

The Administration of the Mystery

*“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...**” Eph. 3:8-9*

—the Apostle Paul

B. P. H.

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.**”¹

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,

¹ 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

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

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/or 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.”²

“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.*”³

“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.”⁴

² Edward Robinson, et al., *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1838) pg. 511

³ Greville Ewing, *A Greek Grammar and Greek and English Scripture Lexicon* (James Hedderwick & Co., Glasgow, 1812) pg. 265

⁴ 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)

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. 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 counsel 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.”⁵ Louw and Nida define it as—“οἰκονομία^a, ας f: a task involving management and organization...”⁶ And W. E. Vine says this regarding the word: “ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ (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...”⁷

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 with this sense of “steward” or “administrator” in Luke 12:42. The word is also used in Rom.

⁵ Edward Robinson, et al., *A Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thomas Clark, Edinburgh, 1838) pg. 541

⁶ J. P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, Eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (United Bible Societies, New York, 1989) Pg. 513

⁷ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ, 1981) pg. 320

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 and understanding; 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. 5:4,⁸ perhaps there would have been less confusion in 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

⁸ In some translations, certain Greek components derived from ἄρχω and/or ἀρχός are translated as “senior.” For example, the New Jerusalem Bible translates ἀρχιελῶνης, in Luke 19:2, as “senior tax collector,” and the New English Translation renders χιλιάρχους, in Act 25:23, as “senior military officers.” Therefore, while “chief” is probably still the best rendering for ἀρχι in ἀρχιοίμην (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.

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, or think this is a minor matter, 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.

(Dear brethren, it should be noted that sometimes the things that we practice, or the things that we allow as acceptable and normal in our Churches are the result of human tradition and not the practice of the apostles or the instructions they left for us to follow in the Word of God. There are many, many godly pastors in our Churches who innocently possess the title of Senior Pastor, who never realize the full implications of that practice. There are many, many humble Christian pastors who would be most sorrowful to learn that such an acceptable practice as that of adopting the title of Senior Pastor might

actually be detracting from glory rightly due to their only Lord and Saviour. We do not wish to impugn them or their love to the Saviour. But neither do we wish to lessen the love and honor that is due only to the Lord Jesus. As such, we share what is written with love to Him and love to our brethren. May we all be humble enough, including ourselves, to never be so zealous in our views that we speak the truth, but not in love. And, equally, may we always be willing and humble enough, if ever what we speak is shown to us by the Word of God to not be truth, to ask for forgiveness and to admit that we were wrong, and so seek, by God's grace, to recommit ourselves to each other, to the truth and to the unchanging principles of God's Word.)

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 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...**”⁹

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

⁹ William Kelly, *Lectures on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle to the Ephesians* (G. Morrish, London) pg. 124-126

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 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 immature, and young, 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. May we build it according to the pattern left for us in the New Testament by the one sent to reveal it, the apostle Paul, unto the glory of Christ Jesus both now and forever more. Amen.