

The Plumb Line

True Foundations

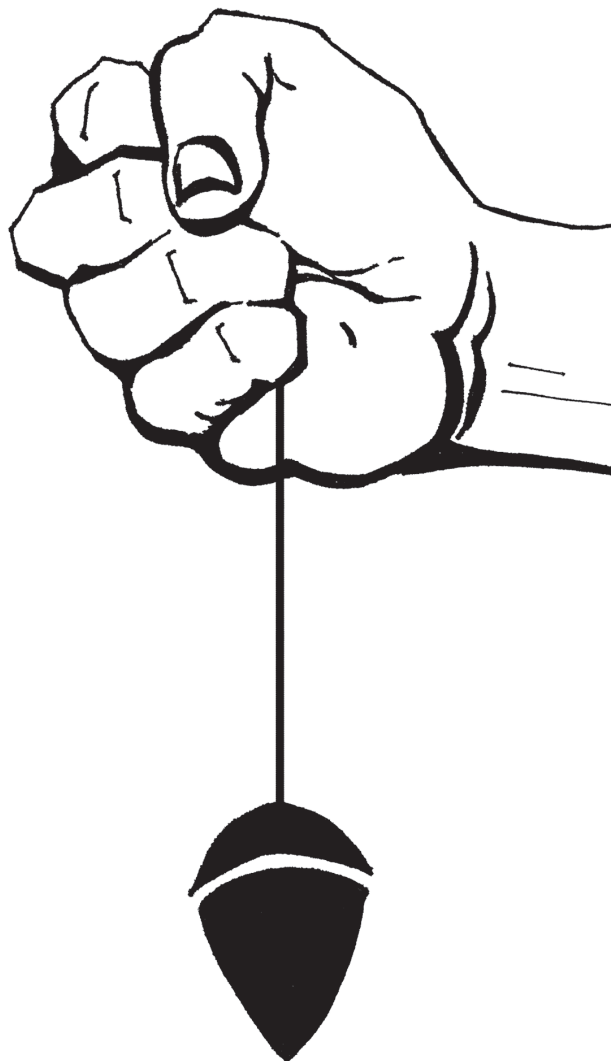
*“Not by might
nor by power,
but by my Spirit,
says the Lord Almighty...
Then he will bring out
the capstone to shouts
of ‘God Bless it!’...
Who despises the day
of small things?
Men will rejoice when
they see the plumb line
in the hand of Zerubbabel.”*

Zechariah 4



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As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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True Foundations

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Below is the list of titles in a 10-part series of books about Foundational Issues of the Kingdom of God and the Bride of Christ.

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THE HAMMER—Breaking Down Misconceptions

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” Jeremiah 23:29

THE PLOW—Planting Hope & Vision

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.” Amos 9:13

THE SCALES—Holding to God’s Standards

“The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.” Proverbs 11:1

THE CRUCIBLE—Refining and Melding Relationships

“The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.” Proverbs 17:3

THE SICKLE—Clearing the Land and Harvesting Change

“As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” Mark 4:29

THE TROWEL—It Matters How We Build!

“This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” Hebrews 8:5

THE SWORD—Cutting Through the Fog

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:34

THE CHISEL—“I Will Build My Church...”

“In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built.” 1 Kings 6:7

THE ANVIL—Forging Out a Life

“See, it is I who created the blacksmith who fans the coals into flame and forges a weapon fit for its work.” Isaiah 54:16

THE PLUMB LINE—True Foundations

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty... Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God Bless it!’... Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.” Zechariah 4

Apostolic Foundations and Apostolic Patterns

Video Taped in 1987, Transcribed in 2002

Prologue

The nature of the apostolic is, without question, one of the most treasured and important topics on the heart of God. But before we even begin to delve into the Apostolic of God, one thing must be clear in your mind. If you don't know anything else, know this:

Everything in the Father's heart is summed up in His firstborn Son, Jesus Christ.

The Father has chosen to express His nature, all that He is, through the Son. And today, on earth, He is building His Church that will possess all the divine qualities and character of Christ Himself. The Church, the Body of Christ, is just exactly that: Christ Himself manifested through His People joined together. Just as Jesus is the exact representation of God Himself, so the Church will be HIS BODY, His representation on the earth today!

While some have neglected this teaching about the Apostolic of God, others have turned it into a doctrine or theology that elevates a "thing" rather than the person of Jesus. In offering the following thoughts, I intend strictly to elevate the Christ (Anointed One) of God and to clarify exactly who Jesus is, expressed in His Church, His present-day Body. "Lampstands" and "Foundations" are nothing more than the nature and substance of the Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven." What is heaven but a shadow of the Christ of God...

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22).

The temple of God is in God Himself. “*Heaven*” itself is the substance of *Christ* and is manifested or explained to us in expressions we can understand. Such as we are “seated with Christ in heavenly realms,” and I am “in Christ” if I am truly His disciple. All of heaven itself is the essence of the heart of Jesus. So the things we’ll talk about are not “things.” They’re not just ideas, doctrines and concepts to run after. They are the very *heart* of Christ Himself. And if this is the Word of God, rest assured that His desire is for the Word to become “flesh and dwell among us.” Let the Word become flesh in you, not just an exciting new teaching to impress others. As Christ the Word is manifested, He tabernacles in our midst; the tabernacle of God is among His people. As the Word becomes flesh, we’re being built together to become a “Habitation of God by the Spirit.”

As we go on into this, please realize that anything that is not “in Christ” is only a gimmick, a form of godliness that denies its power. Accurate, biblical “patterns” can easily become substitutes for a relationship with, and abiding in, Christ. Even with the best of intentions, you’ll never be able to find what you’re looking for—the Christ of God manifest in your midst—by using intellectually modeled forms of “the church of the Bible.” You will not be able to grab onto a form because it “looks that way in the Bible” and ever find satisfaction for your hungry spirit. This satisfaction is found *IN CHRIST*—our abiding in Him and us as His Habitation. That is what the Kingdom, the Church, is all about.

Introduction

The following thoughts are far from the last word on this vast subject, just as they are certainly not the first words written. Nevertheless, I offer no apologies for suggesting that the Church of Jesus Christ has suffered tragic loss at the hands of those who have abused the Biblical teaching on apostolic principles—some to attain power, some for financial gain, and others simply desiring respect for themselves.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, though equally as dangerous, some have created a “post-apostolic” third covenant in which “God doesn’t work that way anymore.” They have denied the existence of obvious truths in the Word of God regarding apostles and prophets, lampstands, and other critical issues. They plant “church” after “church,” and denomination after denomination, out of presumption, ambition, or division rather than on the basis of Apostolic Authority (which is the Biblical pattern). The result has been a religious world

marked by 2000 years of decline. Many, unfortunately, know little of the spiritual Power and Substance of our Lord's Church, the Church we read about in the Bible.

Here's something to think about: You can study what other people have done for years, but that doesn't make you who they are. Painting the picture of some city or country far away from here doesn't put us in that country. To be able to paint a portrait in the minutest detail of what the city of Jerusalem or the landscape of Galilee or any other place looks like doesn't mean that we're there.

This is the dilemma we face as we pursue the nature of the Church. To study in great detail all that they were, to know what they knew, even to believe in what they believed in, does not make us the people that they were. The people of God's Church have substance, integrity, and a pure attitude of the heart. They are characterized by a unique perspective and priority system. Our lives are either hidden in Christ—or we just “know about” being hidden in Christ. We are either full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, or we simply study people who were.

What a massive difference between those two things! Hanging around people who truly are birthed in Heaven and breathing Heaven's air (*pneuma*) every moment of their lives doesn't mean that we have that same *life*. Even if we were right in the middle of those people, literally 2000 years back in time, it wouldn't help us a bit unless we were living in the same life and power that they were. Even if you lived in the first century and called yourself a Christian, that would *not* make you a part of the “first century church.” Why? Because you're only part of the Kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” in as much as your life is truly “in Christ” and as your substance, your genetic structure, is newly created of uncreated Life (Heb. 12:27). Only if you are truly Born of the Spirit, and Born of water, and Living in the Life of Jesus Christ—penetrating into Deity—will you partake of a Supernatural Life.

Merely mimicking behavior and words that you read in the Bible doesn't make you part of the Church. Neither does a philosophical system of morals, behavior, and culture. That's not it. *Either Christ is real in you, or He's not.* “The Kingdom of God is not scientifically observed and studied, but it is within you.” You can hang around the Life of God Almighty in His People your whole life, but never actually be a part of it yourself. You need to know that.

I make these observations in the hope of better things for the future! Jesus is building for Himself “a glorious Church, not having spot

or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish”—a Church that “the gates of hell cannot prevail against” and of which the principalities and powers are in awe!¹ As always, we must build “according to the pattern,” “on earth as it is in Heaven,” in order to see His Glory fill the earth!

Notice the sequence of verses in Exodus 40² which state, “As the Lord commanded, Moses did,” “as the Lord commanded, Moses did,” “as the Lord commanded, Moses did,” and finally, in verse 34, “and the Glory of God filled the temple.” That’s the kind of life that we lead—the Glory of God filling His dwelling place “on earth as it is in heaven” because we “*do as the Lord commanded.*” Because we go right into the Pattern of God, right into the Life of God, right into the Most Holy Place with nothing stopping us, we will understand what the Glory of God is. We discover His ways as we go into His Presence individually, and the same holds true corporately. The Glory of God is found in walking as the Lord commanded. If you don’t do “as the Lord commanded” (out of ignorance or fear) you might still be His child, but you’ll die in the wilderness, pathetically impoverished. It doesn’t have to be that way. There have been too many generations like that. The understanding of Apostolic Foundations and Apostolic Patterns is not a salvation issue. *It is a Glory issue.*

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets” (Acts 3:19-21).

Apparently, there is a restoration of things that God (according to Acts 3; 2Pet.3:12; Rev.19:7 and other passages) is waiting for. There’s a part that we play in *speudo*—“speeding His coming,” “hastening the return of the Lord.” There’s an active part that we play, mysterious as that may sound. Somehow, in some way, we hasten His return. It’s not that we can make God do anything. He’s not a genie in a bottle with our wish being His command. Absolutely Not! But there is a cooperation in which both “the Spirit and the Bride say ‘Come.’” Just as every safe deposit box requires two keys to open (the bank teller’s key and the depositor’s key), so we both—Jesus and His Bride, the Church—put our keys in the lock-box and together we turn the keys...and the vault opens.

¹Eph.3:10; Mt.16:18; Eph.5:27.

²Ex.40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 32, 33, 34.

That's not to our credit in any way. Only by His grace, by His divine wisdom, has he designed the universe in such a way that, by learning to do His Work by the Spirit, we are being trained, built together, and raised up as a Bride that is an equal yoke for the Son of God. There's a partnership in the Gospel. We are partakers of the Divine Nature. God's desire is that we have "fellowship," all things in common, with the Holy Spirit (Php.2:1; 2Cor.13:14). And that's just Biblical Christianity. We're participating somehow in the events of God and the future of this world that we are living in. "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come.'" Praise God for that privilege!

Though generations of religion have passed by, people have not been crying out "these men who have turned the world upside down have come to our city also," or, "See how they love one another!" Nevertheless, the day is coming when people will cry out once again and the Bride will be ready as an *observable* equal yoke for her Groom, the Son of God.

You may already be dealing with these issues, yet it seems important to mention them as a backdrop. It's a pitiful joke to think that the sum total of what God has in mind for His People is to just "go to church" on Sunday. It's a crime to go on as if the only thing God had in mind when He allowed His Son to be butchered in order to buy the Church was a bunch of people dressing up and attending services on Sunday and Wednesday nights. That's terrible! I want to say that as clearly as I can with no apologies. The Kingdom of God does not consist of mere words, mere speeches, and mere meetings, but of *dunamis*—POWER (1Cor.4:20). And that's a fact.

If it's God's Kingdom, then there's a supernatural, divine Essence that men cannot mimic. They can't duplicate God's manifested Reality. It can't be done. You can't do what only God can do. Suppose a group of atheists got together and went through the motions of "singing praises to our God," "waiting on the Lord's Table," "hearing another wonderful lesson from the Word," and "praying for the sick and afflicted the world over." Would anyone on the outside be able to differentiate the atheists from those who were truly born from above? If no one could spot the atheists from the Christians, then there's an element of reality that's missing. Heed the apostle Paul's warning: Watch out for counterfeits from satan that look like Christianity! (2Cor.11:14-15). The heart of God longs for so much more than the superficial, shallow norm of Christianity that we've settled for all these years.

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him Glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ ‘And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then He said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ And He said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (Revelation 19:6-9).

The following thoughts were originally shared with a living room full of ordinary people who simply want to be that Bride. This is the testimony of my heart and theirs that Jesus has, in fact, still “KEPT THE BEST WINE FOR LAST”! There are still some very special things ahead of us, and I’m looking forward to that.

Again, please don’t make a doctrine out of what follows. Nor should you disregard it lightly because it doesn’t fit the norms of twenty-first century American religion. Nor would it be wise to allow it to fan ambition or wander-lust, or allow a movement-centered mentality to creep into your heart. Turn to the Word of God with honesty and turn to the God of the Word with reverence and awe. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus!

Part 1: Three Units of Corporate Christian Life

We live in a world divided and confused with “ministries,” “denominations,” “non-denominations,” and “free,” “universal,” lone-ranger Christians. The “church world” is full of people who live *unaccountable* to men, who by choice and commitment regard themselves as their own best mentor (claiming it is the “Holy Spirit”—“God and me”), while truly it is only their pride, disobedient independence, and their distorted and inadequate personal impressions, knowledge, emotions, prejudices, fears, and experiences that are “guiding” them—not the Holy Spirit at all.

One of Father’s safeguards to this “trap of the devil” that is so popular in this day above all days—is relationship with Brothers and Sisters. Beyond merely a “safeguard,” to be totally intertwined with Brothers and Sisters in work and daily life is a Command (1Cor.12, Rev.3, Heb.3:12-14, Acts 2:42-47). “If you LOVE Me...you’ll obey Me!” Another perspective of this is found in Hebrews 13:17. Here we find that God says, by His Spirit, that accountability should be a given for every Christian. We’re NOT our own, we were bought for a Price, and it’s not our call! It’s God’s call. It’s HIS choice how we relate to one another—and “I have no need of you” and “I can do it myself” and “I only need JESUS”...are the words of the “carnal” and “babies” in the Faith and Walk of Jesus (1Cor.2-3, 12). The Book of Hebrews was written to men who were scattered abroad. It was not written to a specific local Church (as were many of Paul’s letters). The Book of Hebrews was written to Christians all over saying, “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account” (Heb.13:17). This was a general statement to Christians. The amazing assumption was made by the Holy Spirit that everybody would know who it was that was over him in the Lord—who it was that he should “obey.” Wow. Oh, surely this can be abused. But how much worse that YOU should abuse it by refusing the Word of God?! He didn’t say, “only those who are associated and affiliated with the local Church need to obey those over them.” He wrote to Christians scattered all over, and his assumption was automatically, “obey those who have the rule over you, those who watch for your souls, those who must give an account for you.”

If we don't know who it is that gives an account for us, and if we don't know who it is we yield to, then we are in violation of God's intention for every Christian, which the Hebrews writer (the Spirit of Christ) took for granted! If there is no one who we yield to or even consider to be one who is "over us in the Lord," and who walks with us daily, then we are out of line with God's Plan. Do we just make our own way, do what we want to do, and act independently without yielding or submitting to ones "over us in the Lord"? Do we "take it or leave it" based on what we agree with? Such behavior is common when a person desires to be his own boss and do what he thinks is right in his own eyes. When that happens, the norm for a Christian as seen in Hebrews 13:17 is violated. The "lone ranger" type of Christian does not exist in the New Testament; it's an unfortunate growth-stunting anomaly, if the Words of God in the Bible are the final say on the matter.

This "lone ranger" thing, which describes so many today who consider themselves the MOST Spiritual people they know, doesn't exist in the Word of God, except in the *rarest of cases*. God does not ordain such pseudo-heroic spirituality. "Me and Jesus" Christianity is not what GOD said was His desire, or His way. In fact, He even said that the cost of living this way would result in "hardness" and "deception" and perpetual "childhood" in our Faith. Who would want that?! We'll talk later about some of the diverse circumstances that Father may place us in. For now, though, let's get it straight that an intentional lifestyle of "independence" and "white horse" Christianity, where "I can do it myself" is the motto, and one lives their own life as they please and shows up at a meeting or three during the week and calls that "fellowship" and "church"—this is in flat disobedience to God. God Himself says such a person is "hardened" and "deceived." Deceived by sins they cannot see, and hardened to not even care, to the point of defensiveness. "Some love the light..." and some do not, "because their deeds are evil."

In spite of the division and confusion with "ministries" and "denominations" and the like, there are really only three basic units of Christian life in the Bible—the local Church, apostolic companies of men, and the universal Church. Of these three basic units of Life in the Kingdom of the Beloved Son, only the first two are His normal pattern—the local Church and apostolic companies of men (which are closely tied to the local Church). The universal Church is an *exception* to God's norm and is often times grossly abused. So, let's begin with the local Church, or "Lampstand"....

The Local Church

As seen from Jesus' viewpoint in Revelation chapters 1 and 2, there were seven separate lampstands, seven churches, in Asia. Not one general "universal" church. An identifiable local Church is that which holds up the Son and allows His light to shine into all the world, as well as being the place where Christ circulates (Rev.1:13, 2:1). It involves real people, in real places. Although it would be impossible to describe every detail of what God's Church looks like, the following are some crucial elements that characterize the local assembly.

A Kingdom, not a Democracy

The Church is not, and cannot be, individuals "doing their own things," "blooming where they are planted," and getting together with others when they feel it is most beneficial. When a situation is marked by "every man doing what's right in his own eyes," the people involved are not positioned under the full measure of blessing, provision, and protection by King Jesus.³

There's a blessing that comes from being under the King, the Anointed One of God. When men have no king, they also have none of the benefits and protection of the Kingdom. The end of Judges says that because they had no king, every man did what was right in his own eyes. And, beyond that, when a man says, "I have a King, His name is Jesus, but I don't need the Kingdom," he is, according to the Bible, *missing the King*. Such a man has attempted to truncate the Head from the Body. Since that's not possible, he has separated himself *not only from the Body, but from the Head as well*. That's an important point for a lot of today's religious world.

Leadership from On High

When God's timing is clear and circumstances dictate, it may be Father's Intention that there be Elders and Deacons in a local Assembly. Biblically, certain situations motivated the Placement of Elders in the local Church. For example, in Jerusalem, after perhaps a dozen years without Elders (there were still none as late as Acts 6, seven to ten years after Pentecost, with literally thousands in the local Assembly there), it became apparent in the Spirit that perhaps it was time for Elders. While there are no details of the exact time and reasons for the change of ways there, we do know there are Elders in the one local Church in Jerusalem by Acts 15, which was several years later. Perhaps Overseers

³Jdg. 21:25; Heb.3:12-14; 1Cor.12:21-31; Mt.16:18; Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-33; Jdg.17:6.

became necessary because of the scattered work of the apostles (Galatians 1) who lived in Jerusalem from early on. We also see the need for Overseers/pastors/shepherds/elders in the new Assemblies where Paul laid the Foundation. These were places with a void of daily Apostolic input (since Paul only stayed a matter of months in these Asian and European cities, as opposed to the 25 years Peter and others with the apostolic gift stayed in Jerusalem). 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 1 describe the type of man of God required for such a task.

The “eldership” is always plural in *every* example in the New Testament. There is never an indication of there being just one person who is “over” a local assembly, though this Laodicean and Nicolaitan (“conquer the people”) practice is certainly commonplace, if not normative, in today’s religious world. Eldership is always plural in the New Testament. The “senior pastor” idea, with a “board” of elders and deacons as “advisors,” is completely foreign to the Scriptures. The other alternative that some opt for (in rejection of the “senior pastor” idea) is a “hired preacher”—again totally foreign to the Scriptures.

It is essential that we *solve* this leadership dilemma, rather than simply discover and point out (as anyone can do) the problems and discrepancies. That is why this next thought is incredibly significant. The Biblical alternative to the world’s way of doing “leadership” (boards, hierarchies, hired leaders) can only be understood in an environment that is “daily in public and from house to house,” and where all the members are truly “joined and knit together by every supporting ligament.” If you try to grasp what leadership in God’s Kingdom is all about in any other environment, it will never make sense. In a “church” that centers around “Sunday services,” probably the only leadership structures that will work are the non-Biblical worldly models. But in an environment that is according to the Biblical pattern, leadership from heaven can be understood. It makes sense that to discover God’s real answer about the Biblical leadership pattern, you have to walk in the same Life that they walked in. It doesn’t make sense any other way.

You can see why leadership is a dilemma in the religious world. And you can see how easily people form some sort of “church government” that strays from the Biblical standard. Inevitably, it cannot be leadership according to God’s pattern because the religious system itself is not God’s way, either. I know that sounds dramatic, but let’s be honest!

So, because of this dilemma, one of two routes is usually chosen in forming church hierarchy. In one scenario, a specific man is chosen as

leader because he's a good speaker, or he has a magnetic personality or a Ph.D. Or maybe he was the founder so people feel they owe him respect. To be honest, this top man is practically exalted and everyone else comes *under* him. At that point, he then becomes the cork on the bottle for them. They'll never become more than he is because Jesus said "a student is not above his teacher."

In the second scenario, a "preacher" is hired and a plural eldership is formed. But while the man hired as "preacher" is seemingly the man who is most full of the Holy Spirit, who seemingly knows the Word of God best and knows the God of the Word best, he becomes only a hireling and central attraction for the visitors.

Both of these approaches stand in direct opposition to the Word of God. In one, a single man is exalted and holds all the power, with everyone else as his advisors. In the other, a man is hired and made a slave or hireling of the system with a plural eldership who pull the strings. They may hire a man who seems to be most "full of the Holy Spirit," but then turn around and fire him when they get tired of him. In the religious world today, these are the two major alternatives to this thing we call "church government."

By contrast, only the *ekklesia*, the community of God, can accomplish the task of raising up men who will turn the world right side-up. A "habitat" of the local Church—where men and women are "counting none of their possessions as their own" and "admonishing one another daily so that none are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" is the only place where men "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" are raised up (apart from a Sovereign act of Jehovah, which is the exception). The props of elaborate church hierarchy, programs, seminaries, and Bible colleges will never do it. The last 1900 years is proof of that! And that along with the Scriptures is testimony enough that Jesus meant for His Purposes to be fulfilled exclusively in the Church! It can only be too obvious that men's methods have not yielded the fruit that the Church of the first century yielded.

Bad Fruit Equals Bad Tree

Anybody who's honest will tell you that the best we've been able to do is try to find programs that get people fired up enough, police people well enough, apply enough pressure, or instruct their minds well enough, that they can carry out a gimmick to accomplish some task. If the program is good enough, they can network it like Amway and it can seem like they are doing a really "big" work. But the problem is

that they didn't do any of that stuff in the first century. None of it. It's all foreign to the New Testament. They didn't rely on any man-made props to accomplish God's Work, yet they did a far better job than we've done! How can this be? How do you achieve such staggering results without a program? A tree is known by its fruit, and no good tree can produce bad fruit. It should be obvious that 1900 years of "church growth" has failed to produce the fruit of the first century Church. Therefore, the tree itself is wrong. You know a tree by its fruit. You can hang apples on an oak tree all day long, but that won't make it an apple tree. A tree is not a program or an organization, but an organic life that yields the fruit *automatically*.

Jesus never taught motivational techniques to his disciples so they could pass "methodologies" down through the ages. Jesus Himself and Christians of the first century didn't operate that way to accomplish "spiritual goals." Having wonderful externals of hype and numbers doesn't make the organization a living organism full of God's Glory. The externals may seem awesome to us, but what kind of fruit have they borne? The church has been riddled with division and splits and hypocrisy and sin of every conceivable kind. Right? Jesus himself prayed that there would be ONE UNIFIED BODY. Won't His prayer be answered? Have history and our lives today been heading toward unity? If the fruit is bad, the whole tree is bad. The foundation of our entire approach to "church" has missed the mark. This is a scary thought given the fact that Jesus said it is the *Church* that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against."

The Church is "the pillar and foundation of Truth," and Christ is "the Savior (Deliverer) of the Church." "His intent was that now (not just someday 'when we all get to Heaven'), *through the Church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms..." (Eph.3:10). No wonder Paul could exclaim, "to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph.3:21).

Idols—The REAL Obstacle

Many today are striving to understand and define Biblical "church government." However, this dilemma will only be solved in the context of Biblical Church substance *and daily life together as a people*. The answers will never be found in the unBiblical substitute that revolves around Sunday morning "worship services," hierarchies of leadership, committees, and a clergy/laity mentality. From such a context, you will study and administrate your way into

many, many trials and crises that are unnecessary and harmful to the cause of Christ.

The problem is not that we just haven't found the right method yet. The real obstacle to penetrating and discovering God's heart concerning HIS government in the Church is our own idolatry. Our idols of lifestyle, family, and career seem so normal and good to us. Yet, it is these idols that relegate the Kingdom of God to mere meetings, speeches, programs, and “special days” (Sundays, Wednesday nights, “bring your neighbor days,” holidays). These idols—not a lack of Biblical knowledge about church government—are the *true* obstacles.

What is it that keeps you from “laying down your life for your brothers” and learning to “encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none are hardened and deceived by sin”? Is it a lack of knowledge about church government? Or is it your “right” to live in a nice house, pursue an upwardly mobile career, and spend the evenings with your “family”?

The god of this age has blinded the minds of those who are in unbelief. Those blinded ones have believed the lie that satan could bless them and make them happy through idols which feed the flesh. Without even thinking, people are deceived into craving these various idols, feeding the animal of the flesh, all the while thinking that somehow these idols will bring success and satisfaction. But that's a lie! It's a lie of the adversary, the enemy, the “murderer,” as Jesus called him. It's a lie that satan can bless you more than your Father in Heaven can. That's the enemy. The obstacle to discovering the leadership of God is the basic wickedness of idolatry, not the lack of knowledge of church government. And, unless you start there, the rest of this will be meaningless.

Elders Appointed by God

Every man in leadership must be observably drunk on the Holy Spirit, fully controlled by the government of God, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.⁴ Elders and deacons are primarily local (as opposed to traveling) men. There will be exceptions, as some men are both pastoral and apostolic, such as Peter, who called himself an apostle and a “fellow elder” (1Pet 5:1). While God clearly desires elders to be over His flock, simply following the pattern of “having elders” in every church has no merit in itself.

⁴Acts 6:3; 1Tim.3:1-15; Eze.44:7-9; 1Sam.10:6-7; 1 Kings13:33-34; Ps.78:72; Ex.36:1-2, 35:31; Zec.3:6; Num.11:10-17.

Every religious group has its own answer to the problem. Lutherans have a synod; the Presbyterians have a presbytery; the Episcopalians have *episkopos*. Every denomination thinks that by instituting some “form” of church government, they can bring God down into their midst. It’s like the genie in the bottle trick—thinking that if we rub the bottle just right, God will automatically have to bless us. If you follow the right rules and regulations of “government,” then God will have to bless it. And somehow, doing it right makes you right and everybody else wrong.

Again, having elders has no merit in itself, even though it is the Biblical pattern. Everything in the Church must be done in God’s way and according to God’s timing. Anyone who would appoint men who are not described from *God’s* vantage point as being “full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom” (Acts 20:28, 6:3-7) is in big trouble. “The Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” according to Paul. It was not men in their intellect and ambition that made them overseers. Overseers appointed on any other basis than “full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom” are in big trouble.

If you want to be technical, the Biblical pattern is that never (not even once in 30 recorded years of the Church of Jesus) did a Church have elders right after it was born. It was always a few years later that elders were appointed. By the strictest principles of Biblical interpretation, then, it would be “unBiblical” to have elders until quite some time after the Church is born. Amazing, isn’t it? It never happened in New Testament times.

“All right,” you say, “we’ll just make a rule that every Church has to wait a few years before they have elders.” No, No, No! That’s not the point. While some just ignore the Word of God, most of the religious world today uses a “paint by numbers” approach to the Bible.⁵ “From the beginning it was not so.” Christians in the first century never had clear-cut doctrines to go by in each new situation that came up. They weren’t imitating anyone. The account in Acts 15 portrays clearly that twenty years after Pentecost they were still wrestling to find out what the right doctrines were. Men who were with Jesus for 3 years still couldn’t put their fingers on exactly what all the “perfect doctrines” were. They had to talk about it quite a while. It wasn’t a given. It wasn’t some creed that they handed over instantly. There was a wrestling match over God’s will, and it will always be that way. It’s not that clear-cut (as exemplified by 3,000 denominations who *all* think they are right. Nobody thinks they are wrong). Unlike most of us, those

disciples couldn't turn to "pat" answers for their problems. Instead, they were forced to turn to a Living God who always has a current thought about current situations.

The time has come for the 3,000 or so denominations to stop quarrelling about what they think is "sound doctrine." Rather, let us turn to the God they turned to and know the God that they knew—*living our lives with the priorities, vision, obedience, and self-sacrifice of those normal men and women of the first century!* Without that, doctrines, while essential, will leave us empty and desolate, "having a form of godliness, yet denying its power."

Make no mistake about it; the recognition and appointment of "elders in every city" is still (though abused by some) on the heart of God to "put things in order" (Titus 1:5-11). There was a certain dynamic present in each of the situations where Father inspired Paul to appoint elders or to instruct regarding elders and deacons. Likewise, it was a radically different dynamic in a dozen years in Jerusalem where God did not call for "elders." These are the "gems" of Spirit-Life found within the pillar and foundation of Truth—the *ekklesia*. It's not a word game, but dynamic Life. Having elders just for the sake of having elders has failed to produce the fruit of the first century Church.

⁵To illustrate how ridiculous the usual approach to understanding the Bible really is, let's apply the principles across the board. For example, it would be, by honest consistency in modern exegetical methods, "unBiblical" to take up a collection on the "first day of the week" until the Church is in existence for about three years. We never read about such a thing until the first letter to the Corinthians is written, about 20 years after Pentecost.

Paul writes to the Church and says he wants them to take up a collection on the first day of the week. He was with them for a year and a half and never asked them to do that before (Acts 18:11). Paul first mentions the desirability of taking up a weekly collection years later *so that* he wouldn't need to have one large collection when he arrived. There was a specific need at hand that the people could join their hearts to in a weekly collection. It was a specific need so Paul gave specific instructions about how to handle it. Does that mean we should make a law out of it and "institute" a weekly collection? Or would it be unBiblical to take up a collection for the first few years that a congregation is in existence? Surely you see the fallacy of this whole approach. It's nothing but a big game where you search God's Word in order to find out the "rules."

Apostolic Companies of Men

The second unit of corporate life that we read about in the Bible is what we'll call apostolic companies of men. These “ascension gifts” (Ephesians 4) are gifts poured out on men by God. They are virtually always refined in character and raised up in the local Church. Then they are sent out (or taken out by apostolic men) for extra-local work.

“And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia” (Acts 20:4).

When Paul traveled, he pulled men in with him—two from here, three from there, one from there. Paul saw that these men had been given Gifts from on high for the building up of the Church, and he drew them off with him as he went from place to place. That's the second unit of life that we see and which overlaps, ebbs, and flows with the local Church. We'll look at this one more closely later.

The Universal Church

The third unit of corporate life is the universal Church. Please be aware of the fact that there is both a *valid* and an *invalid* sense in which this term can be used. Somehow God may set aside times when it is right for individuals or groups of people to inhabit places in the name of Christ, but where an expression of the local Church does not necessarily exist. The following are a few examples of what might be considered “valid” expressions of the universal Church. However, keep in mind that these are still *exceptions* to the norm.

Valid Expressions

Consider the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39). For reasons that only God knows, He sometimes calls a man back to Ethiopia alone, with no Church, no fellowship, and no accountability. Nevertheless, history tells us that at least two of the original twelve apostles eventually made their way down there and a great Church flourished.

Then there's Apollos. He was a bit of a loner, and Paul seemed to have considerable tension with him. Yet while Paul challenged (even a bit sarcastically) Apollos' service to the saints at times,⁶ Paul would not judge Apollos' heart. In 1Cor.3:4-4:6, Paul included Apollos as he

⁶Acts 18:27; 2Cor.3:1; 2Cor.10:10-13, 11:6; 1Cor.16:12.

spoke of his own heart. He said, “I apply these things to myself and Apollos for your sake.” He said he didn’t even know his own heart, so let every man’s motives be judged by God on that last day. We don’t even know our own hearts and there are secrets of men’s hearts that we don’t even clearly know. That doesn’t mean that we don’t expose sin. Of course we do! That’s normal Christianity. But Paul said there are some things that we just can’t get into, that we just can’t know. “I apply these things to myself and Apollos for your sake.”

So Paul had an open attitude toward Apollos, even though it seems he was a little frustrated by him at times. He was a brother and gifted by God, for sure, but somehow he was a loner and may be considered as part of the universal Church.

Finally, the city of Athens held numerous new disciples (Acts 17:34-18:1), but there is no record of there being any “church” there. Nor did Paul travel back to Athens to establish the believers, or write letters to them, or even refer to them in his letters. Was there a “Church” there? Apparently Paul didn’t think so since he responded so differently to the other cities on that same journey where Churches were established (Corinth, Thessalonica, and Berea). Did the brothers and sisters of Athens move to another city where there was a Church? Or did they just stay put and have a “nice little fellowship”? We have no clues from the New Testament, but one thing *is* clear. On Paul’s next trip to the area, one or two years later, he did *not* visit Athens.

What does that mean? There were believers in Athens, but no Church in Athens! At least, Paul didn’t act like there was a Church there. What does it mean when you have numerous disciples, baptized believers, in a city and yet God doesn’t seem to view that as a Church? *What does that mean?* It just doesn’t jive with our twenty-first century way of thinking. We *think*, “Where two or three are gathered together in His name, there’s *a church*.” But that isn’t what the scripture says. In the context of Matthew 18 Jesus is talking about how His people will function together in the working out of the purposes of God. He is saying, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I’ll work with you and confirm my Word amongst you. There will be binding and loosing” (vs. 18). Jesus said He would work with us if we are gathered in His name. If we agree together in prayer in His name, He will meet us on that ground (vs. 19). But, Jesus *never* said, “Where two or three are gathered, there’s a church there.” Never. A church is not automatically there just because there are believers gathered together.

Athens is an unusual circumstance, granted. But I just want to point out that it is possible to be part of the universal Church without belonging to what we'll call a local Church or Lampstand or Foundation. The people are no less saved, but there isn't a Church there.

Invalid Expressions

The *invalid* expressions of the universal Church are far more common and widespread in the world today. These are the man-made units of denominations and parachurch "ministries." We're getting into big trouble when we establish these deviations from the Truth of God. Show me where there's a "denomination" or "ministry" organization in the New Testament!

How can there be these "ministries" which have "headquarters" that separate them from the rest of the Body of Christ? They simply did not exist in the first century. There were no parachurch organizations devoted to feeding the poor or evangelizing a continent...devoted to this good thing or that good thing as their "ministry." Show me in the New Testament where a parachurch organization specialized in their own special niche of "ministry." It simply does not exist in a Church where they turned the world upside down and the Glory of God was manifested and fear seized all the people (yet many joined their number anyway!).

You don't see the props of parachurch "ministries" where "a great number of priests were converted." A Church filled with God's Glory doesn't need props. It doesn't need systems, programs, visitation things, benevolence things, and who knows what else! God doesn't need that kind of help.

Picture these words emblazoned on the sail of Jesus' boat when He crossed Lake Galilee: *Jesus Christ Ministries*. Or picture a stone, propped outside the cave where Paul and some of the brothers met, with the words: *Pastor Paul of Tarsus*. It just doesn't make sense! You can't picture that kind of thing happening. When we raise up a "ministry" or denomination that is outside God's expressions of corporate life in Christ, men are exalted, names are exalted, and people are exalted. And Jesus' name is tacked on as a token gesture. This is clearly an invalid sense of the universal Church.

The very existence of the props is a clear declaration that God's valid vehicles for His Glory have been pushed aside, either out of ignorance of the Word and the heart of God or because of ambition. Thus,

“Ishmael” is born, always and forever more to “persecute the child born of the Spirit; it is the same now” (Galatians 4). His desired expressions are the apostolic companies of men and the clearly defined Church in a city, accountable to an easily identified local Church government. It is assumed by God that virtually every Christian would be part of that (Heb.13:17).

The truth of the matter is that in the New Testament the word “ministry” is one of those yucky, mistranslated, anglicized words.⁷ The Greek word usually rendered “ministry” simply means “service.” Does “Paul of Tarsus Services” make any sense? Of course not. Yet that’s what people are saying by their use of the word “ministries.” It may seem like a picky little thing, but not when you consider that because of this mistranslation, a whole scheme, a whole avenue of approach to the Christian walk and Christian life has been created that never existed in the Bible. We must go back and unravel some of these things, so that we can return to Christ as the Savior of the *ekklesia*, the Community of God.

⁷Another word like that is “church,” which would be better translated “the community of God.” Or “interactive, interconnected, bonded, union of heart, mind, and lives in the recognizable, visible, Body of Christ.”

Part 2: Do Apostles Really Exist Today?

What Does Scripture Say?

Are there apostles today? First and foremost, the Bible must be our authority. So what does it say? If God Almighty dropped a book down to us on the proverbial desert island, and we knew absolutely nothing of what the twenty-first century church was saying or doing, could we possibly come up with anything vaguely resembling the religious world today just from looking in the Bible? No possibility.

What would you decide about the nature of the Church and the way it functions? Could you come up with “Sunday morning worship services”? I’m afraid not. Even the phrase “first day of the week,” is not Biblical; the literal translation is “first of the week,” not “first day of the week.” But even if it did mean “first day of the week,” how many times does it appear in the book of Acts? You can count the number of occurrences on one hand, from the beginning of Acts all the way to the end of 60 years of recorded church history. Their lives together as the people of God did not revolve around Sunday mornings—that is a settled fact.

But if *we* were to record twentieth century American church life, every other paragraph would read: Sunday morning we did this; Sunday morning we did that; Wednesday night we did this. That’s what you would read because about 98% of what we call Christianity in the world today happens on Sundays and Wednesdays. That tells me that if we were recording history today, “first day of the week” would be in every other paragraph. But in the first 60 years of church history, when God’s Glory exploded, they only mentioned the first day of the week a couple of times. Can we ignore such a discrepancy? No! I’d say that Biblical Christianity has nothing to do with Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. And if the Bible is our only standard, rather than the traditions of men, *our* lives had better not center around special days either. And that’s only the beginning.

What would you decide about apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers? Let’s zero in on the question of apostles, as

it relates to foundations and patterns. Do they exist? If you were to eliminate everything you ever heard about the subject and just looked at the Bible, I suspect you would come up with a dramatically different conclusion than what the evangelical, fundamental world has come up with in these last days. Somehow the lack of power we see around us is justified by a doctrine of our own imagination, a doctrine that holds that apostles are obsolete. In the New Testament we clearly see that the apostles testified with great *dunamis*, great power. We see the testimony of power in the apostolic life of the first century, and because we don't see that power today, we wrongly conclude that it isn't meant to be.

Do you see the faulty logic? The Bible says that God will display apostolic power in His Church. But we don't see it, so we conclude that there's no such thing. We've got the cart before the horse. We're trying to create a doctrine based on what we see with our own eyes, rather than based on God's Word. *We feel the need to rationalize our powerless existence by creating a doctrine to explain it.* That's not acceptable. God did give us a book, and I intend to look at it with brutal honesty and not shut my eyes to what I see Biblically in order to create a doctrine to explain my own failures and inadequacies. I'm going to call upon the Word of God as the standard.

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever” (1Peter1:24-25).

Men are like grass and have failed for generations, *but the Word of God endures forever.* I don't explain what I read by the grass of the last 2000 years; I explain it by the enduring rock of the Word of God. That's my Rock—that's the *only* place I stand. I don't care if no one else is living in the fullness of God's power and presence, I'm not going to give my life over to the “grass,” to men and their traditions. Even if I never see all that God says is “His inheritance in the Church” (Eph.1:18), I refuse to settle for anything less than what the Word of the Lord, which endures forever, says the Church must be!

Even if I never see it with my own eyes, I'm going to be like the people of Hebrews 11: *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they*

had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Those people were earnestly “looking for a city whose builder and maker (whose architect) was God.” I’m looking for that too—nothing less. And, like them, I have opportunity to turn around to the other world, if I want to. But I’m not going to do that. If we have that attitude and trust, God will not be ashamed to be called our God, and we will be His People.

I ask you again: Are there apostles today? If the Bible is our authority, what does it say about apostles? Does it really say that they would become unnecessary and “pass away”?

The Twelve

I’m not referring to the twelve “apostles of the Lamb” (Rev.21:14), whose apostleship was an office (Acts 1:17-26, 2:14, 6:2). Jesus called these men to be apostles *before* “He ascended on High”⁸ and “gave some to be apostles...” (Ephesians 4). Theirs are the only twelve names on the twelve foundations of the wall of the Holy City.

But what about those who were chosen by God *after* Christ ascended on high? Paul wrote that “*when* He ascended on high,” Jesus gave gifts to men: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. These are not “the twelve,” for they were called *before* the ascension! “When” is the literal Greek word in the text. Clearly then, there is a distinction made in the Word of God between the twelve apostles of the Lamb and those men who were called to be apostles *when* Christ ascended on high. The apostles who are included among the “ascension gifts” are those that we will consider as we explore the Foundations and Patterns of God.

All His Gifts

As in all aspects of God’s Truth, the apostolic of God has its beginning and ending “in Christ.” Every spiritual blessing is found in Christ (Eph.1:3). That means He had it first! Any gift you want to name, He had it first. “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives....” He

⁸Mk.3:14, 6:30; Mt.10:2; Lk.17:5, 22:14, 24:10.

was the covenant Man who went before us and who, in bodily form, possessed all the giftedness of God Himself. And He was the Man who ascended and went and sat at the right hand of the Father in Glory. So every spiritual blessing is in Him. After He ascended, the gifts that Jesus Himself first had were then given to the entire Body!⁹

Jesus was and still is the ultimate Apostle. He is the “builder of the house,” “the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess.”¹⁰ Jesus is the Great Prophet.¹¹ He said of Himself that a Prophet has no honor in His hometown. Jesus is the Evangelist.¹² He came to proclaim good news to the poor, to set captives free, to heal the lame, to give sight to the blind, to declare the year of the Lord’s favor. He came to seek and save those which were lost. He was manifest to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.¹³ He came to replace those false shepherds of Israel who didn’t heal the sick, who didn’t bind up the broken hearted, who didn’t wrap the wounds of those who were lame, and who didn’t seek and save those which were lost. The long-awaited Messiah would be called the Son of David. And, finally, Jesus was the Master Teacher,¹⁴ as seen throughout the gospels. “Jesus began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1). He began to teach them and they followed Him.

Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher. Jesus was the Master. The Standard. The Founder of all good things. It follows, then, that if all these Gifts are not part of the totality of the Giftedness of the Body, how can it really be the “Body of Christ”? How can we call ourselves the “Body of Christ” if all of Jesus’ Giftedness isn’t present?

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being...” (Hebrews 1:3).

“And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

No one man has all of the gifts except Jesus, who was the sum of all spiritual things. He was the exact representation of the Father, and the Father’s Glory was manifest in the face of Jesus Christ. He had all the

⁹Eph.1:23, 2:22, 3:19, 4:13, 24; Col.2:9-10; 1Cor.12:12-28.

¹⁰Heb.3:1-3.

¹¹Heb.1:1-3; Mt.13:57; Acts 3:22.

¹²Lk.4:18-22, 19:10.

¹³Jn.10:11; Eze.34:8-24; Psa.23:1.

¹⁴Mt.23:10.

giftedness of Deity. And because He, the firstborn from among the dead, ascended to the Father, *we* (plural) also can become partakers of His giftedness. We share in the fullness that was given to Him. The fullness of Christ dwells in His Body, the Church. All the Gifts that He had were taken and spread throughout the whole Body of Christ. If, as a whole, we don't have ALL the gifts, then we're not the Body of Christ. It's just that simple.¹⁵

And please do not be lulled into thinking that “the Body” refers to the Church “at large,” as some intangible, “invisible” entity out there that possesses all the characteristics of Christ. It was about *relationships* and responsibility and co-working daily within the visible, identifiable local Church—living out the Christ life together, “daily in public and from house to house.” Paul said THIS was the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way: the Body of Christ, “all together and lives merged,” where no one says, “I have no need of you” until next Sunday. In the very next chapter he wrote, “In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too (the Ephesian Church) are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Eph.2:21-22).

Building the House

Since Jesus is THE Apostle—the Builder of the House—HE is our standard for understanding the apostolic.

The apostle Paul said, “*I laid a foundation as an expert builder,¹⁶ and someone else is building on it...*” (1Cor.3:10).

Jesus said, “*I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it*” (Mat.16:18).

According to the Hebrews writer, “*Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself*” (Heb.3:3).

“*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain*” (Psa.127:1).

So, when we talk about the building of God's Church, *we're talking about apostolic things*. The House of God can never be separated from

¹⁵See also 1Cor.12:12-28.

¹⁶The Greek word was *architekton*, or “architect.”

the building up of the House of God. The two are inseparable, so we *need* the apostolic in order to be the True Church of Jesus.

And since the building is in shambles, how much more do we need the *architekton*, the master builder!¹⁷ Those who can read the blueprints in the Heavens and architect the construction project are just as vital as ever. They are just as vital now because the project is just as important now as it ever was, if not more so.

We're not in this to merely exist, and "keep house." We're in this to become a habitation of God with *ever increasing Glory*—to grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

But we've got to do it God's way! Without this vital aspect of the giftedness of Christ, the apostolic, His Body will be disjointed and scattered. The "great power" (literally *dynamo*) of Acts 4:33 will be conspicuously absent. "*The apostles testified with great power...and great grace was upon them all.*" Great grace is the product of the apostolic life.

Until We Reach Unity in the Faith

"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Note the word "until." It literally means "duration of time."¹⁸ Has the Church reached the whole measure of the fullness of Christ? I think not. If we don't have unity of the faith...if we don't have the full knowledge of the Son of God...if we don't have the full measure of the Stature of Christ (His productivity and fullness)...*then we are not there yet.* And if we're not there yet, if the "until" hasn't come yet, then the extinction of these Gifts from on high is impossible!

¹⁷This brings up an important point that I think needs to be clarified in today's evangelical world. Knowing the Scriptures really well does not make one a layer of foundations. Just because a man has read his Bible backwards and forwards, that does not mean that he has the ability to read the blueprints of the Church. Never was a person called an apostle in the New Testament because he knew the Scriptures. It was a *Gift* from on high, and it is the same now.

¹⁸*mechris*—Strong's #3360, 3372.

All of the Gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers—were given to the Church **until** we all reach unity in the faith, the full knowledge of the Son of God, and the full measure of the stature of Christ.¹⁹ If we can ignore that word “until,” then we might as well throw the rest of the Bible out the window as well.

Make no mistake about it, nowhere in the Scriptures are the gifts discussed separately as though some gifts would continue and others would not.²⁰ That is a doctrine of men, and if a man writes his own scriptures, he makes himself out to be a god. I suspect we should be very humble and accept the Scriptures the way they are written. That’s not an overstatement.

The apostle John was called to write down the book of Revelation in about AD 96, long after the other 12 Apostles of the Lamb had died and graduated into Jesus’ presence. The Lord told him to write to the Church in Ephesus (Rev.2:2) that He knew they had tested those who claimed to be apostles but were not, and had found them to be false.

Didn’t John miss the perfect opportunity to say, “Hey, don’t you know I’m the last living apostle? Quit testing these men and just rest assured that there aren’t anymore left?” He could have, and indeed should have made that statement if it were true. But John did not perceive that he was the last living apostle. Otherwise, he would have called it “error” instead of encouraging the people to “test them.” Apparently, John didn’t think there could be no more apostles—they just needed to be carefully tested, since many were making false claims.²¹

¹⁹Even if we were to assume that the Church has reached the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, this passage presents a problem for modern theologians. For that would mean that not only apostles and prophets, but also evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, have become obsolete!

²⁰Another at least minor indication that apostles and prophets aren’t going anywhere until this is all over is found in Rev.18:20-21. The apostles and prophets will rejoice over the judgment of God on the world system (Babylon) “for the way she treated you.” To this day, it doesn’t seem that the world system has been destroyed. And, according to John, when that destruction does come, the apostles, prophets, and saints will rejoice. Therefore, it only makes sense that there will have to be apostles at the time when God destroys Babylon in order for the rejoicing of the apostles to occur.

²¹Incidentally, the Bible (while not yet glued into one binding) was well circulated and quoted by this time (AD 96). If anything happened to change John’s assessment that apostles needed to be tested rather than automatically rejected, it was certainly not the “coming of the scriptures.” Nor was it the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70), which was already history. Has anything happened since that time which would have changed John’s words concerning apostles?

The Gift Not the Office!

There are as many as 23 apostles mentioned in the New Testament, not just the 12, 13, or 14 that most of us have been taught.²² Here are some more references where the literal Greek and the context of the passage point to apostles other than the “Twelve Apostles of the Lamb”:

Matthias (Acts 1:26).

James, the Lord’s brother (Acts 1:14; 1Cor.15:7; Gal.1:19; 2:9).

Paul (Acts 14:14; 22:21).

Barnabas (Acts 4:36, 11:22-30, 14:1, 4, 14; I Cor.9:6).

Apollos (1Cor.4:6-9).

Andronicus (Rom.16:7).

Junias (Rom.16:7).

Epaphroditus (Php.2:25, Messenger = Apostle).

Titus (2Cor.8:23, Messenger = Apostle).

Two unnamed (2Cor.8:23).

Timothy (Acts 19:22; 1Thes.1:1, 2:6).

Judas (Acts 15:23).

Silas/Silvanus (Acts 15:23; 1Thes.1:1, 2:6).

Erastus (Acts 19:22).

Tychicus (2Tim.4:12).

Paul’s calling as “one abnormally born” (1Cor.15:5-8) seems out of place if all you consider are the Twelve. In fact, the job description to be one of the Twelve included the requirement that he must have been “with us” from “the time of His baptism until His ascension” (Acts 1:21-22). Paul didn’t meet the qualifications. There are only Twelve names on the Foundations of the Holy City in Revelation 21, and Paul’s name isn’t one of them! Yet, he certainly counted himself among the apostles.²³

Paul referred to both Apollos²⁴ and Barnabas²⁵ in a manner which suggests apostleship. To the Romans, Paul wrote that someone else had laid a foundation in that city and that he had thus often been hindered from coming to them.²⁶ Neither Paul nor any of the Twelve had ever been there. Perhaps Rom.16:7 gives us a clue. “Greet Andronicus and Junias... They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” The Greek actually says “viewed as outstanding apostles,” not “viewed as outstanding by the apostles.”

As already mentioned, false apostles still had to be tested,²⁷ indicating that the matter was not as simple as taking the original twelve, subtracting one, and adding two. And apostles were given to the

Church “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph.4:11-13). Let us continually cry out to God for all the Gifts He has for us!

It seems clear that the Holy Spirit considered Matthias one of “the Twelve” (Acts 2:14, 6:2, 4). And if Matthias was one of the Twelve, that makes Paul the thirteenth, at best. Paul is not on the foundation stone of Revelation, so he’s in a different class. What we are dealing with is not an office, but a gift.

Paul never claimed that his apostleship was to be recognized by everyone.²⁸ “If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord” (1Cor.9:1-2). His was a gift, not an office.

“We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the field God has assigned to us, a field that reaches even to you. We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the gospel of Christ. Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can proclaim the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory” (2Corinthians 10:13-16).

²²1Thes.1:1, 2:7; Acts 14:4, 14; 2Cor.8:23; Col.4:12-13; 1Cor.15:5, 7; Gal.1:19; Acts 12:17, 21:18, 15:13, 19; Php.2:25; Rom.16:7; 1Cor.9:4-6.

²³1Cor.15:9, 1:1; Rom.1:1, 5.

²⁴1Cor.3:6, 4:6, 9.

²⁵1Cor.9:4-6.

²⁶Rom.15:18-22.

²⁷2Cor.11:13; Rev.2:2.

²⁸In fact, probably 17 years after Paul’s commissioning by Christ Himself, and after many years of “turning the world upside-down,” Paul’s apostleship was still not an established fact in the place where Christianity had its very roots. “I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy’” (Gal.1:22-23).

Part 3: What Good Are They, Anyway?

“And He, Himself, gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, we might grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

The list of benefits brought to the Body of Christ by these men (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) is immense. Two common misconceptions dominate the religious world today. One is that if we'll just hang in there until Jesus comes back, then we'll finally become mature all of a sudden. The other misconception is that our growth into the “full stature of Christ” comes solely through having a “personal relationship” with Jesus. Anything beyond that is considered icing on the cake.

Don't be fooled! Look again at Ephesians 4. These attributes, which God intends for every Christian, come out of a relationship with these gifted men that Christ (He, Himself—intensive pronoun) ascended on high and gives to the Church. Clearly, our fullness in Christ comes through being equipped by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers of God. It does not come by hearing inspiring speeches from a pulpit every week.

Does the Church still have a need for such men today? Let's take a look at what we'll be missing if we neglect these gifts from on high.

Equipping the Saints for Works of Service

The whole list of benefits for every believer flows out of being equipped by those who are supernaturally gifted. The word for equip in this passage is *katartidzo*, which is a medical term with three meanings. The first meaning has to do with the setting of a bone that has been broken. It can also denote the adjustment of a dislocated member of the body to its rightful place or the deployment of anything for orderly use.²⁹

Without that equipping by Gifted men, you'll find a Body broken, disjointed, and lying in pieces with pain and hurt and suffering. If your arm is broken, you can't use it. It won't function properly, and it hurts until it is mended. So, in the Church, true healing (*katartidzmos*) must take place before the Body can function. The "broken bone" has to be set before it can heal and become a useful member to do the work of God.

The second meaning of the word *katartidzo* is "to adjust a dislocated member of the body back to its rightful place"—ligaments, sinews, and bones joined and knit together just right. Can you see the parallel to our lives as members of one Body? You and I must be fitted together to become a habitation of God by the Spirit (Eph.2:21-22). All the stones are set together into their proper places until the whole building rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.³⁰ Gifted men of God are essential in order for the house of God, His Habitation, to be properly built and fitted together.

Finally, *katartidzo* means "to mend the nets." If the Body of Christ is tangled up with holes and knots, and is disorderly, then it won't be useful. It needs orderly deployment to be used by God.

As we are in relationship with the gifted men of God, we are equipped for works of service that would otherwise be impossible to do. While equipping might take place apart from other people (by a *Sovereign*

²⁹As seen in Mk.1:19, where James and John were "mending their nets."

³⁰You may recall that the temple of God was made out of stones that were cut at the quarry. It was not built from bricks that are uniform and square, but by stones. The tower of Babel was made out of bricks, and we know God's pronouncement on that work of men. But God's people are living stones (1Pet.2:5) who are cut from the Rock and who need to be fitted together. Each stone is different in shape, size, and makeup. Each needs to be fitted with another and *compacted together* (KJV) in just the right way. For each to randomly place himself in the house would be chaos, but as the gifted men of God equip all the living stones, they are appropriately cut and fitted and joined together into a flawless house.

act of God), such occurrences are *rare*.³¹ For the most part, God uses earthen vessels to equip us. This treasure in earthen vessels is how God most often trains and equips His People.

Benefits of Equipping

Building Up the Body of Christ

By this equipping, the Body of Christ is “built up.” The word here was used for the architectural and structural considerations of constructing a home or temple. They are “built up.” Makes sense, doesn’t it?

Unity in the Faith

Jesus’ prayer was that we might be one, just as He and the Father are one. He said to Thomas, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn.14:9). Can you truly say of disciples around you, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen Dave, or Jeff, or John”? Surely our cohesiveness as One Body is directly dependent on these Gifts to the Church.

Knowledge of the Son

Not knowledge about Jesus, but knowledge of Jesus. These men must out of necessity know Christ very, very intimately. By the gifts they bring to the family of God, we grow together to know Him fully.

Fullness of Christ

Our destination is “*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*” Paul described the Church as “*the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way*” (Eph.1:23). The Church is the fullness of Christ. What a statement! Everything Christ is, the Church is meant to become.

No Longer Infants

In the original language, the word for infants (nepios) meant “speechless babies.” As we are equipped, we will no longer be speechless babies in God’s household. Rather than “takers only” in the Family, we will be those who take responsibility in the House. Those five gifts are given

³¹Some rare cases when God chose to sovereignly equip specific people included John the Baptist, Moses, and Elijah. But take a look at Elisha. He did twice as much as Elijah and he was equipped for the works of service by a *person*. Moses was sovereign in a sense; yet after spending 40 years as Moses’ servant, Joshua was the one who took the people across the river into the Promised Land. Similar examples abound in the Scriptures.

that we might not be forever speechless infants needing, needing, needing. Instead, we can grow into “fathers” and “mothers,” learning to take responsibility in His Family.

Not Tossed Back and Forth

Equipping is essential so that we are no longer blown around in confusion and gullibility by the impure teachings of men—men who are either ignorant or who are in it for themselves. Now we can be made solid. Remembering what we heard from the beginning, we cultivate the anointing of God in us so that no man can fool us.³² We’re established in what we have heard from the beginning so that now the anointing of God is clear in our lives and in our hearts.

Jesus said to Peter, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Simon Peter, but my Father revealed this to you.” Yet five minutes later, Jesus had to rebuke Peter, “Get behind me, satan.” Peter confused the voice of God and the voice of satan. He couldn’t distinguish between the two. The anointing and revelation from the Father wasn’t clear enough for him at that point in time. He required more equipping and anointing to be able to distinguish those two voices. Likewise, we too need equipping so that we’re no longer blown around by every denomination and every system of doctrine, continually confused and frustrated.

Speaking the Truth in Love

For many of us, one of the most difficult aspects of the Christ Life is learning to confront reality in the hearts and lives of those around us. If we’ve been *equipped* to have the heart of the Lion of Judah, we’ll leave no sin untouched and no stone unturned as we walk in the light with our brothers and sisters. Yet, the Truth is to be spoken “in love,” and that requires that we be equipped to have not only the heart of the Lion of Judah, but the heart of the Lamb that was slain as well.³³

Growing into the Head

As gifted men of God equip us, we grow into a connection with the Head and His guidance, His teaching and Headship—His Lordship. The Head is the source—the Giver of thought, of purpose, and of protection. He gives a sense of direction to the Body so it all moves together toward a harmonized purpose.

³²1Jn.2:24-27.

³³For a more detailed discussion of the lion and lamb qualities of Jesus as these apply to leadership in God’s kingdom, you may want to write and request the three-tape series “Kingdom Leadership.”

Joined and Knit Together

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are given the special task of knitting sinews and ligaments together to form a unified Body. In a Church of 5000 (or even 500), it would be impossible for everyone to merge their lives into the lives of *all* the other local parts of the Body of Christ closely enough to “walk in the light” and “encourage one another daily” (Heb.3:12-14). But God, through these gifted men, “has arranged the parts in the body, everyone of them, just as He wanted them to be” (1Cor.12:18). Observation of, and correspondence with many thousands of Believers on six continents for many years certainly has validated the point: after the initial “honeymoon” period of “excitement” is over, chaos, disunity, sin, ambition, independence, and disconnectedness are the marks of virtually every “group” of Believers not in relationship with these Gifted men. What would be the purpose or motive of fighting against God’s Plan by ignoring the parts of Jesus, the Gifts, which bring cohesiveness, sense, Spiritual growth, and corporate fruitfulness to the Body of Christ? I’m thinking there had better be a VERY good reason to NOT “cry out to the Lord of the Harvest” for the Parts of His Life and Giftedness that make this much difference to the daily Life of His Body. Think?

Building Itself in Love

So finally, as the body grows, it is energized (*energeo*) to build itself up in love as each part does its work. Men of apostolic stature are indeed a necessity in the Church, but they could never do the work alone. “Therefore let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good works” “encouraging each other daily, as long as it is called today, so that none may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Heb.10:24, 3:12-13).

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

All these benefits are ours to the extent that we allow God to raise up apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Don’t think, even for a moment, that you can achieve such growth simply by reading your Bible and praying a lot. The Scriptures themselves testify that *unless you are surrounded by disciples with the five gifts, you will come up short*. In order to attain to the full stature of Christ, we need practical, everyday interaction with gifted men of God. The treasure is in earthen vessels, in men, not just in what they’ve written down. Yes,

contrary to popular belief, our primary tool of growth is not a gold-edged, leather-bound book with a string hanging out of it.³⁴

Heresy, you say? But, what does God have to say about it?

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,’ says the Lord. ‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ says the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more’”³⁵(Jeremiah 31:31-34).

“You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart...But if the law that brought death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the Glory of his countenance, which Glory was passing away, then will the Spirit which gives life not be even more glorious?” (2 Corinthians 3:3, 7-8)

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The testimony is clear that the new covenant would be written on men’s hearts, not on scrolls, stone tablets, or books. God means to chisel His very words deeply in our hearts by placing His Spirit *in* us! As much as I cherish the Scriptures and praise God for them, I have to say that these very Scriptures *testify* to a covenant not written with paper and ink!

Nowhere in Old Testament prophecy does God promise to give us a new book to replace the old book. The promised new covenant would not be like the old one. Rather, God would cause the same Spirit that wrote the Old Testament to *LIVE* in His People.

³⁴See Jer.31:31-34; Eze.36:26-27; Heb.8:7-13; Rom.10:14; 2Cor.4:6-7.

³⁵See also Heb.8:7-13, 10:16-17.

Does the twenty-first century church have any need for apostles? When you consider the vast list of benefits they bring to the family of believers, who could say otherwise! Let us stop debating the existence of these earthen vessels and start enjoying the treasures they impart.

Part 4: What They Are... And What They Ain't!

Jesus is the Standard for the *deployment* of all the gifts. It's not His Body unless it has *all of His giftedness*. What was Jesus like as an apostle? Was He different as a prophet than what we generally see today? (You better believe it!) What kind of evangelist, shepherd ("pastor"), or teacher was He? Jesus alone is the measuring rod that the Father uses, and the interpretation of all the Gifts and of all the Scriptures. It would be a serious mistake to use Paul as our role model for understanding the apostolic. Paul is not the standard of the apostolic; *JESUS* is the standard. Paul's life only gives a partial picture of the whole apostolic life of Jesus.

Builders Under the Chief

As with our Lord and Chief Apostle, the apostles of God are builders or architects under the Chief.³⁶ Paul described the Corinthian Church as God's field, God's building, and Paul described himself as the master builder. "*According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.*"

Paul called himself a master builder. Now that's a pretty radical statement coming from a man who was not one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb! Paul was *a* master builder, but not *the* Master Builder. That's what an apostle is—a builder of the House.

When Moses built the dwelling place of God, he did so according to the pattern he had *seen*.³⁷ This is not to be grasped intellectually, so you'll have to chew on that one a bit. In order for the House to be built, there must be a builder who can *read* the blueprints. There must be an architect who can *SEE*. The masons, carpenters, plumbers, and craftsmen may be the best in the world at their trade, yet without the *architekton's* vision and service to the saints, they'll be unable to build toward a unified habitation of God which is joined and knit

³⁶1Cor.3:10-15.

³⁷Acts 7:44.

together. The role of the apostle is to spearhead a wedge of purpose, which enables the saints to follow and to use their own unique gifts to penetrate into the things of God. The Church is built on the Foundation of apostles and prophets and therefore becomes a habitation of God by the Spirit.³⁸

Apart from a Foundation laid by an architect, there can be no habitation of God by the Spirit. The best that can result is some sort of disjointed, chaotic building known for its meteoric character—that is, it will go up in a blaze of glory and come right down in a puff of smoke. Such “churches” will be reactive and enthusiastic about ideas, but in practice they will constantly have to be propped up. There might be glorious talents, abilities, gifts, and callings among the People of God. *But*, without the prophetic insight and apostolic character of men who can *SEE and build what exists in the unseen realm*, the result is chaos.

Apart from a living relationship with an architect, even the most skilled plumber, carpenter, or electrician is going to make a mess of things. No matter how good he is, he is going to make a mess if he works apart from the one who can read the blueprints—the architect. The final product will have a pattern of being great one minute and rotten the next. It will be marked by pendulum swings—soaring high and then crashing back down. Continuous cycles of success and failure will frustrate the people. New ideas and programs may seem, for a while, to patch up the holes, but these will turn out to be nothing more than band-aids on cancer. The resulting structure will not be marked by ever-increasing Glory.

God’s Habitation will always be increasing in Glory. It won’t be a sporadic, roller coaster experience. The building of the House of God will be characterized by ever-increasing glory, pain, work, and perspiration. We were cursed with doing our work “by the sweat of the brow.” It is *costly* to build a House of God, and there *is* a cross involved. You’ll need quite a bit of timber to start off. And the fact is inescapable that you need the blueprints and the blueprint reader in front of you to bring the gifts of God together into a compacted, unified structure that goes UP (rather than in scattered directions).

³⁸Eph.2:19-22, 4:16.

Not All the Same

As with all of God's creation,³⁹ even apostles are given to the Church with differing degrees of glory. There are different kinds of glory; it's true of different kinds of birds and animals and even resurrected bodies ☺. Well, it's also true in the Church—specifically of apostolic men. There was only one apostle Paul in the first century—so why would we have to be just like him in order to be an apostle today? Who did what Paul did? Nobody. But there was still twenty-three listed in the New Testament. You don't have to be like Paul to have the gift of apostle on your life. Nobody else was just like Paul. Even Peter said, "I don't understand Paul all the time. This man is a little deep. But, you better not twist his words." Peter said that in 2 Peter 3.

Paul was an evangelist, a teacher, and an apostle.⁴⁰ But a man could be an apostle without being a teacher or herald. He might be a lousy communicator from a platform, yet be able to "wipe you out" at the dinner table! Remember that an apostle won't necessarily impress you by his public speaking abilities. Someone who does not have the three distinct gifts that Paul had (who has the gift of apostle but not necessarily that of herald or teacher), may not come across as a great orator. But just because he can't communicate publicly doesn't mean he is not an apostle of God. Actually, you may find that he does awesome work around the dinner table or on a four-hour walk. ☺

Keep in mind that an apostle won't necessarily write Scriptures, either. Only five out of twenty-three apostles wrote *graphe* (writings)⁴¹, and a few books were written by men who were *not* called apostles. Yet, every apostle wrote *living letters*. And since they impacted peoples' lives, they were known by their fruit.

Recognized By Their Fruit

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can

³⁹1Cor.15:38-41.

⁴⁰1Tim.2:7; 2Tim.1:11.

⁴¹ "*Graphe*" is another one of those mistranslated words. It has been translated "Scriptures" but the word itself simply means "writings."

anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he, himself, will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you⁴² are" (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).

"If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 9:2).

"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You, yourselves, are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody (how "boastful," huh?). You show that you are a letter from Christ prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

"Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is **not a matter of talk but of power**. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?" (1 Corinthians 4:18-21)

Paul was determined to find out whether all these boastful men who claimed to be apostles really were apostles—he would find out what they were made of. These men were questioning his apostleship and if he needed to come with a whip, he would. But he would find out whether they were just speaking words or if there was *power* behind what they were doing. There is an unmistakable seal, or mark, of apostolic authenticity. The proof is in their power. The Kingdom of God is *not* mere talk, but *power*. Their *claims* don't make them apostolic men. Paul thought that it was possible that they were apostles and, if so, there would be a mark. An apostolic man would have a seal of the

⁴² In the Greek, this "you" is plural. Can you see why it almost has to be? He flows right into "YOU are God's temple (not "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit" like it says in ch. 6). You are God's temple, His Holy Building, and don't you know the Spirit of God dwells in YOU!?"

Holy Spirit of God and the genuineness of divinity flowing out of him. *Dunamis*, great power, would be manifested.

“I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He isn’t weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:2-8).

Paul told the Corinthians that if they examined themselves and saw Christ within, then that was proof that *he* had passed the test. If the Spirit of God was dwelling in them richly—if there was genuineness, regeneracy, and the power of God—that was all the credentials he needed. Like Grandma always said, the proof is in the pudding.⁴³

Another thing that not all apostles did was “plant churches” (sorry to burst your bubble). After the sixth chapter of Acts, very few of those that we know were apostles are ever mentioned again. Not many are said to have established Churches like the apostle Paul did (Rom.1:5, 15:17-19). Apollos was called an apostle, and it says that Paul “planted,” but Apollos only “watered” (1Cor.3:6).

Either Servants...or Frauds!

If men who claim to be apostles lord it over God’s heritage, they’re frauds. If they must have a platform, if they must have a name badge, if they must have “yes men” around them, *they are frauds*. If they

⁴³Reread 2 Cor.13:2-8 and notice the tremendous cross involved. Paul spoke of being crucified in weakness and then living in weakness so that others might live in glory. And if people wanted to think he failed the test, so be it. That was part of the cost. As Jesus taught, no man is greater than his Master. His only concern was that they look at their own lives to see whether they reflected Jesus. Needless to say, being an apostle is not all fun and games!

clamor for substance, seek money and success, or motivate others through guilt, *they are frauds*. If they float around unaccountable to other brothers—flaunting themselves, advancing their “ministry” and putting guilt or fear or flattery upon others in order to solicit power or funds—they are frauds. If they are simply “pastors” (unBiblical concept anyway, as it’s practiced today) of a mega-“church,” the fact that they currently have “power” and “popularity” and get to make speeches to adoring crowds and control massive budgets —*surely does not make them “apostles” regardless of what they claim for themselves*. If they claim to have “planted 400 churches on nine continents in the last 6 months, and two just last weekend,” then they are frauds. This sort of boasting, and the shallowness of what they leave behind (which will only ultimately serve to discourage honest and courageous Saints once reality sets in) is an abomination, and unsustainable in any Holy form. “I’m going to start an Ephesus or Antioch, and I’m going to train me some church planters, because I’m the greatest living christian author.” I am certain that anyone with the smallest amount of discernment can smell that this is a putrid forgery of God’s Precious Gift. Question their lives—don’t permit them to separate themselves in an Ivory Tower of their perceived importance. Watch for their arrogance and unaccountability as confirmation of any counterfeit and unHoly work. Some have the gall to project themselves as “apostles” or “church planters” based on borrowed words on their “internet web site” or because of manufactured fairy tale word-smithing, SOLD to the Saints for profit. (Can you IMAGINE Paul or Peter doing something so greedy and crass?)

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many’”(Matthew 20:25-28).

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:5-9).

*“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them **by the cross**” (Colossians 2:15).*

And why is all of this so important? Why do we need to cry out to Father for the Real thing, rather than run after every fad that offers cool “church life” and “deep teaching”? Because those things are powerless to deal with satan, which is our only real adversary. The Gates of Hell continue to prevail in those situations, after the “coolness” has worn off. Only those whose backs are scratched and pockets are filled with the Saint’s money can continue to be excited about “this great move of God”—once many see their children go into the world and satan’s clutches, and marriages and lives destroyed by the devil. There is no Power in the “cool church life” world that will not deal with sin, and uses “deep teaching” as a license for sin and blasphemy and make-believe “stories” manufactured from scarce evidence and vivid imaginations—undocumentable make-believe to sell more books and peddle God for their own profit.

Why does this matter? Because there is no Leadership in the Kingdom of God except that which destroys the principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in heavenly realms.⁴⁴ And the only way principalities and powers are defeated is **on a cross**. That means laying our lives down for others while they’re yet sinners, before they deserve it or even desire it. That marked the life of Jesus and there is no other kind of leadership in the Kingdom of God.

You need to realize that Godly Leadership is not based on talent or charisma. The only enemies are the “principalities and powers” in the unseen world. They are the ones with whom we’re at war. All other dealings are merely external and in the end don’t mean much. How dare we think we will win any battle by “instruction of the mind”! Defeating the principalities and powers, the spiritual wickedness in heavenly realms, happens *on a cross*, by the Spirit. One of the ironies of the universe is summed up in this: “not by might, not by power, but by my spirit,” says the Lord.” And His Spirit is pure, holy and good, while our spirits demand equality and rights. Yet, we willingly make ourselves slaves of all and empty ourselves, laying our lives down, even to the point of death on a cross, giving our lives as a ransom for others. Yes, the only kind of leadership is that which destroys

⁴⁴Eph.6:12; 1Jn.2:14, 3:8, 5:18; 2Cor.10:3-4.

principalities and powers—and they can only be destroyed on a cross. That’s the only way.⁴⁵

Pitfalls of Believing in the Gifts

After weighing what God has to say on the subject, we may conclude that we now “believe in” gifts (whether apostles or some other gift). But just deciding that we believe in a gift does not mean that there will

⁴⁵One practical application of all this involves finances. An apostle of God will be very fluid in his manner of making a living. But he will *never* be an “employee of the church” with a salary, car allowance, and three weeks paid vacation. (In addition, he will not have all that is “laid at the apostles’ feet” in his pocket and totally at his personal disposal. A Gifted brother is NOT God, and should not be “in control” of every issue, or feel the need. That is not wisdom or Spiritual Life. Other brothers should handle as much as possible.) Such abuses are not God’s Way, but, in fact, violate many Biblical principles. This arrangement, obviously patterned after the world system, can pollute even the purest heart and amounts to nothing less than robbery in the Kingdom of God! An apostle of Christ will always be willing to “make tents” whenever it becomes physically necessary or seems spiritually best (Acts 20:34; 2Thes.3:8). At times, it would be wrong to *wait on tables* rather than to be devoted to *prayer and service with the Word* (Acts 6:2-4). Ideally, by the *Lord’s command*, a man of God should earn his living by *the Gospel* (1Cor.9:14). In other words, his needs would be provided by those who willingly offer up material benefit because this man of God has brought increase to them spiritually (Gal.6:6).

Clearly, this transaction between lives is **far removed** from today’s religious world, where “preachers” are hired and fired after “trying out” for the position and are paid for “services rendered” (which usually includes a “competitive benefits package”). *From the beginning it was not so!* God’s way has always been *willing service on both parts*. The man of God responds to the calling, grace, and command of God *alone* (1Cor.9:16-18; Rom.1:14; 1Cor.15:9-10), not to any kind of lust for money or to the whims of those who might “fire” him (as if that were possible!). He’s a debtor. If he does it under compulsion, simply fulfilling his obligation, so be it. If he does it willingly, that’ll be even better reward. But, he’s a debtor. He has no choice, *“the grace was given us, therefore we work harder than all the rest.”* By the same token, his brothers and sisters are debtors, as well. They are debtors because of the gratitude to him for what he has imparted to them. He has helped change their very lives, so they are indebted and want to provide for his needs in response to God and His purposes on the earth. As we see God’s purposes being fulfilled and lives changing around us, as we notice the fruit of Jesus Christ and His gospel in men’s lives, we respond. We give to Christ by offering our material goods to the men who propagate the Life of Christ among us. This is not an external response just to “keep the church going.” It’s a vertical response to God as we see Him being multiplied in our midst. So we lay down our lives, physically and spiritually, in any way we can.

automatically be the manifestation of that gift in our midst. Everything is subject to the purposes and timing of God.

Name It, Claim It

Time after time, a gift is “discovered” in the Scriptures, and someone exclaims, “Ah, I see a gift that we don’t have. Let’s start having it!” That’s fraudulent! That attitude has resulted in many counterfeits and much fraudulent activity in the world today.⁴⁶ We must not do that.

This kind of “name it, claim it” approach to the Scriptures makes God out to be some sort of game show host who can’t wait to give you whatever is behind door number two. Just because you can name it doesn’t mean it’s yours. When God gives a gift, there will be no denying that its origin is God. It will have the divine and unmistakable mark of heaven. There won’t be any need to force it or conjure anything up.⁴⁷ The fact is, no gift ever came into existence simply because someone “discovered” it in the Bible. Let us cry out to the Lord of the Harvest with submissive faith to receive these gifts. God is faithful to respond in *His* way and in *His* time.

They’ve Been Here All Along

Another pitfall of believing in apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers is the assumption that they’ve always been around, since “the Bible says so.” Actually, Paul never said we would always have those gifts, but he did say we need them until we all reach the unity of the faith and the full stature of Christ.

Someone will argue, “These gifts have always been around; we just haven’t recognized them.” But God gives specific gifts to specific men who have real names and faces. And they will either be recognized as anointed or they will be able to do no miracles among us.

⁴⁶For example, there are these doctrines of “five-fold ascension gift ministries” and “apostolic teams” that have been commercialized and franchised and misapplied in tragic ways.

⁴⁷For a case in point, read Acts 10:43-48. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.” And the people began to speak in tongues! Peter never said, “You can have the gift of the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues. Just raise your hands and start mouthing the words.” *That’s not how it happened.* Peter was in the middle of telling the crowd about Jesus, and quite unexpectedly, the people just exploded! As far as we can tell, they didn’t know anything about tongues until it happened. It was clearly from God.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus visited His hometown? Jesus, the ultimate Gift to mankind, could do no miracles in their midst because they had so little faith. The people asked, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son? He’s a carpenter! His brothers and sisters are with us.” In other words, they considered Him a mere human like everyone else. They failed to recognize the anointing of God on His life. As a result, He *could do no miracles* among them.

In fact, when God’s people lack the submissive faith that is required to receive His Giftedness, He will often *take away* anointed leadership as a judgment on His household, causing mere children to govern them. A classic example of this is found in Isa.3:1-4, 5:1-7. God had a vineyard, which He cultivated and loved. As gifts, He built it a winepress and a tower. But when He went into the vineyard, He saw that it yielded only bad fruit. The people had been disobedient with the gifts He entrusted to them. They were stiff-necked and obstinate, going on sinning in hopes that grace would abound. Therefore, He took away the prophet, the soothsayer, the captain of rank, the man of skill, the counselor, and all God-given anointed leadership. In response to their disobedience in receiving His gifts, God made mere women and children to rule over them. God made that happen. It was His judgment on the house of Israel. Then people will say to one another, “*You have a cloak, you be our leader*” (or, in modern times, perhaps they will say, “You’ve been to a Bible college,” or “You’re good with money”) Isa.3:6. That’s a judgment of God. To believe in these gifts does not mean they are currently in existence, but we can cry out to receive these gifts.

Korah’s Rebellion

It is actually possible to believe in apostles and prophets and yet miss them altogether when they are sent to us. So it was with the Jews when Jesus walked the earth as a man. Most of them believed in the coming Messiah and even prayed for His manifestation. But when God was moved to compassion by their cries for help, they delivered the precious Gift of God over to be crucified—not out of disbelief, but out of jealousy! For Pilate “knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him” (Mt.27:18). ***The last and deadliest pitfall of believing in the gifts is the tendency to grab onto a concept but reject the man because of your own spiritual pride and ambition.***

“For Moses supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand” (Acts 7:24-35).

“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have certainly seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt’” (Acts 7:33).

God came down to deliver His people, so He sent Moses. That’s how God does business. He chooses a man. He says, “I come down to deliver you. Now, I choose you.” But when Moses did finally go, how did the people respond?

“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35).

And so it is today. Without vision for what God is doing, a selfish man will cast off restraint and perish. As Jude’s letter warns, the latter days will be marked by the spirit of Korah.⁴⁸ “I get all my leading from the Holy Spirit, I don’t need you!” “We have the Holy Spirit, too!” That attitude makes God sick and, if we persist with that kind of heart, He will judge us—as individuals, or as a people, He will judge us!

In conclusion, let me just say again that simply believing in these Gifts doesn’t mean that they are currently in existence. But, for the sake of Jesus and His Kingdom, do cry out to the Lord of the Harvest to receive those Gifts in your midst. Then ask for the eyes to see them and, finally, the heart to submit to whatever God provides.

Worse Yet: Not Believing in His Gifts

To believe in apostles has no merit in itself, but to *not* believe in them is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Suppose God gives you a gift that you “don’t believe in.” That gift remains dormant inside you and so you are right—there is no such thing! You’ve created a self-fulfilling prophecy. God can do no miracles in your life. You’ll never know the substance and beauty of that gift in your life because you don’t even

⁴⁸*“They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, ‘You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?’” (Num.16:3)*

It was this same line of reasoning that prompted God to strike Miriam with leprosy, and in this case, Korah and his 250 followers were swallowed into the earth. Take a few minutes to go back and read Num.16:1-7, 19-35. These things were written for our learning!

recognize the gift as being possible. You'll never experience a gift you don't believe in, not in your life and not in the lives of others around you.

The bottom line is that you can't fan into flame a gift that you don't accept. Nor will you be able to say, as Paul said of his apostleship, "*By the grace (undeserved favor) of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not wasted. No, I worked harder than all the rest—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me*" (1Cor.15:10-11).

Even more tragic than individual unbelief is the corporate rejection of Apostolic and Prophetic Giftedness by the Body of Christ as a whole. Such rejection becomes, once again, a self-fulfilling prophecy. Jesus was without honor in His hometown and could therefore do no miracles there. He was rejected by men 2000 years ago, and He is still rejected today whenever the church refuses to submit to His giftedness in people by the Spirit.

Not only is God dishonored by this state of affairs, but the Body of Christ is cheated out of its full inheritance. Jesus told the Twelve as He sent them out, "*He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward*" (Mt.10:40-41). Receive a prophet, and you'll receive a prophet's reward. Receive only a friend, and you'll receive a friend's reward. Receive a Bible teacher, and you'll receive a Bible teacher's reward. Receive a nice guy, and you'll receive a nice guy's reward. **Receive apostolic and prophetic men, then you'll receive FOUNDATIONS—THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE HABITATION OF GOD BY THE SPIRIT!**

The point is that unless you submit to the giftedness of Christ in a person, you can never receive the benefits of that gift. The extent to which you receive a gift in someone else will determine the benefits you receive. And to receive a gift implies not only belief, but submission.

Some would PREFER a "sperm donor" rather than a "father" (1Thes.1-2). If they can "bring in someone" to give them some ideas, and then dismiss them on their way, instead of building accountable ongoing relationships (the ONLY Biblical Model), then they can stay in control of their "property" and "space." But, a true man of God will not be a "sperm donor" easily, since fathering is vastly superior in God's

eyes. One with legitimate Gifts from Heaven will be very reluctant to simply deposit *information*, when Jesus' way is *impartation*. "The LIFE becomes the Light of men."

Submit to the Gift or you cannot receive the benefits of the Gift. Submission is sometimes hard to swallow because it means that you aren't "it." It means that you don't have all the answers in yourself and that you need the giftedness in someone else. It's not easy to say, "Hey, I don't have it. You do. I submit to the Gift of God that's within you because it's a piece of Jesus Christ." Brothers, we need to be totally willing to submit to anything that is Christ. If we see it in our children, our spouses, someone else in the Body, or even a cricket (of all things!), we must gladly submit to the giftedness of Christ. Otherwise, we'll never know the benefits of that gift.

Part 5: Unmerited, Sovereignly- Distributed Gifts

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are all Sovereign Gifts from God. He alone has the right to decide where, when, and to whom they'll be given. And because they are sovereignly given, they cannot be attained by maturity, sincerity, Bible knowledge, deep desire, or even the need to have them. No, instead "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be" (1Cor.12:18).

Totally Grace

The gift of apostleship comes by grace (*charis*), which means "undeserved favor."⁴⁹ There's nothing anyone can do to earn it. The gift is by grace and is therefore not deserved! You can't grow into it, either. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty" (Zec.4:6). As with all the children of God, apostles are birthed from above, "not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (Jn.1:13).

As Peter and John said of the once crippled man, "*Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see*" (Acts 3:12, 16). And so it is with all of God's gifts. Power won't make it happen, and godliness can't earn it. Natural talents and abilities mean nothing. You can neither earn nor learn, attain nor win, mimic nor duplicate the free gift of God. Not by our own power or godliness, but by faith in the name of Jesus, do we glorify God, lest any man boast.

There might, however, still be a gap in time before these Gifts are manifested in a person's life. Perhaps there will be a season of testing to reveal whether the man of God will be "faithful in little things" (see

⁴⁹Rom.1:5, 12:6; Eph.3:2-8, 4:7-11; 1Cor.15:9-10; 1Pet.4:10; Mk.13:34; 1Cor.3:5, 12:11.

Lk.16:10-12). For Paul, the delay was almost a decade from his vision, conversion, and commission in Acts 9 (AD 36) to his sending out in Acts 13 (AD 45).⁵⁰ Was all that time wasted? Not a chance! More likely, it was an opportunity for God to teach Paul faithfulness “with the little things.”

What was Paul during that time, anyway? Was he an apostle, even though it was almost ten years before he was actually sent out? One thing is certain, the **gift** was there. We know that because God said, “I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to the power of God” (Acts 26:17-18). *I am commissioning you. I am sending you to the Gentiles and to their kings.* Who among us wouldn’t say, “Okay, let’s go right now!” But it was another ten years before Paul was “sent out” (Acts 13).

Paul’s time in Damascus, right after his conversion (Acts 9), seemed like a total failure. There’s no record of any conversions, he had to escape over the wall in a basket, and the Bible says the churches enjoyed a time of peace **after** he left! 😊 Next, he disappeared for three years in Arabia, and finally went home to Tarsus. All in all, it was about six years before he ever made it to Antioch (Acts 11), and almost ten years before he was actually sent out (*apostello*) in Acts 13:3. So, seemingly, Paul had no specific, visible assignment from God for several years. Even though the Gift is Sovereign, there may be a time delay as God tests our ability to be faithful with the little things.

It *is* possible to be *disobedient* to the calling on your life. While it’s true that no one can do anything to earn the free gift of God, it bears mentioning that His calling on a life can be *quenched*. Laziness, disobedience, and failure to grow toward the full stature of Christ are all factors that can inhibit the expression of the Gift. Likewise, there must be a nurturing *environment* for that expression—just the right amounts of light, water, iron sharpening iron, and faithfulness with little things. There is an active part that we play. “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven,” Paul told King Agrippa in reference to his calling. “*Fan into flame the gift of God that is within you by the laying on of my hands.*”

Obviously, once a gift is given, God’s desire is that all of the elements will fall into place. But there will undoubtedly be a period of time that God will use to test our obedience and faithfulness with the “little

⁵⁰Josephus, et al.

things.” And once given a gift by the grace of God, we must actively *respond* to the call *in faith*.

In the Order of Melchizedek

The writer of Hebrews speaks of two priesthoods: the order of Levi and the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). The priesthood of Melchizedek is of the same nature as Melchizedek himself. He was a man without history and without lineage. No explanation was ever given of where he came from or where he was going. “*Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever*” (Heb.7:3). Melchizedek was of a divine nature, sovereignly placed there by God. There was a greatness about Melchizedek—Abraham, the father of our faith, even tithed to Melchizedek!

There was a greatness about him, but understand that it *wasn't* something you could attribute to his training, his lineage, or anything external. It was given by God by His *Sovereign choosing*.

The Sovereign Gifts which Jesus Christ “ascended on high” to give to His Church (Ephesians 4) are best described (as an analogy) as in the order of Melchizedek. Jesus gives Sovereign Gifts to His Church by His grace, His undeserved favor (God’s intervention that man did not earn). The Apostolic Gift is referred to as “the *charis* (grace) of...”

These gifts cannot be earned or learned, but only *received* as the Father freely gives. Those who are “equipped for works of service” in areas they may not have supernatural Gifting in will have definite origins and lineage. In the Old Testament, men in the order of Levi were trained in the priesthood from the age of 25 to the age of 30. They served as attendants and were trained in the responsibilities before they ever took over their priestly duties. In the same way, there is today a priesthood of believers, by way of analogy, who are “equipped” in the stature and fruitfulness of the knowledge of Christ,⁵¹ as well as “equipped” to “do their work in love.”

Again, consider the analogy, for understanding purposes. (Obviously there is no “clergy” or “special class of Saints” in the New Covenant—but ORGANICALLY the nature of Gifts can be understood analogously through this illustration.) The order of Melchizedek can only be

⁵¹See Mt.28:18-20.

explained by God's Sovereign Purposes and His Sovereign Timing. It is clearly by God's grace—undeserved favor that no man can ever earn—that these men are Gifted to the Church. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers are Sovereignly given to the Church to equip others into the fullness of Christ (Eph.4:11-16).⁵² In this way, the priesthood of Melchizedek equips the rest for the works of service and trains others, just as the Levitical Priesthood was trained into their responsibilities. Those of the order of Melchizedek have no explanation for their Gifts, other than purely God's Grace, "lest any man boast."

The Right Environment—Abiding

These Gifts of God, which the Holy Spirit has imparted as He wills, will manifest themselves if the environment of the corporate Christ life is present to nurture them into fruitfulness. What does the life of Christ look like as it's expressed corporately in His people?

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Hebrews 3:12-14).

The Christ life in us will encourage ("admonish" in some versions) one another daily so that none are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This admonishing process is vital to keep us from being deceived and hardened by sin. That's true no matter who you are. There are no exceptions. This continual admonishment is an essential element in the nature of the Body of Christ. Without that environment, you will be deceived and hardened into a lack of fruitfulness. That's not a threat, just a law of nature. Men are like plants—their fruitfulness is determined largely by their environment.

⁵²The apostles were told to go *make* disciples. People are made into disciples—they *learn* to be followers. That sounds so foreign to a religious world that says, "God made me what I am. God made me a disciple and I don't need men!" It was this same carnal arrogance that caused one of the Corinthian factions to boast "I'm not of Apollos or of Cephas; I am of Christ" (see 1Cor.1:12). God's command is not optional, no matter what the world says. Jesus says, "Go *make* disciples...and *teach* them to *obey* everything I have commanded you" (Mt.28:18-20). "I commanded *you*, and you command *them* to obey *me*." There is a cycle there. It was on that condition that He promised to "be with you always, to the very end of the age." Praise God for that promise, because the making of a disciple doesn't happen overnight!

If the environment is right, an oak tree seed will always produce an oak tree. All young sprouts look the same at first, so you won't know what kind of tree it is until a certain amount of maturity is reached. An oak tree, a maple tree, and an apple tree all look the same when they've first sprouted.

So it is with the Body of Christ. You won't see men bursting with obvious gifts right from the start. But if the environment is right, they can grow into the stature of Christ. These Gifts, any Gifts, can be quenched without the nurturing of that Gift. Without the environment of growth, without the habitat of growth, without the iron sharpening iron—those gifts can be lost or quenched or pigeonholed. It is vital to live in an environment that nurtures the Christ life, so that the giftedness can begin to grow up and bear fruit. It *will* bear fruit in due season if it is planted by streams of living water.

The fruit is not manifested instantly. With regard to apostleship, the *seed* is the Gift of the Holy Spirit, given as He desires and as He wills. But the *fruit* won't manifest itself right away. You'll never see a little green sprout with an apple hanging off the end. Nor will you ever see a bunch of tiny apples on a tiny sapling. Every good tree bears fruit in season, *but only after a time of nurturing and maturing.*

You won't have to put a sign in front of the oak tree to make it grow. It doesn't need a label to grow and flourish, and neither do God's gifts. Just feed it and nurture it in the Holy Spirit's "habitat." That is, *admonish one another daily and refuse to consider any of your possessions as your own, being devoted to the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers.* In that setting, the gifts given by the Holy Spirit will blossom and bear fruit as the genetic nature within permits. Remember that the destination is **the full measure of the stature of Christ**, not some "ministry." The Holy Spirit gives gifts *as He wills*, so watch for fruit, not name tags.

In the meantime, don't run after these things, but do "earnestly desire the greater gifts." You don't know what form the gifts will take because the Holy Spirit gives them *as He wills*. But when they finally are given and planted in the habitat of God's Kingdom, they'll bear fruit in season. You'll know it when it happens. It won't be some mysterious thing where you have to "discover your calling." Nowhere in the Bible is a person encouraged to discover his gift. It's good to desire whatever gift God may be able to give you. "Earnestly desire (not discover) the greater gifts." Fix your eyes on Jesus, not on what you think is "your ministry."

Be fruitful as you abide in Christ and lay down your life for others. If you're busy climbing on a cross for others, you'll know as time goes on what gift you have. If you're abiding in Him and planted in the right habitat, you'll grow and bear fruit after your own kind. A seed always bears fruit after its own kind. If you nurture and water whatever seed you have in you, it will bear fruit. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will bear much fruit." The emphasis is on *abiding* in Him.

Timing is paramount when it comes to the bursting forth of the Gift within. Consider just a few examples from biblical history. It was almost 10 years after Paul's vision of Christ and his commissioning before Paul ever did anything worth noting. What might have happened if he had jumped on the scene before God said it was time? Or consider Joseph. His dream was given 22 years before it was finally fulfilled. And then, there's Moses, who rushed impatiently into his calling and had to flee to the desert, where he waited 40 years for God's timing.

You Can't Miss it or Fake it!

The Apostolic is , straight from God's heart and the presence of God. You can't miss it. There won't be any doubt in your mind, and you won't have to take a vote on it. If you have the hunger and humility and passion for Jesus to care and receive, then you will recognize the apostolic. The apostolic represents Divinity, and whatever is from God is unmistakable, if one cares. That's why Paul could say, "*I'll come and show you whether this is mere talk or real power*" (1 Corinthians 4). Of course many missed or refused Jesus Himself when He was here physically, so those same types (the proud, the lazy, those with sins they want to hold on to, the religious, those with power, prestige, or money to lose) will still not See or care.

You can ignore His Gifts or brush them aside if you like, but if you have a heart that really *wants* to see the Glory of God, you'll see it. Again, Jesus was missed by most people of His day. There He was, the ultimate Apostle, and they missed Him. John wrote, "He came to His own and His own received Him not." But if you have eyes to see and you really care, you can't miss it. You won't need to go down any kind of checklist to see if they meet the criteria: Do they do this? Do they do that? What about that? How many conversions do they have? What is on their resume regarding books they have "authored" and "churches" they have "planted"? When it is unmistakably and undeniably God,

those with eyes to see will see, and those with sins and agendas will not. Just as it was with Jesus Himself, there will always be excuses and “let’s be careful here” and other diversions and “smoke and mirror tricks” to justify ignoring what is of God’s Plan and Mandate.

Though some will always try to do so for personal gain, in truth no one can mimic apostolic stature.⁵³ “Knowledge” or personality or leadership skills are NOT the same as Grace from Heaven, and God’s Deposit of the Gift of *architekton*, “master builder.” Knowing all the right verses (or even great maturity) will never substitute for the specific gifting of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2, Peter quoted, “My menservants and maidservants shall prophesy.” The people of God would be a prophetic people. But that doesn’t make everyone a prophet.⁵⁴

The same is true with any other work in the Kingdom. Paul asked rhetorically, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets?”⁵⁵ The implied answer is no. Doing apostolic work, prophetic work, evangelistic work, administrations, mercies, or helps doesn’t mean that the gift from God that dwells within you is in that area. But those qualities are part of the stature and fruitfulness of Christ. Therefore, you can anticipate doing many of those things, even though they may not be the thing that God has specifically caused to be embedded in your genetic new creation.

You Don’t Have to Define It

We may not have all the answers about the place of apostles, but let’s at least be honest with what we see going on around us. If this church

⁵³Some claim to be apostles, but these are to be tested (Rev.2:2; 1Jn.2:18-27; 2Cor.13:3-6).

⁵⁴If you are genetically right-handed, your left hand can be trained to do much or all that the right hand can do. I can dribble a basketball and shoot with my left hand (some may dispute this!), but that doesn’t make me left-handed. I can’t make myself genetically left-handed. Some have, because of an injury to their right arm, learned to be very proficient at tasks with their left hand. Such a person might, with great effort and training, learn to out-perform someone else who uses his dominant hand, especially when the opponent is sick or untrained in the task.

All of this is analogous to giftedness in the church of Jesus. With much **equipping**, a person can learn to function in an area where he is not **genetically gifted**—even to a greater extent than one who is gifted in that area, but who is spiritually sick or lazy.

⁵⁵1Cor.12:29.

existence is not what we read about in the Bible, then we must pay any price to find out what God wants to do. As long as that's our heart, we can set a course that will result in God's Glory without ever knowing the vocabulary!

If we determine to submit to whatever is of God, we will see His Glory and presence manifested among us. Rest assured, if you don't understand everything there is to know about Gifts, that's all right. You don't have to understand it all. You could be deaf, dumb, and blind to all of these terminologies and ideas, yet if you submit to whatever is of God, you will do the right thing. And if you look for the Glory of God but don't see it, cry out to the Lord of the Harvest for laborers!

Again, if you submit to whatever is clearly of God, He will do His work without you having to know the vocabulary behind it. All you need are the eyes to see it and the heart to get on your knees when you see a piece of God show up. You don't even have to label it at that point. Eat the fruit and digest it. If you were shipwrecked and starving on a desert island and you saw fruit hanging on a tree, you would eat it to find out if it had substance. You might never have a name for that piece of fruit, but if it nourished and fed your body, you wouldn't care if you knew its name or not. You can LIVE off it, and that's what matters.

And that's the way it is with giftedness. You don't have to be able to describe it accurately—all you have to do is eat it. You don't need to know all the vocabulary. You just have to cry out to God whenever you don't see His Glory being manifested around you. Then when He sends Life and begins to establish things around you, and you *see* it, GO AFTER IT!

Part 6: Territories: The Apostolic Wedge

Territories: A Living Relationship

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Christ is the chief cornerstone and no man can lay any Foundation other than Christ. We know that much is true. And, according to Paul, that Foundation is built on the apostles and prophets. Now, is Christ, our chief cornerstone, just a dead teacher who left some morals for us to try to obey and a certain pattern of behavior that will make us good little Christians who will die and go to heaven? If so, if our relationship is with a dead Jesus who was a good teacher, then it makes sense that dead apostles would be our Foundation.

But if Christ is the cornerstone because of our living relationship with Him, then how can we have a Foundation of dead apostles and prophets? The *ekklesia* (Church) of God is built on the Foundation of apostles and prophets who are as alive as the Chief Cornerstone Himself! If a historical Jesus isn’t enough to sustain the building, then neither are historical apostles and prophets. You can’t have a dead foundation built on a Living Cornerstone.

Jesus is the Cornerstone of my life, right now, not just a historical figure who impacted me by the life He lived way back then. My fellowship (the Greek word meant “having all things in common”) is with Him and I abide in Him *now*. “They won’t see him any longer, but you will” (Jn.14:19). If it’s a *Living* Cornerstone, it had better be a *Living* Foundation. And as I see more and more in the Scriptures, I testify to you that everything in me is crying out that we must have a relationship—a living relationship—with living apostolic and prophetic men.

That doesn't mean that they have to be everywhere. They weren't in every city in the New Testament Church. But we need somehow to be *in relationship with all the Gifts of the Body* if we really are going to grow up into the Head and attain to the full measure of the stature of Christ. And don't think that you can have it by just reading what they wrote. We don't need a dead apostolic teaching any more than we need a dead Jesus. A dead Jesus who taught moral things is of no real value to us. We can only bear much fruit to the extent that we abide (make our home) in Him, and we need that same kind of Fellowship with the Gifted men He sends to us. It must be a current, moment-by-moment relationship with *real live people*.

Now that we've established the fact that a living relationship with apostolic men is important, you need to know that the *relationship is everything*. It was on the basis of relationships, not an office, that Paul had authority where he did. "Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the *seal* of my apostleship in the Lord" (1Cor.9:2). Paul was not an apostle to everyone, and certainly not in Judea, where he was "personally unknown." Paul's tone with the Romans, whom he described as "another man's foundation," was more like that of a teacher than like that of an apostle. So authority is bound up in giftedness and flows through living relationships with gifted men.

Territories: Not Always Geographic

"Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can proclaim the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work done in another man's territory" (2 Corinthians 10:15-16).

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis" (Colossians 4:12-13).

Sometimes the boundaries of apostolic authority are determined geographically. Paul expressed a desire for his area of activity to spread beyond Corinth to the surrounding regions. And in reference to Epaphras, Paul specifically mentioned three cities where he was called

to be a laborer. Paul could have said, “He labors over all the saints everywhere.” But, instead, he specified three cities.

However, geography is only one way that God sets limits on apostolic authority. For example, Paul was called to be “an apostle to the Gentiles” just as Peter was “an apostle to the Jews” (Gal.2:8). The boundaries can also be determined based on culture, area of a specific assigned task, area of life, a particular group of people, or even a sphere of understanding.

Before we continue with this idea of territories, I need to emphasize something. While not talked about very much in the New Testament, apostolic boundaries are very important. God only has to mention something once for it to be meaningful. I challenge you to dig into it. God leaves a lot of hidden treasure for those who are willing to work the hardest to find it.

Paul’s Company

One thing you don’t see in Paul’s life is a loose association of men strung out across the miles. Rather, men stood behind the Apostolic Gift of Paul, corporately, as a “wedge” supporting him in his Work. An apostolic company of men traveled with Paul from city to city establishing Churches, strengthening and reinforcing the disciples, and then appointing elders and putting things in order.⁵⁶ In the New Testament a total of between 50 and 53 men traveled with Paul in this capacity at one time or another. Paul would send two here and two there, meeting others elsewhere by boat.

This mind-boggling beehive of activity we see in the book of Acts was very much a part of the Apostolic Pattern. But we can’t mimic it by hopping in the car, and traveling all over the place. Do you see the difference? The Apostolic is a dynamic that’s always moving, but which is initiated, maintained, and geared by the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t always the same men who traveled each time, and there was no predictable itinerary planned year by year. Paul traveled as God directed from place to place and drew different men with him, adding some and dropping others off along the way. Sometimes, when Paul was unable to go himself, he sent men to represent him. And, in those cases, he urged the Churches, “*Receive them as you would receive me.*”

⁵⁶Col.4:7-17; Acts 20:4-6; Rom.16:1-24.

Some of the “apostolic companies”:

Peter and John sent to Samaria to Philip the “evangelist” (Acts 8:14)

Barnabas, Saul and Mark (Apostles and helper) (Acts 13-15)

Paul and Silas (Apostle and Prophet) (Acts 15:40)

Barnabas and Mark (Apostle and helper) (Acts 15:37-39).

Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke (Apostle, Prophet, co-Worker /helper, physician/co-Worker) (Acts 16:9).

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos (Apostle, Prophet, co-Workers, physician, Teachers) (Acts 18:2-24).

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Erastus, Gaius, Aristarchus (Apostle, Prophet, co-Workers, physician) (Acts 19).

Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus (Apostle, Prophet, physician, etc.) (Acts 24).

Judas and Silas, as prophets, sent with the Letter (Acts 15:27).

Barnabas and Saul bring relief money to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).

Demas, Epaphras, Luke, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, “many co-workers” etc... (Col.4:7-14)

Over and over again, Paul spoke of men who were behind his apostolic wedge. These were multinational, multicultural, cream-of-the-crop men, properly gifted for extra-local work. They came from different nations—even from different continents! Economic status, culture, and color all varied within this apostolic wedge of men. Yet Paul never set out to have just the right mixture of cultural and economic backgrounds in his apostolic company. Somehow, it was God’s desire to have that spread of people from differing backgrounds.⁵⁷

Nor did Paul hunt around for each “gift” in Ephesians 4 and stick them all together into a nice, neat package of people with all the right titles. This is not a card game where you try to get some kind of royal flush by finding one apostle, one prophet, one evangelist, one shepherd, and one teacher. “Hi, I’m the apostle” “Hi, I’m the prophet”... *That’s not it at all!* Rather, it’s a dynamic and flexible group that doesn’t come with a prepackaged set of rules. As you look at it Biblically, you won’t be able to put a nametag on everything.

Epaphras in Colosse

For example, what would you call Epaphras as you look at his relationship to the Church in Colosse? They initially heard the gospel from him.⁵⁸ Yet Paul, who had never even been to Colosse, took great authority in his letter to the Colossians. And it appears that Epaphras was reporting to Paul what was going on in the Church.⁵⁹ Could Epaphras have been an extension of Paul's apostolic territory?⁶⁰ Epaphras seemed to think so, as he gave Paul an open door and allowed him to write to them in the authoritative manner that he did. There were other Churches where Paul never exercised that kind of authority (see Gal.1:22).

Epaphras stood behind Paul's apostolic wedge and made it possible for Paul to write as one who was "present in spirit" though "absent in body." Could you write a letter to a Church that you had never visited and spell out detailed instructions about things you expected them to do? How presumptuous that would seem to us! We have this idea

⁵⁷There was a reason for that. God wanted to demonstrate that the wisdom of men is foolishness to God. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Race, culture, background, and color are of little significance. Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are One, so shall we be One. The men in the apostolic wedge, along with all their differences, form a miniature representation of the Godhead. Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit are so one that they can't be separated. And Jesus said, "As the Father is in me and I am in him, so you will be **in each other.**" We will be so intertwined that you can't separate us. There will be no difference—black, white, yellow, red, old, young, street person, engineer, bank president, or secretary. You won't be able to separate us.

As in heaven, so on earth. The Kingdom of God will share such a oneness, walking in the Deity of the Godhead, that it can't be separated. That's a pronouncement from heaven. Jesus said that the world will know us because we are one, **just as** He and the Father are one. Those men were pulled from various regions, not because Paul was trying to do something special, but because he watched for gifted people and **God** decided to raise men up from every conceivable walk of life. That is what God, who is no respecter of persons, chose to do, perhaps as a testimony to the oneness of lives that aren't built on prejudice but on love.

⁵⁸Col.1:7, 9.

⁵⁹Col.2:5.

⁶⁰2Cor.10:13-18; 1Cor.16:10.

today that we call “autonomous congregations,” and that mentality leaves no room for someone like Paul to write with such authority to another Church.⁶¹

But Epaphras seemed to consider Paul the apostle of the Church in Colosse. Paul wrote, “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the Church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.” He spoke with an authority that you wouldn’t expect from a man who had never been there—unless, of course, you considered the idea of territories, boundaries, and an apostolic wedge. Epaphras was clearly an extension of Paul, going back to Paul and reporting what was going on.

Does that mean he was Paul’s slave or a “yes man”? Certainly not! No more than Timothy or Titus, who served as extensions of Paul in Corinth. These men simply recognized and submitted to Paul’s giftedness, and there was a relationship between them based on his apostolic wedge, territories, and boundaries.⁶² “*I will not build on another man’s foundation,*” Paul wrote to the Church in Rome. So while he took a position of authority in Colosse, having never been there, Paul’s only authority in Judea was on a personal level.⁶³

Paul in Judea

Paul was “personally unknown to the churches of Judea.”⁶⁴ Even after 15 years of turning the world upside down, they didn’t know him! They only knew his face and that he used to be a persecutor of the

⁶¹The idea of autonomous congregations doesn’t exist in the Bible. Yes, the church in one city is certainly separate from the church in another city. But in the light of apostolic truths, we begin to see clearly that there is to be a degree of relatedness, of being joined and knit together as one body, **between churches**. A lot of things in the Bible (the nature of the church, the book of Acts, the letters, etc.) start to come alive and make more sense as we return to God’s way of doing things. The apostolic of God is the glue that holds everything together and builds it up. And if you can hear it, let it be known that churches never planted churches—apostolic men planted churches (but more about that later).

⁶²A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Lk.6:40). You become like your teacher. There is a substance about the student, a certain representation of the teacher. “He will remind you of me in all his ways.” A substance and character will mark the person, and he will be a product of the one who teaches him. People who were part of an apostolic wedge, as well as those who were affected by it, were marked by the substance and character of the life of Christ.

⁶³Gal.2:11.

⁶⁴Gal.1:22.

saints, but “now he’s a brother.” Paul goes on to say in his letter to the Galatians (chapter 2) that the leaders in Jerusalem recognized him as an apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter was an apostle to the Jews. So while he was an apostle to the Colossians, there was a sense in which Paul was not an apostle in Judea. The gift was not an office, and there are many examples in the New Testament that point to the fact that apostolic authority was localized within boundaries.

Barnabas in Antioch

The Church in Jerusalem felt free to send Barnabas to Antioch. That’s really interesting because the disciples in Antioch never invited anyone to come.⁶⁵ Those in Jerusalem just heard that good things were happening in Antioch and decided to send Barnabas. The authority crossed city boundaries in an apostolic kind of way. Nobody invited a “guest preacher” from Jerusalem. That wasn’t the attitude at all. God was genuinely moving in Antioch, and the leaders in Jerusalem acknowledged that and so *sent* Barnabas to them.

Philip in Samaria

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them” (Acts 8:14). They didn’t ask permission, nor did Philip invite them to come. Peter and John were *sent*. There is an authority based on territorial boundaries which doesn’t keep a man’s hands tied according to how much he is liked, or whether he’s “invited back.” Inside of apostolic boundaries, a man can walk in with authority, even uninvited. That’s the Biblical pattern. A little bizarre to our twenty-first century understanding of church, but true! There is an authority there. If someone is *sent*, they can walk in and seem to take over; that can’t happen in the denominational parachurch world where everything is so sterile and controlled.

Titus in Corinth

Paul sent Titus to Corinth, partly to find out how they had reacted to his first letter. While he was there, he acted in the same spirit and followed the same course that Paul had taken with the Corinthians. And they responded in obedience, receiving Titus with fear and trembling.⁶⁶

Timothy in Many Places

Timothy, whom Paul described as “our brother” and “God’s fellow worker,” seems to have represented Paul in more than one city. Several

⁶⁵Acts 11:19-22.

⁶⁶2Cor.7:15-16, 12:18.

of the letters were written from Paul and Timothy. And Paul urged the Corinthians to accept Timothy as they would Paul, since he would remind them of Paul's way of life in Christ, as well as his teachings.⁶⁷

Paul among the Gentiles

When it came to the Gentile churches, to whom Paul was sent by God (see Gal.2:9), he was pretty bold about making decisions. Concerning the collection for the saints in Judea, Paul told the Corinthians, "*When I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me*" (1Cor.16:3-4).⁶⁸ They will accompany me. These men were already planning to go, yet Paul said that if he went also, *they* would accompany *him*!

Was Paul arrogant and boastful? Was he trying to prove something by running the whole show? No, he was simply operating in his Apostolic Gifting and exercising Authority as one who saw God's heart concerning people, places, and Foundations. This wasn't just a bunch of good-buddy brothers going from place to place. Rather, Paul had Authority from Heaven to make decisions about who would go, as well as where and when they would go.

Careful How They Build

Without a doubt, God's way of building His Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven" has always been, and will always be, to use mere men to do His work, so that satan is humiliated and principalities and powers are in awe. Paul refused to build on "another *man's* foundation." Obviously, the very basis of this whole business is somehow related to *men*. It takes more than good intentions, sincerity, and a bunch of nice people who believe in God to build the Church!

The quality, type, and substance of the building materials will determine the quality and substance of the Foundation. The depth of footings (how deep you dig) will determine how tall your building can be. The mixture of the concrete, and the dimensions of the base have everything to do with how high and wide a building can be. You can't let a building hang 30 feet over the edge of the Foundation.

⁶⁷1Thes.3:2; 2Cor.1:1; Col.1:1; Php.1:1; 1Cor.4:17, 16:10.

⁶⁸Read verses 5 and 6 as well. You might be surprised by the way Paul just takes over the situation.

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds...using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Corinthians 3:10, 12-13).

The substance that a building is made of will determine if that building will stand the test of time and will be able to weather the elements. In a foundation, the aggregate mixture greatly affects the strength, stability, and character of the foundation, which in turn affects the nature of the building. If the mixture is too fine or too coarse, then the compression strength of the building will only be a few hundred pounds per square inch, instead of well over 10,000! And if the mixture is right, the concrete will only get stronger and stronger over the years as it hardens and solidifies. How does that apply when you’re building people together into a Habitation of God by the Spirit?

The nature and substance of the Foundation will determine whether the Church can stand the storms and pressures over time. If the Foundation is pure, no matter what may come, the House will stand.

Foundations are hidden after the building is finished. But if you have a building with a faulty foundation, you will be forever trying to square up the corners—replastering the cracks and planing the doors so they will close. And as storms come, the house, which looks so great from the outside, will erode and crumble. That is a picture of fading glory. What is of man has a fading glory, but what is of God has an ever-increasing Glory.

Jesus said that the storms will come, and when they do, the foundation will be shown for its true worth. Foundations are invisible and the building can look great for a time. But, ultimately, the storms of life will reveal whether the foundation is a good one, built on the Rock, or whether it was built on sand. *Oh, cry out to the Lord of the Harvest to send forth those who can lay foundations that will stand!*

Part 7: Christ Circulates Among the Lampstands

But, What's a Lampstand?⁶⁹

The word Lampstand is used almost interchangeably in the Bible with the words Foundation and Church. While a lampstand might possibly come about as a Sovereign act of God, His normal Pattern is to send apostolic men to lay the Foundation for His Building in the exact places of His choosing.⁷⁰ Most of what we call “churches” today are formed unBiblically out of sincerity, ambition, ignorance, or division.⁷¹

“News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (Acts 11:22-23).

What is a Foundation? It's a Sovereign Gift of the grace (undeserved favor) of God *that is evident*. Barnabas saw that the undeserved favor of God was evident. He could see the hand of God intervening in a divine way. God was there and he saw that. So he dug in and started teaching daily and bringing people to Christ, and equipping the saints for the works of service.

⁶⁹For more depth on the subject of Lampstands, write and ask for an e-mail titled “Community? House Church? No, No, No. It's about Zoe Life!” Or this e-mail can also be found in the book titled “The Scales.”

⁷⁰Acts 17:26-27, 16:6-10; Lk.10:1.

⁷¹For example, we send out a group of people to “start a church” because we have money in the budget that we feel guilty about. Or, because some other group is doing it, we figure we ought to be planting churches, too. Or we send out an offshoot because we're growing so big that it seems better than buying a larger building. Or the elders and deacons have a fight, and we decide to split off and form a new congregation out of our desire for purity. Or because we read some foolish psychology book, purporting to be a church growth book that says we should “split” after we reach some certain number of people—no matter that this is TOTALLY unBiblical and a conjured “wisdom of man” theory. It would be safe to say that ninety-nine percent of America's churches have their origins in one of the above categories. Yet, these are all clearly unBiblical ways to start a Church.

When there's a lampstand, Foundation, in a city, it will be marked by the obvious thumbprint of God. You can't do anything to deserve it or make it happen, but the grace will be evident. Men with eyes to see will know that God is there and will respond according to the giftedness within them to bind on earth what is already bound in heaven.⁷²

Foundations are the result of God's timing, His desire to bless His children and the free gifts He bestows on them. In the same way that God gives peace (not just the absence of trials or conflicts), so also a lampstand is God's gift to men.⁷³ No one can claim it, demand it, orchestrate it, or administrate it. The undeserved favor of God is just that—*undeserved!* You can't make it happen, no matter how slick you are and no matter how finely tuned your program is.

Foundations are God's response to our preparedness and crying out to Him for an expression of Himself. And a lampstand is a place where Christ circulates⁷⁴ in a manner you won't find anywhere else. "But wait a minute," some will say, "I thought God was omnipresent." Quite true. But Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be in their midst" (Mt.18:20). In context, gathering in His name meant agreeing together in prayer about what was already bound and loosed in heaven, standing for the same things Jesus stood for. While God is certainly present everywhere, does He not promise yet a greater manifestation of His presence to those where two or three gather in His name and to those who go out in His name (Mt.28:20)? And as awesome as this is, how much greater his presence in a Lampstand?!

He is everywhere, obviously, but there is an even greater, specific manifestation of Himself in the midst of His People. There's a greater manifestation that makes it possible for an unbeliever to fall on His

⁷²Mt.18:18 (see the original Greek text).

⁷³"*The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the Lord Almighty.*" (Hag.2:9)

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you." (Lk.10:5-6)

So many people think that they'll have peace just as soon as this family situation works itself out, or that marriage conflict is resolved, or they find the right job. But those things will never grant peace. Never. The peace of God is *given*. It never comes by the absence of frustrations, trials, or externally "bad" situations. Likewise, foundations are *given* as God sees fit, in His time and in His way.

⁷⁴Rev.1:13, 2:1.

face and cry out, “*God is really among you!*”⁷⁵ Otherwise, it wouldn’t make sense for Paul to have said, “*When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present...*” (1Cor.5:4).⁷⁶

Christ circulates among the Lampstands and wherever you find one, you can rest assured that He is there in a way that far surpasses His general presence everywhere. But what exactly is this thing called a Lampstand and how do you know when you’ve got one?

You won’t find a precise definition for Lampstand in the Bible any more than you find a precise definition for love in 1 Corinthians 13. But you can see its effects. Asking the question, “Well, do we have a Lampstand in this city or not?” is like asking, “Am I in love or not?” You just know. When you’re in love, you know it. You may not be able to put a finger on exactly how or when it happened—you just know you’re in love! So it is with a Foundation. You can’t chase after it or do anything to “make it happen.” It’s clearly a gift from God, and when you’ve got it, you know it!

How do you define it? You really can’t, but you can see its outworkings. What a tragic mistake it would be to conjure up some formula or checklist for determining whether or not this particular group of Christians is a Lampstand! Anybody who’s ever been part of one knows the difference when he’s not, just as anybody who’s ever been in love knows the difference when he’s not. You know when you’re in love and when you’re not in love. And you know you can’t perfectly define it, *so don’t try!* Don’t make a “doctrine of lampstands.” You’ll suffer greatly for that.

Built on the Rock

What is a Foundation made of? What is the Apostolic cement that makes it joined and knit together? The only Foundation for a christian

⁷⁵1Cor.14:24-25.

⁷⁶Power was *coming from* Jesus to heal the sick. Wasn’t He all-powerful? Well, sure He was! But power came *from* Him and He felt power *leave* Him when the woman with the bleeding was healed. How could He feel power leave an infinite supply of power? Somehow, God gives a greater presence when He *desires* to give a greater presence. Where two or three are gathered, and when you’re together and the power of the Lord Jesus is present—these are times when God manifests Himself in an even greater way. Why didn’t the unbeliever fall down on his face and cry out, “God is truly omnipresent!” There was a specific manifestation of God with His People at that point in time, and the unbeliever responded to it.

Church is obviously *Christ*. No man can lay any Foundation other than Christ.⁷⁷ Yet only a revelation of the Christ of Rev.1:12-18, not another Christ of men's *imagination*⁷⁸, can be the basis for Foundation. This "Jesus" who does us little favors when we say the magic words is a false christ, and I'm sad to say that there are many false christs around today.

But when it is the Holy Christ upon which the Church is built, the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. There's only one Jesus with white hair as wool and eyes of blazing fire and a sword in His mouth—"Faithful and True" who thunders through the nations on His white horse and has "Lord of lords and King of kings" written on His thigh! And *that* is the Foundation that the master builder, the *architekton*, lays.

In Revelation, John describes Jesus as one with a voice like a thundering waterfall and feet glowing like bronze. And when John, a man who knew Jesus intimately, saw this Revelation of who Christ really is, he fell on his face as a dead man.⁷⁹ John had even been on the mount of transfiguration with Jesus and had seen His Glory once before, but still he fell as a dead man. That's the *Revelation* of Jesus Christ. That's the Christ upon which the Foundation is built.

Any other foundation is sand.⁸⁰ Then the attitude is, "I hear the words of Christ, but I don't have to put them into practice, because...(you can fill in the blanks). I'm sure Jesus will understand my situation." But when you see the Christ as He really is, the Anointed One of God in His full revelation, there's no question of how you will respond to His Word! He doesn't even have to say anything, but you'll fall as a dead man when you see "someone like the Son of Man." You won't be fighting and arguing over words, debating fine meanings and trying to find an escape hatch to get out of doing what God has called you to do.

If you've truly seen the Risen Christ, you'll never have that kind of attitude! You won't be looking for the easiest way out or the path of least resistance. You'll just fall like a dead man. That's the Rock upon which the Church will be built that the gates of hell cannot prevail against!

⁷⁷1Cor.3:10-11.

⁷⁸Mt.7:21-27.

⁷⁹Rev.1:12-18.

⁸⁰Mt.7:26.

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock [the testimony of the revelation of the Christ of God!] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-19).

Upon this rock. What rock? The rock, the Foundation that the Church will be built on, is the testimony of the Christ of the Living God, with white hair as wool and eyes of blazing fire. The rock-solid Foundation that the apostolic brings to mankind is *a revelation from the Father of Jesus Christ in His fullness and in His Glory*. The master builder lays a Foundation of Christ in the lives of the people.⁸¹

Drops You to Your Knees

The insanity of sin and the perversion in our lives is directly related to the perversion of our revelation of Christ. So also, the strength of our Foundation is directly related to our Revelation of Christ. For that is what an apostolic man, the master builder, lays for the Foundation of the Church. As one who *sees*, he lays the Foundation of Christ against which the gates of hell cannot prevail. He brings a Revelation of Jesus Christ that drops men to their knees, *and it is upon that rock that Jesus builds His Church*.

In the same measure that the Revelation of Christ is given, the Foundation will be laid. And that Revelation of Jesus Christ to a people, along with an understanding of what it is that He’s building, will drop us to our knees. *“At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow”* (Php 2:10). There are no exceptions. That’s what a Foundation is—a revelation of the Christ of God through the *Father’s* eyes rather than through men’s imaginations and self-serving ambitions.

Can be Taken Away

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on

⁸¹ For more on this subject, write and ask for “A Revelation of Christ.”

this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:10-11).

There are no guarantees that the building will stand, no matter how excellent the Foundation is. Every disciple builds on that Foundation. *"From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work"* (Eph.4:16). Are you careful how you build? Do you use costly materials, investing in lives with gold, silver, and precious stones? Just as David refused to offer his God that which cost him nothing, do you have the same attitude toward your brothers and sisters? The fires of testing will reveal the quality of *your* work.

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things say He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands... Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 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'" (Revelation 2:1, 4-5).

It is possible for a local assembly to lose its lampstand, its right to be called a Church. And good deeds aren't enough to keep it from happening! The Church in Ephesus had a lot of admirable things going on, yet it was in danger of losing its Foundation. That's an incredible thought, and worthy of serious consideration.

Foretold by Prophets

Even the Old Testament is not as silent concerning Foundations and Patterns as you might suppose. Go back and read about Zerubbabel, who rebuilt the temple after the period of captivity had ended. Try to understand what was signified by the "plumb line" of God, which is a *straight* measure that *cannot be altered*. God said He would build a habitation for Himself through gifted men, "not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit." And the result would be that the latter house will be far greater than the former house.⁸² These prophecies were intended for our learning. Look into these things!

⁸²Isa.62:1-12, 2:1-4, 28:6, 58:12; Hag.1:12-14, 2:3-9, 2:23; Zec.4:1-14, 8:1, 9.

Holds up the Light

A Lampstand (Foundation, *ekklesia*, or local Church) is necessary in order to illuminate the Christ of God. The Lampstand lifts up the Light of the World, and the city set on a hill shows the Glory of God in the Face of Christ Jesus to the world! You know what a Lampstand is—it's something that holds a light. In Jewish culture it was the menorah, a sort of candelabrum, the seven-prong stand that holds up the lamp.

“He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left’” (Zechariah 4:2-3).

“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.’ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth” (Revelation 11:3-4).

Oil from the olive trees is piped straight down through the seven channels into the lights.⁸³ So it is a perpetually supplied Lampstand. It has a never-ending supply of fuel because the olive trees get their oil from roots planted along the river of life.⁸⁴ The river flows and the tree grows and bears fruit, while the oil from the olive tree flows right into the Lampstand.

So the Lampstand, the Church, holds up the Light of the Glory of God. You can see the oil of the Spirit of God flowing continually and the blaze of the Glory of God as the Lampstand holds up the Light of Jesus Christ. That is a testimony of the Revelation of the Christ of God that the gates of hell can't prevail against. That's what a Lampstand is. It's the vital component necessary to *illuminate* the Christ of God.

Can be Measured

The Testimony of the Revelation of Jesus Christ as “the Son of God, the Living” is the rock upon which the Church is built that the gates of hell cannot withstand. And the measure of that testimony is the measure of the substance, the depth, and the breadth of the Church.

If it is truly built on Jesus the Rock, the substance of the Church will always be characterized by an obedience of the faith.⁸⁵ Who really is this Christ? Does He hold such an honored place in our hearts that at

⁸³In Biblical prophecy, oil (used for anointing) represented the Spirit of God.

⁸⁴Rev.2:1-2.

⁸⁵Rom.1:5.

the mere whispering of His Name every knee collapses and bends in reverence and awe? Do we fall as “dead men”?

The depth of the footings will determine the eventual height of the building. Moreover, unless the foundation is dug below the frost line, it will crack and crumble when cold weather sets in. The depth of relationship we have with Christ Jesus and with each other will determine our ability to see over the clouds and to overcome the works of satan.

The boundaries and limitations of the Church will be determined by the breadth of the Foundation. A narrow Revelation of Christ in the lives of the people will limit their ability to expand apostolic territories.

A Lampstand holds up and exalts the Glory of God made to shine in the face of Jesus Christ as a city set on a hill, a people who shine like stars in the universe.⁸⁶

Brings Repentance

There must be a clear Revelation of the One Faithful and True, the King of Glory, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and Bearer of the ever-increasing government of Almighty God. Remember that where there is no vision, or revelation, the people cast off restraint, they perish.⁸⁷ Jesus the Christ must be openly and graphically set forth and portrayed—revealed with the conviction, the demonstration, and the power of the Holy Spirit—by a sent one of God.⁸⁸

And if the True Christ of God is revealed in God’s timing with God’s Authorization (a True Apostolic Foundation of the Revelation of Christ), then “at the name of Jesus” men and women will instantly drop their selfish nonsense and fall to their knees. At the mere whisper of His name every knee shall bow.

Take a look at Corinth, for example. Even the worldly residents of this wicked seaport proved that they could respond with radical repentance when someone like Paul confronted them with their sin. Many today would try to justify lukewarmness and compromise in the churches by pointing out the fact that “Corinth wasn’t perfect.” But notice how the very least of those truly converted to the Jesus of the Word responded when someone touched their denseness and foolish sin.

⁸⁶2Cor.4:6; Mt.5:14; Php.2:15.

⁸⁷Pro.29:18.

⁸⁸Gal.3:1 (Amplified Version); 1Cor.2:1-5; 1Thes.1:4-6; Rom.10:14-15.

“Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:8-11).

Because a lampstand (a revelation of Christ) was in place, God’s power and Spirit prevailed. No matter how sin and carnality threaten to drag us down, our future is secure if the Christ of God has been laid as a Foundation in men’s hearts. Then, when the apostolic Word of God comes forth, no one will debate it or argue about it. They won’t say, “Well, that’s your opinion,” or “We’ll never invite him back again!”

Because there truly was in Corinth an Apostolic Foundation of a Revelation of the Christ of God that the gates of hell could not prevail against, what earnest desire they had! What eagerness! There was a passion behind it! When they found out that they had violated the holiness of the Christ of God (with white hair as wool), they dropped to their knees! It didn’t matter where they were then—the only thing that mattered was where they were going from there. And their direction was set; their course was determined, by the Foundation that was laid in their lives.

As an apostle of God, Paul reminded the Corinthians of what they had heard from the beginning. What *“we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1Jn.1:1)*. Paul had touched, he had handled the Holy One of God and he imparted this Revelation as he had fellowship with them. Jesus was alive and tangible to the Corinthians and they bent their knees at the sound of His name, because a True Foundation was in place.

Even in a Church like Corinth, which was far from perfect, God prevailed. If it’s truly a Church, if there really is an Apostolic Foundation (literally a Revelation of Jesus Christ), the people will bow their knees. No matter how far they’ve strayed.

Those men and women still had remnant habits and areas of blindness from their previous lives, but, oh, how they had seen Jesus! And when Paul showed them the discrepancy between their lives and the Revelation of the Christ, their knees collapsed at His name! In this, the very weakest of apostolically grounded bodies of believers, it was clear that Jesus was the awesome measuring rod of the pleasure of the Father. May it be so in our day, or may God's judgment fall to awaken us from our stupor and hypnotic slumber.

Results in Obedience

“Through Him and for His name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” (Romans 1:5).

What is faith? Faith is seeing Him as He really is. Faith without works is dead, but it's not a legal system of following rules and regulations that He's after—He wants our hearts. Our obedience comes from seeing Him.⁸⁹ How could there not be works to follow your faith? Only if it's not true faith, if it's not seeing Him as He is. If your knee doesn't bend at the name of Jesus, then you're not abiding in Him and there will be no fruit.

But if you have seen Him and you are abiding in Him, the true Christ of God (not a figment of your imagination or some religious thing-a-ma-bob), your knee will bow and you will bear much fruit. Your neck will be loose, rather than stiff, and you will respond to the Word of God as soon as you hear it. So the Foundation of the Revelation of Jesus must be laid in your life as an individual, as well as corporately in the Body of believers in whom you're investing your life.

This foundation of obedience to the faith is in contrast to the inevitable foundation of sand or mud that results from a weak revelation of Jesus Christ. “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Pro.29:18). Every building has a foundation—the only question is what kind. A house that's not built on a concrete slab will instead have dirt or sand for its foundation. If you build your house on the sand by failing to put into practice the words of Jesus, then the gates of hell will prevail in your life and in the lives of those you care about.⁹⁰ It is impossible to teach them to obey all things that Christ has commanded you if the substance is missing from your own life.⁹¹

⁸⁹ 1Jn.3:2-6.

⁹⁰ Mt.7:24-27; Mt.16:16-18.

⁹¹ Mt.28:18-20.

The Foundation of obedience to the faith is nothing more than a Revelation of the True Christ of God and a Testimony of that which goes forth and holds up His Light—the Glory of God that’s made to shine in the face of Christ Jesus. *It’s the Lordship of Jesus Christ declared as an absolute.* All the heavens and the earth, and things under the earth, bow at the name of Jesus. Peter and the rest of the apostles never begged anyone to become a Christian.⁹² They simply declared to men that God has made this Jesus whom you’ve crucified both Lord and Christ.

That’s the way it is when the Foundation is right. It’s a declaration, a proclamation, and a testimony of the Christ of God, holding up the Glory of God that was made to shine in the face of Jesus Christ. And there will automatically be an obedience to the faith. It’s not a legal system, just simple obedience of the faith. To See Him and Believe, and then to respond to Him because of who He *really* is—not who men say He is—that’s a Lampstand.

The Glory of God in Living Stones

Once the Apostolic Foundation is in place, it will allow for diversity among the saints even while they are compactly joined and knit together. The Church is built together out of living stones taken from the quarry.

“In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7).

And we are that temple! It is not with bricks, all uniform and square, that the House of God is built. The House of God is built *with living stones*. Rocks are all different shapes and sizes. There’s diversity. And while bricks can be stacked one on top of the other with a little mortar in between, stones have to be *carefully pieced together*. It is a Sovereign God who decides how the stones in His House will be pieced together; and it is *the job of the builders* to See where God intends for the stones to fit in the building of His House. The “builders” are those with Gifts to See and piece (“mend” or “equip”) His People together by putting the joints in the right places, as Father has designed the Body to work.⁹³ Once the rubble of the religion of men has been cleared out of the way, the builders can begin to tightly join together what God has done in

⁹²Col.1:28-29.

⁹³Eph.4:11-16; 1Cor.12

people.⁹⁴ Carefully positioned just right, with all the joints in the proper sockets, it is *living stones* that house the Glory and Presence of God.⁹⁵

So, there is room for precious diversity and unique expressions of giftedness in the Body of Christ. The solid Foundation of God will never turn out clones or press people into conformity and quench the special gifts, but will instead fan them into flame. However, those gifts must flow from the hub of the City of God, the local Church. There is no room in the Kingdom of Christ for individualistic attitudes from people who “do their own thing.” God is not raising up lone ranger superstars who ride in to save the day and then disappear without a trace. The maverick, self-appointed prophet or evangelist will do much to harm the cause of Christ. *All the gifts from on high are intended, not as ends in themselves, but as a means of equipping the saints and edifying the body.*⁹⁶

When God is in something, His thumbprint will be on it. And God’s thumbprint is always ever-increasing Glory. Anything else is just man’s attempt to do something for God. Without exception, man-made organizations end up cloning and squeezing people into conformity. They suppress gifts and callings. In that kind of environment, men are unable to speak what is on their hearts whenever it differs from the norm or creed. That in turn forces hypocrisy in the name of “unity.” *Men* rule rather than the Lord of Hosts.

Man’s thumbprint is a fading, decreasing glory.⁹⁷ It becomes apparent that the local Church just isn’t doing what God designed it to do, so we invent Bible colleges, bus programs, youth rallies, vacation Bible schools, and all kinds of other crutches that the first century Church managed to do without. The glory is a fading one, so we constantly have to pump things up with new and exciting ideas, new teachings, new programs, new “preachers” or elders, and new buildings. In an effort to prop up what is failing to produce Apostolic Fruit, men rest on gimmicks and tricks done with mirrors, rather than putting their full weight on the Glory of God.

⁹⁴Neh.4:10.

⁹⁵Rev.1:13, 2:1, 5.

⁹⁶Eph.4:11-12; 1Cor.14.

⁹⁷2Cor.3, 4.

A Self-Perpetuating Foundation

In an apostolic environment, Paul was free to move about from city to city without failure. He usually spent only four to six months in one place, and never more than three years. In the span of three Sabbaths, Thessalonica had a Foundation⁹⁸ that allowed them (by God's grace) to become a model for the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. The Foundation is self-perpetuating because the Church cleanses and builds itself up in love once the Revelation of Jesus Christ in all His Glory has been laid.

Paul couldn't be everywhere at once, nor were there apostolic men in every city. But God's ability to sustain a Church with a solid Foundation is not dependent on men. Rather, the understanding from the beginning is that "I must decrease; He must increase." It is Jesus who is the Chief Cornerstone. To be sure, in the early stages of a Church's life, a great deal of dependence and reliance upon specific men will characterize the disciples. But that dependency will be less and less as time goes on and others are equipped for the works of service. Others will naturally grow up into the Head, which is Christ Jesus.

That doesn't mean that the men who initially laid the Foundation won't be needed anymore. Paul was not only a blueprint reader but also one who watered, planted, and built upon the Foundations he laid. He never just left town without any intentions of following through with what he had started. Rather, as soon as possible, Paul would go back and strengthen the Churches. An ongoing relationship develops between apostolically gifted men and the churches, and this relationship continues on after the foundation has been laid. So Apostolic work includes not only the initial foundation laying, but also the watering, feeding, and nurturing of the Church.

Once the pure Foundation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is in place, it becomes a self-perpetuating Foundation because the people won't be satisfied with anything less than the standard of Christ.⁹⁹ When there

⁹⁸Acts 17:1-10. Actually, Paul may have been there a little longer than that (Php.4:16).

⁹⁹Here's an analogy. When a foreign substance enters my body, it reacts by sending white blood cells to surround and swallow it. The foreign matter is taken care of by the normally functioning body. And so it is with the Body of Christ—if a pure revelation of Jesus is in place, then whatever is not of Christ will be surrounded and dealt with. The "alien" substance in the Body will not be allowed to survive. It won't be able to co-exist with the Body of Christ. Thus, it's not mandatory that apostolic men be there once the foundation is laid. If it is a pure foundation, it will purify and cleanse itself because men have *seen* Jesus Christ.

is the testimony of the Glory of God in Jesus Christ, men can never be satisfied with anything less. Never again. They wrestle to present every man perfect in Christ and they are in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in each other. Once they've seen Him, they can't settle for less. As long as their hearts are pure—as long as they're not feeding their flesh or blinding and hardening themselves by searing their consciences—if they have honest hearts, they will never be satisfied with anything less again.

That's why Paul was able to leave Thessalonica without failure after only about a month. Once the Foundation of the revelation of Christ was laid, he decreased and Christ increased. Make sense? He wasn't the "super-speaker" for their annual "conferences."¹⁰⁰ He was a brother.¹⁰¹ The relationship didn't end when Paul left any of the churches. He was never a hireling who could be hired and fired, or quit one job for another one that paid better. Show me one example where Paul was "hired" and then "fired" and moved on to another Church!¹⁰² It ain't in there. Not only did Paul's relationship with the Churches continue after he left, but his authority continued as well. Even when he had been gone for years, something about his authority was still intact.¹⁰³

Years after leaving a Church, questions were still pouring in through letters and through visitors from cities where Paul had worked in the past.¹⁰⁴ They would then go to great trouble to make copies and circulate

¹⁰⁰Somehow, they managed to get along without such things in those days. But they did hang on his every word whenever he was able to be with them (Acts 20:7-12, 31-38).

¹⁰¹Mt.23:8-11.

¹⁰²The apostolic pattern is not that men are hired and fired. They don't leave to go on to a "greater work." Rather, once a relationship begins, it continues. It's not a stepping stone for something else. It ebbs and flows and there are times and seasons when it is more prominent than others, but the apostolic man is always part of it.

¹⁰³An example of that ongoing relationship was the Corinthian Church. Paul said, "Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present" (1Cor.5:3). In essence, he was saying: *I've judged this man, even though I'm not there; I have already cast judgment on him, and here's what I want you to do—now do it.* And in the second letter to Corinth, Paul went on to say that he took that line of action not only for the sake of the guilty party, but also to prove that they would be **obedient** to him. Read it. That's what it says. It was a clear test of his authority in that Church. Their response to Paul was proof of his apostolicity.

¹⁰⁴See, for example, 1Cor.1:11, 7:1.

his letters among the ones who really believed in Jesus and wanted to grow spiritually. No one considered this an inappropriate “dependency on men rather than on Christ.” Nor did Paul rebuke the elders from Ephesus when they hung on his neck and wept after he told them he wouldn’t see them again.¹⁰⁵ There really is a proper way to be loyal and grateful to the gifts of God in men, without worshipping them.¹⁰⁶

Rivers of Living Water

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer” (Acts 16:13).

When Paul entered Philippi, he found a place of prayer. But when he moved on, he left a Church there.¹⁰⁷ A fellowship, a place of prayer where two or three are gathered together, is like a lake. It’s nice and peaceful, with great fellowship, but there’s not a foundation of obedience to the faith in a place like that. “We’ll just have a nice time and we’ll sing and we’ll pray,” but there’s not a Revelation of “*at the name of Jesus every knee shall BOW!*” The penetration and the joined and knit together apostolic cement that compacts and places and fits and binds—is not there. Nice people, saved people, but something is really, really missing. There is a huge vacuum and things just get syrupy and sickening after awhile because it is not unto anything. A lake may be a nice peaceful place to be for a little while, but if you put a water wheel into the middle of a lake, there is no power generated! For sure, the water ripples at times and there may even be a few waves, but the movement is random and without purpose. Sure it’s nice and peaceful praying, singing and fellowshiping, but there is no *dunamis*, no power. It really isn’t unto anything. If we project this “gathering” five years down the road, what would we see? It might be okay, but we would have to wonder what it was unto. No one would be tempted to say, “These that have turned the world upside down have come to our city also!” “The *apostles* testify with great power and great grace was upon them all!” *That’s the difference—a lake cannot generate POWER!*

On the other hand, when there is a *Lampstand* in a city, rivers of alive water gush from the throne room of God and spill over into the

¹⁰⁵ Acts 20:22-38.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 14:12-20, 12:21-24; Rev.19:9-11.

¹⁰⁷ Php.4:15.

hearts and lives of everyone they touch!¹⁰⁸ A river may not always be producing great power, but the *potential* is there. Just put a water wheel or a dam in it, and you can light up a city! The greater the river and the more defined its banks, the more water of the Holy Spirit and of the Word of God rushing through its channels, *the more power you can generate!*

Let me give you another analogy. Consider the difference between a flag and a sail. The flag generates no power, while the sail catches the full blowing of the wind to steer and move the ship. This is the difference between two or three gathered together in a “nice fellowship” versus a Lampstand or Foundation with the Glory of God in His *purposes*. A flag and a sail both go up into the wind, but one catches the wind of the Holy Spirit which drives it through the water of the Word to a destination of God’s choosing. The other just sits on the ship and flutters. A flag is very pretty, but it doesn’t generate any *power*. That’s the difference between the Apostolic and the sincere. Sincerity is a *flag*, but the thing that *God* calls and *God* does is a sail, driving through the waters to a destination.

A picture I once saw in Louisiana opened my eyes to something really wonderful. There was a mill house next to a flowing river and a mighty waterfall. Built into the mill house was a water wheel. I saw that the wheel was the Church of Jesus. All of the buckets were like the people of the Church who are joined together. A bucket by itself is worthless. But if all the buckets are connected by spokes to the hub of Jesus Christ, a beautiful water wheel mechanism results which can tap the energy supply of the river, the Holy Spirit. It’s all one wheel, though it’s made of many separate buckets all joined to the hub. The buckets, if they are all filled with rocks or cement, can never carry any water. So the vessels all the way around the wheel must be clean in order for it to generate power uniformly.

The river is coming no matter what, but the buckets must be clean and available, joined and knit together. Then the power of God’s Spirit can be tapped as the buckets are connected to the hub of Jesus through the spokes of giftedness in the Body. As the Gifts and Callings of God and the obedience to the stature of Christ is in place, the wheel of the Church will generate the power of God. The hub goes through to the grinding house and the millstone turns and grinds out the grain of the work of God.

¹⁰⁸Jn.7:37-39; Rev.22:1-2; Eze.47:1-12; 2Cor.1:3-5.

If a bucket is not attached to anything, it's just an ornament—it's unproductive in doing the work of God. You can see how the Church with its buckets, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ work together in doing the work of God. Individual buckets with holes or mud don't work on the waterwheel, nor do they have the ability to tap into the power it generates. The river and the power of God have been there all along, but it must be *tapped* in order to grind out the grain, the work of God. I hope that picture is as helpful to you as it was to me.

While everyone can't help but testify to what they've seen and heard, “great power” (*mega dunamis*) is especially visible when the work is Apostolic. “The apostles testified with great power, and great grace (*mega charis*) was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). “The apostles performed many wonders and miraculous signs, and everyone was filled with awe” (Acts 2:43).

Seven Golden Lampstands

The seven golden lampstands were seven Churches. These were specific, local Churches, not the universal Church “at large.” God's use of the word lampstand was not a random or poetic title. He has a beautiful and revealing picture in mind for us. The Jewish lampstand was specifically designed with seven stems. Seven is God's number, the number of perfection, and that can be clearly seen by the prongs of the lampstand.

At a glance, you notice that six of the stems surround the center stem, which is representative of Christ.¹⁰⁹ Six is man's number. But with the seventh stem in place, Christ becomes the central, unifying feature. Yet, somehow the lampstand is pounded out of one piece of gold.¹¹⁰ Somehow, Christ and man are together, hammered out of the same substance. “*The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col.1:26-27). The man Jesus Christ is the firstborn of a brand new race of people raised

¹⁰⁹For a detailed description of the lampstand, see Ex.37:17-24. Keep in mind that none of these details are coincidental. The lampstand with its branches and buds was a copy and shadow of what is in heaven—the reality is found in Christ (Col.2:16-17; Heb.8:5, 10:1).

¹¹⁰By God's command, the lampstand had to be hammered out of one piece of pure gold. Notice the application to the Church: *one loaf*, a *pure* batch without yeast (1Cor.5:7), all together in *one accord*, joined and knit together, compacted, having *one mind*, forming *one new Man* (“the Christ”—1Cor.12:12).

from the dead.¹¹¹ So as the lampstand is held together with Jesus as the perfect Man, together we become a vessel that holds up the Glory of God by the oil of the Holy Spirit.¹¹²

Built of Apostles and Prophets

The Church is built on the Foundation of apostles and prophets. This Foundation, as mentioned earlier, requires a current relationship with real-life, apostolically gifted men. Just as we must be in relationship right now with Christ who is the Cornerstone, so also tangible, present-day relationships with apostolically gifted men must be taking place. Know this: Only as we are in relationship to Jesus and the men He has Gifted from on high can a Pure Foundation be laid. A Foundation or Lampstand isn't just having some historical belief in Jesus' teaching and conforming to some manner of life and a bunch of "traditions" that He handed down. It's real-time, real-life situations that bring about the fullness God desires (Eph.2:19-22).¹¹³

So just meeting together with other Christians doesn't necessarily make you a Church. For example, was there a Church (*ekklesia*, Lampstand, Foundation) in Colosse? We don't know. Paul's letter isn't addressed to the "Church," but rather to the "saints" in Colosse. We do know that Laodicea was a Lampstand (Rev.3:14) and Paul called them a Church (Col.4:16), even though it doesn't seem that Paul ever went there. Nor did he visit Thyatira or Sardis, yet there were Lampstands there. We don't know the apostolic backgrounds of some cities. Perhaps there was a Church in Colosse, but Paul didn't refer to it as one.

What about Rome? Paul implied that a Foundation was there. We also know that Andronicus and Junias (or Junia) were in Rome, and Paul referred to them as apostles,¹¹⁴ even as "outstanding among the apostles." That means exactly what it says. Literally, from the Greek text,

¹¹¹1Tim.2:5; 1Cor.15:20-23; Col.1:18; 1Cor.15:56-57.

¹¹²For more on the subject of Christ *in* men fulfilling the purposes of God, write for the mp3 *When Sent, satan Falls*. When God sends his people, Jesus sees satan fall like lightning, and He leaps for joy in the Holy Spirit. We go wherever He sends us, doing whatever He calls us to do. Then He follows by His Spirit visiting the towns and villages, and His work is done! We go there to prepare the way of the Lord (see Lk.10:1-24).

¹¹³See *Territories: A Living Relationship* on page 61.

¹¹⁴Rom.15:20, 16:7.

there's no way to translate it, "The apostles thought highly of them." Some folks try to translate it that way in order to preserve their doctrines, but the text literally says that these men were outstanding apostles.

Then, there's Athens. There were believers in the city (Acts 17:34), but no record of a Church there. And in Ethiopia there was at least one Christian, but does that mean there was a Church? Or what about Tarsus or Bithynia? Paul was in Tarsus several years, but then didn't go back for at least ten years—and he never even wrote them a letter! Peter wrote to the *pilgrims* of the dispersion in Bithynia, but he didn't call them a Church.

Not everything in the Scriptures is as clear-cut as we might like it to be. But one thing is certain: Not every group of two or three Christians who worshipped God was known as a Church that the gates of hell couldn't prevail against. It takes a lot more than "nice fellowship" to destroy the works of the devil, tear down the gates of hell, kick satan in the teeth, and make all of Christ's enemies His footstool! We desperately need the Foundation of apostles and prophets.

Apostolic Men Plant Churches... Churches Don't Plant Churches!

What a shock this would be to the religious world! If you went back in time and took a close look, you would realize what a critical deviation we've made from the New Testament norm. Because we've deviated from God's Pattern by rejecting Apostolic Truths, God has taken away His Glory and His Giftedness. As a result of our blatant disobedience, we are faced with a dilemma. How do we plant churches if we don't have apostolic giftedness?

Instead of crying out to God for His Intervention and for the pouring out of His Gifts, some say, "The solution is simple. We'll just have churches plant other churches. No problem. We'll just get together a SWAT team of really spiritual people who know their Bibles real well and the church will send them out to plant a church." Seems like the obvious alternative, doesn't it? Yet that *never* happened in the Bible. Never once did a Church plant a Church in the New Testament. Not even one time.

In the beginning, God's way to propagate the Church was to appoint and send men of apostolic stature and intimacy with the Lord Jesus

into towns and villages that He would later visit.¹¹⁵ This was necessary so that He alone could initiate and direct the “plantings.” Men who are called and anointed with Apostolic Gifts and who are directed by the Head plant churches. There is no other way.

In Acts 16, Paul tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit of the Lord prevented him. Then the Macedonian call came and he ended up planting a Church in Philippi instead. Paul couldn't have planted a Church in Bithynia, because God didn't initiate that. As proof, we see that Peter later wrote to the strangers *scattered* in Pontus and Bithynia.¹¹⁶ He didn't call them a Church of God in Bithynia. Peter wrote to a scattered remnant, which might fall somewhere in the category of “universal Church.” God didn't allow Paul to go into Bithynia but instead called him to Philippi. And that Church of Jesus in Philippi ended up being a great asset to him through most of his life. They were partners in the gospel with him, rather than a pain in the neck like most of the other Churches who second-guessed and watered down the Apostolic Foundation to suit their flesh and egos.

There are no “daughter churches” mentioned in the Bible. Antioch was not a “daughter church” of the Jerusalem Church. There were many believers in Antioch before Barnabas arrived; yet, it was not until after he brought Paul to the city that the word “church” was used.¹¹⁷

God has seen fit to invest this whole matter of establishing churches in men who are Gifted for the Task (1Thes.2:7-16). Who knows what exciting discoveries await us as we return to His Way of doing things? You can count me in! What about you?

How do I Hang on to this Thing?

Let's say you have (whatever that means!) a lampstand. How do you guard it? How do you keep from losing a lampstand?

As they learned in Ephesus, doing “good works” isn't enough to maintain a lampstand.¹¹⁸ No one could do more good works than they did. The calling of a lampstand is to do what the Father and the Holy Spirit do—to point to the Son. “Remember the height from which you

¹¹⁵Lk.10:1.

¹¹⁶1Pet.1:1.

¹¹⁷Acts 11:19-26.

¹¹⁸Rev.2:1-5.

have fallen,” God warned them. Remember the heights of the First Love. Exalt Him! Our job is to be faithful with the little things, one on one, in bringing everything and everyone to a position of honoring Him. We don’t need to worry about protecting anything except the honor of Jesus. “Unless the Lord builds the house, it is built in vain” (Psa.127:1).

Don’t worry about protecting the Lampstand. That’s not your calling, and you can’t do it by good works anyway! Remember the heights of the First Love. Remember how you did good works in the beginning, and do those kinds of works! Don’t you dare forget the First Love because *He’s* the one you’re lifting up. You’re not just doing good things—you’re lifting up Jesus Christ. Your love for Him is what shines forth to the entire world so they might know that you’re His disciples as you express love to one another and to Him.¹¹⁹

A Lampstand is a rather mysterious entity that’s neither here nor there and has no beauty or majesty. It does not come with your careful observation.¹²⁰ So don’t cling to it! Jerusalem changed dramatically in a single day (Acts 8:1)—and did anyone look back later and say, “Remember the glory days when we were baptizing people right and left? Remember when...”? Anybody who had that attitude missed the whole point!

Lampstands aren’t meant to be clung to. Jerusalem changed in a heartbeat, and anyone who looked back and said, “Remember how great it was,” missed the whole point of the Lampstand. It’s not a thing. It’s not some entity that you try to establish and then hold onto. Our job is simply to live for Him who died for us, and to lay down our lives for one another.

Our job is to keep our sights set on the Son, and then whatever God chooses to do to exalt His name is His business. Let Him protect it if it needs to be protected. It will be preserved only by His grace, His undeserved favor. As in the first century, so in our day, the grace of God will be evident. We’ll never be able to force something to happen and then tighten our grip on it to make sure it doesn’t crumble.

I’m all for Lampstands, but what I’m trying to say is that it’s not our job to make it happen! “*Unless the Lord builds the house, it’s built in vain.*” Of course we play a part in this whole business—making sure

¹¹⁹Jn.13:35.

¹²⁰Lk.17:20-21; Isa.53:2.

the components are there, seeking out an environment that's daily in public and from house to house, positioning ourselves to live in one accord and in obedience to the faith so we can receive His Gifts. But it's not a gimmick. When thousands of Christians left Jerusalem in just a few hours and only the apostles stayed, they couldn't say, "Hey, wait a minute, we should've changed our approach and then we wouldn't be having all this persecution."

That persecution was not necessarily failure on the part of the people, though it could have been. Maybe they didn't go into Jerusalem, Judea, and the outermost parts of the earth, so God dispersed everyone. But it wasn't necessarily failure. Philip was called away from an "open door" to a single person (the Ethiopian eunuch) on the road to Gaza. That doesn't make much sense to our all-American win-everyone-you-possibly-can-to-Christ mentality. What a crazy thing for Philip to do! Or was it? The way God does His business is far beyond our ability to grasp and understand. So don't map everything out in an attempt to make a Lampstand "happen" and then cling to it in an unhealthy way.

The Kingdom of God is neither here nor there; it's within you. Jesus said that. There's no beauty or majesty that we might be attracted to it. It's not a showpiece to put on a shelf: "Look at our Lampstand!" Now, it's possible that God will use it as a model community, a model *ekklesia*, for all the world to see. He might do that again today, just as he did (for a time) in Jerusalem and Thessalonica. But don't you cling to it and try to make things happen, refusing to let go of what you have. That's not your job. Your job is to lift up Jesus Christ and to bring everything into submission to Him, until every enemy is His footstool.

There's a whole world of difference between the attitude I'm talking about and the religious approach we see around us. This is a different way of thinking altogether. Ambitious and prideful motivations become unthinkable and grotesque when you're in love with the Lord Jesus and when you long to live for Him and please Him first and foremost. Building your own "kingdom" for Him with human hands seems like such a noble project, but the results can never compare to the vast riches of waiting for Him and watching to see how He chooses to manifest Himself on the earth! Always be ready and watchful, earnestly going about your Father's business, but don't you dare take the reigns in an attempt to "start" something. Understand? It might seem like a subtle difference at first, but once you begin to walk it out, God will make His ways clearer and clearer.

God never gave us a *method* to accomplish His purposes in saving souls—He gave us a *person*, the man Jesus Christ.¹²¹ In the same way, He never gave us methods to accomplish His purposes in the Church, but rather persons “filled with the Holy Spirit and Wisdom” (Acts 6:1-7). There was no set methodology on how to deal with widows. The answer was men. God’s method of salvation was the man Jesus Christ. Likewise, in His Church it is the man Jesus expressing Himself through men to solve problems and give solutions.

God’s ways just can’t be found in a tidy little how-to guide. His answer to all the problems and complications in the Church is never a set of methods that you mimic. It’s men! It’s men filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ!¹²² God’s answer is men endued with “power from on high.” That’s the way it’s always been and that’s the way it will continue to be.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God...The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:11, 14-16).

It’s a big mistake to imitate methodologies, as if you can figure out with your mind how God wants something done. Cry out to Him for answers, “give yourselves no rest and give Him no rest until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth” (Isa. 62:6-7). But don’t lean on your own understanding. That is a fatal error. The Lord does not live in houses (or cities) built by men;¹²³ He lives *in* men!

¹²¹1Tim.2:3-7.

¹²²Acts 4:23-31; 2Cor.4:6-7; Php.4:2-3; Col.4:12; 1Thes.3:1- 5; 1Tim.1:3-7, 4:11-14.

¹²³Acts 7:48-50; Rev.21:22.

Where is Your Home?

Where do you live? What “church do you go to”? These may seem like very reasonable questions to the twenty-first century mind-set. Yet a pilgrim, an alien, and a foreigner may not be sure where he lives. “Where is your home church?” someone will ask. “What? My home is in heaven! It’s in heaven, and it’s in Mary and Kent and Don and Tammy and Jeff and Maggie and Katie and Ross!” Where is *your* home? *Really?*

This is something you need to grab hold of. It’s good to wrestle with where your geographic location is and to ask yourself, “What if a great persecution hit this city? Where would the Church be?” Well, it would continue to be in Dave and Tim and Cindy and Kathy and everyone else. Just where is the Church anyway? Where is your investment? “*You* (people!) are the seal of my apostleship,” Paul told the Corinthians. “You are living letters read by everyone.” If God chooses to destroy what we call a Lampstand in a single day, through persecution or some other means, God is going on. *His Kingdom will continue to advance and grow somehow!* It’s not confined to times and places, nor is it determined by some organizational structure. Somehow, there’s an ever-increasing Glory because it’s built *in people*.

Now, does that negate the importance of the visible, local Church? **Not at all!** God’s heart is sickened by the way men have used the concept of the “universal Church” as a cop-out for selfishness and individualism. But what I’m saying is this: It’s a neither-here-nor-there Kingdom. Don’t cling to it. Until we return to the Father, don’t hold onto it. Allow Him to do as He wills until the full Glory of what God is doing can be seen. He has reasons for everything He does, even dispersions and persecutions. Wait for His timing and let God do the building. Unless the Lord builds the house, it’s built in vain. Be faithful and cry out to God for an expression of His presence, for His Glory’s sake, not for your own comfort. Not so you can be happy or get swallowed up by “good fellowship.” This whole thing isn’t about you, anyway. It’s God whose honor is at stake!

The True Kingdom and Lampstand can never fall. It cannot be conquered or lost as we invest intimately in presenting every man perfect in Christ. We invest in people and wrestle to present one another perfect in Christ as we live for each other every day—this is how His Kingdom stays intact. It would be a pipe dream to think that you could have a “Church” without the kinds of relationships that

are daily in public and from house to house; confessing sins one to another; joined and knit together; one part rejoicing, all rejoicing; one part suffering, all suffering.¹²⁴

Because the Kingdom is not “here or there” but within people, it is possible for someone to live right in the middle of a lampstand and receive zero benefit from it. Because the Kingdom of God is not *within him*, he might not even realize there is a lampstand and therefore spend all his time complaining and murmuring about how things could be better (the key word there is “things”). This is a no-beauty-or-majesty kind of Kingdom that’s “neither here nor there.” It’s within you! You can be right smack in the middle of it and not benefit at all. Not even be touched by it! You can still be your old sloppy, carnal self, driven by the lust of the mind and imaginations, without receiving any benefit at all. That’s because it’s not a thing—it’s the Glory of God in men. Now certainly, if God is truly there, you won’t “fool” as many people in your hypocrisy as you think you are, and “like Jannes and Jambres your folly will become evident to all” if you will not repent in “the space of time” that your Father grants you. You won’t truly be a “member” of the Christ’s Life if you can easily continue in sin without conscience or effort to change (1 John 3), and if you will not turn around in the Grace and time provided you, eventually “your going out will prove you were never among us.”

The very deity of Christ is a joke to the world when His followers live their lives individualistically. But when we are truly one together, having all things in common and counting nothing as our own, His deity and tangible Lordship are undeniable! *Our oneness as a people is proof of our oneness with the Father and Jesus Christ—the testimony of Christ’s deity.*

Vision for the Builders

Now here’s something you may never have considered before. It’s kind of subtle, because it has to do with internal issues. With all the awesome vision in Paul’s heart for the yet unrealized corporate expression of the Life of Jesus, how could he leave city after city, having spent no more than 24 months? And, knowing all the yet unrealized stature and fruitfulness in individual lives, how could he spend an average of only 4 to 6 months in a place?

¹²⁴Col.1:28-29; Acts 2:46, 4:32, 5:42; Jas. 5:16; Eph.4:16; 1Cor.12:26.

Having seen the Reality of the Church, how could Paul walk away from it when it was still in its infancy? When it was undeveloped? When there were things left undone? And when he looked around and saw so much that wasn't really the way he had envisioned it in his heart, how could he leave? How could Paul just walk away and leave unfinished business when he had a Revelation of what God was doing, and he knew God's desire for a Habitation by His Spirit?

In individual lives, as well as in the corporate expression, it all fell short of what Paul wrote. Right? And yet he walked away from it. Why didn't he stay 20 years in one place and continue to invest? Perhaps it was lack of understanding. He did seem to stay in cities longer and longer as his life went on, so maybe he grew in understanding.

More likely, though, it was a higher vision that drove him to press on to the next place. Surely his heart was broken for the unrealized potential in the young Christians, but he entrusted them *"to God and the Word of His grace, which can build up and give an inheritance among all those who are sanctified"* (Acts 20:32).¹²⁵

Might that higher vision be the laying of Foundations that others cannot lay, and trusting God to provide the other gifts essential to build on the Foundation? "I laid a foundation" and "every man should be careful how he builds" on it (1Cor.3:10). Maybe what drove Paul on to other places was knowing the Calling on his life—the Calling to lay Foundations that other men couldn't lay. And while he was capable of going on and bringing them to maturity, so were other men with their gifts of building on the House. So maybe Paul was seeing the necessity of deploying God's giftedness in the most economical way.

Not only that, but he didn't want to warp them by staying around long enough to foster an improper relationship, an unhealthy dependency. The building will always be somewhat less than the dream found in the heart of the architect—the corners may not be quite square, the

¹²⁵As Paul was leaving the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38), he told the elders they would never see his face again. Then they clung to him and wept. That was not improper, by the way. It wasn't idolatry or worshipping a man. It was an expression of people who really see Jesus in one another. It was okay and Paul didn't rebuke them for that. He ripped his robes on another occasion when there *was* worship of men. But when Paul left Ephesus, he *wept* with them. He had a higher vision that drove him to press to other cities even though his heart was broken with the unrealized potential that he was seeing corporately and individually. He pressed on, entrusting them to God and to the Word of His grace.

finishing work is perhaps a little sloppy, and the instructions are not always followed quite closely enough due to the liberties taken and the “better ideas” of the craftsmen.

When an architect has a vision and draws it on paper, he imparts the vision to the foreman and tells the craftsmen what he wants. Of course he envisions a stairway that’s perfect and doors that don’t squeak but are perfectly square and plumb. His vision is never one with doors that won’t shut. Due to human frailty, and because the craftsmen take liberties, the vision is always higher than the building itself. “Well, I have a better idea,” the craftsman says to himself, “I think it ought to be this way.” I’m sure that happens on construction sites. The craftsman doesn’t like the way it looks or the way it works, or maybe he just doesn’t have all the materials right in front of him. Things happen so that the building is always somewhat less than the dream in the heart of the architect. Nevertheless, he can’t be on the building site 24 hours a day, nor would he want to be. He’d be a pain in the neck if he were! Running around, peering over people’s shoulders all the time...it’s not supposed to be that way.

Besides, the vision of the architect may not be flawless either, since human weakness is a factor. Only the Master Apostle could do flawless works of genius. The level of giftedness varies from man to man, as can be clearly seen in the Twelve as well as in the rest of the apostles of the Bible. And the clarity of vision can be clouded by personal sin in a man’s life. Both of these factors will dramatically impact the final Foundation and the resulting integrity of the structure. The architect’s revelation of Jesus and his response to it will set the limits and determine whether or not this is a corporate identity that the gates of hell cannot prevail against (Mt.16:16-18).

Individually, of course, we need not be limited by any other man. In other words, in your gift and your calling you don’t need to fall into another person’s sins. But, at the same time, the corporate structure that goes up is tied to the vision of the *architekton* (the master builder) and the Foundation of the Revelation that he lays.

Part 8: The Cost of Going All the Way With God

Normal, Everyday Apostolic Fears

In this chapter, I'd like to suggest some of the fears that might come up in an apostolic walk.

Lack of Security

In today's age of the all-American career, IRA's, and retirement plans, a man may fear a lack of security in providing for his wife and children.¹²⁶ Going to a new city could threaten that comfort zone. Of course, he always has the option to go back to the career world and make a secure salary, but he would sell his calling in the process. It takes a man of integrity to stand firm on his conviction that "it would not be right that we should leave the service with the Word in order to wait on tables" (Acts 6:2).

But then there's the risk that the people of God in other cities will forget about his material needs because, like Paul, he's out of sight, out of mind. That's not an irrational fear; it was reality for the men who traveled from city to city in the first century!

"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only" (Philippians 4:15).

It's comfortable in a city where things have started to grow and prosper. There's a cost involved when you go into a new place and do a new thing, where you're not respected or loved or appreciated. Starting all over with carnal people in a new place is like going back to ground zero. And, before you know it, you're out of sight, out of mind from the people you just left.

That was the first century pattern. That was Paul's experience when it came to support. The people didn't see clearly what was of Christ, so they fought against it, rather than supporting it and running with

¹²⁶Keep in mind that only Barnabas and Paul were not married. All of the others were (1Cor.9:5-6).

it. Because it wasn't entirely their vision, the people didn't participate with Paul's work in other cities. So the fear of material uncertainty in moving on to another city is one of the things that could quench the apostolic gift. Dragging your family around from place to place is not too attractive.

Starting Over

Obvious ramifications of moving to a new city include starting at the beginning of a new work God is doing. With that comes the need to pay the price all over again. Paul put it this way: *"We work hard with our own hands; when we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world"* (1Cor.4:12-13). And no one seems to appreciate it!

"For it seems to me that God has put us on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9).

The fear of paying that price all over again can be terrifying. The persecution, the insults, the reproach and all the fussing, carnality, and backbiting can be overwhelming. If the price seems too high, a man could squelch his calling by not taking the risks to do what God has called him to do.

Running Ahead of God

Another fear that might, if carried to an extreme, cause an apostolic man to bury his Gift is the fear of running ahead before his time. The proper response, however, would be to proceed with caution and in faith.

For example, Moses blew it by slaying the Egyptian and then had to flee to the desert. But forty years later, he was ready for the real thing. Perhaps he sensed the calling of God on his life, but he ran ahead of God's timing.

Then there's Joseph, who was given a prophetic dream, which he enthusiastically shared with his brothers. Yet it was another twenty-five years before the vision was fulfilled. And Samuel, set apart for God's work while he was still in his mother's womb, had to grow up before he was "released" by God. Then God "let none of his words fall to the ground."

The word of God came to John the Baptizer in his 30th year, even though he had been trained by a priest (his father) and was a devoted, fasting Nazarite long before that time. God has His own timing that cannot be rushed. Even Jesus, who was sinless and who astounded the scholars by the time He was 12, did not receive utterance until His 30th year.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to declare deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’”(Luke 4:18-21).

Finally, Paul was raised a Pharisee of Pharisees and was extremely zealous for God. He was “set apart from birth” (Gal.1:15), yet he was a grown man before he was called. Then, after having seen the Righteous One and receiving his commission in Acts 9, it was several more years before he was actually sent in Acts 13.

Clearly, to go before your time is to invite disaster. But, lack of faith in God’s timing can tempt men to bury their gift for fear that maybe they’re not ready for this, and maybe they just need to rest and be secure in their situation.

Leaving Too Soon

Another fear that would paralyze a man, if he walked by sight and not by faith, is the possibility that the Church he was about to leave might not prosper, or even survive. Paul was able to go on, knowing that Thessalonica might fail (or that Colosse might not make it if he didn’t visit them sometime). That didn’t hinder him from going on, but surely it had to enter his mind. What faith it takes to entrust men to God and the Word of His grace! He poured out his life and heart for people, and then he had to leave them behind, knowing full well how much work was left to be done in their hearts. How could he leave when he saw so much more that needed to happen, let alone what God saw? What if it all just fell apart? What an embarrassment that would be to him, and what an embarrassment to God!

If the Church that he was leaving didn’t prosper, wouldn’t it be a heartbreaking thing for the precious brothers and sisters involved?

While confident that their salvation was secure, the apostolic man of God couldn't help but weep over the wasted potential in Christ as they slumped into nominal existence.

But that scenario can never happen—not in the Kingdom of God! The Kingdom is neither here nor there. Either it's within them now, or it was nothing but an illusion all along. This is for real! Though the particular local Church might not stand as it once did, you can't destroy it by cutting it up. It's like an earthworm. Since the worm has five sets of hearts, when you cut it up you don't get one dead worm in five pieces—you get five new worms. And so it is with the Church. The Foundation is laid in men's lives, and you can't kill it by cutting it up! IF it is something that Father has orchestrated (rather than more of man's divisiveness and ambition), such as the "persecution" of Acts 7-8 which resulted in the Spread of God's Work, then even the difficult things will "work together for the Good" as they are born out of our Love for Him and responsiveness to His Purposes.

Granted, there might possibly be, if the church ceased to exist, a tremendous loss of the demonstration of the Truths of the Kingdom that can best be *Seen*. "You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia" (1Thes.1:7). It is true that "for lack of vision the people cast off restraint"—they don't want to hear about it! But when a Church is visibly "a city set on a hill" that "cannot be hidden" (Mt.5:14-16), and the nations praise God for this City, there's no denying that God is alive.

When the expression of "on earth as it is in Heaven" is currently in practice, no one can argue that the selflessness and Christ-centeredness of the New Testament Church was just a "cultural" thing that doesn't apply to us. You can argue until you're blue in the face that the first century way of life would never work in our day, but you can't dispute something that's happening in the here and now!¹²⁷

You can't argue with the facts—what your eyes have seen, what your ears have heard, what your hands have touched. You can't argue with that. So God does want a demonstration, a model, of what He can do in people so that nobody can argue anymore. It's not just theories and ideas. There had to be in Paul's heart a fear that maybe the testimony would be lost.¹²⁸

Maybe that fear haunted Paul as he left the Ephesians, but he entrusted them to God even though he knew wolves were coming in from among their own number. Even though he knew there would be challenges,

he entrusted them to a Sovereign God without doubting that He who began a good work in them would complete that work. The gates of hell cannot prevail against anything that *God* is doing.

Violently Pursue Equipping!

How do you “get in on” the glorious life of *mega dunamis* (great power) in an apostolically founded and equipped Body? Do you *search out* these apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and shepherds to be “equipped for works of service”? It is clear in Acts 2 that men from all over the earth STAYED in Jerusalem and didn’t just wander off back to their hometowns to have a nice little fellowship in their living rooms with a few family members. “All the Believers were together and had everything in common” (Acts 2). The men from “every nation” who had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish Pentecost stayed in Jerusalem rather than going home to their jobs and families. The people saw the testimony and the Glory of God’s presence in that place, so they stayed and all the believers were together and had everything in common. Nothing on this earth could take them from it. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, prayer, breaking of bread, and fellowship. They were *devoted* to the apostles’ teaching.

Paul spoke of the equipping of the saints for the works of service and the fruitful results that follow.¹²⁹ Consider that list of incredible riches

¹²⁷“A man with a theory will never convince a man with an experience” as a wise man once said. True Life in Christ, TOGETHER, daily, fully intertwined “from the least to the greatest, they all know Him” Life is our Inheritance AND our experience. It is only the shallow and the compromised who will not believe the Word of God, the Teachings and experience of Jesus, and then the Apostles—and passionately live for all they lived for. This book has grown out of the experience of a people of God who have lived in the Quality of Life of Acts 2:42-47 for two decades now. Folks can give some very convincing arguments to prove why the book of Acts was cultural and could never happen in our day. But you can’t argue with **reality**. The Reality of God in His People will have no beauty or majesty, to be sure. But still, it will be the Glory of God in His People, daily in public and from house to house, counting none of their possessions as their own, with ever-increasing Glory.

¹²⁸Must it take visible proof, though? After all, Jesus did say, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Lk.16:31). If they don’t believe the word of God then maybe seeing it with their own eyes isn’t going to mean beans to them either! That’s another factor to consider.

¹²⁹Eph.4:11-16.

that have such magnitude of depth and far-reaching ramifications: the unity of the faith, the full knowledge of the Son of God, the full stature of Christ. Words can't express it all! Yet all of these things will happen through the Gifts that Jesus gave to the Church when He ascended on high. If you're one who is seeking first the Kingdom of God with your life, then that tangible equipping is worth your most earnest pursuit.

It will alter your life immensely to be in relationship with the Gifted men of God who are anointed to do the "equipping of the saints" in a unique and life-changing way. If they have the grace of God expressed in their lives in the form of special giftedness, I should do everything I can to position my life to be in relationship with them. If you really want to be useful to God, then it only makes sense that you would pursue those things.

This blows away the lone ranger approach to things. God's way is to form and shape through the giftedness and the community of the Body of Christ. So it's worth going after. If you're seeking first the Kingdom, then you will go after it. It will be that important to you. If you want those attributes as part of your life, you will seek hands-on, tangible equipping from legitimately gifted, vulnerable, accessible, and cross-bearing men.¹³⁰

"Great!" you say. "Count me in, but how do I do that?" There are a couple of possibilities when it comes to positioning yourself to be equipped from on high. For one, you might just call them and see if they'll come to your city.

"Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them..." (Acts 11:11-12).

"Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch" (Acts 11:25-26).

¹³⁰Do you want these blessings or not? Show me one place in the Bible where there is a list of attributes more powerful than these! And these come, according to the word of God, from being equipped by these men. Not from personal Bible study. If your priority for living is to seek *first the kingdom*, then it will be a very small price to pay to live in "the exact times and places" where God wants you to live, with no regard for your preference of job or climate or proximity to pagan relatives!

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (Acts 16:9).

Or they might just come to your city (even your “fellowship”) uninvited. As the Spirit led, Paul and the other apostles simply went from place to place without asking any man’s permission.¹³¹ For example, the Macedonian call landed Paul in Philippi, where he proclaimed the good news to a group of women praying by the river, not to the man he had seen in the vision.

Join Your Heart—and Work With Them

Before we leave this idea of seeking out equipping, here’s some food for serious thought. You need to ask yourself *why* you would hang around these men. Is it to get help for yourself? Or is there a higher reason—to help them with the Work that God has given to them? That’s very important to consider.

If you can’t serve another man’s vision, then you’ll not be given one of your own (Lk.16:12). There’s something about working with someone else as part of a “wedge” or “plow” that is imperative to understanding God’s purposes. God honors the heart of a servant who can work within the context of what’s already happening because of another man’s vision, rather than trying to get something out of it for himself.

You need to see leadership the way God does and respond to those men accordingly with loyalty, respect, and obedience.¹³² An excellent example of loyalty and commitment to leadership is found in the account of Paul’s Macedonian dream in the middle of the night (Acts 16:7-10). It wasn’t that Paul simply decided to change course and the rest followed. Scripture reads, “we went” and “God had called us.” Luke’s record of the event includes a collective conviction about God’s calling and heart at the moment.

Since the men who traveled with Paul were loyal to him, they could join their hearts with conviction to Paul’s dream. Paul’s dream was their conviction. It was certainly not blind obedience, but they saw the Gift of God on Paul’s life and responded to it. The Life of God was more important to them than their intellectual assessment of the situation and what may have seemed logical. Because they saw the

¹³¹Acts 8:14, 11:22, et al.

¹³²Heb.13:17; 1Thes.5:12-13; 2Cor.13:10.

manifestation of the Life of God by the Spirit, they could say together, “We determined that God had called *us*.” So they got up in the middle of the night with no warning and went to a new continent, all because of the loyalty behind that wedge of leadership. They identified with the giftedness given by the Head that does not demand a “business meeting” and a “vote,” but is received as if from God Himself.

Another natural overflow of the appreciation for what God has given you through gifted men will be some kind of ongoing financial support. “Anyone who receives instruction in the Lord must share all good things with his instructor” (Gal.6:6), and even “double portion.” When done out of love and a pure heart, rather than from a sense of obligation, this is a wonderful way to participate in what God is doing through gifted men! “If just a cup of water in My Name....”

You notice that captives are being set free and the lame are walking and the poor are hearing the good news and the year of the Lord’s favor is being proclaimed. You want to help, so you provide sustenance to allow the man of God to get on with the work unhindered. In so doing, the reward of a prophet, or apostle, or shepherd, or Good News Teller becomes your reward as well.

In Paul’s day, men were sent from the various churches to see how he was doing financially. But their giving was clearly organic, not organizational! People gave to the apostolic and prophetic Work of God as their hearts prompted them. It was not an obligation or a sense of duty that moved them. They didn’t have to give. If that had been the case, their hearts could have easily been far from it. Instead, people gave out of the overflow of their lives and hearts. Paul was often in need, and for a long time, only the Church in Philippi helped him out.

Paul never organized a “missions fund” for the various churches to contribute to his needs. There were no “fund raiser” banquets, and absolutely no peddling of the Word of God in SELLING music or teaching. How appalling! Paul’s approach to life was conspicuously lacking any kind of administrative process that included a budget, percentages, and a year-end report. Paul just trusted God to supply his needs, and he knew times of plenty and times of want. Obviously, it wasn’t something Paul told everyone to do. He urged them to respond to Jesus from their hearts as the Holy Spirit prompted them. And so, churches and people gave out of the overflow of their hearts. They saw the need and Paul told them he was glad because it would be credited

to their account in heaven for having done it. Not that he needed it, but for their benefit he was glad they did it (Phil.4).

The Stigmata

The stigmata were the marks that Jesus had on His hands and feet after the resurrection. And when we see Him face to face, we are still going to see a Lamb, looking as though He's been slain, seated on the throne. These marks, the scars on His hands, His side, and His feet were what He showed to the disciples *after* He was raised from the dead. Seemingly, the scars from the crown of thorns, as well as the scars from having his spinal column ripped open by the lashes, were gone. He was beaten so badly, according to Isaiah, that He was barely recognizable as a human being. Yet He came up from the dead with scars on His hands, side, and feet. Those are classically called the stigmata.

The stigmata of the apostolic is exemplified by the lives of apostolically gifted men. In Paul's case, the first words of encouragement he got upon entering the Kingdom of God were from a man to whom God had said, "Tell him how much that is appointed for him to suffer for My name" (Acts 9:16). What a nice greeting! "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light" (Acts 26:17-18) sounds pretty glamorous, but it was tempered by the stigmata.

Now, while the stigmata is exemplified in apostolically gifted men, the high calling of suffering for His name is by no means limited to apostles and prophets. *Everyone living in an apostolically founded existence will enter the Kingdom of God "through great tribulation" (Acts 14:22) and "violently" (Mt.11:12).* Jesus said the Kingdom is entered forcefully and the violent take it by force. You need to realize that there's a cost involved in this whole business! When a Foundation has been laid and a Lampstand is in place, there's a certain pain, a cross that you don't find in a "nice fellowship."¹³³ There's an element of apostolic existence that includes taking up your cross daily.

¹³³People just have a great old time "going to church," making money, coming home, and watching TV. People all over the world live that way. Go to church, believe the right things, and be nice folks—some of us used to be like that. We were so happy, too. Happy as pigs in mud! But then, all of a sudden, something hit us and the **Glory** and the **stigmata** came together. The cross and the Pentecost came together and they were inseparable. There is a stigmata of the apostolic existence. There's a trauma to consider.

“From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Galatians 6:17).

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24).

“Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles; hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also” (2 Corinthians 6:4-13).

“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored; we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:9-15).

“Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:6-10).

God is no respecter of persons! If you want surpassing great revelation, you also will be sent a messenger to keep you from becoming conceited. You also will be crucified in weakness, as your Lord was. You'll bear the marks of Jesus on your own body. You too will receive buffeting in exchange for whatever blessings God bestows on you, to keep you from becoming conceited, "lest any man boast!" Will you bear the cross? Or will you scramble to avoid it?

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour" (John 12:27).

Will we cry and scramble to get out of it? Will we whimper and complain when everyone deserts us and nobody likes us? If no one receives what we say, what will we do? Will we bear the marks of Jesus on our own body, or will we scramble to avoid the pain? Will we try to lessen the pain by accepting the vinegar mixed with myrrh? Will we try to lessen the pain by doping ourselves up with our little fellowship and our games and hobbies? Will we go on parade and go on great speaking "missions" because we don't want to bear the brunt of the cross in day-to-day living?

It's so much easier to be a star. It's so much easier to say neat things in Bible class and then run off to gratify the flesh. *But will you bear the daily cross of being face to face with people and wrestling for their souls?* Wrestling for the life of Jesus in them and for the fullness of that life to be expressed? Will you wrestle to bind up the broken-hearted and set captives free? You know, that takes a lot of time and a lot of pain and perseverance. It doesn't happen overnight.

There's no magic formula. Jesus didn't lay hands on the Twelve, and pray for them, and then walk away with those men being spiritual giants all of a sudden. He wept over them, and He talked with them, rebuked them, and loved them. He wrestled with them, kicked them in the backside, hugged them, and let them lay their heads in His lap. There was a life imparted as He came to be in their midst and serve them, giving His life as a ransom for them. None of this can be done in a vacuum—it can only take place in relationships. That's the nature of the Kingdom of God. Will you bear that kind of pain? Will you carry the *cross* of Jesus?

What is the cross of Jesus? Losing your job? Not having much money? No. It's being willing to die for others even though they are persecuting and slandering and rejecting you. Even though they're failing again and again, and it perplexes the "dickens" out of you! And yet, if they "LOVE THE LIGHT" (this is the lone non-negotiable, not their performance...they MUST want to have their lives exposed and they must WANT to change for Jesus, John 3, 1Jn.1), we will persevere for them without "striking the rock" out of our own impatience. We will endure for them, IF they "love the Light," as Jesus has endured for us. We accept the cross for them, willingly and honorably, without complaint and without the gall of "whine." Then, and only then, will the unBelievers "on that day" be able to say as the centurion, "Surely these men and women were the sons of God." They have a right to see us on that cross, and "shining like stars in the universe." However, if we're not willing to get on that cross of risk and suffering to draw others away from sin and "snatch them from the fire," the cross for others where "now, through the Church" that principalities and powers are humiliated, then "the world" won't see the Real Jesus.

As with Jesus, the Apostle, however, most will not recognize apostolic things...

"This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (2 Timothy 1:15).

"But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort" (2 Timothy 2:16-17).

"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words" (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

"Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he will be helpful to me" (2 Timothy 4:9-11).

"You, therefore, must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8).

“This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare” (1 Timothy 1:18).

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12).

The nature of the apostolic is that it has no beauty or majesty—you can only see it with the eyes of the heart. It’s never seen “after the flesh.” Remember how they responded to Jesus? They killed him! Truly apostolic things will have a Glory that cannot be recognized on an external basis by nominal “Christians.” But as the crowds are walking away and the “scholars” are jeering and asking trick questions, those who have eyes to see will say, “To whom shall we go?” and “Did not our hearts burn within us as we walked along the way?”

Don’t Miss God’s Blessing!

Be diligent not to miss the Blessing of God! The no-beauty-or-majesty apostolic of Christ may arrive in a borrowed Volkswagen that has to be push-started (just as the Master Apostle made His entry in an animal trough, and His greatest moment was riding on a borrowed donkey). The apostolic may be hidden in “contemptible speech” like Paul’s in order that God might “confound the wisdom of the wise.” Will *you* have eyes to see if God does send Divinely Gifted men *your* way? Or will you join the vast majority who keep their distance and analyze, or even stone, those who God sends?

Like Jesus, Paul was rejected and blamed. “We considered him stricken by God” (Isa.53:4). He couldn’t heal his friend, he was in chains, and even Timothy was tempted to be ashamed of him after nearly ten years by his side. Rumors that Paul might be a fraud deceived even those closest to him.¹³⁴

“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you” (2 Corinthians 4:8-12).

¹³⁴Rom.3:8; 2Pet.3:15-16; 2Cor.11:26; Gal.2:4-5; 1Cor.4:12-13.

Elymas, Bar-Jesus, was an advisor to the proconsul of his day, and Paul came to town and struck him blind (Acts 13:6-12). Now if that were to happen today, if a man were to walk in with an Apostolic Calling on his life and strike someone blind, Elymas would probably go out of the room saying, “That guy splashed chemicals in my eyes!” And then everyone would have to decide whether or not Paul was a fraud! Was Paul “unloving” in his “sermon” when he called Elymas a child of satan? Were his actions too severe? They had to make the same kinds of decisions about Jesus (John 6). Now we’d be forced to decide and face the scandal of it in our own hearts—did he throw chemicals in his eyes, or did God strike him blind? Was he too harsh, or did it just seem that way because he was full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom?

There’s a scandal (“*skandalon*”) involved that’s invisible to the naked eye. To everyone on the outside, it’s obvious he threw chemicals in his eyes because “God doesn’t work that way anymore.” Anyway, look how unloving that action was. That proves how unlike Jesus he is. “He’s a fraud! He’s an imposter!” With the eyes of *your* heart, *you* will have to decide.

All the evidence could externally support that idea that Paul was a fraud. He was a great healer, supposedly, yet he left his dear friend sick in Miletus. He even had his own physical problems. And now he’s in chains. To be sure, Jesus was crucified in weakness. To be sure, it was a scandal to believe on the One whom the Father sent with no beauty or majesty.

Paul was winning a tough, brutal fight, 14 rounds to 0, and then got an illegal kidney punch in the 15th round and went down. Would he get back up and finish the fight? You betcha!!!

That’s the best way I know how to describe the apostolic stigmata that Paul knew. He wasn’t going to give up or give in, even though he got an illegal kidney punch toward the end of his life. Would he give in to the pressures and the messenger from satan, or to the persecutions and the jeering of the life he’d been given? Did he give up when he was persecuted in rags and counted as an imposter and a fraud? He was rejected as His Lord was. He got an illegal punch and everyone in the province of Asia deserted him. Even his best friends were wondering about him, yet Paul got back up again and he fought the good fight. He finished the race. He kept the faith, and now a crown is laid up for him.

The apostolic stigmata leaves no room for boasting in the flesh. If it’s “glorious and awesome,” if it flexes its muscles, it’s probably not

apostolic. Impressive resumes of so-called “church plantings” or “accomplishments” deserve the same Judgment God inflicted on King David for “taking a census” in his day. Paul “boasted” in very little, and only to make a point with those he loved and had laid down his life for. And yet today, the imposters publish their “results” in their biographical sketches, embellished by photographs on the books they “sell.” They flaunt themselves rather than Jesus on their “websites” and “newsletters” and “mailings” and the back of their “books.” They publish “my itinerary” junk, sign autographs, and often allow titles or special treatment. They have NO shame for the oohing and ahhhing that is cultivated by their strut. There might be a season for riding into town with shouts of Hosanna, but for the most part it’s going to be an animal trough. And only spiritual eyes will See while everyone else is crying, “Imposter!” There isn’t anything about it externally that would cause you to say, “Wow, this is really of God; I really like this! Hip-hip-hurray!”

The True Apostolic Church and Apostolic Gift will follow the Pattern of its Lord. *“No servant is greater than his Master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (Jn.15:20).* If they treated Him this way, they’ll also treat you like that. And the more of Him there is in you, the more they’ll treat you like Him. Makes sense, doesn’t it?

And the slander isn’t due to jealousy. They slander because they really do believe you’re a fraud, with all their hearts. ☺ Such a “report” spreads like gangrene. But you’re going to have to see with the eyes of your heart, or you’ll miss it all. That’s true for the Church as well as for men who are called by God throughout all generations. It’s always been that way. Jesus Himself was executed by capital punishment, as a base criminal, with few objections from “spiritual” and “just” men. How could the Spirit of Christ within a man or woman be treated any differently?

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

So be it.

A serious debtor to the Blood of Jesus,

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Do We Need “Church Planters”?

Saturday Morning, January 2, 1999

Here are some thoughts responding to a slew of questions about the gift of “church planters.” Below is a cut-n-paste merging of several letters and conversations with folks from a number of places...

Common Questions:

As we’ve reviewed reading material (from various sources) currently available regarding the “beginning” of a local assembly of Believers, one thing is emphasized over and over again. This is the concept that success can ONLY be had when there is a planter. This is pretty disheartening to us, as we have no planter. If Father’s heart is for us to have eternal life, and “eternal life is to know Him,” then isn’t a true body of believers simply a collection, or coming together of those who have seen (a revelation of) their Lord? If any collection of people wants to chase Him, desires to have Him, and is willing to follow Him, isn’t that a “church”—planter or no planter?

However! I also have to admit that we have many, many problems in our band of folks here. Our group is really quite immature with lots of reactions and suspicion. Many (though not all) have been badly hurt in religious situations previous to coming together outside of the institutional setting. Sometimes things don’t look very saintly around here. There are folks that are lazy, and others with out-of-control families. Some like to dominate, and with others you would have to wonder if there is anything inside of them at all. Some are friendly and “would give you the shirt off their backs”—but are very shallow, at best. Some have agendas or talents or knowledge that they want a stage for. Others just want to do something spiritual while maintaining their worldly lifestyles—and WITHOUT anyone saying anything or touching it, or intruding into their evenings or hobbies or occupations. Others may be in love with Jesus (everyone seems to be when we’re worshipping, don’t they?)—but the fact that they have no interest in living any closer than twenty miles to other saints makes me wonder what

is *really* most important to them. Are they seeking first the KINGDOM (the expression of His Reign in His People), or just adding some form of weakly “fellowship” to a health food and home school lifestyle—with time, attention, and affection dominated by their own biological family units? I know that’s definitely not what Jesus taught us to do.

SO, isn’t all of that *really* a sign of a lack of devotion to Jesus, rather than a need for a “church planter”? What good will a “church planter” be if people aren’t really sold out for Jesus anyway? And if they *are* sold out for Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, then we wouldn’t need a “church planter” at all, would we? So, in either case, how would it matter if we “had one” or not??

Great question. Very important. I only have a few moments to offer some additional thoughts to you, but hopefully this will be helpful.

YES, the gift of apostle is *very important* in God’s Plan for a *local assembly*. Especially if many are lukewarm or confused or wandering. And especially if many are on fire for Jesus! Apostles are still extremely important!! The best masons, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers in the galaxy cannot build a house without the additional gifts related to *seeing the design of the house in that locale*. Paul called it the gift of “architect.” This gift can “see” how it all fits together. This gift helps give the other Believers the freedom to develop and use their gifts. The “apostolic” gift helps the other gifts to not step all over each other “laying dry wall before the plumbing is installed.” It really is an *essential* gift. Sure, folks can be Christians and enjoy Jesus and be saved and pray and worship together without this gift. You could compare this to the Jewish “place of prayer” by the river—where Paul looked for Jews who were “two or three gathered” in a city. This was where Paul found Lydia and a few others in Philippi. But an *Ekklesia*, a “Lampstand,” is a different matter. That gift of architect is extremely important if we want a *Home* for Jesus, a Bethany where He can truly *rest*, rather than having to fight His way through carnality day and night.

The truth is, most folks, even if messy and worldly in their current lives, would *change* and give up their worldly priorities, their early bedtimes (when necessary for Higher things), their selfish habits and spending, and their family idolatry and other stuff...*IF* they had something clear in front of them to live *FOR*.

“*REPENT!*” Why? “*FOR THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND!*”

“*The people cast off restraint!*” Why? “*For lack of REVELATION.*”

Some people are surely religious pretenders that don't WANT everything to belong to Jesus. Jesus will do as a figurehead, or a genie-in-a-bottle. But they "won't have this Man to be KING over them." However, there are *many* folks that are only messing around in mediocrity because they don't have a revelation of all that can be! They "cast off restraint" and live like carnal men because they can't SEE it. They don't repent because they don't experience much of the Kingdom "at hand." Guess what? The Foundational gifts help folks make it that were meandering, and exposes those that just look good on the outside, but don't "love the Light." Without these gifts, it's not too likely that these things will be resolved very well or very quickly—if at all.

(By the way, I don't find "church planter" to be a reasonable or spiritually sound translation of the gift now often referred to in writings on the subject. I certainly DO understand why some would want to get away from the intimidating word that is translated/transliterated "apostle"—but "church planter" is far from the mark. It is too incomplete, and somewhat misleading, since the twelve were not primarily church planters, but were CLEARLY apostles.

There is *much* more to being an *architekton*, a "wise master builder" than simply "planting churches." There is a difference in how Paul expressed his Gifting, and how Peter, for example, expressed his. But in every case, "church planting" was not the primary issue or even the focus. It was often the product of what they were doing, or the starting place of what they were about to do, but not the goal. For that reason, calling this gift "church planter" instead of apostle, simply because a lot of folks are uncomfortable with this word, isn't a great idea. It is too limiting. Jesus gave glorious new meaning to the word *apostolos*, as He did *ekklesia*, *agape*, and numerous other words that existed in His day. While we are NOT speaking of capital "A" Apostle—the Twelve—in what follows, I don't want to trivialize or minimize anything God intends when He speaks of apostles, little "a," either.)

Now, letting the Scriptures speak,

"He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love” (Eph. 4:11-16).

To be perfectly honest, no matter what we’d want to believe about it, these gifts are essential for about *nine* different *extremely* important things to every sincere Believer. This “list” of incredible things to be gained, mentioned in the Scriptures above, is the *result* of interaction with these “Gifts” mentioned in the first verse. HOW does one become “no longer an infant”? HOW does one grow into “the full measure of the stature of Christ” and become useful to God by being able to do THEIR “works of service”? Not by personal desire or personal commitment, but by *relationship* with the gifts that Jesus ascended on High to give to the Church. (Obviously this is not referring to the original Twelve in this Scripture, since He chose those twelve before He “ascended on High.” There is much more that could be said to make this point about the necessity of the present-day Gift, if He would give it, but we won’t delve into that subject at this time.) This apostolic Gift (Gk. *apostolos*) will be needed “UNTIL” (Gk. *mechris*) we all reach unity of the faith, and all the other wonders mentioned. That would certainly include our generation. No doubt about it.

And the troublesome situations you mentioned certainly *would* be much helped and eventually resolved (one way or another) by involvement of the gifts that lay Foundations (Eph. 2, 1Cor. 3)—“the apostles and prophets.” This, of course is NOT about the charismatic movements’ versions of gifts: bending spoons, memorizing birthdays, and stained-glass voices prophesying flattery or doom. “Church planting” is NOT the issue, really, either. But the GIFTS mentioned, “first apostles, second prophets, then teachers,” are necessary for the nine or so amazing and wonderful things God has listed. “Two or three gathered” can have a measure of good stuff going on. However, you will also find heartache, confusion, leaven, domineering flesh, and a bunch of other stuff—that can *rarely* ever really be resolved without these Gifts being involved. I wish it weren’t that way, but it is. Both scripturally, and experientially.

Let me give you an example from the world. A guy named Archimedes discovered, around 250 B.C., what is referred to as “the lever.” This “device” allowed a man to move objects weighing many times a man’s weight, from one place to another. He is quoted as saying, “Give me a lever long enough, and a place to stand, and I can move the entire world!” THIS is the awesome Gift of God in the “foundation of the apostles and prophets.” When a Foundation is laid in a relationship with Foundational, architectural gifts there is Spiritual “leverage” to move the ugly, complicated, unSpiritual problems that inevitably come up. There is *a place to stand* to resolve the issues and the challenges of daily life in the church. And they *will* come up! The apostle lays, as no other gift can, a foundation of “obedience of the faith.” Then, when the storms come, the house will stand. The gates of hell will not prevail. Now we *can* find answers. Now the “impasses” don’t separate God’s People. No longer is the only choice: “agree to disagree.” What a pathetic curse that would be.

When the Foundation of Jesus and “obedience of the Faith” is laid, the teens will NOT be lost to the world, and will NOT “sow their wild oats.” This is an incredible rarity, instead of the norm. There won’t be constant problems with out-of-control children, manipulative women, and spineless (or dictator-like) men. You won’t find yourself wondering if those that are part of the “fellowship” are even truly in love with Jesus and consecrated to Him. In most situations, without these gifts, you won’t even *know* if half of the folks in “the fellowship” lead worldly lives. There isn’t enough mutual daily relationship to even know. Leaven can easily coexist, against God’s clear command, in such a disconnected environment. Crisis after crisis, leaven galore—and little of it can be solved. (And nothing can be solved with legalism, obviously.)

THIS IS THE DILEMMA usually encountered when a group of Believers does not have involvement with the Gifts Jesus ascended to give to His church. Problem after problem. And you just can’t sing or preach or program your way out of those kinds of things. Nor can you ignore the sins and problems and claim no responsibility (“The Holy Spirit will solve it”) without defying many, many commands and teachings from God.

As was said earlier, though, these problems of ongoing sin and devastation will *seldom* happen in an environment of LIFE, and a True Apostolic Foundation. And when the problems do come up amongst the new Believers or those that move in, or those that temporarily

lose their way (and this will happen), the problems can be solved with Grace. Why? Because the Scriptures say that on this Apostolic Foundation (*assumed* in the New Testament beginning days), folks will “admonish one another DAILY...so that none will be hardened and deceived!” *Without* a proper foundation, dealing with problems cannot happen without all sorts of weirdness and difficulties. *WITH* a Foundation, and relationship with the Gifts Jesus ascended on High to give to His Church, problems can be addressed and solved with grace and love and prophetic Wisdom. “From the least to the greatest” they will *all* love the Light, and *all* KNOW HIM!

So, you really should build some relationships with those that *MAY* be able to help lay a Foundation there. You’ll likely lose some of the people that are self-centered and worldly. There are always the types that you won’t be able to Work with: Ananias, Sapphira, Alexander, Hymenaeus, Achan, Simon the sorcerer, Elymas Bar-Jesus, Jannes and Jambres, the oozing hyper-spiritualists, Demas (“who loved this world”), Diotrophes (“who loves to be first”), Korah (“But *WE* have the Holy Spirit *TOO!*”), Balaam (who is motivated to “serve God” by personal gain), Cain (who has his own way of doing things, and is crazed with jealousy, and mocks the idea of being his brother’s keeper) [these last three are spoken of in the book of Jude as *MODERN* assaults on God’s Plan]. And others (Titus 3:10; 1Cor. 5, etc.). (Please take the time to consider the spirit of each of the men that I’ve mentioned above, one by one. You’ll see real people like them again and again in the years to come.) However, when there is a “Foundation,” these sorts of issues *can* be resolved. Where there is not an Apostolic Foundation and relationship, there will be confusion, and worse.

Frankly, I wouldn’t write off the necessity of foundational Gifts as essential for ongoing corporate Life. They *will* actually help solve those sorts of problems that you mentioned. They will do it by inspiration, by example, by supernatural gifting to expose and strengthen, and whatever else is required. Biblically, spiritual growth is not simply about sincerity and commitment. Sincerity and commitment are greatly enhanced by the foundational gifts we’ve spoken of. And for those who are weak, but *WANT* to be fully given to Jesus, they will be tremendously helped (Eph. 4:11ff). The pretenders that love the world and the things of the world (while putting on a good external religious act, of course, and glad to “attend” something “cutting edge”) will *HATE* these gifts. Remember Paul said, with good reason, “We are either the aroma of life, or we are the stench of death.” Does a

man “love the Light” or “hate the Light” (to put it in Jesus’ Words)? His receptivity to the Gifts Jesus ascended on High to give to His Church... *will be proportional to how much he desires Light to expose him in the inner man.*

All over the world, literally, many, many attempts have been made to have meaningful corporate life. The motives are usually very pure: for Jesus’ sake, and for the sake of His lambs. Some approach it innocently, in a misguided way: “We’re all Christians and ‘love the Lord’ so we ought to be able to just love each other. Any good Christian should be able to have real church and real daily life. And we don’t want any more ‘clergy!’”

Clergy, an official “head of the meeting” (in a religious building—or in a living room), an “official leader of the church”—these are all serious mistakes (made by most religious groups on earth!). But it is also true that the foundational GIFTS Jesus gives are incredibly important. SAUL was a ‘clergyman’ (king) of Israel. He was the official main person. SAMUEL was a “brother amongst brothers,” with a gift and relationship with God. He had no title, no office, no staff, no salary, no NOTHING. He was just a man who walked with God, and was gifted by God for the Tasks he was given. What a difference there was between Samuel and Saul, though both were “leaders of Israel.” One was assigned and empowered externally, and the other just did whatever he did. Did Israel NEED Samuel? Of course Israel was infinitely better off with his gifts available to them. They would never know how much they needed him. But, a gift can never be replaced with a “position,” as Israel attempted to do with Saul. Clergy? System? Scheduled visits of God? Gimmicks? NO, NO, NO!!!

Well, I’ve already said that I’ve never seen or heard of a, “We all have the Holy Spirit, so it’s my turn” group of folks prospering for very long. “Let’s make every Tuesday meeting ‘African-American Day’ where only they can talk. And then Thursday can be Ladies’ Day. And Friday will be ‘Happy Hour’ where people are only allowed to say ‘happy’ things. And, of course, when ‘revelation comes to the second’ (1Cor. 14:30), he’ll have to remember if he already has used up his five minute allotment for the week. There are rules that must be considered—before he decides if he can obey God and speak up and let Life flow from His relationship with Jesus and the saints.” I think it’s obvious that these silly things bear no resemblance to the apostolic and biblical story. They won’t be needed when Jesus is Reigning and His Gifts are finding their place, on a daily basis. Meetings are just

“extra” anyway. Meetings are not the central feature of what Jesus has brought from Heaven to earth. Meetings are simply the overflow of what is already happening, daily, from house to house and workplace to workplace and errand to errand and chore to chore.

Days and years on end, those who are related intimately to architectural gifts are free to love Jesus, desirous of Light, and protected from the ambition and flesh of men. Given the chance to have relationship with Gifted men and women, and inviting them (as Epaphras did with Paul in Colosse) to have authority in their midst, I'd highly recommend the nine or so things in Eph. 4 to anyone! (Be assured, though, that they will NOT function as mere men do as they exercise authority, or anything even *close* to that.)

Many are too ashamed to send some from “the household of Chloe” after Paul when the problems come. They have often been “blackmailed” by those with something to lose, locally. “You’re not going to call him again, are you? Shame on you. We can handle it—don’t always be calling them—we all have the Holy Spirit. You’re just being weak, and not trusting Jesus.” This is the song that some will sing that don’t love the Light and don’t respect the fact that GOD set it up to intertwine Gifts across the miles. Pride is a big problem. *Why* did the folks in Corinth and “the household of Chloe” feel so comfortable traveling many miles to give Paul a very detailed account of all the problems in Corinth? Because it was *GOD’S* Plan to utilize these Gifts to build up and protect His Body! The neglect of the Gifts He has given to help solve the problems will allow unnecessary tragedy in our lives and environment, more often than not. Whenever we refuse to call on those gifts that can help us (out of pride or laziness or man-pleasing or lack of understanding), the unnecessary harm to the Body of Christ, to teens, to young children, to marriages, to the neighborhood is very sad. Let’s not be afraid of the Ways God has set out to help His People! Remember this: GOD HIMSELF chose this Plan (Eph. 4 gifts) for helping His People prosper. Why should we be ashamed or afraid of it?

Need to take off—the whole Church will be together in a few minutes... (Actually, now that I look at the clock, they’ve been together for a pretty good while now, and I’d like to get there.) *Love to you!*

PS Now *finding* disciples of Jesus with these foundational Gifts—Gifts that lead people toward Jesus and away from sin, and bring Vision and order to God’s House so that all the gifts can function on a daily basis

in Life—now that’s a little harder than simply believing it’s necessary. But we have to start somewhere. (And a person that teaches about it—ain’t necessarily “it”! By their *fruit* you’ll know them, not by their leaves. Jesus said, “Wisdom is proved right by her children.” Look for real, living babies.)

Here’s the deal. If we’re not “asking the Lord of the harvest” because we don’t see the need, we’ve missed the starting place. *PLEASE* don’t “wait” on some ribbon-cutting ceremony, or for someone on a white horse to show up to be our hero and “plant” us. *BUT*, let’s at least, while we’re along the river worshipping, be asking that God would give us, or bring us, whatever “*TOOLS*” are necessary to build His House in this location! And receive them as He provides. If they’re the real thing, they won’t push themselves on you, anyway. Only the pretenders are boastful and ambitious. Good night.

Foundational Gifts: Organic vs. Organizational Authority

Tuesday Morning, January 12, 1999

A follow-up discussion to “Do We Need Church Planters?”

At times, the expression “foundational gifts” has been used in various writings, without much explanation included. I thought I’d say a bit more about that, for whoever may be interested.

When speaking of “foundational gifts,” we are referring to the thought of Eph. 2:19-22. This phrase certainly has large-scope implications for the whole Body of Christ for all time, as well as implications practically for our time and space, when exposed to the same gifts. You can also consider these passages when trying to ascertain the “value” of what we’ve called “foundational gifts” to the Body of Christ Jesus... (1Cor. 3:10; Eph. 3:9, 4:11-16; Rom. 12:8, as well as others you can think of easily).

A Lever and a Place to Stand

Some of the previous thoughts referring to one of the primary foundational gifts, and its role amongst the Believers:

“The best masons, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers in the galaxy cannot build a house without the additional gifts relating to seeing the DESIGN of the house in that locale. Paul called it the gift of ‘architect.’ This gift can ‘see’ how it all fits together. This gift helps give the other Believers the freedom to develop and use their gifts. The ‘apostolic’ gift helps the other gifts to not step all over each other ‘laying dry wall before the plumbing is installed.’

“And the troublesome situations so often experienced certainly WOULD be much helped and eventually resolved (one way or another) by involvement of the gifts that lay foundations (Eph. 2; 1Cor. 3)—‘the apostles and prophets. This, of course, is NOT about the charismatic movements’ versions of gifts: bending spoons, memorizing birthdays, and stained-glass voices prophesying flattery or doom. ‘Church planting’ is NOT really the issue, either. But the GIFTS mentioned, ‘first apostles, second prophets, then teachers,’ are necessary for the nine or so amazing and wonderful things God has listed. ‘Two or three gathered’ can have a measure of good stuff going on. However, you will also find heartache, confusion, leaven, domineering flesh and a bunch of other stuff that can RARELY ever really be resolved without these Gifts being involved. I wish it wasn’t that way, but it is. Both scripturally, and experientially.

Let me give you an example from the world. A guy named Archimedes discovered, around 250 B.C., what is referred to as ‘the lever.’ This device allowed a man to move objects weighing many times a man’s weight from one place to another. He is quoted as saying, ‘Give me a lever long enough, and a place to stand, and I can move the entire world!’ THIS is the awesome Gift of God in the ‘foundation of the apostles and prophets.’ When a foundation is laid in a relationship with foundational, architectural gifts, there is Spiritual ‘leverage’ to move the ugly, complicated, unSpiritual problems that inevitably come up. There is A PLACE TO STAND to resolve the issues and the challenges of daily life in the church.”

This is what the “foundational gifts” are “for”—the Gifts that Jesus “ascended on High” to give to His Church.

In simplest terms, as we try to understand “GIFTS,” know that Jesus gave ALL of Himself to His Body, in the Gifts of the Spirit, granted “as He wills.” All together, they represent the whole giftedness of Jesus of Nazareth (Col. 1:18, 24, 2:9-10; Eph. 1:22-23; 1Cor. 12, and others). Now, within that array of multiplied thousands of Gifts that Jesus possessed and spread out amongst His Spiritual Body here on earth, there are particular gifts that we MIGHT dare to call “leadership” as in Rom. 12:8, and Eph. 4:11. These gifts are often counterfeited by those who love to be seen of men, love to be called by titles in the marketplace, and love to be first. But, *that’s* not what I’m speaking of here. The true Gifts of leadership are involved in laying foundations of local assemblies and allowing “the administration (the practical daily working out) of the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3).

These gifts are the “poured out” particular Gifts that Jesus possessed, and has granted as a gift to His Church (Eph. 4), that allow the other gifts the freedom to express themselves. This gift brings out the best in others, and pulls them forward to know Him and serve Him with understanding and love. They are *not* positions of “authority” in churches, per se, but *gifts* with His “anointing” evident for a particular area of service to the saints and to the world. They facilitate, rather than dominate.

Brother Amongst Brothers

Now, foundational types of gifts may be more visible than most other gifts (such as mercy, helps, generosity, or even shepherds) in certain circumstances. Notice Peter’s place with Ananias and Sapphira, and with Dorcas, personally assigned to visit Cornelius, etc. Nevertheless, even foundational gifts or more visible gifts are not daily “bosses” of the church. No gift or position, biblically, is in that role. “It must not be so with you,” saith the Lord.

And certainly, there is no gift set out by God that is permitted to “run the meetings.” There is NO biblical record of such an animal as “the official or expected runner of meetings.” Not a “pastor”—not a “priest”—not a “reverend”—not an “elder”—not a “minister”—not ANYTHING. No “official runner of meetings” existed in the New Testament Church, with its foundation laid by those who walked with Jesus daily. That job description (“runner of meetings”) is a new addition, added by fearful men. They may be afraid things won’t go smoothly, or won’t be upbeat enough for visitors, or have too many quiet moments, or they are afraid the big bad wolves will get them.

Sometimes this unBiblical role of “man up front” is claimed by ambitious men. “God ‘called’ me to dominate all of you and persuade you to revere me, call me by a title, and think that I’m holier and more spiritual and better ‘connected’ than all of you. I wasn’t bright enough to be a candlestick maker or Indian chief, and I didn’t want to get my hands dirty as a grease monkey, so mom thought this would be a great career path.”

Or sometimes this clergy thing happens at the hands of lazy or fearful saints (“Give us a king like the other denomi-nations!”). Oh, PLEASE, let’s not underestimate the mystery withheld for ages and generations, the *CHRIST OF GOD WITHIN* those who truly trust and live in Him!

Visible leadership at times? Perhaps. James facilitated when he spoke up in Acts 15 and said, “I perceive that _____.” He didn’t dominate, but he provided “sternsmanship” (leadership—Rom. 12:8). He facilitated order by taking the pieces that were there, provided by the Great Shepherd of the Sheep to individuals one-by-one in that gathering, and helping to put them together in an orderly way. He didn’t decide *for* everyone. (And that’s good, since he was one of the last ones to get a grip on this Jew/Christian puzzle being discussed in Acts 15. Remember “the party of James” which misrepresented the Gospel to the gentiles in Antioch? Remember that Paul did battle with Peter over James’ buddies’ misunderstandings “in front of them all”? I don’t know that James was as messed up as his close friends were about the Gospel, but James didn’t help them much either, obviously.) Still, James was *visible* and very respected in that setting in Jerusalem in Acts 15, but not “the boss.” And he might have stayed invisible for hours on end, or days on end in any given setting. He wasn’t the big cheese or official holy man. He was a brother who functioned as a brother amongst brothers, but was not ashamed of his gifts. (1 Cor. 15:7-10 is so important to *feel* in your heart—a deep need to show gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for you!)

Organic, Not Organizational

Is it possible that God does not intend to have a generic “no gift,” “no foundational gift,” church? Consider this “teaser”... An angel at the empty Tomb said, “Go tell His disciples, *and Peter*, ‘Jesus is going ahead of you into Galilee.’” Here’s the million Euro question: Why did he single out Peter? “Go tell His disciples, *and Peter*.” After all, “We all have the Holy Spirit!” so Peter shouldn’t be singled out. Right? And yet, a spokesman for God, an Angel, highlighted Peter and mentioned the other brothers generally.

Another “teaser”? Peter, after being freed from prison by an angel, knew that he could find some brothers and sisters together even at that late hour. He arrived at a surprised room of folks praying at John Mark’s mother’s home. And what did Peter say? “Tell James and the brothers about this!” Why single out James? Why does James get special notice? He wasn’t even one of the Twelve! Why single him, or anyone out? Just maybe that’s okay, if seen *organically* rather than organizationally.

Why did the “household of Chloe” travel hundreds of miles to find Paul and present him with a rather long list of sins and problems in the

church they were a part of? Shouldn't they have been able to handle it on their own? Don't they all have Jesus? Couldn't they just take a vote at a "men's breakfast" or something, and not have to ask some mere man, from the outside no less, to help? Perhaps they understood "gifts" better than most in our age do. And perhaps THAT is because so many people today are wounded from the abuses of self-proclaimed authority figures. We've become fearful of God's Way because so many "leaders" are living in the spirit of "king" Saul—rather than Melchizedek, Samuel, or Jesus, or Paul.

Still, if we can get over our ow-ees long enough to consider the beauty and life of God's Plan regarding ORGANIC leadership, it's time to move ahead. There certainly is an undeniable implication in the Scriptures that everyone would know who THEIR leaders are, those who have lived the Life and have spoken His Words (Heb. 13:7). And they would be glad to "submit" to those who "watch for their souls" as those who "will give an account." That "leadership" is clearly recognizable, *but not as the Gentiles!*

WOW! This is so unheard of. God, give us grace and have mercy on us. No one "running the meetings" (except the Risen Jesus, rising up in His priesthood! 1Cor. 14:26-30). No one whatsoever with a title, or even viewed as the "head librarian and greek researcher," or "official speaker." In God's true Church, there are NO King Sauls running God's People. And yet there is every possibility that God can raise up many Samuels at His pleasure, with their obedience. Yes! And these will be men and women OF God, who can hear Him, and hear His children, and help them find each other on a daily basis. NOT speeches, books and meetings...but "hand to hand, eye to eye, and mouth to mouth" as Jesus did. "The LIFE becomes the light of men"—NOT the other way around.

His Anointing

Here is another way to look at it. Stay with me here. "ALL authority" belongs to Jesus, now and forever more! Right? So why the contradictions with "authority figures"? There IS no authority, right? Just me and my conscience, RIGHT? Whatever's right in my eyes—flies, because, "We all have the Holy Spirit." But then, why do we find ourselves needing to disobey dozens of Scriptures about obeying and submitting, and about leaders, in order to hold on to this viewpoint the way it is sometimes interpreted? Here's the key. YES, Jesus does

have all authority, which means it is His *ANOINTING* on His Gifts, case-by-case, day by day, that we respond to! NOT titles and positions, like the gentiles. We respond to His Presence and His Voice wherever He chooses to express it!! We watch for ANOINTING! His anointing is a part of His Life that He has deposited in that situation. (And I surely don't mean human charisma or personality or talent! Yuck.)

Practically, in a situation with children, or relating to music, or physical needs, or illness, or discouragement, or unBelievers...someone in particular may have an anointing, a Life, a gift that is clearly from Heaven. The voice of God rings clearly through the hushed Children that are listening for the Shepherd's Voice. And the fruit of His Anointing is beyond human organizational skills, motivational gimmicks, gadgets, borrowed ideas, man-made psychology, intensely researched or carefully crafted words, or self-proclaimed authority ("Touch not God's anointed!") or flexed muscles. It is God's Fruit. Jesus has passed this way. We all feel the Wind of Heaven and humbly bow down.

In this way, as a Priesthood, *any* saint, *anyone* with JESUS living inside can be chosen and anointed for a task or a purpose, or at a crucial moment. We speak of daily, intertwined Life, but meetings are okay, too. He gives His authority to the parts of Himself that are distributed in the Gifts in the Body of Christ. He does NOT invest it in a title and position, but in Gifts. Overseers are facilitators, not bosses. There *is* such a thing as Leadership in God's economy, and God forbid that we would destroy God's Plan of how to build His Body. We must not pooh-pooh ORGANIC, ANOINTED leadership and thereby rob His People of embracing those five gifts in Ephesians 5, and the thirty thousand others that Jesus has, and poured out. And yet, it is a rare thing in this confused religious landscape to see GIFTS rather than POSITIONS. *Anointing* rather than tradition, hierarchy, and habit. GOD is after Samuels—*people who know His friendship intimately*—in every area of giftedness! They demand nothing, but give all. We no longer need Sauls, who steal our children, steal our vision, and steal our money (and all of the other things mentioned in 1Sam. 8). It is truly to "reject God" when we handle leadership as the gentiles do. It is equally damaging to do the "Korah" thing and cry out, "We ALL have the Holy Spirit" and despise or ignore anointing and giftedness.

Probably it's better to ask God to show us HIS way, as unheard of as that may be! Wouldn't you all agree?? ☺ xXxoXoxOo

Equipping vs. Edifying vs. Intimacy?

Wednesday Afternoon, April 17, 2002

Can you help me out here? Someone said to me: The “five-fold” is sent to “equip” the saints so that they can do the “work” and this work IS the “edification” of the body of Christ. Ok, so, now we are left with another puzzle. What is the essential difference between edification and equipping? Isn’t all edification some sort of equipping? Isn’t all equipping some form of edification? What would the distinction in function here really be? Also, what is the work that the saints do after they have been equipped that is so different from the work that the five-fold do in equipping them?

And regarding intimacy, do the five-fold have some sort of level of intimacy with the Lord, like being one of the “three” that get to go up on the mountain with Jesus, or revelation or anointing that allows them to do some function that is denied to the rest of us? Are the five-fold those closest to Jesus’ heart or something, that they know what and how He wants to build better than we can?

Hi. “Works of service”... that is what the five-“fold” (or four-“fold”—if “kai” is translated as shepherd/teacher, rather than shepherd, teacher) is supposed to “equip” the Saints to do. The word is a medical term that describes the setting of a broken bone or the placing of a dislocated part in the right place. This *includes* teaching saints to “build one another up” (“edify”), but certainly isn’t *limited* to this. The “five” or “four” Gifts in Ephesians 4 are supernaturally Enabled with Insights that they did not “study” or “aspire” to, but were Given to them. Why? According to Ephesians 4, to help everyone else to function in the other 4000 (or so) Gifts that Jesus has, Jesus is, and Jesus has bestowed upon Himself (His Body). The Ephesians 4 Gifts IMPART—so that others are “no longer infants tossed to and fro” and eight or so other *essential*

things in that passage. These Gifts enable the other 4000 Gifts, as in “fitting together into the proper place for strength and functionality”—“equip”—“katartidzo.” These, Biblically, train the Saints to *express* the other 4000 Gifts of Jesus, and learn how to FIT together with the other Saints while expressing those Gifts. Thus, the “parachurch” (“I have a gift, I have a gift!”) organizations will no longer be necessary—when the Ephesians 4 Gifts are doing what *they* are supposed to be doing. ALL the GIFTS will “fit” and build up (rather than tear down and divide) in *the local corporate daily life* (the “Church”)—rather than co-exist in some loosey-goosey, unBiblical fashion that is so common (and divided and unaccountable and ambitious) today.

Any *legitimate* Gifts of Ephesians 4 *will know* things others cannot know naturally, *SEE* things others cannot usually see (without being “equipped” into this Seeing), and *DO* things others cannot do without this “Equipping.” Yet, these are not “earned” by “intimacy” or “maturity.” These are *Grace Gifts*—“unmerited favor” by definition, *given* when “He ascended on High and *gave* Gifts” to men. And such a person is allowed the Privilege of Seeing—so they can *spend their lives helping others to see, and to “fit” into the place of making a difference in the Church and the world*, “no longer infants” who only make demands, and take, take, take. IF they’ll respond and grow. See it yet? Much as you may *never* play the piano and SEE the notes as a Chopin might—virtually from birth—you can still *learn* to play piano, right? There is, of course, “overlap” between Gift and having been “equipped” or “trained” or having received *impartation* from those with Ephesians 4 Gifts, whether by the laying on of hands, or by “the things you’ve seen and heard in me.” As an example from Ephesians 4 itself: You may not *have* a “Gift” of “Good News Telling”—but may, of course, “do the *work* of a Good News Teller” and “always be ready to give a reason for the Hope that lies within you.” You may not be SUPERNaturally enabled (as Ephesians 4) in shepherding and teaching, but “You ALL ought to be teachers by now!” and must “Bear one another’s burdens, and SO fulfill the Law of the Anointing and the Anointed One, the Christ.” Many will *DO* what they are Equipped to do, rather than supernaturally Gifted to do. And the results will often be “similar” in some ways. I can *learn* a “cross-over dribble” in basketball, but Michael Jordan didn’t have to “learn” it. It was the “air” he breathed. :) The same is true for Gifts that matter, the parts of Jesus “given to men” in His Body. The Ephesians 4 guys did not *learn* stuff—it is as natural to them as the air they breathe. But that doesn’t mean a *lick* about how intimate they are with Jesus, or how pleased He is with them.

Will someone with an Ephesians 4 Gift *automatically* have more intimacy with Jesus than someone with some of the other 4000 Gifts of Jesus? NO WAY. That is about relationship, not function, and is available to ALL. Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, admiring, listening, learning, and loving may not have had near the "Gifts" that Martha had (who knows?), but we *know* what Jesus thought about that. And for forty *years*, there were a bunch of guys in the wilderness who *saw miracles every day* (quail and bread from heaven, clothing never wearing out, water from rocks, a pillar of fire in the sky to lead them, etc.)—who God was *angry* with! (1Cor. 10, etc.). Did *they* have a great relationship with God, *just because they saw miracles constantly*? NO WAY! Gifts, or even *miracles from God* are *no proof* of God being pleased with a man or a woman, or a people. GOD just had bigger Plans, and they were part of them, even though He was *displeased* with them. Intimacy is *very* different than Gift. Think about it. If you had three children, and one was very, very talented in science or sports, but they were selfish and snotty, or arrogant or distant to you, their mother, or to their brother and sister, would *you* feel "intimate" with that child *just because* they had some "talent" that the others didn't have? Of course not. "GIFTS" are very external compared to Intimacy with Father. *ANYONE* can have Father's ear and heart, regardless of what their Gift or assigned role may be. And which is better or more important??! I submit that Intimacy is FAR superior to what "Gift" a person has, Ephesians 4, or any of the other 4000 parts of Jesus.

Got it?

For His Glory, Alone,

4000 Gifts? No... FORTY THOUSAND GIFTS!

Thursday Night, April 18, 2002

You wrote, “The ‘five’ or ‘four’ Gifts in Ephesians 4 are supernaturally Enabled with Insights that they did not ‘study’ or ‘aspire’ to, but were Given to them. Why? According to Ephesians 4, to help everyone else to function in the other 4000 (or so) Gifts that Jesus has, Jesus is, and Jesus has bestowed upon Himself (His Body).”

What are you referring to regarding “4000 Gifts”? Can you help me understand? I am not seeing what you mean, so far.

Thanks,

Hi... Pretty simple, really. How many things does GOD do well?

Those who had met Jesus said of Him, “This Man does ALL things well!”

What are YOU gifted in, from a natural vantage point? A few things, no doubt?! ☺ And your personality qualities—your preferences, your communication skills, your manner of presenting yourself? *All that you are*—how much IS that??!! Put a number on it. An exact number. Ha!

Jesus deposited *all of Himself* in the Body of Christ—and we now “fill everything in every way.” That IS the *person of the Body of Christ*—that we are “many members” of HIM!

How many “Gifts” did *JESUS* have? How many “Gifts” does *God* have??!!

Therefore, can one actually get out a solar calculator and figure out from reading Bible verses “how many Gifts there are supposed to be”—when *all of Christ’s Giftedness*, in the “manifold Wisdom of God,” has been poured out upon Christ’s Body? What a SILLY thought to think there are “nine” of this kind of Gift, and “four” of that kind of gift!

Four thousand is an “abstract” representation of the *fullness of deity dwelling in the man Christ Jesus*, and *poured out on His Body*, “which fills everything in every way.”

Hope you can follow that. As I said, it wasn’t meant to be rocket science, just a “Picture” of the unbelievable Majesty of Jesus, and what He has done in us.

“CHRIST in you, all-together—the hope of GLORY!” “RIGHT NOW—THROUGH THE CHURCH—the many-faceted Wisdom of God is made known, even to the principalities and powers!”

Discern His Body: A Window Into Life and Blessing

Sunday Night, July 4, 1999

The first letter to the church in Corinth revealed some serious problems. They were taking each other to court. They were not caring for each other, but only thinking of themselves and their wants and needs. They had sin problems of various kinds. They had divisions among themselves. That same letter also revealed a major root of these problems. *Many, many painful problems will flow at a rapid, destructive pace if this problem (mentioned by the apostle) remains undealt with!* What is that ROOT that the other problems flowed from? You'll find it in 1Corinthians 10 and 11. It is this: **They were not discerning the Lord's Body!** They couldn't SEE Jesus in these other people around them, or in the Church Jesus had planted there for them. They could only see themselves, and "men walking as trees."

IF we'll SEE Jesus in His Plan and in His Body, in a supernatural way...*many* other roots of evil will be flushed out of our lives and out of our Relationships and our Service of Him! (God even said in this passage that anyone would be wasting their time having meetings if they weren't going to *live* as mashed potatoes, rather than a bowl of potatoes!) If we wish to add more decades of Life and Love to decades past, we must each call ourselves to See JESUS in what Jesus says He has done...*and respond accordingly!* We must treat others and See others the way *God says they are!* We must "Discern the Body" in order to See Him and have His Blessing in our lives and midst. Much sin and chaos and division and many curses (even sickness and death, according to Paul!) come from *not* forcing ourselves to SEE as God Sees. I think we'd all rather skip that part. Being "conscious of God" in all things, and "discerning the Body" in all ways He has decreed and endued is a wonderful opportunity to find "Life that is really LIFE!" Let's "Discern the Body" as He's called us to?

Gifts and the Authority of the Body

August 26, 1996

This is taken from a time a few years ago when some saints were together in a living room. We'll preface it ahead of time :) that if all you ever see is somebody behind a pulpit on Sunday morning, or a committee chairman that you don't even know, it's going to be hard to figure out how to apply these kinds of things...

The more we become organic in our life together, the more we will be able and willing to see Jesus through other people. Because of the nature of God's investment in the Body of Christ, we accept them as part of a kingdom of priests. Maybe they are not so incredibly mature and wise, but you see Jesus there. We desire to be one, and we know that is what God intends for everyone else too. So we need to see Jesus when we look at a room full of people. We need to see that, rather than to judge individuals or evaluate them. We need to soften our hearts and **see it the way Jesus sees it**. It so distresses Him that He is willing to make people sick and even kill them if they *won't* see it.

It's possible you are going to have to trust somebody else's seeing, right? If you're a hand, you have to understand that you can't see, though maybe you can do other things extremely well. Whatever our gifts are that we *can* do, one thing that has to happen is to see that those gifts are part of something far bigger than any of us are as individuals. If we are members of one another, we want to function as one because of the authority in Heaven and on earth that's been given to Christ. And Christ means Anointing. We are watching for anointed life. We're looking and responding to things that are *anointed*. The twelve saw it, even though somehow it wasn't anything they could comprehend themselves. They saw something that was real, that had life in it. So they participated in it, not because they could see it exactly

the way He did, but because there was a connection to life there. There was an anointing that was real and not counterfeit. It had authority. Not because they were persuaded about it, *but because they saw anointing, they saw life*. They knew there was something there that they didn't have, and so they submitted to it. It wasn't that they had to be persuaded so they could have it themselves—"Okay, now that we are in agreement, we can go on." It was something bigger than they were and they recognized that up front. That is why there is authority. Authority is not a military, hierarchical thing, but it is recognizing that Jesus is bigger than what we can perceive and we do not have total control of it, in ourselves. That's part of discerning the body.

Excerpts From Nee's *Spiritual Authority*

The Riches of Christ Are Authority

"It is impossible to make each member a whole body; we must each learn to stand in the position of being a member and of accepting the workings of the other members. What others see and hear is reckoned as my seeing and hearing. To accept the workings of other members is to accept the riches of the Head. No member can afford to be independent, since each is but a member in the body; whatever the other members do is taken as the doing of all the members and hence the doing of the body.

"Today's problem is that the hand insists on seeing, even after the eye has already seen. Everyone desires to have everything in himself, refusing to accept the supply of the other members. This creates poverty in him as well as the church. Authority is but another expression of the riches of Christ, only by accepting the functions of others—accepting their authority—does one receive the wealth of the whole body. Submitting to the authority of the other members is to possess their riches. Insubordination brings poverty. "If therefore your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light; if your ear is good, the whole body will hear."

Neal: Did you catch the authority thing in terms of missing out? If you veto the eye and decide to have a committee instead, then you are forfeiting what the eye has to offer to the Body. "Let's veto the eyes." And then all the members decide the color of something, whether it's blue or whether it's yellow. You are going to be blind for the rest of your life. Or people often think of authority in terms of the military—"So what do I have to submit to? What's the bottom line? What's the eye or the ear going to tell me I have to do? What's the hand going to tell

me?” If you look at it that way, you end up forfeiting the deposit that is vested in the gift that is in each member. If you veto the authority of the eye, you also veto the blessing of the eye in being able to enjoy a sunset. It’s not just the eye that enjoys the sunset. The whole body enjoys the sunset, if it accepts the eye. The whole body enjoys the symphony, not just the ear. You don’t sit there and say, “Oh, my ear really likes this but the rest of me...” It doesn’t work that way. You enjoy the whole thing collectively.

More From Nee

“We often misunderstand authority as something which oppresses us, hurts us, and troubles us. God does not have such a concept. He uses authority to replenish our lack. His motive in instituting authority is to bestow His riches on us, and to supply the need of the weak. He would not have you wait for decades to pass through many dark and painful days before you are able to see by yourself. By that time you might have led many into darkness. Indeed, you would become the blind leading the blind. What damage would God suffer through you! No, He first works in the life of another, and works thoroughly, so that He may give that person to you as an authority above you for you to learn obedience and to possess what you have never possessed before. This man’s wealth becomes your wealth. Should you overlook this divine procedure, though you may live for fifty years, you may still lag far behind the attainment of that person.

“The way God grants His grace to us is twofold: sometimes, though rarely, He grants grace to us directly; mostly, He gives His riches to us indirectly—that is, God puts above you the brothers and sisters in the church who are more advanced spiritually (*or who have different gifts*) that you may accept their judgment as your judgment. This then will enable you to possess their wealth without you having to go through their painful experiences. God has deposited much grace in the church; but He dispenses to each member some grace in particular, just as each star has its own particular glory. Hence authority brings in the riches of the church. The wealth of each member is the wealth of all. To rebel is to choose the way of poverty. To resist authority is to reject the means to grace and richness.

Distribution of Functions Is Also a Delegation of Authority

“Who would dare to disobey the Lord’s authority? But let us remember that the authority of the members, which God has

coordinated in the body, needs to be harkened to also. God has joined many members together, and it is downright rebellion for anyone to resist the help of the other members. Sometimes the Lord uses a member in a direct way, but at other times He uses another member to supply the need of that member. As the head directs the eye to look, the whole body must accept the seeing of that eye as its seeing. Such distribution of function is a delegation of authority; this also represents the authority of the head. Should the other members presume to see themselves, they are rebellious. Never be so foolish as to think of yourself as almighty.

“Always remember that you are but a member; you need to accept the workings of the other members. When you submit yourself to a visible authority, you are in perfect harmony with the Head, since the fact that someone has the supply constitutes its authority. Whoever is gifted has work, whoever has work has authority. The eye alone can see; so in the need to see, you have to submit to the authority of the eye and receive its supply. The work God appoints is authority; no one should reject it. Most people want to have God’s direct authority, but God’s more frequent way is to set up indirect or delegated authorities for us to obey. Thus through them we are to receive spiritual supply.”

Life Makes Obedience Easy

“It is hard for the world, even as it was for the Israelites, to obey, because there is no link of life. But for us who have a life relationship, to disobey is hard. There is an inward oneness—one life and one Spirit, the Holy Spirit directing and controlling everything. We are happy and restful if we are subject to one another. If we try to bear all the burden entirely upon our own shoulders, we will tire. But if the burden is distributed to various members, we will feel restful. How peaceful it is to accept the restraint of the Lord. In being subject to the authority of the other members, we experience a great emancipation. But to stand in another’s place makes us feel most forced. To obey is natural; to disobey is difficult.

“The Lord calls us to learn obedience in the body, the church, as well as in the home and in the world. Were we to learn well in the body, we would have no difficulty in other areas. The church is where we should begin to learn obedience. It is the place of fulfillment even as it is the place of trial. Should we fail here, we will fail everywhere. If we learn well in the church, the problems of the kingdom, of the world, and of the universe can be solved.

“In the past, both authority and obedience were objective, that is, an outward subjection to an outside power. Today authority has become a living thing, something inward. Authority and obedience meet each other in the Body of Christ. Instantly, both turn subjective and the two are merged into one. Herein is the highest expression of God’s authority. Authority and obedience reach their consummation in the body. Let us be built up here; otherwise, there is no way. The place where we meet authority is in the body. The Head (the source of the authority) and the members (each with its function, working with each other as delegated authority as well as being obedient to authority) are all in the church. If we fail to acknowledge authority here, there is no way.”

External vs. Internal Authority

Bruce: These words stand out to me in what Nee said: “Who would dare to disobey the Lord’s authority? But let us remember that the authority of the members which God has coordinated in the body needs to be hearkened to also.” What I was thinking is, the world goes about it by appointing authority first and then requiring others to follow. But that’s backwards. God is the one who gives the gifts and that anointing is real and the authority is real. It’s not this approach of, “Understand now, that so and so has authority. Hearken to what they say.” It could be true (that they have authority), but you find that out in the experience and fellowship within that relationship. The fruit of their life, rather than it being “assigned” to them for external reasons, proves it to you. It’s something God does.

Mark: That distinction between internal authority and external authority is so important. In the case of the external authority, it’s dependent on who’s been here the longest, who knows their Bible the best, who went to seminary, who speaks louder than anyone else, or some other such thing. And you can judge it and say, “You can’t tell me... I don’t think I like your authority.” On the flip side, true authority in your life comes from an inward knowing of God. “The situation that’s about to come up requires seeing, and I’m a hand. So who can I ask to help me?” It’s not, “Okay, okay, you’re an eye, so I’ll do what you say. Someone said you’re an eye—all right.” Rather, it’s a humility that says, “I need an eye.” And so the authority comes from the other direction. It’s recognizing a gift that I don’t have, and submitting to the fact that I don’t have it and they do. With the gentiles, Jesus said, the authority comes from the top. Discernment

of the body comes from the other direction. It's as members of one body you were called, Paul said.

So authority is not wrapped up in my opinion. "Whatever I agree with, that has authority." That would mean that I have all the authority, right? It's also not a hierarchy. It's not that you bring in a desk and put a gold nameplate on the door that says, "pastor" or whatever, and then you have your hierarchy. "There's the boss right there behind the door with a nameplate, so there's authority." It is also not wrapped up in democracy—if enough people vote in favor of it, then that would be authority. So it's not my judgment, which makes me god, and it's not the nameplate, the hierarchical authority, and it's also not democracy. It's none of those three things. There is another choice, and it's called *anointing*—life, giftedness, or the authority that has God's thumbprint on it that He's invested in the members of the Body.

If a person doesn't discern the body, you can see why they can't even be a member of the body. There's no way. Anybody that doesn't submit ends up getting caught in the door of the elevator. They end up getting burned on a hot stove because they won't submit and function together with the body. It's not because, "If you don't submit, I'm going to crush you with a hammer." It's just that sooner or later, a hand that doesn't submit will lose its feelings and nerve endings. They end up losing a limb, it falls off, and it's all because they got themselves in trouble. They do things that they shouldn't do because somehow their limbs are not connected to the head in a way that they will be properly protected. Sooner or later they will have to be disciplined because of that.

3-Dimensional Life in a 2-Dimensional World... How Do You Do It??

Do keep in mind that some people don't really have a way to apply the things that Paul wrote about because *they are not in a Church*. It isn't a Church. It isn't a Body, so the elements of connectedness in the body are just not applicable. That's something to keep in mind, and some of you know that experientially already. But some of you don't know it, except from things that you have heard about. The truth is, if you try to apply some basic truths about how to live with one another in an environment that's not really a Church, you will find yourself getting beaten to smithereens. There's no logical solution. There are

just too many dilemmas, and too many contradictions of Scriptures in the religious world. There is no way to apply what we're talking about because it's in a different dimension.

It's like a picture on one of those calendars you squint at for a while and all of a sudden it becomes 3-dimensional. If you try to stick your hand in there and get it, you can't! You can kind of see it, but it's in a different world. Your hand just goes flat up against the calendar when you try to reach in and grab that apple or that building or that kitty cat. Your hand goes up against something flat, even though your eyes can see something in the third dimension. You can't get your hand on it.

That's what most people are facing in the religious world. They see these scriptures and they want them so bad. But no matter how sincerely they are seeking God, their hand comes up against something flat when they try to reach in and get it. It's because they are part of an organization—not the Church. It doesn't apply, it doesn't work, and it doesn't make sense. It's just not there. Now what some people do is they begin to rewrite the scriptures in order to accommodate their experience. "Well, it didn't mean that. It's just figurative." Or, "I'll just ignore that and not think about it and maybe it will go away." Or, "We're doing the best we can. We are only human and the Bible is an ideal book and we live in a non-ideal world." You can come up with all kinds of humanistic garbage, but the real problem is, that unless you *live* in that third dimension, all these Scriptures about the third dimension don't make any sense. Many of them don't.

For instance, you have to stretch it to find a "pastor" in the Scriptures. "Well, James must have been a pastor because Peter said, 'Go tell my brothers and James...'. That's it! James must have been the pastor." They start stretching stuff like crazy, because they are living in a 2-dimensional calendar world, and trying to make a 3-dimensional world happen. They try to reach in and get the kitty cat and end up smashing their hand against the thing, so they finally just quit. They just say, "Well, I guess it's supposed to be this way, like it always has been. Let's just ignore it."

I want you all to really be asking God to give you clear vision of this point that we are talking about—the nature of the Body of Christ. Most people would not have the slightest idea of how to apply the things that we are talking about. To them, democracy is the authority, or their own personal judgment is the authority, or the hierarchy that's listed on the "church" bulletin is the authority. So they try to apply things. "Well,

what does that mean, then? Does that mean I can't ask any questions about his sermon because that would be 'touching God's anointed'? People are just caught in this world because they are not members of one another. They don't have any way to relate the flow of blood from one member to another that carries the nutrients from the hand to the eye to the foot and around and around.

Appreciate...And Live It Out

Here are two things for you. If God has given you a chance to have something organic where you can apply the Scriptures in their fullness without all these weird contradictions of whole chapters that don't even apply, *really* appreciate that. Take 1Cor. 12 for example. Being "members of one another" makes no sense at all when you are "attending" something. "When one part suffers the whole body suffers." There is no way that scripture means anything! Or "devoted to the apostles' teaching, counting none of their possessions as their own"—that stuff makes no sense to the average person that goes to a religious facility. So first of all, appreciate it if God has given you a chance to live out the fullness of God's counsel, because that is not a privilege that everyone, no matter how sincere they are, has available to them. There are better people than us that do not have the ability to live out the Scriptures. They see the 3-dimensional object in the calendar, but they can't get there. There is no way to apply Mat. 18—to tell two or three witnesses and then talk to the Church about it. It's impossible! They can't find two or three witnesses that aren't going to slander the guilty party behind his back and laugh about it as soon as they do. So then to "tell it to the whole Church" is an absolutely idiotic thought. Most people can't even do what Jesus commanded them to do. It's impossible.

So appreciate it if God has given you the privilege, and *live it out*. Do something about it. God takes it away from people that won't use it and gives it to somebody who will. That's what Jesus said. "I'm going to take the kingdom away from you and give it to those that will bear its fruit." If you are just going to sit on it and not live it out, God will take it away from you and give it to someone who will bear its fruit. A Scripture I was looking at prayerfully the other night was that God has ransomed others that we might live (Isa. 43). He has *killed others* that we might live. Others have died that we might live. That's a serious, serious thought. He will take the Kingdom away from us if we won't bear its fruit and do something about it. That's point number one—to

realize and act on what God has given you the ability to live in and don't be lazy about it and bury it.

By His Grace...Gifts for a Foundation

The second thing is to ask God that His Kingdom would fill the earth. Ask that everyone who sincerely calls on His name, whether in Africa or Brazil or someplace else—wherever it may be—will have a chance to live it out. They won't be caught living in that 2-dimensional world and just gazing into the third dimension, but unable to touch it. Ask God that He would grant, by His favor, the gifts that are necessary to lay the foundations to make that possible. We are back to gifts again, aren't we? Knowledge won't get you there. If you took all the knowledge about what the Church is supposed to be organically and gave it to the most committed Christians, they would not be able to do anything with it apart from the gifts that make that possible. Even the most sacrificial and wonderful Christians that you could ever imagine, with the most marvelous maturity and character would not be able to pull it off. That's an amazing thought. Knowledge does not equal maturity. Knowledge does not equal giftedness. Knowledge will not allow a person to fulfill their destiny. Only gifts do that. Knowledge doesn't do that. I want to restate that, because you need to understand the nature of this unseen Kingdom.

Imagine if you took the very best Christians in the world, the most committed who know their Scriptures, who pray three hours a day, and who love people sacrificially with everything within them. They never utter a negative attitude or thought. They are worshipful, filled with joy, loving with all their heart in every area, and you can't even find a weakness because they are so close to God. Put fifty people like that together and you will not be able to come up with a body of believers out of those fifty totally committed people. They will not be able to be a people that are "joined and knit together by every supporting ligament." You cannot have it by commitment or knowledge or any such thing as that. It only comes through gifts. Is that something that everyone realizes? Does everyone recognize that fact?

Katie: Are you meaning that if they are all hands it doesn't constitute a body? I may not be following you....

Mark: I am saying there are certain gifts that allow Foundation, that allow all the parts to work together. Just to put it in plain English, Eph. 2 says that the Foundation is that of the apostles and prophets.

Now, let's say you have hands, eyes, ears, mouths, and feet. You take all the parts of the body and put them all in one place, but you don't have those two gifts (apostles and prophets). You will not have a functional body, because the hand won't know how to connect to the forearm, as it says in Eph. 4. It says that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers for the "mending together," the equipping of the saints. The word in the Greek is "*katartidzo*" and it means, "mending together." It has to do with setting a broken bone, for example, and putting it in the right place. The word "*katartidzo*" is the word for putting two members together. That is the literal Greek word that God chose there. That means that if the parts of the body are all going to fit together in the right way and then have the life to function together, there are a couple of particular gifts that allow that to happen. If you put all the same members together without those specific gifts to mend them together, you won't get a oneness of compacted life no matter how mature and desirous they are of having that.

One of the mysteries of the gospel of the Kingdom is that a whole lot of this stuff is related to giftedness, not to commitment, "lest any man boast." Commitment is something you can do. You can develop commitment by obeying God. Of course, you need God's Grace and His Spirit to know what to obey and to have the strength to obey it, so even then you can't boast very much, can you? But apart from all of that, it says in Eph. 4 that He "gave gifts to men," and the word "gift" there is the same word that's translated "grace" in other places, and it's unmerited favor. That's how we normally define grace, is "unmerited favor." In other words, there are things that God does that aren't earned. They are gifts that God bestows that aren't related to commitment or maturity. It's related to His sovereign intentions and what He wants to accomplish in a certain time and place. So He bestows gifts "as He wills," the Scripture says. Depending on what and how and when He wants to do it, He pours out His gifts in order to accomplish His purposes. Commitment is not the same thing as gifts. It's *the gifts* that are necessary to compact the body together and allow it to be an organism, rather than a bunch of committed members all in one place trying to figure out how to look like a body.

I could give you some examples over the years and across the cities, as several have come to mind tonight while we have been reading. But just suffice it to say that *all of this is very large and very related to God's sovereign purposes and gifts*. It's very important that we discern the

body and see these things that God has done and respond to them with the right kind of heart toward them, as well as ask God for His sovereign intervention in other cities and places.

“Commitment” Won’t Do It

Neal: I can feel some of it, but could you paint a picture of what that would look like? You may not have words for it right now, but what if there are fifty people who are totally committed, but there’s just no oil to lubricate life. The people are intelligent enough and care enough that they ought to be able to understand each other, but misunderstandings and hurt feelings are constantly there. The communication just doesn’t work, and for some reason the thing just isn’t clicking, though it doesn’t appear to be anybody’s fault directly. Everybody’s trying hard to make it work. It’s almost like it’s under the Babylonian babble curse, with this inability to really work together in a cohesive way. You can feel the anarchy of the thing, even though the players seem admirable.

Mark: You are right on the money. Here’s an example of that very thing. Let’s say some people are together some place and one man says something about how God is going to have a “triumphant Church in the last days.” He makes this statement, and to him it brings life and there is purpose and power in that, and he’s excited about it. It brings vision and motivation to him and everybody else to lay down their lives for others. Then there’s this other person, who is totally committed to Jesus, and totally desirous of seeing God’s will brought out on the earth. There’s not a negative thought in this other person’s mind in terms of there being a triumphant Church. But he, with his set of experiences, thinks to himself, “Oh, I bet he means dominion theology. We are going to have a utopia on the earth, and Christians are going to hold all the offices, and we are going to eliminate taxes, and everybody is going to do good for one another. There is going to be a Christian utopia. That’s what he means by a triumphant Church.”

Well, the first guy didn’t mean that at all! But that’s all the second guy could hear. Both are sincere, so the second guy brings that up: “Are you trying to say dominion theology?” And the first guy says, “No, no, no!” And everyone listening says, “Dominion theology? What’s that?” And he chimes in with, “Well, dominion theology is when...” All of a sudden, he’s on a roll, and the heart behind what the first guy said is gone. Now we don’t have motivation to lay down our lives for

each other; we are just brighter about what dominion theology is. All because they never heard of dominion theology, and though they both really cared, the heart behind the lifeblood that was flowing through us is gone. A few minutes earlier, we were motivated to lay down our lives that Jesus might come back for His Bride. Now all of a sudden, all we can think about is, “Some people believe in dominion theology, but we don’t. That’s not what we think about.” And our heart has been stolen, it’s gone. Our connectedness isn’t there.

That’s what happens when it’s not really the Body of Christ. The gifts haven’t laid the foundation in such a way that the parts can be mended—*“katartidzo”*—mended or joined together so that it flows. We have all these millions of things come up in our heads and we can’t help it. It’s not that we are not committed or that we don’t love, it’s just that we can’t help it. It just keeps coming up. We can’t get connected. We can’t feel together as one, the way we need to feel.

I’m glad you began that illustration, because that’s exactly what I was saying. Fifty, or five thousand totally committed people, far beyond anything we’ve known, *still could not be the body of Christ apart from the gifts that allow the parts to connect together*. It could be the bionic man with the best parts in the universe, and it still won’t be as much life as could be in ten people who don’t know their Bibles worth a hoot. It’s God, through His gifts, who allows those ten people to be connected one to another, and truly love each other. He allows people to truly feel the suffering and rejoicing that the other ones feel, and like Melchizedek and Abraham to be able to sense things between each other that aren’t even being said. When one part suffers, the whole body suffers—they feel it together. Well, that comes from a foundation that comes from gifts, not from commitment or knowledge or desire. No matter how hard we try, confusion happens. The tower-of-Babel chaos happens apart from God’s grace being poured out and this foundation issue. It’s just a marvelous, miraculous act of God’s grace that allows it to be anything other than that tower-of-Babel, competing knowledge sort of thing.

I can think of one practical example of that. One time a couple just showed up when the whole Church was together and we were listening to a book on cassette tape. We were all very aware of the fact that this particular book had a few things of a New Age flavor or something. In the novel, there’s this guy roaming around from one “church” building to another, being a do-gooder and making everyone feel better about themselves. He confounds them with his special kind of wisdom, but

he doesn't ever join anything. We all see the error of that. None of us would do that, right? You would all see the error in your personal life if you were to go around from building to building and just say nice things and then drift away. We know that isn't what God wants, and that wasn't why we were listening to that tape. It wasn't to talk everyone into being drifters and hot shots that say witty things and then vanish off into the sunset. That wasn't why we were listening to it. We all see the error of that lack of commitment to personal lives.

So this couple showed up on that particular evening, and they felt some compulsion to have something to say. I forget what it was about exactly, but it had to do with the realm of psychology. It was thrown in the middle of everything with, "Well, I'd like to say something about that." And because they were disconnected from the life of the body, the very thing that we've been talking about, happened. Everybody except for that couple could feel the life of what it was that we were doing there. They were disconnected from that and all they could think of was the fact that one of their dads had written a book on New Age sort of stuff, and the other was an expert in trying to expose psychology as being American witchcraft. So the thoughts in their heads were their "ministries" and their experiences. They weren't connected to the body of Christ in any way, so all they could talk about were the first things that popped into their minds. They were on a kind of witch hunt of, "How can I find things where my 'ministry' can come out?" and they were disconnected. They didn't feel what we felt when we were listening to that tape. All they could hear was the chaos of the errors of it, which none of us cared about. We didn't pay any attention to it. We didn't even feel a need to qualify it, because we were grabbing the life out of it, with no acknowledgement of the other junk. But that's all they could think about.

Not a Pep Rally...

That's what happens when you are not part of the Body of Christ in a connected way. That's all anybody can do. They just do their best to survive with what they know, trying to help each other and trying to get as much out of it as they can. They eat the meat and spit out the bones, and try to survive as best they can. They find someone to lead a pep rally, and get them all excited about the latest program so they can act as if they are one until the program gets old. Then they think they've had a pretty good experience with "church." That's about as much as you can get out of it, is human leadership, human motivation

and human pep rallies that get you excited about the program until the program falls apart. You get a rush of adrenalin that feels like the body for a short amount of time and you can be satisfied that at least you are in as good a place as any other place.

But there is a whole lot of difference between being connected to the Body of Christ and getting an adrenalin rush from a new “preacher,” or new program, or new building, or an exciting special on Sunday morning. Someone sings a great song that you feel good about, or you went forward for the altar call and it gives you an adrenalin rush, and then you’re back to your old life. Frankly, that’s the way most people live. It’s not because they want to. Some do, I suppose. But the fact is, we really need to cry out to the Lord of the harvest for the gifts that make genuine, committed Christians be able to be one—members of one another. Those gifts are sadly lacking on this planet, and so committed people wander aimlessly, trying to find something that they can connect to. They’re trying to find something where they don’t have to kind of hang out in a place and where their conscience isn’t violated every time they walk in the door.

God deserves better than that, and *He will have it*. Part of our job is to explore what He has given us. As I said before, He will take it away from us if we won’t bear its fruit on an individual basis. You have to give your life away to it and submit to what we’ve been reading here, in terms of connecting your life to others. You see Christ in it and you *act* that way. If you hold yourself back and won’t do that, then it will be taken away from you and given to one who will bear its fruit. Secondly, care about your brothers and sisters around the world. Beg God that they would be able to know what it’s like to be members of one another in this present age...for the testimony of Jesus as well as for their own spiritual growth.

A Taste And a Hope, But...

Neal: Most of you may have read “The Day of Small Beginnings,” including the epilogue at the end. One of the reasons the epilogue exists is this thing we are talking about now. We didn’t want to lead people on into something that’s unrealistic. What’s pictured in the novel is this small group of people that are getting to know each other and who are moving forward and connecting with each other in a dynamic way. While what is depicted in the book isn’t called a church, even what *is* depicted, realistically, is impossible. You may remember detecting

an unquantifiable specialness that existed between the half a dozen members. That wasn't really possible just because they were kind, and hard-working and committed people, though that was commendable. There wasn't anything wrong with them; it's just that they needed an element that wasn't depicted in the book. So we just said at the end, "Let this inspire you, but please know that it ain't possible to do it the way we depicted it. There are some other things that are mandatory to get there."

Letting the Davidson's and the Stone's and George Archer experience a dynamic of life is meant to inspire the people who read that book. It's to let people know that there is hope for the future out there. That Christianity can really function and it's not a myth. The people in the novel began to experience some of that life. George and Wayne and the others get to know each other and they have something unique and special in their lives together. But their qualities and their gifts alone would not have made what is depicted about their lives possible. It is not realistic. That they would even stay together and be friends for very long is highly unlikely in most places! You might find some people with common things, people clustered here and there. But the warmth and the life, the heartbeat, the blood that was holding these people together in the book and drawing them toward each other, and that's making them fall in love with each other isn't possible without the things that are said in the epilogue. And that is, that apart from giftedness (which these guys didn't have), they couldn't live the way we depicted. They can't get there from here.

Can you see the picture of what is there and feel in your bones that they can't even really get to where they were? Can you feel it? I lived in another city for a time, and the level depicted in the book would exceed anything that ever existed where we lived. And though I liked most everybody there, it was not the level depicted in the book. It was much below that, and the strange misunderstandings and the inability to communicate just didn't make sense to me. I would think, "I like this person a lot and am positive they love God and want to go forward." And, "I like this other person too, who wants to go forward with God." Yet these situations would come up where they'd each have their thoughts about what the other said, and neither was right, and they'd be stuck at an impasse about it. Again. Why do they keep getting at an impasse? Something was missing in their ability to relate to each other that was bigger than themselves. And I don't want to make it seem like it was just those two people who were misunderstanding each other. I,

too, would get confused in the mix. There would be this tossing to and fro of the whole thing, trying to sort out the normal issues of life. Life could get a lot more complicated than it had to be.

You could mistakenly think that twenty people who loved God and cared about each other could probably have a pretty good time together indefinitely in a city. What would keep them from doing that? It ought to be a blast, right? Things don't come to mind that would keep them from that. Sure, it'd be better than being a pagan. But the Life that would be missing would be obvious if you were in the middle of it.

What Can We Do??

Faye: I have a question that probably has a really obvious answer, but it's about the fifty people we were talking about a while ago, that acknowledged and cared and loved. But there was that lack that they had. We've met people like that and I just am wondering, what can we do about it? It reminds me of the scene in "The Bride" video. The Bride had kind of blown it, and she was talking to the Holy Spirit and she put her hands on her waist and said, "What are *we* going to do about it?" She had that spunky kind of, "What are we going to *do* about it?" As I'm listening to all of this, I know it's right. So what if we know fifty people like that and they come to a place where they realize there is something lacking? What are they to do about that, or what do *we* do about it? How's it going to change?

Mark: There are two elements. One is to pray to the Lord of the harvest for laborers. And the second is, "Go ye therefore. The gospel of the Kingdom will go into every nation and then the end shall come." It says it will *go*—not just emerge in every nation and the end shall come. The gospel of the Kingdom *will go* into every nation. There simply is just work to do, so we ask God. The context of the commission was, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest, and now therefore, I am sending you." We ask God to provide what He needs to provide, and we also do whatever we can do in response to Him. We spend ourselves laboring in the vineyard. Does that answer your question?

Faye: Somehow my mind wants to make it more complicated than what it simply is! I guess that's because the so-called "church" situations make it complicated. I know it is the simplicity of what you just said...

Others Reap the Benefits Too...

Neal: I was wondering whether it is mandatory that the two gifts of apostle and prophet be in a certain locale for it to function on a true Foundation, or if the locale can just be in connection with those gifts. How did that work with Paul in an age where staying connected was a whole lot tougher than it is now? They couldn't deal with something in 24 hours like we could now, almost anywhere in the world.

Mark: There are people we know in other places who enjoy many of the benefits of the Foundation here, even though you couldn't necessarily point at vast amounts of knowledge, maturity, or giftedness. Even though challenges come up for them, there is a general sense of connectedness with us, even if we don't talk to them for several weeks on end. Maybe we don't have a huge amount of contact with them, but there is a sense of connectedness there. They do not feel an unhealthy reliance like, "Oh, I don't think we can do anything without asking someone in your city." It's nothing like that. They have a very colorful life in other places, with a thousand things going on that we don't know anything about, and don't need to know about. But there is just a sense of overall connectedness where we really are one with them. In spite of a lack of communication for huge amounts of time, and lack of knowing the details that are going on (and there are many colorful situations people are juggling at any given time), there is a mutual love we have with them. There's not only respect, but also connectedness.

We've talked about this in various ways and that is, that with a foundation of teaching, what you end up with is common knowledge. With a foundation of evangelism, you end up with a common desire to save the lost. If shepherding is the foundation, you have a common sense of well-being or being well fed. But those aren't the foundations that allow you to be joined and knit together by every supporting ligament. The foundation that allows us truly to be connected to each other are those other two gifts. And while those don't have to be in every location, as Paul certainly wasn't in every location, there was a connection there spiritually. They had "10,000 tutors but not many fathers." Paul could go for nine months at a whack without talking to them, and still he referred to himself with a clear conscience by the Holy Spirit, as being their father. They saw it that way and responded that way to him even though he had been gone for months on end. Even after being slandered behind his back after he left, there was still a bond there that wasn't just based on teaching. "After all, Paul told

us a whole bunch of stuff.” There were 10,000 tutors, but not many fathers. There was a kind of bond there to his gift. He wrote to those same people, “I, as a wise master builder, laid a foundation of Jesus Christ, but now each of you must be very careful how you build on the foundation.” He was a father and master builder or architect—a foundation layer with them.

And that was totally different than giving them a whole bunch of teaching and information. As valuable as teaching might have been, that isn’t what allowed them to be one with each other. *Teaching didn’t provide that, but the gift that he had did.* Even after being gone for probably nine months from the time he left till he wrote the first letter, he could still refer to himself as a father. He could say to them without fear of contradiction or objection or accusation or arrogance that he was a master builder and had laid the foundation there. There was a genuine father/son, father/daughter connection there. It was a live dynamic of, “We are one” rather than, “We owe him because he gave us information.” And so his gift and his oneness with them allowed them to function and respond out of his gift, even though he wasn’t there for huge blocks of time, and they had very little information to work with.

Very Rich Truths

These are all pretty rich biblical truths we are talking about. If each of you, as individuals were all part of various different religious organizations around the country and everybody just showed up here for one night to talk about these things, I would feel sorry for you. I’d feel sorry because you would be going back to that 2-dimensional world where you wouldn’t be able to apply any of this, but all of it would still be true. All of this about apostolicity, or whatever you want to call it, and how the Body of Christ works together with authority and being one would still be true. And the *truth* about being members of one another and how our gifts relate would *all* still be *TRUE!*

The truth about it is independent of your experience of it. Regardless of whether you ever have or ever will experience them, or wherever you might live, all of these things are rich truths from God’s Heart. It’s the way He ultimately wants things to be, as the gospel of the Kingdom “goes into every nation, and then the end will come.” These are very real things. Forget about your experience of Him or lack thereof. Wherever a person might live, we need to cry out for these

things in Jesus' name. This is the oil that makes possible these different commands that God gave and all these different descriptions of things. It all flows together, makes sense and begins to work when the gifts are in place. But it's very awkward and difficult, if not impossible, apart from that. This is something to ask God for in its fullness in every city on earth.

Neal: Father, the things that we are talking about are much more important to You than they are to us. It's hard sometimes in our own hearts to sift through our fascination with new ideas versus our genuine love to see Your purposes thrust forward in the earth. But we beg You in the name of Your Son to look past our weaknesses, and our ability to apprehend these things or to understand them, or even appreciate them. We ask that You would look past those things in the name of Your Son and stretch out Your hand. We invite Your government. We want the government to be on Your shoulders and we invite it. We invite Your authority and want to be in submission to that authority. Please, for the sake of the scattered lambs that will never have any way at all to have fellowship to a significant degree with You or each other, we beg You to pour out Your gifts on the earth. We ask that Your House could be built, that people could know You. We ask that the chaos and confusion could be over and that the lonely could be placed in families and that lives could be restored and brought back together. None of these things can happen apart from You pouring out this kind of grace that we have talked about tonight.

Please burn up the petty, stupid things that occupy too much of our lives that would keep us from embracing Your vision for the earth—the reason that You built the earth. Please don't be forced to tear the Kingdom from us and give it to those who will bear its fruit. We want ourselves to do that, to live lives worthy of the calling, regardless of how well we understand the calling. "Who is sufficient for such things?" as Paul said. Certainly we are not, but certainly it has also been Your desire to do it with real people. We would like to be those people. And also others—whatever and whoever—it doesn't matter to us. We don't have to get any ego out of being some instrumental agent in this being accomplished. You deserve better than that. There will not be a demonstration of the life of Your Son apart from these gifts being able to function. So because that is more important to You than it ever has or will be to any of us, we ask You to do that, for Your own name's sake.

To See the Body of Christ—This Is War!

Mark: There's a war that is waged over all these things, and I'm sure Nee felt a pinch of that in writing a book like this relating to authority. One of the places the battle is waged is over pride, ego, and ambition—that sort of thing. Because we don't get to choose what our gifts are. Paul said, "I was the least of the saints, the chief of sinners, and yet I am what I am; therefore, I have to do what I have to do. It's by God's grace. I didn't choose it, I didn't pick it—but don't get in my way. I am going to work harder than all the rest. Get out of my way. I didn't choose it, I didn't deserve it, but I am what I am, and I have to. So get out of my way."

"The apostles testified with great power, and great grace was upon them all." That's not "generic Christianity" like democracy, is it? "They were all together, devoted to the apostles' teaching." Right? In Samaria, Phillip brought a lot of people to Jesus. Then Peter and John show up. Why? It's because even though Phillip was one of the seven, and referred to as an evangelist in Acts 21, his gift didn't have to do with joining and knitting together. He certainly participated in the gathering, yet there were other gifts *necessary* to help put the pieces together. Peter and John knew that.

Think about it. They laid the money "at the apostles' feet." That doesn't sound like generic Christianity, like democracy, does it? So again, let's start looking at stuff like that and pretend we are all in this room, gathered from fourteen different cities for one night just to discuss some biblical topics. Let's take a hard look at that. What is going to get in the way of being able to really embrace that kind of Christianity? You can hear someone saying, "I ain't layin' no money at nobody's feet! You can't make me. He is just a mere man like I am!"

Remember that Peter was rebuked in public for being prejudiced against gentiles ten or fifteen years after he became an apostle. He still had flaws that required even public rebuke at times. But that didn't in any way stop the fact that Jesus gave him the keys to the Kingdom. That was real. Flip two chapters over and he gave the keys to the other eleven too. These were apostolic keys that we are talking about, and that's why the apostles "testified with great power and great grace was upon them all."

Realistically and biblically, there is something extremely important about those two gifts, and the apostolic gift in particular. And pride is a major enemy of that whole idea because no one wants to lay money

at anyone's feet! No one wants to be devoted to a mere man's teaching or let them testify with great power, because someone is going to call you names if you do. Right? Someone is going to start calling you names and you will have to deal with that if you lay money at the feet of a mere man. You're going to have to deal with something in your own heart about that, no doubt, just like they had to back then. "You're devoted to what?!" Well, nowadays we say, "to the apostles' teaching" and it sounds kind of religious and nobody thinks about it. But what if you say you are devoted to *Paul and Peter's* teaching, you lay siege to it and you lay money at *Peter and John's* feet? You choose to bring Ananias in front of Peter, to let him handle this thing. "Well, why don't you just handle it yourself?"

I'm just saying that we are not going to be able to look at life in an American, democratic mindset and truly find everything God wants for His people. We are not going to be able to help other people in our short lifetimes if we are not able to overcome some things in our hearts that our American mindsets have injected into us—things that repulse our pride and our carnal nature. Would you have been able to lay money at Peter's feet, or John's feet? Would you have been able to do that? If not, you just cut yourself out of the only work of God on planet earth during that era because you had too much ego for it. You just didn't understand and you just didn't like it. Or you didn't want to be devoted to a mere man's teaching, because someone might call you names for following a man, or whatever.

I'm talking in extremes here, but it's because I'm trying to rattle your cage. I'm trying to make you think this through as if you are coming together from fourteen different cities just for the evening to think about some biblical topics. If you can't overcome these barriers, you are never going to experience what they experienced. Let's say Dorcas dies. Do you go to the next village to get Peter, or do you take care of it yourself, like Korah? "We all have the Holy Spirit, so why don't we take care of it? We don't want to exalt a mere man by getting Peter from the next village." Okay. She stays dead then. God has His ways of doing things and we have to find out what that is, and work with it. We can't have too much ego in it, or be too afraid of the opinions of men to hold onto it. We can't justify it or push it under the rug or try to excuse it with a bunch of pretty words. Did you or did you not lay money at Peter and John's feet? YES, I DID! If you don't have the heart and the courage to do what they did, you are not going to have what they had.

I don't know how that would apply, if we were fourteen people from fourteen different cities. I'm just saying it is the mindset that is not afraid of man. We are willing to see the Body of Christ the way God sees it and respond to it the way He responds to it. We have the ability to lay money at Peter and John's feet, and at the same time we can also see them be rebuked publicly for being prejudiced against gentiles. Both are valid, and both are real. You have to be able to handle both of those things; otherwise you will not have what they had.

You have to acknowledge that there is authority in the gifts of the Body of Christ, and the different parts of the body have different gifts and need to be responded to in different situations for different purposes. If you can't live with that, then you will be a generic Christian, with not much beyond generic Christianity in your lifetime. Work really hard on discerning the body the way they did and responding to it accordingly, because there are a lot of riches in there. That's where the keys to the Kingdom are. I can't emphasize enough how important all of this is.

Let the Eyes Do the Seeing

Zach: You said to “work really hard at it,” and I'm wondering if you had any practical thoughts in mind? Like laying the money at the apostles' feet? What do we need to work on so God can have a body of people that He can draw upon so His Kingdom can “fill the earth,” like you were talking about earlier? I could use some practical examples of how in today's context, we could resist, or disrespect, or not recognize the eye or the ear.

Mark: There are two ways I can get myself in trouble in not discerning the body. I'll use the example of the eyes. One is, I judge what the eye says it sees, because I'm not an eye and I don't see it. I don't take into account that maybe I don't see. So that's one way we can do great harm to ourselves, is to sit in judgment of what other parts of the body are functioning in. There may be evidence of anointing or fruitfulness—evidence that it really is an eye. I could have judgment and skepticism in my heart about that and let that hang there and hang there, “Well, I don't see it. Maybe it's not really there even though the eye says it sees it. Since I don't see it, maybe they don't either.” That lack of discernment of the body comes in the form of judging others that have different gifts than we do. Withdrawing our heart and our loyalty and love, and pulling back away from that in judgment is one way we can bring poverty to ourselves.

There's another way we can hurt ourselves seriously in the area of discerning the body. It's when we are in a situation where we really need to see, but we are not inclined to go ask an eye. We just try to see for ourselves. "I'm a hand. I have the Holy Spirit, too," Korah says. "I have need of nothing. I don't need you." So we live independently. We figure we have all the gifts, and other people have all the gifts too, in other measures. "I really don't need them. My hand can't see very well, but it can see enough. And my hand can't smell very well, but it can smell okay. And maybe somebody can see or smell a little better, but I can smell and I can see well enough." And so we function without *observably* needing each other...very much. Maybe something will come up, and in a token way we ask around. Or maybe your wife says, "Did you ask anyone?" "Oh, all right, I'll go ask someone." But the pressures are *external* rather than feeling the need. It's not because I *know I need* those parts of the body.

So the first way to get in trouble is to judge the eye for what it does see because I don't really see it myself. I judge and have an uncooperative, arrogant, critical heart, and I'm not loyal to the fact that they can see. And secondly, I don't express my need for eyes. I don't function in a mutually dependent sort of way with the other gifts, and therefore end up being somewhat self-sufficient.

As far as the example of laying money at the apostles' feet—that sort of thing is almost one of those examples that is irrelevant, because there are 10,000 other ways that it could express itself in any given month. That one may never come up in 100,000 years, but the spirit of being able to *feel and see* that and respond to it without any pride—that's really the issue. It's being able to connect with whatever they were connecting with. That's what allowed them to do that.

Bruce: I'm wondering...what if a person isn't judging what the eye says it sees, but judges the eye itself, questioning if it even is an eye? Is that related to what you're talking about? Everyone else can acknowledge the eye and is very content to follow the eye's seeing, but someone says, "Well, I don't even think you *are* an eye." Is that different? That's really bad.

Mark: Most people in that situation are hypocritical, because they would also say, "I know that you are an eye, but I just don't want to *think* you are an eye." It's as if they would acknowledge the reality of it, but they just choose to ignore any responsibility to it. That's usually the way it works itself out. "I know it's an eye, but I don't like the

way it's an eye, so I refuse to acknowledge it as an eye. So I'm not responsible to respond to it as an eye." I've never seen anyone function in such a way as to not even recognize that it is an eye—it's that they *act* like it isn't an eye.

Lone Eyeball?? Or the BIGGER Picture!!

We're saying all this in specific terms, but analogies are rarely perfect. If you look at it that way, 1Cor. 12 would lead you to believe that a person is an eye and an eye alone, and that it's the only eye. It's not really like that. Philip was an evangelist. And Timothy was to do the work of an evangelist. But there's no evidence that Timothy was an evangelist. Everybody has a responsibility to an extent to be a teacher, right? In Hebrews, "You all ought to be teachers by now." And yet, those of you that are teachers are "judged more severely." So obviously, not everyone is a teacher. In fact, Paul went so far as to say, "Are all apostles? No. How about teachers? No." *Some* are given to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers—some. But, "You all ought to be teachers by now." So the analogy doesn't hold so airtight that a person is an eye and only an eye. They may have other gifts. And they may do other things that aren't even gifts, but they just come out of a responsibility and commitment to Jesus in maturity. Also, the odds are that they are not going to be the only one that could ever see anything. That's just not going to happen.

The bigger picture is that somehow we recognize that there are different kinds of glory (1Cor. 15). You can see that with the stars and even with the plants and animals. We all have Jesus, who has all of the gifts, inside each of us, and yet there are different kinds of glory. Some things are touched in each of us that stand out, above and beyond the normal level of maturity or beyond how far it would have gone just out of development. We all ought to be prophetic people (Acts 2). And yet some are prophets. I want to round that out to say it's still not a democracy—God is very able to cover His bases. He's going to make sure we have multiple testimonies available to us, and other things to where we can see together in a broader way. It's not just an individually-based sort of thing.

In the corporate life, an eye has blood vessels and other parts connected to it. Think about hand-eye coordination. The ability of my eye and my hand to work together is the only thing that allows me to eat and the only thing that saves my life day in and day out when I am driving. All

of it's very interconnected; so, in that sense, my hand can "see." My eyes apart from my hands have very little, if any value in many situations. It's all connected together and we need to see that. It's important that we not get into the realm of, "Janie has the gift of mercy and she is the only one who does, so put her on the mercy throne. If anyone ever needs any mercy, go to Janie. Surely don't go to Susie because she doesn't have that gift." It's just not like that! Jesus definitely has something that is bigger than any one person in their individual gifts. All feed together to make the whole thing. A gift isn't isolated from the whole. It only even exists and has value as it is connected to the whole. If you pull it apart, it will have little, if any value at all. There is no reason to applaud an eyeball. It flat has stinkin' little to no value, sitting on the table by itself! It is utterly worthless. You've got to see the big picture as we're talking about these things. We've been talking about gifts and their necessity, and authority as it relates to gifts, but keep it within the big picture. And that picture is, that it is *still* a part of the body. Paul covered both of those bases in 1Cor. 12. He said, "You can't say I have no need of you. On the other hand, make sure that you don't get cocky about it."

Neal: After all, what are apostles anyway? It's simply a tool—another tool in your toolbox—if you will use it. It doesn't have independent, intrinsic value sitting on the table.

Mark: Very important point. It has no independent, intrinsic value. No gift does.

Neal: There is a way to live horizontally and view each other after the flesh. I can look at Bill and think I know all of what there is to know. I know his background, his personal history, what he likes and dislikes, where he lives, the jokes he tells and so on. Therefore I have extracted everything I can get from Bill. That's a human way of viewing him, but there is a way to treasure the fact that God has made an investment in him. If Bill has put his hope in Messiah and Christ lives in him, then there is a sunset inside of him that is mine! And it's everybody else's too! Somehow it's getting past the external Bill and digging into the deposit that's *in* Bill. There's God in Bill, and I want to find that, because I like God.

Mark: And it's not like a lockbox or vault where you go in and get the thing that's in Bill and then take it home with you. It's more like a power source that you plug your cord in to and you continue to draw power from it as long as the cord is plugged into their heart. But

when you pull the plug out, you cease to get anything out of it. You don't retain any power just because you were plugged in at one time. It's only as far as you are currently plugged in that you receive what they are and who they are and what God has done in them. It's not something you go get and now you have it. It's something you plug into, and stay plugged into, if you really want it.

The simplest summary of all this is just to recognize what God has chosen to do as it relates to living through the Son, through the many members of His Son. Recognize that fact and live that way. Act like that with your mornings, your afternoons, your evenings, your conversations, and with your choices and decisions. Believe what God has said about what He has done with the people around you. He's made them members of His Son, and therefore gifted with who He is and the various workings of His personality and His gifts. Live that way. Believe that. Discern the body and live that way as you make your choices about the stuff that you allow in your head and your heart and what you have in your mind to do and not do. Believe that and live that way, and we will see some pretty good stuff come out. 😊