....	331, 442		
II Tim. 2:1-4.....	338		

II Tim. 2:11.....	346
II Tim. 2:14.....	340
II Tim. 2:15.....	409, 509
II Tim. 2:19.....	53
II Tim. 2:24.....	342
II Tim. 2:24-26.....	406
II Tim. 3:8.....	349
II Tim. 3:10-11.....	434
II Tim. 3:16-17.....	409
II Tim. 4:1.....	96
II Tim. 4:1-5.....	337, 507
II Tim. 4:3-4.....	399
II Tim. 4:5.....	276, 308
II Tim. 4:21.....	510

Isa. 2:21.....	52
Isa. 8:14	68, 69, 76
Isa. 9:6.....	264
Isa. 28:16.....	76, 77, 86
Isa. 30:29.....	71, 72
Isa. 44:5.....	111
Isa. 44:6.....	265
Isa. 53:1-5.....	88
Isa. 60:17b.....	446
Isa. 63:7-12.....	394
Isa. 63:16.....	115
Isa. 64:8.....	115

J

Jam. 1:1.....	502
Jam. 1:27.....	118
James 3:1.....	474
Jam. 3:16.....	265, 327
Jam. 4:1.....	118
Jam 4:4.....	506
Jam. 5:14.....	299

Jer. 3:4, 16.....	115
Jer. 6:21.....	69
Jer. 29: 19.....	397

Job 10:12.....	330
Job 11:7-8.....	78
Job 24:2.....	239, 424
Job 29:2.....	330

Job 37:23.....	78
----------------	----

John 1:1.....	22
John 1:3.....	95
John 1:4.....	116
John 1:12, 13.....	117
John 1:14.....	23, 95
John 1:42.....	59, 64
John 2:14-17.....	464
John 2:15-21.....	64
John 2:16.....	410
John 3:13.....	95
John 3:16, 18.....	95
John 3:17.....	83
John 4:6.....	78
John 4:23-24.....	132
John 4:34.....	89
John 6:69.....	95
John 8:6.....	77
John 8:12.....	95
John 9:32-34.....	457
John 10:3-4.....	394
John 10:30.....	95
John 11:41.....	58
John 13:1.....	22
John 14:16.....	387
John 14:26.....	335
John 15:26.....	96
John 16:12-14.....	335
John 16:13.....	67, 132
John 17:4.....	22, 89
John 17:5.....	95
John 17:6.....	115
John 17:11.....	114
John 17:18.....	82
John 18:23.....	87
John 19:30.....	89
John 20:28.....	23, 85
John 21:15-17.....	336, 483
John 21:16.....	280, 291, 299
John 21: 23.....	223

Judges 11:25.....	61
Judges 13:17.....	135

Jude 1:3.....	97, 409
Jude 1:20.....	94

L

Lev. 6:16.....	461
Lev. 6:25-26.....	462
Lev.7:5-7.....	462
Lev. 7:8.....	461
Lev.7: 11-15, 31-34.....	462
Lev. 10:1-2.....	7
Lev. 19:4.....	69
Lev. 27:21.....	461

Luke 1:23, 39-40.....	462
Luke 1:26-35.....	96
Luke 1:33.....	96
Luke 3:23-38.....	187
Luke 4:12.....	78
Luke 5:17.....	331, 442
Luke 6:13.....	502
Luke 6:48.....	56
Luke 8:1.....	160, 161
Luke 8: 5-15.....	411
Luke 8:8.....	411
Luke 8:49.....	369
Luke 9:6.....	162
Luke 9:38.....	13
Luke 9:46-48.....	328
Luke 9:51-56.....	491
Luke 10:1-9.....	462
Luke 10:25.....	77
Luke 12:41.....	335
Luke 12:42.....	37
Luke 13:22.....	160
Luke 18:13.....	58
Luke 22:12.....	182
Luke 22:25.....	309
Luke 22:25-26.....	457, 487
Luke 22:31-32.....	495
Luke 22:34.....	368
Luke 24:46-49.....	337

M

Malachi 1:6.....	142
Mark 3:17.....	491
Mark 6:34-44.....	160
Mark 6:39-40.....	160

Mark 7:3, 11.....	223
Mark 7:7.....	334
Mark 7:7-9, 13.....	259
Mark 7:13.....	251, 397
Mark 7:16.....	251
Mark 10:35-45.....	327
Mark 10:43.....	327
Mark 12:15.....	77
Mark 14:15.....	182
Mark 14:37-38.....	408
Mark 15:15.....	96
Mark 16:14.....	321
Mark 16:19.....	96

Matt. 4:1-11.....	78
Matt. 4:13-16.....	468
Matt. 4:19.....	408
Matt. 4:19-20.....	434
Matt. 4:21.....	471
Matt. 5:17.....	87
Matt. 6:24-34.....	411
Matt. 7:15.....	399
Matt. 7:24.....	12, 13
Matt. 7:28-29.....	13
Matt. 8:9.....	11
Matt. 8:14.....	60
Matt. 10: 5-6.....	393
Matt. 11:29.....	11
Matt. 12:44.....	11
Matt. 13:11.....	34
Matt. 13:28-29.....	309
Matt. 15:24.....	393
Matt. 16:13-18.....	10
Matt. 16:13-20.....	62
Matt. 16:16.....	22
Matt. 16:18.....	14, 19, 22, 50, 58, 72, 106, 108, 121, 264
Matt. 17:15.....	13
Matt. 18:17.....	108, 149
Matt. 18: 17-20.....	134
Matt. 18:20.....	96, 132
Matt. 19:28.....	453
Matt. 20:21-28.....	282
Matt. 20:25.....	239, 309, 407, 424
Matt. 20:25-26.....	487
Matt. 21:18.....	78
Matt. 21:23.....	13
Matt. 23:8.....	113, 252, 254, 408, 417
Matt. 25:31.....	96
Matt. 27:2.....	96

Matt. 28:19..... 96
 Matt. 28:19-20 23, 453

Micah 3:11..... 410, 463
 Micah 3:5 LXX.....481
 Micah 5:2..... 95

N

Num. 3:28..... 30
 Num. 4:37..... 30
 Num. 18:21..... 461
 Num. 18:26-28..... 461
 Num. 20:8,12..... 48
 Num. 27:20..... 306, 391
 Num. 33:54..... 424
 Num. 35: 4-5..... 169

P

Phil. 1:1..... 300, 379, 426, 469
 Phil. 1:15-18 186
 Phil. 2:5-8 89, 328
 Phil. 2:6..... 95
 Phil. 2:7..... 95
 Phil. 2:19..... 510
 Phil. 2:25..... 452, 503
 Phil. 3:4-5 242
 Phil. 3:6..... 108
 Phil. 3:10..... 209
Phil. 3:17..... 186, 301, 408
 Phil. 3:19..... 186
 Phil. 4: 3..... 372, 446
 Phil. 4:10-12 411
 Phil. 4: 10-19 460
 Phil. 4:12..... 34
 Phil. 4:15..... 185
 Phil. 4:21..... 203
 Phil. 4:22..... 176, 178

Philemon 1:1-2 199
 Philemon 1:2..... 108, 155, 204
 Philemon 1:8-9 310

Philemon 1:10-12..... 199

Ps. 2:2 63
 Ps. 2:11 394
 Ps. 14:1 75
 Ps. 14:2 75
 Ps. 14:3 74, 75
 Ps. 18:2 71
 Ps. 74:1 392
 Ps. 74:3 392
 Ps. 77:20 394
 Ps. 78:12 392
 Ps. 78:55-64 393
 Ps. 78:67-68 49
 Ps. 78: 70-72..... 393
 Ps. 89:26 115
 Ps. 92:15 72
 Ps. 93:1-2 73
 Ps. 96:6-9 137
 Ps. 109:2 408
 Ps. 110:2 239
 Ps. 110:2 (109:2)..... 425
 Ps. 115:15 95

R

Rev. 1:4..... 154
 Rev. 1:11..... 230
 Rev. 1:20..... 230
 Rev. 2:1..... 153, 230, 237
 Rev. 2:2..... 455, 501
 Rev. 2:5..... 260, 423
 Rev. 2:8..... 154
 Rev. 2:12..... 154
 Rev. 2:13..... 99
 Rev.2:20..... 492
 Rev.2:21-23 492
 Rev. 3: 7-8 231
 Rev. 3:12-13 132
 Rev. 3:22..... 230
 Rev. 10:11..... 280
 Rev. 11:4..... 230
 Rev. 11:15..... 240, 425
 Rev. 13:13-14 467
 Rev. 15:4..... 404
 Rev. 21:14..... 58, 453
 Rev. 22:1..... 96
 Rev. 22:17..... 132

Rom. 1:4	312
Rom. 1:9	282
Rom. 1:24-32	165
Rom. 2:1	300
Rom. 3:10-18	74, 99
Rom. 5:14	14
Rom. 8:14	132
Rom. 8:29	209, 292
Rom. 8:3	86, 87
Rom. 9:20	300
Rom. 9:33	73, 76, 99
Rom. 10:4	87
Rom. 11:33	78
Rom. 12:2	209
Rom. 12:3	258
Rom. 12:5	96
Rom. 12:7	409
Rom. 12: 8	298
Rom. 12:9	285
Rom. 13:4	491
Rom. 13:7	272
Rom. 14:1-10	172, 259
Rom. 14:5	466
Rom. 14:9	458
Rom. 14:13	69
Rom. 15:14	338
Rom. 15:18-24	469
Rom. 15:20	468, 478, 501
Rom. 16:1-15	195
Rom. 16:3, 5	198
Rom. 16:3-5	154
Rom. 16:5	157, 158, 161, 175, 204
Rom. 16: 3-10	191
Rom. 16:6-16	176
Rom. 16:7	452
Rom. 16:10	204
Rom. 16: 10b	191
Rom. 16:10,11,14,15	205
Rom. 16:11b-13	192
Rom. 16:14	192
Rom. 16:14,15	204
Rom. 16:14-15	179
Rom. 16:15	184, 193

Rom. 16:17	186, 407
Rom. 16:18	186
Rom. 16:21	481, 509
Rom. 16:23	37, 179, 204, 272

Ruth 1:16	111
-----------------	-----

S

Song of Solomon 4:12	30
----------------------------	----

T

Titus 1:3	391
Titus 1:5	299, 305, 306, 312, 325, 339, 429
Titus 1:5-7	297, 300
Titus 1:5-9	304, 447
Titus 1:6	402, 405, 406
Titus 1:7	403, 410
Titus 1:8	403, 404, 405
Titus 1:9	409, 410
Titus 1:10	368
Titus 1:11	410
Titus 1:16	368
Titus 2:11	95
Titus 2:15	308, 339, 509
Titus 3:8	346, 347
Titus 3:12	325

Z

Zech. 14:16-21	251
Zech. 6:12-13	64

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