

RESTORING THE FIVEFOLD MINISTRY

Pastors or Elders for the Church Today

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Foreword

This book is not intended to be an argument but is an honest look at a Biblical plan for church government. The author would welcome any feedback and desires to hear any opposing view. Please provide your comments to the following questions and e-mail to the author's e-mail address:

- Why do you think the church today changed from a concept of multiple elders in the Bible to a single pastor concept?
- Is there New Testament support for having only one pastor in the church, while a church can have more than one of any of the other ministries in the fivefold ministry?
- Do you believe Ephesians 4:11 supports a fivefold or a fourfold ministry?
- Is there another form of church government that should be considered in place of either a single pastor form or a collegial eldership form of government?
- Why do you think pastors insist on being the sole authority in the local churches?
- Do you think it is possible for a group of men to govern a local church equally?
- Is there a difference between a *board*-run church and a church governed by elders?
- What is the scriptural difference between elders who may also have a ministry and a board of elders not properly ordained?

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An Introduction

*Take heed therefore unto your selves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,*¹ Paul says to the elders of the Ephesian church whom he has called to Miletus for a final conference. In this one verse, Paul summarizes the basic duty of the spiritual ministry which has oversight for God's flock. Guarding the flock and feeding the flock are the two main purposes of the overseer. But he precedes his instruction with a very strong admonition: "take heed therefore unto your selves".

Jesus himself recognized that the shepherds of the flock were always great targets for Satan's devices. He quoted the prophet Zechariah, "smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Zech 13:7 and Mark 14:27). Satan failed to smite the Great Shepherd with temptation and perhaps thought that death on Calvary would vanquish forever the Son of Man. While the resurrection of Jesus Christ has proven forever that Satan is a defeated foe, it has not stopped this determined adversary from doing everything in his power to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. Satan did learn this one truth, however, that sheep will indeed flee when the shepherd is smitten. When a sheep is separated from the shepherd, he becomes prey.

This book deals with a different aspect of spiritual leadership. There have been books written by the score that deal with the sins of the ministry. The failures of well-known preachers from Jim Bakker to Jimmy Swaggart have only spotlighted facts that we should all know well, that preachers are human and that a tall pedestal makes for a long fall. But the biggest reason for tragedy in ministry is not because of the personal sins of the individual minister but because the ministry itself has become

¹ Acts 20:28 KJV

something entirely different from that which God has ordained for His church.

First of all, preachers for the most part no longer *minister*. The calling of *ministry* has given way to the function of *administration*. If one wonders about why someone would want to become a bishop, elder, deacon, pastor—or whatever title one might choose—you have to ask the question, “Whose needs are being met?” The first principle of ministry was service, not to be served. When a vow of poverty includes the promise that your living will be generously provided, one has to wonder “whose needs are being met.” If the “ministry” entails having the spotlight, “whose needs are being met?” When it is normal to receive the praise of men, “whose needs are being met?” All the basic temptations are inherent in being a preacher. Fame, fortune, prestige, the adoration of men or women, the chance to perform—all of these can be seen to flourish in the pulpit today. The most difficult problem of all is the fact that the position of minister in the scheme of things today is one of “authority.” This was the very problem that Jesus warned about when he was defining the role of church leadership.

²⁵But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus’ basic pattern was *authority inverted*. How can this be? When we speak of church government, pastoral authority, and ministerial leadership, elders that rule, how do these things fit the idea of “minister”? It is impossible to understand the Lord’s meaning if one looks at “authority” in its natural context and adopts the normal meaning of authority to this term. That is exactly why Jesus pointed out to his disciples that His way was not the way that the world sees authority. “It shall not be so among you,” he said. The way to minister is as a servant.

When the Lord set up his kingdom, he established it with *his* principles of leadership in mind. For his model, he did not use the model

of a king as we know in Saul or David, but the model of a servant. He actually used the model of a king dethroned, Moses, who fled the life of pleasure in the palaces of Egypt to tend to sheep in the desert. But since most preachers today believe that Moses was a type of the pastor, it is very important to look deeply at the life of Moses to find exactly what shadow is being cast for the New Testament Church.

Moses was *not* a type of the pastor of the local church. Moses was a type of Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ alone. He was a king who fled Egypt. This was a preview of the fulfilled prophecy of Jesus Christ spoken by Matthew:

And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son (Matthew: 2:15).

Moses, like Jesus, was condemned to death while still a child. His name means “drawn from the water.” I find it interesting that Moses’ mother did indeed obey the edict of Pharaoh to cast her son into the Nile River. However, she put an ark under him. Moses was spared by God’s intervention, just as Jesus was spared by God’s intervention. In many ways, we can find parallels in the life of Moses with the life of Christ. We know that Moses prophesied concerning Jesus Christ,

The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Moses was a king who became a shepherd. Jesus was a king who also became a shepherd. The Bible speaks of Jesus Christ as being our “Chief Shepherd,”² but it is this typology that has also been misunderstood. Many ministers today have taken Moses as a type of the pastor of a local church rather than as a type of Jesus Christ, the one for whom this type was intended. Indeed, there is a type for the local pastors mentioned in the Old Testament. That type is elders. The elders of Moses, as recorded in Numbers 11, are a type of the local pastors of the church insomuch as they are to receive the same spirit as their chief shepherd. Notice how this scripture reads:

² 1 Peter 5:4 KJV

And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease (Numbers 11:25).

In the course of this small book, I hope to provide enough scripture to help the church to understand the principle of “eldership”. The early church did not operate with a single person fulfilling an ecclesiastical role. There was no church with a pastor who had complete and total oversight of the local congregation. Instead there were only two offices, which could be filled from the local congregation, in the local church (Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3). It is important to understand that the *office* of elder (also known as “bishop,” Titus: 1:5–7, I Timothy: 3) or deacon is distinct from the *ministry* of Apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. A pastor may be an elder, but not all elders have the ministry (or gift) of pastoring.

Quoting from the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* under the topic, *Ministry*, we read:

It may be said generally that about the close of the 1st century every Christian community was ruled by a body of men who are sometimes called presbyters (elders), sometimes but more rarely bishops (overseers), and whom modern church historians are inclined to call presbyter-bishops. Associated with them, but whether members of the same court or forming a court of their own it is impossible to say, were a number of assistant rulers called deacons. The court of elders had no president or permanent chairman. There was a two-fold not a threefold ministry. During the 3rd century, rising into notice by way of geographical distribution rather than in definite chronological order, this twofold congregational ministry became threefold in the sense that one man was placed at the head of each community with the title of pastor or bishop (the titles are interchangeable as late as the 4th century at least). In the early centuries those local churches, thus organized, while they never lacked the sense that they all belonged to one body, were independent self-governing communities preserving relations to each other, not by any political organization embracing them all, but by fraternal fellowship through visits of deputies,

interchange of letters, and in some indefinite way giving and receiving assistance in the selection and setting apart of pastor.³

Also:

The uniquely Christian correlation of the three conceptions of leadership, service and “gifts”; leadership depended on service, and service was possible by the possession and recognition of special “gifts”, which were the evidence of the presence and power of the Spirit of Jesus within the community. The “gifts” gave the church a Divine authority to exercise rule and oversight apart from any special apostolic direction.

Regarding the threefold congregational ministry, Biblesoft says:

During the 2nd century the ministry was subject to a change. The ruling body of office-bearers in every congregation received a permanent president, who was called the pastor or bishop, the latter term being the commoner. The change came gradually. It provoked no strong opposition. By the beginning of the third century, it was everywhere accepted.⁴

When we seek to trace the causes why the college of elders received a president, who became the center of all the ecclesiastical life in the local church and the one potent office-bearer, we are reduced to conjecture. This only can be said with confidence, that the change began in the East and gradually spread to the West, and that there are hints of a gradual evolution.⁵

Jerome, one of the early church fathers, wrote,

A presbyter is the same as a bishop. And until there arose divisions in religion, churches were governed by a common counsel of presbyters. But afterward, it was everywhere decreed, that

³ *Ministry*, in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database, Biblesoft, 1996.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Lindsey, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 180, 183-85)

one person, elected from the presbyters, should be placed over the others.⁶

Basically, the first church operated on a local level with elders (also known as bishops) and deacons as the offices of the church. The offices were filled by men who had special ministerial gifts defined in Ephesians 4:11. An elder might be a pastor, or he might have the gift of evangelist. The Apostle Peter calls himself an elder (I Peter 5:1), not in the sense of an older man but in the sense of an elder who shepherds the flock. We shall look more at the office of the elder later. It appears that apostles, like Paul, Timothy, and Titus, filled a governing role but on a wider level than the local level. It might be speculated that the apostle “in the field,” though not necessarily subject to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, received recognition from them, as when Paul and Barnabas received the right hand of fellowship and were sanctioned by the Jerusalem body of elders.. (Acts 15, Galatians 2:9). Although it seems that this hierarchy of the Jerusalem Church, apostle, and elder is similar to that of the Catholic church of today, there are two major differences. One is the structure of government at the local level. The second is that the line goes from bottom to top, not top to bottom. The Jerusalem Church represented the foundation, not the roof. This again is *authority inverted*. There is only one person at the top level of authority, and that is Jesus Christ and He alone.

This principle is best understood if we recognize the principle of *ministerial gifts* described in Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church. I believe that the major hindrance to God’s ministry today is not sin, as grievous as this may be, but the lack of ministry operating as a “spiritual gift.” It is not hard to see how the ministry has become a vocation, occupation, or profession. The earliest colleges in America were primarily religious schools whose first and foremost mission was to prepare candidates for service in the ministry. One of the oldest professions known to mankind is that of priest or cleric. It is not that God did not intend for there to be such a vocation, but the duty of the Old Testament priest was usually fulfilled in the religious roles of ceremony. The New Testament brought about a different kind of ministry.

In reality, what has happened today is that the new wine has been poured into old bottles. This is true for the ceremony of the church. It

⁶ *Annotations on the Epistle to Titus*, as quoted by Dr. Woods on Episcopacy, p. 63.

is also true for the religious trappings, from the styles of worship to the ministerial offices. And in spite of how the “conservative” Christian wants to distance oneself from the “liberal” Christian, there are a lot of carryovers that only say that Christianity is a mingled and mixed multitude that still does not listen well to the Savior who leads us.

Before we begin our discussion of the ministries, allow me to discuss the crisis that exists in the church today. Although not seen by most ministers in evangelical churches as a crisis, the truth is that we have lost the power of the apostolic ministry. The ministerial gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 do not operate according to God’s plan. There is a high incidence of failure among preachers and teachers of the gospel, and for the most part the lack of true apostolic ministry only contributes to the worldly, powerless, and backslidden condition of the church today.