

THE NEW APOSTLES

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What does a modern Apostle look like? Is apostleship about authority? Or does it look more like fathering?

This article does not address the question of whether apostleship continues in our time, nor does it address the necessity of the "five-fold" ministry. Rather, these things are assumed. Paul gives no indication in Ephesians that a time will come when the five fold leadership gifts will no longer be needed.

The intention of this article is to contribute to discernment between the true and the false apostolic, and to move toward an understanding of the function and form of the apostolic gift in our day.

Poised at the millennium, we confront two critical challenges: how to address deep problems for which hierarchical leadership alone is insufficient and how to harness the intelligence and spirit of people at all levels of an organization to continually build and share knowledge. Our responses may lead us, ironically, to a future based on more ancient -- and more natural -- ways of organizing: communities of diverse and effective leaders who empower their organizations to learn with head, heart, and hand.

Peter Senge, Author of The Fifth Discipline.

I have always thought it unfortunate that so many books on leadership and gifting start at the top. Maybe this is inevitable: such books are usually written by gifted leaders, and like all of us, they are preoccupied with their own function!

At the same time leaders recognize that they have a catalytic place in the body. They are initiators, fire-starters and trail blazers. They are wise enough to recognize that without them the church will not move and grow and be equipped to respond effectively to the need of the moment.

The problem is that many discussions on gifting and apostleship neglect the context of leadership: the healthy and functioning body of Christ. In so doing, they also neglect the headship of the LORD. There is one body, and one head, and the function of authority in the body of Christ is to rightly connect individuals to the head so that the whole body may be built up (Eph. 4).

The point is this: God is renewing the foundation of the church in our day, not so that leaders can lead, but so that all the people of God can be released into the world to serve Him and to offer their lives as sacrifice to Him. It's not about leadership: it's about all of us realizing the stature of Christ (Eph. 4: 13).

Consider for a moment the current status of the church in North America: we are on the decline. What we are currently doing is not working. There are fewer believers this year in North America as a percentage of the population than there were last year. Furthermore, there are far fewer candidates for "the ministry." The kingdom growth crisis is also a leadership crisis.

It is leaders who bear the greatest responsibility in this failure. Leaders are often failing to hear from the Lord or failing to lead in the right direction, or they are more concerned with their own status and popularity than with the kingdom of God. The crisis we face in the church is a crisis of leadership.

True leadership must be for the benefit of the followers, not the enrichment of the leaders.

Robert Townsend – Up the Organization

How strange that at the same time as we hear much about apostolic renewal, most of what we see is business as usual. "If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always got." We desperately need change, and we need leaders who aren't afraid to move in new directions. Apostles break new ground: many of the new leaders will be apostolic.

Thank God for crises. Crises get us out of our comfort zones and force us to our knees. Every crisis is an opportunity. We have a new opportunity to turn to the Lord in dependence. We become open to change. Graham Cooke writes that, "When we become a prototype (pioneering church) and the Holy Spirit begins to move in power, we will also come into a different level of warfare." (A Divine Confrontation).

"In times of profound change, the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." Al Rogers

"Spiritual formation is the number one issue for the church. It doesn't immediately present itself as the major concern. But the loss of mission that plagues many churches is a direct result of not being shaped by the heart of God. The fact that we focus on creating members instead of missionaries grows from our lack of being captured by the heart of God for people." Reggie McNeal, author of A Work of Heart

THE CHARACTER OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

Although this discussion is about apostolic ministry, that isn't the primary interest of the Lord. The apostles are not the center of God's plan: His kingdom is at the center. The Lord wants to create and release an empowered people. (We'll talk more about this when we consider Nehemiah's calling.)

If we don't get this right, if we don't properly place apostles in the context of the building of the kingdom, then we also don't get the question of authority right. We all know that in our day authority is greatly abused. In some cases the abuses are obvious and result in great wounding. In many cases the abuses are less obvious: leaders who use their authority to build their own status and kingdoms generally do so in the name of the Lord. Many of these leaders are tremendously popular. In his recent book "Soul Survivor" Philip Yancey comments,

From the inside, as a journalist, I have watched a disturbing pattern in what we do to religious leaders today. We reward them with applause, fame, enticing new contracts, and a flurry of requests for speaking engagements and media appearances. We push our pastors to function as psychotherapists, orators, priests, and chief executive officers. When a leader shows unusual ability, we dangle the temptation of a radio show or TV program, complete with a fund-raising machine to float the organization. In short, we in the church slavishly copy the secular model of media hype and corporate growth. I wonder how much more effective our spiritual leaders would be if we encouraged them to take Monday as a day of silence for reflection, meditation and personal study? P. 167

How sad that the "success" of modern ministry is hand in glove with the death of the church in our culture. Too many modern "apostles" are more interested in building their own kingdoms than in building God's kingdom; the end result is fortress style churches which are almost irrelevant to the culture around them. Unfortunately, this is nothing new. In 1948 AW Tozer commented that, *"Promoting self under the guise of promoting Christ is currently so common as to excite little notice."*

Countless Christians have told me that after trying this model of church, that recipe of revival, riding this wave and catching the spirit that way, attending this "life changing seminar" and that "anointed conference" their lives and their churches are still dreadfully the same, and they are prepared to give up or just hold on for dear life.

As we consider the context of apostolic ministry, therefore, the first point I want to make is that it has NOTHING to do with popularity! Our modern marketing machines work extremely well, and those who can "tickle" itching ears and generally make us feel good about ourselves and our self-focused lifestyle will always draw a crowd.

Instead of the popular preaching circuit with its accolades, book tables and power point presentations, Paul characterizes apostolic ministry in two ways. First, the heart of the dynamic itself is the close link between the Spirit's power and present weakness. We are "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus might also be manifest in our mortal flesh." (2 Cor. 4:10) Gordon Fee comments that, "In Paul's view, knowing Christ means both knowing the power of His resurrection and participating in His sufferings (Phil.3:9-10). Indeed, one needs to know the former to embrace the latter." (Paul, the Spirit and the People of God, p.144).

The heart of apostolic service is a willingness to suffer for Christ and for His people. Leaders must often take unpopular stands; if they must risk their book and tape sales by doing so, they are far less likely to tell the whole truth. If they must oppose error at personal cost, or sacrifice their time when they are tired, they pay a cost for their service.

But it isn't only leaders who take unpopular stands; parents too must do this. Every father knows that he has gone through a stripping process in fathering where he has learned to give himself for his children, often at personal cost. Every mother who wakes up twice during the night to nurse her baby pays the cost of parenting in her body. Any time one must take an unpopular stand with a teenage daughter or son, one discovers that parenting isn't always glorious.

Paul characterizes apostolic ministry as parenting. "For if you have many tutors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers" (1 Cor. 4:15) Paul not only considers himself a father in Christ, but continually demonstrates this characteristic in his appeals. He will "most gladly spend and be expended for [their] souls," (2 Cor. 12:15) and he is "exhorting and imploring and encouraging each one of you, as a father would his children." (1 Thess. 2:11)

Does this give us a clue as to the way apostolic authority is to be exercised? Certainly. But before we go there, we need to establish the context of apostolic ministry.

Many people are either unwilling or unable to suffer the pain of giving up the outgrown which needs to be forsaken. Consequently they cling, often forever, to their old patterns of thinking and behaving, thus failing to negotiate any crisis, to truly grow up and to experience the joyful sense of rebirth that accompanies the successful transition into greater maturity.

M. Scott Peck

THE CONTEXT OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

While "the body of Christ" is the most powerful and embracing metaphor for the people that God is creating, there is another one that is equally useful: the temple of the Holy Spirit. Let's consider the apostolic ministry in those terms for a moment.

The Lord is building a temple that He can dwell in. In our day this temple is often confused with buildings. Sadly, we centralize our life together as congregations rather than as community, and we focus on structures and programs rather than on relationships. The temple God is building, however, is a people (Eph.2:22, "a dwelling of God in the spirit"). That temple will not be established apart from right leadership and authority.

If the heart of God's work in the world is not apostles, and not even leadership, then the point of the renewal of apostolic ministry is not authority per se, but the right and secure establishment of the entire spiritual building in relationship to the One Corner. In a sense the primary task of leadership is not to lead, but to build the foundation -- a place for the walls to rest. The foundation is there so that the walls will be strong and rightly related to the Cornerstone.

So once again the focus is on the building, on the whole. It is "the proper working of each individual part that causes the growth of the body" (Eph. 4: 16). Where leadership and authority are constantly in focus, this will never happen, because we lose the essential nature of the church as a community.

God is interested in releasing and establishing leaders to ensure that there is a proper place for even the most (apparently) insignificant gifting. The "weaker" are most easily neglected and lost to the Body; they are the most vulnerable. We know that God's heart is always toward the smallest and weakest among us; the Good Shepherd left the 99 to find the one who had strayed, and this father heart is a central characteristic of the true apostle.

The misalignment of the foundation is most quickly felt and most destructive to the weaker ones. But even one stone out of place in the wall leaves an opening for the enemy. Because we are a body, the growth of one strengthens us all; the fall of one hurts us all ("if one suffers, all suffer.") The Lord is reestablishing a correct understanding of leadership so that the entire building can grow into a holy temple.

When we were first married my wife and I traded my old clunker in for a nearly new Honda Accord. When it had a minor breakdown a year later I bought a part from an auto supply store and replaced the original part. Later when I took the car into the Honda dealership they told me I could have voided the warranty. The car was no longer in spec.

In our modern churches we have largely imported secular models of leadership. This is like adding a non spec part to a perfect car, or like the building that is not built to code. Repairing a car properly is often more costly, but there is usually a good reason to use the manufacturers part - even when we don't know what it is. "Unless the Lord builds the house..."

It's striking that the word Paul uses in Ephesians 4 for "equipping" the saints is the same word used in the gospels for mending a net, or for repairing a wall, or setting a broken limb. "Katartizmos" means to restore or repair so that the original function is restored. The saints are equipped when the connections are functioning and when all the needed parts are in the correct place. Leaders are equipped when they understand their own function and place in the wall.

Leadership in many churches has mirrored leadership models of the business world. The very best of those secular models have an element of empowerment in them, particularly when those who occupy positions of authority are genuinely secure and caring individuals. On the whole, however, business models centralize authority and control, professionalize ministry and disempower the people of God. The Lord can't build his house with parts that don't fit the original model. He doesn't recognize them as His own and they don't retain the original function.

In "Houses that Change the World," Wolfgang Simson compares exploiting leadership with empowering (fathering) leadership (page 208.)

Exploiting leadership	Empowering leadership
Give them functions	Let them function
Make them believe in you	Believe in them
Require submission	Delegate authority
Make them a part of your plans	Further God's plan for them
Use them	Invest in them
Take what they have	Give them what you have
Preach at them	Discuss with them
Require appointments	Spend time freely with them
Hold back until you retire	Give them the keys now
Let them serve you	Serve them
Accept their praise graciously	Praise them
Demonstrate master hood to them	Transfer master hood to them.

It would be pointless to talk about gifted ministry without talking about the Giver. Many teachers have focused on the fivefold gifts of Ephesians 4 and neglected the flow and completeness of the passage. We need servants who lead, not leaders who serve! We live among a leader fixated people, in a power fixated age! We need to recapture a servant mind. Let's look more closely at **Ephesians 4**.

But to each one grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore he says; When he ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men. (Ps.68:18). (Now this, "He ascended" - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

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 ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of 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 of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by that which every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. **4:8-16**

The passage opens with relational unity in verse 2 and 3 ("unity of the Spirit," and "bearing with one another in love") and then moves immediately to a sweeping panorama of unity ("one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.") Next Paul focuses on the victorious Giver, who "ascended on high," and moves through the listing of gifts ("he gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and pastors and teachers.") Paul then mentions the direction of these gifts ("equipping the saints"), and ends on two notes: the functioning of the healthy community ("joined and knit together by what every joint supplies,") and the means of growth, love! The body "upbuilds itself through love," the primary task is relational and on that note Paul closes one of the most often quoted passages in the New Testament.

Our focus has typically been the governmental function, and not the community function. In our desire to establish proper order, we have missed the flow of the passage, with Christ the Giver at the center and the outward flow of love in gifting to the body.

Perhaps we as leaders have been too focused on our own significance in the community. Perhaps we have been pushed in that direction both by our teachers and our followers. Our culture has itself been management rather than relationship focused. Our task orientation (we leaders are mostly male) has itself pushed us away from the dimension of mystery and toward management and control.

Larry Crabb, in his recent work, "The Safest Place on Earth," comments that we have a choice: we can be either managers or mystics. Most of us feel somewhat out of place in community: we don't always feel safe and community itself is a mystery. We prefer structures we can understand and control. The problem is, God is less interested in predictability and control than we are! Or, from another perspective, He wants to be the one in control, and He doesn't always tell us in advance what He is up to!

Almost everyone agrees that the command-and-control corporate model will not carry us into the twenty-first century. In a world of increasing interdependence and rapid change, it is no longer possible to figure it out from the top.

In the knowledge era, we will finally have to surrender the myth of leaders as isolated heroes commanding their organizations from on high. Top-down directives, even when they are implemented, reinforce an environment of fear, distrust, and internal competitiveness that reduces collaboration and cooperation. They foster compliance instead of commitment, yet only genuine commitment can bring about the courage, imagination, patience, and perseverance necessary in a knowledge-creating organization. For those reasons, leadership in the future will be distributed among diverse individuals and teams who share responsibility for creating the organization's future. Peter Senge, Author of The Fifth Discipline

Traditionally we think of fathers as the ones in charge. We picture a pyramid, with fathers on top, then mothers and children below. This is a classic image of patriarchy and it fits well with the old paradigms of management and control. Instead, let's focus on the One who is at the center.

The "fullness of Christ" in Eph.4:13, or the "whole body working properly" of 4:16 is precisely the correct interrelation of the ministries of 4:11,12 - in line with the divine unity of 4:3-6. We have tended to individualize this, in step with our self-focused culture, by focusing on the gifts of a few or on the maturity of individual believers. The result? We have tended to make ministry into something done by the few to the many.

But it is completely out of line with the flow of the chapter to center all this on the maturity, or status, or achievement of the individual believer. The phrases "unity of the faith," "mature humanity," and "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" refer to the divinely coordinated ministries of the body.

Incredibly, it seems that it is precisely the diversity of giftings and multiplicity of ministries of the body that will bring harmony. It's a measure of our failure to attain significant relationships that we haven't come anywhere near this, and have even feared it and restrained it.

On the other hand, our failure to be a true community has left us with the only reasonable alternative: we have become managers rather than mystics. Our failure to be a community has itself caused a retreat into structure, with an unhealthy emphasis on leadership and authority. We live with only a shadow of true community. Institutionalism is where we end up when we have failed to be a true community. Our final form of retreat is into congregations.

If this is not true, then why do we value the working of a few gifts so much more than others? Why do we fail to create a place where all these gifts can function together, and in fact imply by our order of meeting that only a few gifts (and a few people) are really important? Jean Vanier comments,

So we have to create structures which encourage everyone to participate, and especially the shy people. Those who have the most light to shed often dare not show it; they are afraid of appearing stupid. They do not recognize their own gift... perhaps because others haven't recognized it either. Community and Growth

Recently my wife traveled to a conference in the north to assist in the ministry there. Called on spontaneously to do workshops on spiritual and emotional healing, she proceeded to lead two sessions. In spite of the good things that happened, the high point was at the end of her second workshop.

As she was finishing and women around the circle were sharing, the turn came for a young lady seated beside her. This woman was mentally challenged.

She said, "I just came because my spiritual mother came. And I just love the Lord. And I know he is healing me because I can walk better today, and my arthritis isn't hurting me so much. And I just love Jesus and all he has done for me."

When she shared this the Spirit suddenly came in power, and my wife found herself weeping and rejoicing in the goodness of God. God didn't need her to elaborate, and the simple words of this woman of faith said it all.

We have much to answer for, and it's frightening! Do we think ourselves greater than God that we can neglect his sovereign will? If we haven't really seen his glory in his church, it is because we have failed to be a family and a community and have not seen the right exercise of authority to release and "equip the saints for the work of service."

To develop a broader vision we must be willing to forsake, to kill, our narrower vision. In the short run it is more comfortable not to do this - to stay where we are, to keep using the same microcosmic map, to avoid suffering the death of cherished notions. The road of spiritual growth, however, lies in the opposite direction. We begin by distrusting what we already believe, by actively seeking the threatening and unfamiliar, by deliberately

challenging the validity of what we have previously been taught and hold dear. The path to holiness lies through questioning everything.
M. Scott Peck

THE ELIJAH ANOINTING: CHILDREN AND FATHERS

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,
With the statutes and judgments.
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.
And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of children to the fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. **Mal.4: 4-6**

And his disciples asked him, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Jesus answered and said to them: Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished... (He spoke to them of John the Baptist). Mt. 17:10-13

This is a curious set of passages. Jesus is clear that John the Baptist carried the anointing of Elijah. But Jesus also implied that Elijah is yet to come. Which is it Lord?

Thankfully, we know that the Kingdom itself is both present and yet to come. We live with a paradox, in between the times.

Biblical scholars acknowledge that the prophecies which refer to the coming of the Messiah often have a dual fulfillment: the first fulfillment occurred with the first coming of Jesus. The meaning of the coming forerunner has the same application, and Elijah both DID come and WILL COME.

But what does that mean for us, and how does it relate to prophetic release and the renewal of apostolic ministry?

First, the Malachi passage itself is about authority. It begins with God calling to the remembrance of His people the Law with its statutes and ordinances. The Law reveals the character of God and is "a lamp to our feet." To be rooted in it (Ps 1) is to be fruitful.

Biblically, renewal and revival, (except the brief "shot in the pan" variety), always coincide with a renewed zeal for the word. Elijah the prophet is not a "head in the clouds" idealist, but one who is deeply rooted in the central truths of the Gospel. All the prophets, Old Testament and New, had a deep passion for God and His word. Respect for God's word is respect for God's authority. His word (written and spoken) is life. His word sets the boundaries of creation, and establishes right from wrong (Ps.19). Apart from recognition of the word as authoritative, there is only rebellion, sickness and death. When we fail to walk in God's way we come under a curse.

This passage is primarily about Elijah's restoration of God's authority, Elijah establishes God's rule, God's kingdom. Then turning "the hearts of fathers to the children" means that the ministry of Elijah is about the right ordering of relationships under God as King and Father. To some any discussion of authority sounds heavy. But we have to translate authority into its New Testament context: love and relationship. The question to ask is, "When are the hearts of children alienated from fathers?"

Around the turn of the century a British hospital was overrun with abandoned children and infants. At that time very little was known about the attachment process (ie. the later John Bowlby and his followers.) But the nurses noticed that the children who were picked up and fondled tended to thrive, while infants who received less attention were more likely to remain ill or get sicker. In fact, it was discovered that if an infant was only changed and fed but otherwise not handled, it would die.

The hearts of children are alienated from fathers when they are either abused or neglected. Secular researchers have clearly proven that either extreme creates wounded and broken people.

Church leaders are to exercise authority in a fathering manner. The hearts of people to fathers/leaders become alienated when authority is not exercised or not divinely given, or is improperly exercised or abused. And once this authority is lost through abuse, like the broken foundation of a building, the entire wall is broken down.

Now the connection to apostolic ministry becomes obvious. If the ministry of Elijah is to restore all things to divine alignment, then it directly supports apostolic order. Godly authority is like a covering, and under that covering there is freedom and release. But we need to rightly understand "covering" since the term itself, like authority, is commonly abused in practice in Christian circles.

The first implication is the right ordering of relationships. God is intensely interested in the healing of families. But families will only be as healed and whole as the leadership in our churches. When we get the foundations in order, all other things will fall into place.

Sadly, too often authority has been positional and institutional, with institutional aims. Authority has often lacked a foundation of relationship, and consequently has not been rooted in real love and servanthood. Too many wounded leaders have used their authority to oppress rather than to release, as a service to their own egos. We desperately need leaders who are whole and healthy, free to father and empower others.

In the same way the "covering" doctrine is often used to control people, not to release and empower them. This is always the way in unhealthy families. While the same words are used, the relational reality they express is distorted and twisted.

Fathering authority is relational authority. As a church, we need to repent of institutional and positional authority, which has often been wielded apart from brokenness and relationship. Unless we have washed another's feet, we have no business attempting to correct them. Too often the question, "Are you under a covering?" has become an abusive ideology, aimed at expanding human kingdoms rather than at true pastoral concern. **"Woe to the false shepherds who have been feeding themselves!" (Ezek. 34)**

Now consider the words of Peter in Acts quoting Joel 2: And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out My Spirit.

Incredibly, fathering is the foundation of this passage, often unrecognized. "My Spirit" is poured out first on "sons and daughters!" Authority in the kingdom is meant to be like authority in a family: relational, gentle and loving. Contrast this with a business model, the foundation for authority in most modern western churches.

While secular models work fairly well when efficiency and outcomes are the primary concern, don't try this in your family! The nature of family relationships is completely different than business relationships, and the church is the family of God.

On the other hand, even where leaders are fathers, healthy leaders alone won't build strong communities. We can have all the vaccines in the world, but unless we actually inject the sick, they will stay sick! Apostles, teachers and elders must actually build relationships of trust and caring and empower other leaders, or the people of God will remain immature and in diapers. Remember Paul's words to Timothy in **1 Timothy 3:5: "for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?"**

There is probably no time in history where we were more in need of fathers. The coming generation are fatherless like none have ever been before them. The so-called "Generation X" don't trust authority and often have negative experiences of family, but they long for intimacy, they thrive on friendship, and they welcome

mentors. Robert Banks in "Paul's Idea of Community" points out that Paul's entire ministry in caring for the church is like that of a father, with deep compassion, strong attachment, and great love and gentleness.

There is no ministry to this generation apart from community, and there is no community apart from intimacy. Furthermore, intimacy is not possible until we create safe places, and safe places don't happen accidentally. They must be built with great love and great skill. In places of safety there is vulnerability, and ministry happens. And when ministry happens, Christ is revealed.

The restoration of apostolic ministry is about extending the kingdom. Extending the kingdom involves both works of power, and building community. Is it any surprise that the NT text most commonly used to talk about community occurs in Acts 4:32 and following, where both "great power" and "great grace" are also present?

The Lord's desire is to fill His temple, to fill His people with His Spirit. He desires to be all things to us. One of the primary reasons for the rebirth of Apostolic ministry in our day is so that the foundations of spiritual community can be strengthened. Only as churches become intimate communities in the Spirit will the world again take notice and say, "See how they love one another." The only way to propagate a message is to live it. As Jim Wallis has stated, "Community is the place where the healing of our own lives becomes the foundation for the healing of the nations" (Call to Conversion).

NEXT: NEHEMIAH AND PAUL - APOSTOLIC BUILDERS

God is coming to the Church like a building inspector; to see if the things we have built will measure up to His code. A house can be built in many ways, and it's not uncommon for contractors to cut corners. What we deem adequate can completely fail inspection. When a building inspector determines that a house isn't up to code, the work stops. Nothing else is done until the work conforms to code.

PART TWO

NEHEMIAH AND PAUL: APOSTOLIC BUILDERS

In Part 1 we considered the context, character and purpose of apostolic ministry. God is renewing the foundation of the church in our day, not so that leaders can lead, but so that all the people of God can be released into the world to serve Him and to offer their lives as sacrifice to Him. The Lord is building a people.

In Part 2 we will consider two examples of apostolic builders. "Wise master builders" are those who build, and don't merely bless. They have a fathering ministry, and pursue "presence" and not merely "power." They are interested not just in the walls, but in establishing firm foundations.

In our time the church has largely lost alignment with the purposes of God, becoming a defensive structure against the world, rather than an offensive army on the move, taking back ground from the enemy. Unfortunately, because the church has been mired in ways of doing and being that are more grounded in culture than in Scripture, leaders have unwittingly encouraged passivity and "church" has become a spectator sport. We are in desperate need of a new reformation. We look first to the book of Nehemiah.

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall, that we may no longer be a reproach..."

So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.

Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

Then I said to the nobles and the rulers, and the rest of the people: "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." **Nehemiah 4:17-19**

In May of 1999 Graham Cooke spoke locally in a series of meetings. He referred to "wise master builders" as those who build, and don't merely bless. Too many leaders prefer to merely "bless" the work of ministry around them rather than invest their lives in building solid foundations. We want results quickly and don't want to spend the time investing our lives in a solid foundation. Too many are not willing to pay the cost of rebuilding foundations.

There is a biblical picture of the work of rebuilding that is like a prophetic parable for our time. Nehemiah is an apostolic builder. His name means literally, "Yahweh comforts." His story begins in the book of Ezra and then continues into the book with his name.

"You see the distress we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire.

Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, That we may no longer be a reproach." Nehemiah 2:17

The period covered by these two books, Ezra and Nehemiah, is roughly 110 years. The period of rebuilding the temple under Zerubbabel, inspired by the preaching of Zechariah and Haggai, was twenty-one years. Sixty years later Ezra brought a revival and proper teaching on worship. After thirteen years Nehemiah came to work on the walls. (Some scholars think that Malachi also lived and prophesied during these years).

"You see the distress we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, That we may no longer be a reproach." Nehemiah 2:17

"And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations." Isa.61:4

These verses in Nehemiah picture the church in our time, and the passage in Ezra speaks to the apostolic work of laying new foundations and rebuilding the wall. The wall, as we know from the New Testament, is composed of living stones. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

In our time the church has largely lost alignment with the purposes of God, becoming a defensive structure against the world, rather than an offensive army on the move, taking back ground from the enemy. Unfortunately, because the church has been mired in ways of doing and being that are more grounded in culture than in Scripture, leaders have unwittingly encouraged passivity and "church" has become a spectator sport. We are in desperate need of a new reformation. Rick Joyner comments, "Spectator sport" Christianity is another cause for much of the lukewarmness that now prevails in the church. It is also a primary reason for many of the problems that churches experience with people becoming disgruntled, or even worse, bored.

Every Christian has been given a calling, a ministry. They were known before the creation of the world and called with a purpose. The frustration of not being equipped or given the place to fulfill what we were created for is causing many of the church splits and other problems many experience today.

The LORD desires to rebuild the foundations and build the wall! For this purpose He is raising up apostles and prophets who will declare the word of the LORD and restore alignment, releasing His people from captivity.

The angel answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel; 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, Says the LORD of hosts.'" Zechariah 4:8

As the church in our day is captive to culture, so the Temple in Nehemiah's day lay in ruins. The people of God had been in captivity in Babylon for generations. But God raised up prophets and apostles (though in those days the term "apostle" had not yet been coined) to strengthen His people, and eventually to lead them in restoration of worship. Much more than this, however, as God regathered His people He was restoring their identity as a people.

Nearly eighty years before Nehemiah returned to the land, the Lord raised up the first apostle of restoration in Zerubbabel, who was appointed by King Artaxerxes of Babylon as the governor of Judah. As governor of Judah, Zerubbabel was responsible for rebuilding the Temple. But the word of LORD to him was not to trust to his own resources or abilities.

6 The angel answered and said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel; 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, Says the LORD of hosts.'

7 Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

8 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "The hands of Zerubbabel Have laid the foundation of the temple; His hands shall also finish it. Then you will know That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

9 For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." **Zechariah 4:6-10**

The first word of the LORD cautions Zerubbabel to depend on the LORD. The second word declares that it is only by grace that God's work is accomplished, and also that it is God's intention to be gracious in this work. He has not forgotten His people ("Zerubbabel" means literally, "God remembers.")

WHO HAS DESPISED THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS?

"Who has despised the day of small things?" In our time the LORD is shaking all things that can be shaken, and many churches are experiencing profound discomfort. The wine of renewal that the LORD has been pouring out is bursting the old skins, because it is the LORD's intention that no structure that limits His purpose shall stand.

When we depend on the forms and neglect the function, we have reached the institutional stage of decay. The old forms are encrusted with centuries of tradition. We may not even know what they were intended to accomplish.

But the heart of the issue is that we are dependent on the forms. We are attached to temporal things that were not meant to stand to eternity. Consequently, we defend as "divine" things that were intended to serve a defined and time limited purpose, and then die. We are comfortable and secure, and we don't know how to move beyond the limits of the dead forms. Jean Vanier comments on the dangers of security.

"It is important for communities to discover the focal point of fidelity which enables the spirit to stay strong, and what makes for deviation from it. There seem to me to be two essential--and linked--elements which lead to deviation: the search for security, or a weariness of insecurity, and a lack of fidelity to the initial vision which gave the foundation its spirit.

"When a community is born, its founders have to struggle to survive and announce their ideal. So they find themselves confronted with contradictions and sometimes even persecution. These oblige the members of the community to emphasize their commitment; they strengthen motivation and encourage people to go beyond themselves to rely totally on Providence. Sometimes only the direct intervention of God can save them. When they are stripped of all their wealth, of all security and human support, they must depend on God and the people around them to understand the witness of their life. They are obliged to remain faithful to prayer and the glow of their love; it is a question of life or death. Their total dependence guarantees their authenticity; their weakness is their strength.

"But when a community has enough members to do all the work, when it has enough material goods, it can relax. It has strong structures. It is fairly secure. It is then that there is danger." In Community and Growth

The Lord is shaking the old foundations. To the eyes of man these may seem to be small things. When old foundations are crumbling and new things are being birthed they can seem small and insignificant. The old things have great stature in our eyes because they were structures that the LORD indwelt in power. The old things were good things for a time, until the cloud began to move. But as the old walls crumble, the LORD is releasing new vision and new leaders - Moses passes the torch to a Joshua generation. Joshua represents the new leadership that will take the land, slaying giants and taking cities.

"For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel."

The seven eyes of the LORD are also mentioned in verse 9 as seven eyes that are on the stone that the LORD has laid before Joshua. Zerubbabel stands upon the wall with a plumb-line in his hand, to evaluate it, and see where it is bowing or bulging. The plumb-line will discover exactly how the work is going. Where the wall is crooked it must be pulled down, and where it is straight it will stand. Zerubbabel represents the Spirit of God in this, for when God assesses His work, it is with exactness. **"The time has come for judgment to begin, and God's own people are the first to be judged." (1 Peter 4:17)**

One of the astonishing things about chapters 3 and 5 is that virtually EVERYONE is involved in the work of rebuilding. There is no apparent distinction between leaders and people. In fact, even Nehemiah and his servant worked together on the wall. Nehemiah himself did not take the portion that was rightly his (5:15) and personally fed 150 at his table daily (5:17). In the process of working together the people of God rediscovered community.

"Community" may become the watchword in the rebuilding work that God is doing. One of the things about community that make some uncomfortable is that it can be difficult to tell who the leaders are.

In community authority is not restricted to a few specially anointed leaders, creating huge bottlenecks in the work of building the kingdom. Leadership is shared and functional, rather than positional. Submission is mutual, to "one another." (Eph. 5:23) Authority will flow down like anointing oil from the beard of Aaron, a fathering and releasing work that is a hallmark of the true apostolic.

Nearly five hundred years ago, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others unleashed a revolution that promised to liberate the church from a hierarchical priesthood by rediscovering "the priesthood of all believers." But the Reformation never fully delivered on its promise. Greg Ogen - *The New Reformation*

One day last fall I was out walking with my wife in the hills near by our home. As is typical for a late fall day, some Canadian geese were forming a huge V above the hillside, heading south.

From our vantage point we were almost at eye level with the formation. I watched with fascination as I saw something take place that I had only previously heard about. The lead goose dropped from the front of the V to the rear, and another goose took his place.

I felt the LORD speak to me that so it should be in His body. Leadership must be flexible, and should be shared. Breaking the trail for the entire V formation is tiring. The lead goose bears the brunt of the forces in the air.

Eventually the goose in the lead gets tired, so he moves to the back and allows another goose to be on the cutting edge. Trading off this position with another goose allows each goose to rest, since those behind the leader don't have to work as hard. It also allows each strong goose to experience the exhilaration of being out in front.

This sharing of leadership sends a strong message that EVERY goose in the formation is capable of doing the work of leadership, and in fact it is the responsibility of each to have a significant place in breaking the way for others. Geese seem to have no need for control, and no lack of humility!

The only obstacle to building and maintaining community within an organization is not structural. It's political. If you get somebody at the top who is not willing to relinquish the structure, even temporarily, or who has to dominate everything, there's no way you can have community in that organization. So the people in the organization, particularly at the top, have to be willing to temporarily lay aside their role and their rank. M. Scott Peck

This is a challenge to us, because leaders are accustomed to control. If God is in control, what are WE to do? We thought that was OUR job. If anyone can bring a word in our services, where does that leave our sermon? We are accustomed to being valued for our highly visible giftings. Will the church still need us? We need to remind ourselves that our task is not to DO the work, but to equip others to serve. We need to recover Eph.4:16, where the body is built "as each part does its work."

BUILDING INSPECTOR

God is coming to the Church like a building inspector; to see if the things we have built will measure up to His code. A house can be built in many ways, and it's not uncommon for contractors to cut corners. What we deem adequate can completely fail inspection. When a building inspector determines that a house isn't up to code, the work stops. Nothing else is done until the work conforms to code.

Much of what we know as God's building has been built upon weak foundations, foundations that in fact are not up to code because they were not built as the LORD prescribed. The easy answer is some simple adjustments. But just as "no one puts a new patch on an old garment," so small adjustments are not the answer. "Band aid" solutions don't help the victim of a cataclysmic event. In the same way, shoring up the old building will only make the whole structure unsound. Rather, we need to start anew.

In volume 7, No.4 of Living Water magazine Randall Kittle recalls an old Cary Grant movie called Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House. He relates the story like this: "In this movie he buys an old house that is in need of some major repairs. He has a building contractor come out to give him an estimate for remodeling. To his surprise, the contractor hangs a rock from a string and looks at the house (makes a plumb-line) then matter-of-factly says "Tear it down." The shocked look on the owner's face causes the builder to explain. "We can't repair it; the foundation is crooked. It's leaning. You've got to tear it down and start over."

"Everyone knows that if you put up a building on a crooked foundation, your building is in imminent danger of falling. The higher you build the more certain will be the collapse. Is the Holy Spirit trying to tell us that our spiritual house is faulty? It will not last if the foundation is out of plumb - not in alignment with God's true and undeniable measure!"

A few days before I began writing this article the front page of our local paper shocked me with a word from the LORD. There on the cover was a church steeple, with a huge backhoe in the foreground, and the crumpled remains of a wooden building spread out before it. The caption read, "Out with the old." The picture showed a mess of tangled and broken wood. Graham Cooke, in A Divine Confrontation, comments that, "Order is always birthed out of chaos. When chaos surrounds us, the Holy Spirit broods over us...and God is creating a new masterpiece."

PASSING INSPECTION

"Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." Building things up to code can be a little more costly, but there is almost always a good reason behind the building code - even if we don't know what it is. Doing it the right way may seem more difficult or expensive until you have to tear things down and redo them. Only after the building inspectors have approved each department-structural, plumbing, electrical, masonry, heating and air-conditioning can you get a certificate of occupancy.

Similarly, God has been giving the Church great seasons of visitation, but we will not function effectively until we are "up to code." Each and every area of church-life must be in alignment with God's design if we would hold the wine of the Spirit. And that is His desire far more than it is ours - to fill us up to overflowing!

We cannot hold onto our old order and still progress to a new level of anointing. When a new paradigm unfolds before us, it will always take us back to ground zero. Paradigms do not build on each other; they replace each other. God loves this! We start again with a new dependency rising out of fresh inadequacy. Graham Cooke, A Divine Confrontation

During times of renewal many ministries grow very prominent because they were part of the old order establishing the new. But those ministries must pass away in order for the new to be fully released. Was there a time like this in the Bible?

John the Baptist represented a transition time in God's purposes. He was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. But when the Messiah arrived, John said, "He must increase, and I must decrease." John understood that when a new paradigm is being born, there is no place for the old ways. Rick Joyner comments: In the same way many ministries which have been prominent in renewal will begin to decrease as God reestablishes His church in new ways of being. The church in the new millennium won't look like the old church. Some of the old leaders will transition to the new thing, but many will not. God is raising up Nehemiah's who will build a new foundation, calling His people out of captivity and building on new foundations as He reveals the plan.

However, there is about to be a clear distinction between those who have received their authority from above, and those who have promoted themselves, or been promoted by institutions. The latter authorities will be increasingly revealed as operating in the control, political and religious spirits.

This is Satan's "cord of three strands" that he has used to bind the church. That cord will soon be broken, and the true liberty of the Spirit released in the world, and the church which will fall into increasing tyranny and bondage to evil. *"Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." (II Corinthians 3:17)*

Freedom is coming. A new breed of leader is going to arise who will fulfill the mandate of true New Testament ministry to equip the people, and allow them to do the ministry. This will probably come in many forms, but it will come. It must. A true New Testament church leader is only successful if he or she is raising up others who can do what they do. Is that not the model that the Lord gave us for leadership? Then we will also have true church growth, which is not just growing fat, but growing strong as well.

From Mega-trends in the New Millennium

PART THREE

In Part 1 - we considered the context, character and purpose of apostolic ministry. God is renewing the foundation of the church in our day, not so that leaders can lead, but so that all the people of God can be released into the world to serve Him and to offer their lives as sacrifice to Him. The new temple the Lord is building is a people.

In Part 2 - we considered Nehemiah as an example of an apostolic builder. "Wise master builders" are those who build, and don't merely bless. They have a fathering ministry, and pursue "presence" and not merely "power." They are interested not just in the walls, but in establishing firm foundations.

Now in Part 3 - we'll consider the relational nature of leadership and apostolic ministry before considering authority more closely. Just as "the body" is the context of leadership, so "community" is the context of the apostolic. Furthermore, the clear purpose of service in the body, "to present every person mature in Christ," will provide a foundational contact point for our discussion.

From there we'll move on to discuss tent-making as a biblical pattern and the need for a new way of thinking about the "center" of ministry and community.

THE STATURE OF CHRIST

The Reformers left us with definitions of the church that are two dimensional. They describe the church universal, and they describe the local church. That's about it. The sad reality is that going to the lost, living Christ-like lives among them and revealing Christ to them, is not in our ecclesiology. Jim Petersen, Church Without Walls, p. 119

A few years ago I spoke with a man who had come to a turning point in his life. He was recognizing for the first time that he had spent some thirty odd years working for his father's approval. It seemed that nothing he did was ever good enough. Even though his father was a pastor who spoke often of the forgiveness and acceptance of God, he seemed to expect nothing less than perfection from his own son.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of rejection or acceptance of one's parents on one's life. This need is so great that it carries on into adulthood and even forms the soil for new families. The hunger for affirmation can be passed on to many generations, creating workaholics, perfectionists, and obsessive and compulsive people. Many leaders are driven and compulsive perfectionists who are still trying to perform for a demanding father.

Todd Rutkowski in an unpublished manuscript proposes that the role of fathers is three-fold: to tell their children who they are, to give them a sense of security and belonging, and within that framework to offer a sense of destiny and purpose.

Gary Smalley and John Trent wrote of "the blessing." Every human heart cries out for acceptance and blessing. When this need goes unmet people may spend their lives hungering for love. When a child experiences real acceptance, however, they usually develop the inner resources to withstand the disapproval of others. In other words, they become self-directed people, able to give without reward and march to the beat of a different drummer.

As wounded people walk toward healing, they also walk toward release. No longer are leaders seen through a discolored lens of parental authority. The true call of leadership is not to set boundaries, but to bless. Boundaries must be set by the Lord, and internalized and made one's own. In healthy communities this works; in less healthy communities disciples forever seem like adult children, and leaders play the role of rule makers. But what does all this have to do with the apostolic? After all, the gifted church is composed of adults, right? Surely we don't parent one another when we are in our twenties and thirties? Isn't that "patronizing?"

AUTHORITY AND ITS PURPOSE: MATURITY

As we begin it's helpful to note the parallels between church and family. The goal of parenting in a family is ultimately release: to send children on their way as mature and healthy adults, who can then start their own family.

The goal of body life is similar: to present every person complete in Christ. The healthy Christian reproduces herself. The healthy church also reproduces itself. That is the nature of living things.

Research into healthy families has demonstrated that a climate of safety and trust produces healthy individuals. Due to differences in knowledge and status, parents are in a position of power over children. Likewise, leaders have power over those they lead. Power is defined as the ability to exercise influence over others. Good leadership, as good parenting, is the wise exercise of power.

The message of Jesus was that he came to give abundant life. He provided a model of power which was empowering; his model of authority was service. His radical reply to the disciples who wanted to sit in positions of authority was, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant." Jesus redefined the understanding of power by his teaching and actions in relating to others as a servant. He flatly rejected the use of power to control others, and affirmed it as a means of releasing others: to lift up the fallen, forgive the guilty, to encourage responsibility and maturity in the weak, and to give power to the powerless.

Every family has individuals at different stages of physical, emotional and spiritual development. In human families the goal of effective parenting is to bring children to maturity. The church family is no different. Maturity is defined as the capacity to be a servant to others. This requires real spirituality and the ability to love unconditionally. It demands that a person go beyond individualistic measures of maturity to an interdependency model. Abundant life is more than a self-centered life in which all of one's personal needs are met. It involves a meaning beyond the self. The gospel call to love, forgive and serve others is a call to extraordinary living.

The mature person is an empowerer. Empowerers help others become competent and capable persons who in turn will empower others.

The mature person is an empowerer. Empowerers help others become competent and capable persons who in turn will empower others. The goal of parenting is to create autonomous individuals who can leave home with confidence, making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their own successes and failures. Parental empowering is the affirmation of the child's ability to learn and to grow and to become all that they were meant to be in God's image and as part of His creative plan.

From a biblical perspective, empowering does not entail one gaining power at the expense of another. Such a "limited supply" view of power may work in the physical world, but is not true of God. When empowering the children of Israel, the Lord did not give up power, but rather offered it in unlimited supply. Jesus had authority and his power flowed from His person. A part of authority, whether in the church or the family, is the responsibility to lead others to maturity. The process of giving them power does not mean relinquishing God given authority, nor does it mean the loss of power, but rather authority and power that are given away is an expansion of the rule of God.

The goal of leadership is to work itself out of a job. Just as healthy children grow up and no longer need their parents, so healthy Christians, connected directly to the Head, no longer need human direction. Rather, they will themselves be discipling others as they get their instructions directly from the Top.

Effective leaders move beyond delegation to reproduce their own maturity in their disciples, where they then act more like coaches and consultants than as leaders.

According to the New Testament, Paul planted churches and then left them! Apostolic leaders don't hang around too long, since their multiple giftings can create unhealthy dependence. Where in healthy families children leave home, in healthy churches the church planters leave as God raises up local leaders, so that the "children" can experience their independence, which is their own healthy dependence on God and on one another.

Furthermore, dependence on any one of the five-fold gifts creates unhealthy church families. Wolfgang Simson comments: *If you leave a teacher to develop a church all by himself, he will built it around his unique gift of teaching, what else? He might either convert any church into a lecture hall, or plant bible schools or other teaching centers, which sometimes grow into impressive cathedrals, if he has the necessary speaking gifts. But often when the talented man leaves, the place falls apart. A teacher does not really lay foundations, but he explains them brilliantly. "Houses That Change the World," p.40*

We need a developmental model of leadership and growth. When the church reaches a certain stage, new leaders should have been raised up, and the church planters should be moving on. Parents that stay with children forever foster dependency and stifle growth.

This is the problem that God describes to Samuel in **1 Samuel 8** when he says, "they have rejected me from being king over them." We are spiritually lazy. We often wish someone else could do the praying, teaching, counseling and discipling for us. But this direction has stifled the growth of the kingdom.

It's easy to cultivate dependence; but mature leaders know when to leave. Bob Lund comments on the necessity of a mentoring mindset.

If a church does not have in its genetic code a mentoring mindset, leaders cause the swirl of activity to focus around them... The people will not mentor, disciple and impart to others. They will do the natural thing, which is to hand their friends and converts to the church and expect the staff or pastor to deal with them. "The Way Church Ought to Be," p.252

This kind of bottleneck in ministry is created by leaders who have a strong need to remain at the center. Like unhealthy parents who need their children's dependence, they create unhealthy bodies that do not know how to release and empower disciples into service.

Where the primary function of elders is a nurturing function with individuals, apostles father churches and movements. Where elders focus on the trees then the forest, apostles see the forest then the trees. Apostles generally work from the "big" to the small.

Apostles are called to the local but also to the extra-local. As such apostleship is not a governmental calling, but tends to work more through a network of voluntary association.

IN 1996 WHILE IN AUSTRALIA MIKE PHILLIPS HAD A DREAM

In the dream, I saw a huge tent that stretched around the world. It was not a tent like most people would think of a tent but rather merely the top of a tent with no side walls. We called this A 'dining fly' in my scouting days, years ago. I remember thinking how easy it would be to come under this tent for dining and fellowship because you could come and go from any direction. The top was shaped like the Bedouin tents in the Middle East. It was quite striking and caught my attention because I was perplexed as to how you could build a tent around a sphere shape.

I saw a close-up of the weave of the material of the tent. It was a closely-woven fabric of very strong natural fiber which had been rubbed with oil to make it water proof. The tent would swell with the breeze, but seemed very secure.

I asked the Lord, "What is this?" In the dream, He replied, "I am going to build a 'New Covering' over all of the earth. It will be based solely upon 'relationship' and not heavy authoritarian or sectarian structure." He then gave me the verse in **Matthew 20:25**, "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! (Emphasis, mine - meaning such authority is prohibited in the body of Christ) whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant."

I then felt the Lord say, "Authority and control which is similar to governments and nationalism in a secular context are prohibited in the Body of Christ! This 'New Covering' is the 'New Tabernacle' which is meant to be a 'Tent of Blessing.' Many people have already been called to come under it and dine together. They will be able to come in and go out as they please from any direction because THERE WILL BE NO WALLS. They can remain a part of their denominations and movements as they please because they will only be joined together here by a mutual sharing of covenant relationship. That was the close weave you saw that was rubbed with the oil of My Spirit. The reason I said I had not decided about America yet was because this will be very difficult for some Americans to come under. They will want to make it theirs and they will be bothered that it will not be centered in America nor have any perceptible central government. Therefore, if I call them, it will be last!"

He continued, "I never wanted to dwell in a heavy, rigid, organizational structure. I want to dwell in relationship. That is where I can command a blessing - Life evermore! (Psalms 133:3) In this 'New Tabernacle' you will not be able to say of those that come in, 'They are ours!' Nor will you say of those who go out, 'They are no longer with us!' But they will be free to come and dine as they please. If they go out from the tent for a season, you must still value them and accept them back if they decide to return. Relationship will keep them coming back for more. This is why I told you that this will be 'twenty times stronger than steel'.

It will be able to adjust and move in a strong wind without blowing away and it will be stronger than any organizational structure that has ever been even though the relational strength will not be as obvious as the organizational structure. I want you to give your life to help facilitate seeing this vision come to pass. The work has already begun all over the world in the hearts of many!"

AUTHORITY AND ITS CENTER

The church has been brought into the same value system as the world: fame, success, materialism and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues. We want to emulate the best known preachers with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices. Preoccupation with these values has perverted the church's message. Chuck Colson, *Loving God*

The godly leader is not threatened by such visions of mutual ministry; rather, he or she is excited about giving away control. The more authority I give away, the more Christ's realm of authority expands and grows!

Paul's personal goal was "to know Him: the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering." That statement captures in a nutshell the heart of apostolic authority - it grows out of suffering servanthood.

There are many men and women today who would like to be called "apostles." The hallmark of their service will be not be their prosperity or their popularity, but their willingness to suffer for the sake of the kingdom and for God's people. Paul says that "we always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our mortal flesh."

A true and safe leader is one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the Holy Spirit and external situations. A reliable rule of thumb is as follows: A man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. A true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage. He is rather ready to follow as well as lead. A W Tozer, *The Reaper*, Feb. 1962

One of the problems with current conceptions of authority is that we are used to defining the church within a certain circle. We work at clarifying who is in, who is out; what the leadership structure is to be and not to be; what we believe and do not believe; which activities belong, which do not; and what behavior is appropriate and what is not. So the line between insiders and outsiders is clearly drawn.

Paul Hiebert of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School calls this kind of thinking "bounded-set thinking." That is, there is a boundary that sets the standard. One either qualifies or is rejected; it's pass or fail. Jim Peterson in "Church Without Walls" advocates that we move from bounded-set thinking to what Hiebert refers to as "centered-set thinking" in our understanding of the church.

In a centered set, what counts is how each member is moving in relation to the center. The focus is upon the center, and each individual is in dynamic relationship to it. Belonging, in this case, is not a matter of performing according to an agreed-upon profile; it is a matter of living and acting out of commitment to a common center. The focus is on the center and on pointing people to that center. Process is more important than definitions. Centered-set thinking affirms initiatives that would otherwise not find a place. It rewards creativity.

It is not that bounded sets are always bad and centered sets are always good. Boundaries do exist. Salvation is a bounded set. One is either in Christ, or not in Christ. Discipleship is a centered set. To be a disciple is to be constantly moving toward the center, which is Christ.

WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT CAN BE VISUALIZED BY THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM.

To view the church from the perspective of the centered-set model opens the possibility for recovering its fluidity, and therefore its mobility.

If we use this model, our understanding of what is the center must be very clear. The church is not that center. The center is the Head of the body. All members of the body are to function in relation to the center: Christ. If

there is confusion on this point and we think of the church as being the center, we will find ourselves merely creating another bounded set. If God's people are those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is transforming their character and giving them gifts they are to use in service in the world, then it is His empowerment that will determine our boundaries.

APOSTLES, TENTMAKING AND THE POOR

Too often in our modern churches we pay lip service to the priestly call of every believer, but fail to implement this understanding in our practice. Instead, and particularly in charismatic circles, we center the life of the church around a few "anointed" leaders.

The Apostle Paul was a tentmaker. It's hard to envision such a practice receiving validation in our world of big churches and senior pastors who are more like CEO's than like fathers.

Too often in our modern churches we pay lip service to the priestly call of every believer, but fail to implement this understanding in our practice. Instead, and particularly in charismatic circles, we center the life of the church around a few "anointed" leaders.

Sadly, we reinforce this misleading practice by paying a few professionals to do the ministry while "non-professionals" work at ordinary jobs. Inevitably, the "full time" priests are given a status and authority that those who work for a living are not given. There is not visible equality between paid leaders and unpaid leaders. Lacking visible equality, we reinforce the mindset that one type of ministry is more valuable than another, and disempower the people of God from a self-understanding of their priestly calling in the world. Could this be why even the Apostle Paul did not make use of his right as a father in the gospel and instead continued his work making tents?

In June of 1958, Gordon Cosby from the Church of the Savior was invited to participate in and to address a meeting of ministers held in Geneva, Switzerland. The subject was "world evangelism," and the following is an excerpt from his talk.

One order of ministry is not eternally more valuable than another. It is easy to absolutize the significance of one type of ministry and leave the feeling with many that they are second class members of the body, important only as extensions of official clergy. This I cannot accept.

One psychological reason for this may be the minister's inability to be one among a number of equally significant ministers. He may need to be the center of a revolving constellation. He may find it difficult to decrease while another increases. On the other hand, the layman may not really want the responsibility involved in an ordination as a lay minister of Christ and His church.

Of greatest importance is our own attitude... Do we believe that the people in our congregation are as vital to the life of the Body as we are? Do we give lip service to the concept of the ministry of all believers while being seriously threatened by the reality of it when these ministries begin to emerge? These are not merely academic questions; there is real threat experienced as the circle of activities in which we excel gets smaller and smaller. Unless we see the ministry of the layman in our world to be as of great a significance as ours, we shall ever be tempted to use him as a lackey in our personal fulfillment.

The ordination of a lay person to a ministry in the world is much more than the recognition of significant activity. It means that the person knows him or herself to be grasped by God for a task that only they can do, and which the church must have done. Ordination means that the person's sense of call is confirmed by their own community. The world is a big place and its structures are tough to penetrate. It is good for the nonprofessional minister to discover specifically where he is to exercise his obedience.

The structures of the church must be geared to implementing this conception. This newness will not emerge because we are eager for it to happen. Nor will it come because we preach on the ministry of all believers. These ministries will emerge when the whole congregation is engaging in its ministry in the world and when the

whole structure of the congregational life expresses this intention. When the structures thus express such an aim, a person in his first encounter with the church will sense that the church exists as a servant in the world... Cosby suggests that we ordain lay persons into their ministry, whether inside the four walls or outside the walls. I'm not sure this is the best answer. Rather, we should perhaps avoid ordaining anyone and also avoid hiring clergy to do the work of the church, except in unusual cases or in response to the leading of the Lord. Too often those who are hired to do ministry become caught in the narrow world of the clergy and lose touch with the real world where most of us live and work. Even Catholic clergy recognize the problem.

"This is why we see that many men and women of faith who are inserted into the world of the laborer have found a new experience of God. In the experience of finding themselves alone and misunderstood, their soul is ripe for the fullness of God. In this simple experience, they feel themselves very small and yet open to value in a new way how God speaks to them through those with whom they stand together. They see that those people, the marginal ones, the oppressed, though not often believers, have something divine to tell them through their suffering, their oppression, their abandonment.

"Here one understands true poverty; one rediscovers awareness of one's own incapacity and ignorance; one opens one's soul to receive very profound instruction in the lives of the poor, taught by God Himself, by means of those rough faces, those half-ruined lives. It is a new face of Christ discovered in the little ones." Father Arrupe, General of the Jesuits in 1977

One argument against pastors or apostolic leaders taking "secular" jobs is that the work would not get done. But where did we ever get the idea that one person was supposed to do so much anyway? The work of ministry is to be shared by all believers (Ephesians 4). In "Biblical Eldership" Alexander Strauch comments on the real problem.

The real problem lies not in men's limited time and energy but in false ideas about work, Christian living, life's priorities, and Christian ministry. To the Ephesian elders Paul said, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to them who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:34,35) How do working men shepherd the church yet maintain family life and employment? They do it by self-sacrifice, self-discipline, perseverance, hard work and the power of the Holy Spirit. (p.28)

Paul clearly connects the needs of the poor and oppressed to his earning his living as a tentmaker. In our current church system where we import the Old Testament tithe to support an unbiblical system of professional clergy. Instead of using our limited resources to meet the needs of the poor and the working poor among us, we enable a few professionals to live in comfort. In effect, we become oppressors, robbing the poor and the people of God in the name of Christ.

I am particularly struck that Paul connects the poor and oppressed to his earning his living as a tentmaker. This is in stark contrast to our current church system where we import the Old Testament tithe into the New Testament in order to support an unbiblical system of professional clergy. Instead of using our limited resources to meet the needs of the poor and the working poor among us, we enable a few professionals to live in comfort. In effect, we become oppressors, robbing the people of God not only of resources but of their identity as true priests. Equally terrible, we rob the poor of desperately needed resources... all in the name of Christ.

Clearly, in Paul's discussion of giving in 2 Corinthians 8, the focus is on the needy, and not on support for a priestly class and a new temple. We are the temple, and we are all priests. Our resources are thus free to go where they are truly needed - not into mega theatres where we encourage the spectator sport of Christianity while only the superstars get to play the game.

Bob Lund addresses another question related to salaried ministry in "The Way Church Ought to Be." He comments that a common justification for the traditional approach is Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:14:

"those who proclaim the gospel [should] get their living from the gospel." Bob asks, "who are the ones proclaiming the gospel?"

In western culture we only release professionals to do this. While we release the entire people of God in theory, our methods and gatherings proclaim another message. Bob goes on to talk about proclamation:

A study of every occurrence of the same Greek word for "proclaim" that occurs in 1 Cor. 9:14 shows that in every use of the word in the NT the reference is to one of delivering the gospel to the unbeliever. So, in the grand scheme of gifts, ministries and offices in the church who are the ones that the Bible declares are "proclaiming" the gospel? P.299

Bob answers his question that "every believer is to proclaim Jesus to others." Does this mean that all Christians should make their living from doing so? Obviously not. Rather, those in the New Testament who received support for ministry were those traveling around and planting churches. In essence, we have confused an apostolic calling with a call to local eldership. Yet even the greatest apostle did not use his right in the gospel, but rather supported himself to set an example for us to follow.

The impact of paying a few local and stationary brethren to perform ministry has been terrible. Bob lists a few of these:

[We widen the gap between clergy and laity](#)

[We rob four or five part time volunteers from discovering the joy of their calling](#)

[We use funds that otherwise could be spent in service and in caring for the poor](#)

[We compound institutional overhead due to the need of offices, assistants, copy machines etc.](#)

[We reinforce the unbiblical notion that one must have professional training to be an adequate minister of Christ](#)

A Christ centered leader: by Don Zimmer

+ Is not a simply a person called, elected, or employed in a position of authority, but a person who stands only as his or her own vulnerable self, committed to carrying the message that God loves not because of what we do or accomplish, but because of who God is.

+ Leads in a radically different way, not on what the world values but in the footsteps of the servant leader, Jesus where the measure is not in what the leader does but in the answer to the question: "are the served becoming healthier, freer, wiser, more autonomous and more likely themselves to become servants?"

+ Claims relevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that permits him or her entry into a deep solidarity with the anguish and pain underlying the glitter and hype that engulfs us and to bring the light of Jesus there.

+ Understands that the Gospel is best communicated to people through relationships where people can encounter the message at their points of anxiety and pain, shared interests, circumstances, and/or experience.

+ Is not simply well informed about the burning issues of our time, but first rooted in a permanent, intimate relationship with Jesus and finds there the source of his or her words of advice and guidance.

+ Just reclaim the time for quiet that Jesus repeatedly sought and have an ardent desire to dwell there.

+ Is called into the community of believers, and to discover there the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He or she must be a full member of that community, accountable to it, in need of its affection and support, and committed to minister with his or her whole being including their "wounded selves".

+ Needs to be poor, prepared to journey with nothing but a staff. Being poor offers us the opportunity to allow ourselves to be served and led.

+ Seeks not to control but to use their power to grow others. This is not a leader who lacks spine but a one so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow him, trusting that they will find life and finds it abundantly

- + Is comfortable with power but chooses to use it to nurture growth in others and their organizations.
- + Must seek to listen to others as God listens to our deepest longings and in so doing help them to disclose and discover their createdness and redeemedness in new ways.
- + Recognizes that leadership does not rest in one person but in the many people of a community as they are gifted and the need requires. He or she seeks to help prepare others for leadership and to be an effective follower when others are called to step forward.
- + Knows that the only authority he or she has is that which others are willing to entrust to them save the authority to serve as Jesus served.
- + Understands that his or her leadership is finally stewardship, stewardship of the Gospel, stewardship of people, and stewardship of the resources that God so richly surrounds us with. + Understands people serve God through many organizations and he or she seeks to create the commitment to serve in each organization of which they are a part.
- + Is intimately rooted in the Biblical text and the sacraments. They are familiar and mysterious, a source of continued wonder and strength, faith and wisdom, hope and promise."

CONCLUSION

Change is often messy, and few of us like change. It is a challenge to all of us to release control and allow new ways of doing and being to arise. Leaders are needed to correct, protect, and direct as the entire people of God are equipped and released. In the first two centuries AD the church grew and spread like wild fire apart from buildings and programs because all God's people carried the good news. The modern house church movement is attempting to recover the dynamic of that day.

New wine requires new wineskins, otherwise the skins will burst and the wine is lost. The Lord Himself is bringing change to structures. His heart is to see all His people released to serve Him. Old structures are falling down and God is raising up a new generation of apostolic leaders and fathers who are not afraid to try new ways and walk without maps in dependence on the LORD.

We work in the physical world, but the weapons of our warfare are not earthly. Individualism is deadly; we need one another. It's interesting that the context of Zechariah 4:6 is the rebuilding of the Temple: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD." The Lord will build His church!

One connection may be less obvious. Warfare is closely tied to the word, the word is the sword of the Spirit. By the Word of the Lord all creation came into being. All authority rests ultimately on the word of God. The Word and the Spirit must be held together.

Sanctify them in Thy truth; Thy word is truth... John 17:17

What is all of this "unto?" We could as easily ask, "Why the church?" Paul says that "God's plan is to unite all things in himself: things in heaven, and things on earth." He desires to pour out His love on all people, to show His glory in all creation, beginning with the church.

He was crucified because of weakness; He lives because of the power of God. I Cor. 13:4

We live in an upside down kingdom, but don't always grasp this reality. God is working hard at changing that, and many of us are discovering that "when we are weak, then we are strong." It is at our point of weakness that Christ is revealed, and that we become open to the strength of others. In our weakness we discover community.

As God re-forges our hearts, he gradually entrusts us with ministry. Leaders who have learned to walk in weakness are more likely to also walk in power. I once heard a renewed Priest define the church: "the gathered weakness of man which becomes the gathered power of God." Or as Jim Wallis put it, "The principal

less of community is that God breaks in at the weak places." As we walk in renewal, may we also learn to walk in the way of the Cross!

A fathering and apostolic anointing is currently being released in the church worldwide. No longer content with positional authority and mere outward conformity, leaders are beginning to walk in relational authority, with the fullness of servant hearts of love toward people. Increasingly leaders are looking for ways to release and empower others, so that together we may work to build the kingdom. No longer content with distant, formal and task oriented relationships, the heart of the Lord is to build a family and true brotherhood where mutual submission is the pattern.

Recently my wife and I met with two couples who will soon be involved in planting a local expression of the Vineyard in our city. As we spoke with them about community, ministry and the poor we realized that we were traveling the same road. We desperately need missional communities: the church often fails to be missional, and para-church organizations usually fail to express real community. We need to recover the full expression of the gospel in the radical middle.

May the Lord build His church! Come soon, Lord Jesus!

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