

THE CHURCH

Most Christians' definition of church needs to be redefined. They refer to it as the place they go to for fellowship with other Christians and to worship God, but it is the congregation of Christians themselves who are the church, not the building where they meet. The church is a New Testament term designating the Christian community, whether it be a local congregation of Christians or congregations of Christians collectively throughout the earth (CP Mt 18:17; Ac 11:22-26; 1Cor 3:1-2). Those scriptures refer to local congregations (CP Mt 16:13-18; Ac 20:28; 1Cor 10:32; Ga 1:13; Eph 1:19-23; 5:25-27; He 12:23). Those scriptures refer to congregations of Christians collectively throughout the earth – the universal church.

The church is not a building made with hands, but a spiritual building embodied in the Christian community, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone, or foundation (CP Isa 28:16; Mt 21:42-44; Ac 4:11-12; 1Cor 3:11; Eph 2:19-20; 1Pe 2:6-8). As the embodiment of the church Christians in scripture are called *God's Building* (CP 1Cor 3:9); the *Temple of God* (CP 1Cor 3:16-17; 2Cor 6:16); the *Household of Faith* (CP GA 6:10); the *Household of God*, an *Holy Temple of the Lord*, and an *Habitation of God through the Spirit* (CP Eph 2:19-22); the *House of Christ* (CP He 3:1-6); a *Spiritual House*, an *Holy Priesthood* (CP 1Pe 2:5); a *Chosen Generation*, a *Royal Priesthood*, an *Holy Nation*, a *Peculiar People* (CP 1Pe 2:9).

The church was decreed in God's eternal purpose before the beginning of time, but it was not revealed to the angels in heaven even until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ (CP Mt 13:17; Ac 15:18; Ro 16:25-26; 1Cor 2:7-8; Eph 1:4,9,11; 2:10; 3:1-12; Col 1:25-27; Tit 1:1-3; 1Pe 1:3-12, 18-20). The church is founded upon the great spiritual truth Peter confessed to Jesus in Mt 16 - that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (CP Mt 16:13-18). Jesus is the rock upon which His church is being built (CP Mt 7:21-27; 1Cor 3:11). It is the same confession of faith in Christ as Peter's, from the heart of every repentant sinner that brings about and confirms their new birth in Christ and sets them in the church (CP Ro 6:3-5; 10:8-10; 12:4-5; 1Cor 12:12-20, 27; Eph 2:1-8; 4:1-6). These scriptures show us how the church is constituted. The baptism referred to in Rom 6:3-5, 1Cor 12:13 and Eph 4:5 is spiritual – the baptism by the Holy Spirit of repentant sinners into Christ and into His body, the church. The Holy Spirit unites them with Jesus as members of His church upon their conversion to Christ. The church is compared to a human body with its many members. Christ is the head of the body (CP Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23-24). Every born again believer is a member set in the body with a function to perform.

Scriptures stress the importance of church membership – of belonging to a local church. They teach us that it is not possible to be a Christian independent of the rest of the body of Christ because God has foreordained that each Christian has a place, a purpose and a function in the body that no other Christian can fulfil (CP Ro 12:4-8; 1Cor 12:14-18, 25; Eph 4:15-16). God has set us in the body to suit His purpose not ours, and if we refuse to join

ourselves to a church we are refusing to join ourselves to Christ, because He is the church (CP 1Cor 12:12). It is folly for anyone to assume that they can be intentionally separated from the body of Christ and still be a member of His body. A body is an organised whole made up of parts and members, and nothing can function as a member if it is not attached or joined to the body. This applies in both the physical and spiritual realms. No member of a physical body can function if it is dismembered from the body, and neither can members of the spiritual body, the church, function if they become dismembered from it (CP He 10:24-25).

Here Christians are admonished to remain in fellowship with one another in the church as the day of Christ – His coming again – draws nearer, in order to stir each other up to love and to exhort one another to fulfil their ministries and functions in the church. The word "forsaking" here means abandoning or deserting. We are being warned not to abandon or desert the church like some are doing to their peril. The church is self-propagating. It is a living organism reproducing itself as its members preach the gospel of salvation (CP Ac 2:36-47; 4:4; 5:12-14; 6:7; 11:19-26; 13:48; Ro 1:16; Col 1:3-6). We see in Ac 11:26 that the term "Christians" was first used to describe the followers of Christ in Antioch. To be called a Christian is the highest honour any human being can receive (CP Ac 26:28; 1Pe 4:14-16).

It should be noted here in the light of so many scriptures referring to the church as the body of Christ, and that as Christ the head of the body is a man, it is incongruous that a teaching persists in Christendom that the church is a woman - the Bride of Christ. Apart from the fact that the real Bride of Christ is clearly identified in scripture requiring no ingenious interpretation, nowhere in scripture is the church ever referred to by a feminine pronoun to support this teaching. In fact the church is only ever referred to as a man in scripture (CP Eph 2:15-16; 4:11-13). (Some modern translations and paraphrased versions of the Bible refer to the church by feminine pronouns in Eph 5:25-27, but this is a contradiction in terms because they refer to the church as a man in Eph 2:15 and 4:13. How can the church be a "man" in one teaching in scripture, and a "woman" in another? God's word does not contradict itself – it is the translators and interpreters of those versions who are responsible for this contradiction.). In Eph 2:15 *man* is from the Greek word **anthropos** which designates a human being, a person without reference to sex, and in 4:13 it is from **aner** which refers specifically to a male. **Aner** is used here metaphorically of the church being brought to maturity - a *man* of mature understanding - in Christ (CP Ro 7:4; 2Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33). These scriptures are used to teach that the church is the Bride of Christ but it is soon apparent on examining them that they do not teach that at all. In Ro 7:4 Paul simply illustrates the Christian's freedom from the law with the analogy of marriage showing how the death of one partner frees the other from life-long obligations. He compares it to Christians, who having died to the law are now free to follow Christ – to become one with Him (CP Ro 7:1-6).

2Cor 11:2 is used by some to teach that the virgin referred to Symbolizes the church, but that is not what Paul is teaching. He is simply addressing his converts in Corinth and he tells them that he is anxious for them with the deep concern of God Himself - anxious that their love should be for Christ alone, just as a virgin saves her love for one man only: for the one who will be her husband. But Paul feared that in some way they would be led astray from their simple love and devotion for Christ, just as Eve was deceived by Satan in the Garden of Eden (CP V2-4). When kept in its proper perspective it soon becomes clear that V2 does not teach that the church is the Bride of Christ. Furthermore, Paul is only addressing his own converts in Corinth, not the whole church which extends far beyond Corinth in the earth. It is not Paul's job to present the whole church to Christ, only his own converts. Every Christian will have rejoicing in their own converts (CP Dan 12:3; 1Cor 3:11-14; 2Cor 1:14; Php 4:1; 1Th 2:19-20). In Eph 5:22-33 Paul is teaching us of Christ's infinite love for the church. He compares the relationship of Christ and the church to that of a man and his wife. He is not teaching that the wife Symbolizes the church or that the husband Symbolizes Christ. He simply teaches that the relationship of Christ and the church is more easily understood through the dynamics of the marriage relationship between a husband and wife (CP Eph 5:22-33). The great mystery Paul refers to in V 32 is that marriage is a sacred reflection of the magnificent and beautiful mystery of union between Christ and the church which was completely unknown until revealed in the New Testament.

Now we will look at the true Bride of Christ (CP Rev 19:7-9 with 21:2, 9-10, 18-27). This is the Bride of Christ: the Holy City, New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem is the Lamb's wife that "made herself ready" in 19:7, and was "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" in 21:2. She will be adorned with the jewels of 21:18-21. It was granted to her to be arrayed in fine linen, pure and white, which is the righteousness of saints, because she will be the eternal home of all the saints of God - Old Testament and New Testament alike - from Abel to the very last soul saved in the Great Tribulation (CP 19:8 with 21:24-27). New Jerusalem is the City of God which God promised to all the Old Testament saints and Jesus promised to all the New Testament saints. They will all go to live in New Jerusalem together (CP Isa 2:1-4 (also Mic 4:1-3); Jn 14:1-3; He 11:1-2, 13-16; 12:22-23; 13:14; Rev 3:12; with 14:1-5; 15:2-4; 20:4-6; 22:1-5). Finally, the church is also referred to as a man in 2Th 2:7. The *he* who is presently restraining Antichrist from revealing himself is the church (CP 2Th 2:1-9). This refers to the *rapture* of the church - when the church will be "caught up" in the air with Jesus when He comes to take all the saints of God back to heaven with Him at the first resurrection (CP Jn 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:12-23, 32, 42-44, 50-58; 1Th 4:13-18; Rev 20:4-6). Many Christians believe that the *he* of 2Th 2:7 is the Holy Spirit, but that is not correct as the preceding scriptures clearly show. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit will still be on earth after the first resurrection to convict the multitudes of their sins who get saved during

Antichrist's reign, because nobody can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit (CP 1Cor 12:3).

There is one more issue concerning the church that needs to be raised here before concluding this segment of our study. There is a conception of the Christian calling in the church that divides Christians into two classes - the *clergy* and the *laity*. The *clergy* designates paid, professional, full-time ministers or priests as opposed to the rest of the church - the *laity*. This implies a system with grades of status or authority ranking one above another in the New Testament church which is hierarchical, and totally unscriptural. In scripture the terms "clergy" and "laity" refer to the same thing - the church. *Clergy* does not designate a paid, professional priesthood in scripture as man has designated it (CP 1Pe 5:2-3). The word "heritage" in V3 here is from the Greek word *kleros* which means "clergy", and it is clearly referring to the church - the so-called "laity". *Laity* is from the Greek word *laos*, meaning people, which almost totally refers to the church in scripture, but when used by men to distinguish it from the *clergy* it designates those who do not hold a ministry office in the church. Yet God designates the *laity* a "Royal Priesthood" (CP 1Pe 2:9; Rev 5:1-6). It is patently obvious that if scripture designates Christians as being both God's *clergy* and *priesthood* then there are no distinctions in the church. Any distinctions are strictly functional and do not determine the superiority of one group of Christians in the church over another (CP 1Cor 12:4-25). This very clearly teaches that no member of the church is insignificant or inferior, and that every member has a ministry to fulfil (CP Ro 12:1-8; 1Cor 12:4-11, 28; 2Cor 5:17-20). The *laity* are not merely passive spectators in the New Testament church - it was the *laity* who first took the gospel into the world from the Jerusalem church, doing the work of evangelists and leading many people to Christ (CP Ac 8:1-4; 11:19-21).

Scriptures plainly teach that any conception of the Christian calling that divides Christians into two classes is totally unscriptural. It in no way reflects God's purpose for the church. God wants every believer to be able to minister His word to others, and to fulfil God's purpose, Christ has given certain ministry gifts to the church. These ministry gifts were all embodied in Christ Himself and He gave them to the church as an extension of His own earthly ministry to prepare and equip the church for God's service (CP Eph 4:11-12). We need to study these ministry gifts very carefully in order to understand them, because there is a great deal of confusion surrounding them in the contemporary church. Most Christians in the contemporary church believe that Eph 4:11 refers to five orders of ministers in the church appointed to discharge five different kinds of duties - generally known in the church as the "five fold ministry". But that is not what scriptures teach, as we shall soon see. These gifts can overlap each other in one man. There are a number of men in the New Testament who functioned in them all, and the same applies in the contemporary church. Let us now study them.

APOSTLES: from the Greek word *apostoloi*, means ones sent, messengers. In the New Testament church

it designates the office instituted by Christ to witness of Him before the world (Jn 17:18). Apostles are placed first in the divine order of ministry gifts Christ gave to the church to prepare and equip it for God's service (CP Eph 4:11; 1Cor 12:28). Yet there is much teaching in the contemporary church that apostles and prophets ceased with the first century church, but that is not what scriptures teach (CP Mt 24:14; Jn 17:18-21; Eph 3:1-12; 4:7-16; 5:25-27). It is plainly evident from these scriptures that Christ has ordained the ministry gifts He gave to the church to remain there while ever the church exists. They are all essential to God's purpose for the church - "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry" (CP Eph 4:11-12). *Perfecting* means "to make fully ready", which defines the completed process outlined in V13-16 (CP Eph 4:13-16). This confirms that all the ministry gifts Christ gave to the church will remain there until God's purpose for the church is accomplished, which can only ever be when it has fulfilled its mission on earth and is taken up to heaven by Jesus (CP Eph 2:19-20). This further emphasises the continuing importance of apostles and prophets in God's purpose for the church and underlines the reason why they are placed first and second in the divine order of ministry gifts for the church. God includes them with Jesus as the foundation of the church. *Foundation* in this context is used metaphorically of the ministry of the gospel and the doctrines of faith - the church is built upon the teachings of the apostles and prophets. It is their responsibility to bring clarification and illumination concerning God's word to those they are establishing in the faith.

In the primary sense Eph 2:20 applies to the original twelve apostles Christ called before Pentecost and in the secondary sense to all those God has called since Pentecost (CP Ac 2:42; Eph 3:1-12). Apostles have two main tasks to perform in the ministry: to bring into being properly ordered churches and to set, and maintain in order, and continue to build churches that already exist. Apostles not only pioneer new works, but continue building on foundations others have laid (CP Ac 8:14-17, 25; 1Cor 3:10). Apostles can function in either an itinerant ministry or be domiciled in a local church. There is nothing in scripture to indicate that the apostle James, the Lord's brother ever left the church at Jerusalem and the same thing happens in the contemporary church. There are many men who either pioneer a church or continue building on foundations others have laid and stay there. Sadly however, in the contemporary church these men are not designated apostles as they should be but "pastors", although nowhere in scripture is the term "pastor" ever used to define rank, authority or title of anyone - man or woman - in the New Testament church. There are men designated apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers in scripture but there is no man (or woman) designated a pastor. We will examine the scriptures proving that statement in our study on pastors. (Designated means described as, given a name or title, specified). There are at least 28 men named as apostles in scripture. Apart from the thirteen - including Matthias - before Pentecost, at least fifteen others have been designated apostles since then: Paul and Barnabas (CP Ac 13:1-5, 50 - 14:4, 14; 15:22-25, 35-39); Silas and Timothy

(CP 1Th 1:1; 2:6); Apollos (CP 1Cor 4:6-9); Titus (CP 2Cor 8:23); James, Joses, Simon and Jude, the brothers of Jesus (CP Mt 13:55; 1Cor 9:5); Andronicus and Junias (CP Ro 16:7); Epaphroditus (CP Php 2:25), and there were at least two others with Titus (CP 2Cor 8:23). Scriptures do not tell us how all these men were commissioned, but in the case of Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Apollos and Titus, we see how God promoted them after they proved their faithfulness in other areas of ministry first. This is the biblical pattern for promotion in the New Testament church (CP Mt 25:14-23).

Although Paul was a chosen vessel of God he was not sent out as an apostle until after he had proved his faithfulness in other areas of ministry first (CP Ac 9:1-30; 11:25-30; 13:1-5). Paul and Barnabas were already ministering in the local church at Antioch as prophets and teachers before being called of God and sent out as apostles. Barnabas first proved himself as a liberal giver in the fledgling church at Jerusalem and then as the first missionary sent out from a church. In this capacity he also did the work of an evangelist leading many people to the Lord and building up the church at Antioch where he and Paul worked hard and long spreading the gospel (CP Ac 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:22-26; 12:25; 13:1-5, 50 - 14:4). Silas was also a prophet when chosen by Paul to take John Mark's place as his travelling companion on Paul's second apostolic mission journey. It was on this journey that Timothy also joined them, and he and Silas helped Paul establish the churches at Philippi and Thessalonica (CP Ac 15:22-25, 35-41; 16:1-5, 19-40; 17:1-15; 18:5; Php 2:19-23). Timothy was one of Paul's converts from his first mission journey. Paul became his mentor and taught and encouraged him through other areas of ministry until he became an apostle. He and Silas were first designated apostles in 1Th 2:6 (CP 1Th 1:1; 2:6; 1Ti 1:1-4; 4:1-16; 2Ti 1:1-6; 4:1-5). Apollos was very active in promoting the gospel at Ephesus, Achaia and Corinth, and was even more so after being properly instructed by Aquila and Priscilla. He laboured with Paul establishing the church at Corinth (CP Ac 18:24 - 19:1; 1Cor 1:11-12; 3:3-7; 4:17). Titus was also a long-time fellow-worker of Paul's in his apostolic mission journeys and God promoted him too (CP 2Cor 7:5-7, 13-15; 8:23; Ga 2:1-2; 2Ti 4:9-10; Tit 1:4-5). We get a good insight here into what is involved in preparing and equipping the saints for service, seeing them released into ministry, and how God promotes them from there. None of these men started out as apostles. They all proved themselves faithful in other areas of ministry first and then God promoted them just as Jesus teaches in Mt 25:14-23.

Most Christians believe that the ministry gift of apostle in the contemporary church has been fulfilled in the ministry of the missionary, and there are doubtless many missionaries who do function as apostles and should be recognised as such. The ministries of apostles and missionaries are similar - they both evangelise, plant churches, instruct, correct, and establish them in the faith, but whereas every apostle is a missionary, not every missionary is an apostle. Furthermore every apostle is a qualified elder in the New Testament church, but not every

missionary is, and it is the elders, collectively and co-equally, to whom God has committed the direction and government of the local New Testament church (CP 1Pe 5:1; 2Jn 1; 3Jn 1). There is a highly impactful teaching originating in these scriptures that the majority of Christians are completely unaware of but which leads us to a clearer understanding of church government. Elders are much more important to God's purpose for the church than most Christians realise. They are not simply rubber stamps for the decisions made by local church leaders - they are the local church leaders, yet are not recognised as such in the contemporary church. The elders constitute the presbytery, the ruling body in the New Testament church (CP Ac 20:17, 28). Paul's admonition to the elders here to collectively heed their responsibility to feed the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers, clearly teaches that God has committed the direction and government of the local New Testament church to the plurality of elders co-equally. *Feed* is from the Greek word **poimaino**, which means to pastor or shepherd. It is the plurality of elders' responsibility co-equally to pastor God's people who comprise the local church. *Overseers* is from the Greek word **episkopos**, which means bishop (CP Ac 1:15-20).

Here we learn that apostles are also bishops. Judas Iscariot forfeited his bishoprick – the office, charge, or duty of an overseer in the New Testament church – when he betrayed Jesus. He also forfeited his apostleship and eldership at the same time. *Bishop* is simply another name for elder. **Episkopos** is equal to **presbuteros** the Greek word for elder or presbyter. The terms bishop/overseer, elder/presbyter and pastor/shepherd all refer to one and the same person. However, although they all refer to one and the same person, the terms are not synonymous – they do not all mean the same: *elder/presbyter* refers to the man, *bishop/overseer* refers to his office, and *pastor/shepherd* refers to the work he does (CP 1Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:4-9). These scriptures not only confirm that it is the elders to whom God has committed the direction and government of the local New Testament church, but they also teach that the elders are all men. The Greek words **episkopos** for bishop, and **presbuteros** for elder, both only refer to a male. Also, the fact that anyone aspiring to the office of a bishop or elder must be the husband of one wife if married, is further confirmation that elders can only ever be men, not women as well. Likewise deacons can only ever be men also, for they too must be the husband of one wife if married (CP 1Ti 3:12). Scripture does not teach that a bishop, elder or deacon can be the wife of one husband. We will examine this aspect of women's ministry in the church in more detail in our study on "pastors". There is just as much confusion concerning elders in the contemporary church as there is concerning apostles and prophets. Sadly, not many Christians know who the elders really are in the divine order for the church. They simply see them as having been a long-time member of the church, but that is only a part of what qualifies them as elders (CP Eph 4:7-16).

This clearly spells out for us that the men who function in the ministry gifts of V11 are the ones God has designated as the ruling elders in the New

Testament church. All the scriptures we have examined so far in our study on apostles confirm this. Christ gave these men to the church and ordained them to remain there while ever the church exists and we do not have to look for any one else in scripture beyond them as the elders to whom God would commit the direction and government of His church. The ruling body of elders in the church consists of apostle/elders, prophet/elders, evangelist/elders and teacher/elders who collectively and co-equally pastor the church (CP 1Pe 5:1-4). Peter highlights the co-equality of the ruling body of elders in his statement here "...who am also an elder." This "elder" is not **presbuteros** but **sumpresbuteros**, which means literally "one on the same level with them" - a fellow elder or co-presbyter. This is further confirmation that the divine order of government in the local New Testament church involves a plurality of elders co-equally. Peter is addressing a plurality of elders from each of the local churches at Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia in this letter (CP 1Pe 1:1). His admonition to them is similar to Paul's admonition to the elders in the church at Ephesus in Ac 20:28 but with the added injunction that they are not to "...lord it over their congregations." This means that they are not to rule them in a high-handed, autocratic way. Some who are opposed to the concept of a plurality of elders co-equally ruling the New Testament church teach that in 1Pe 5:1 Peter is identifying with the elders as an apostle and with the people as an elder, but that begs the question, why? He had already identified himself as an apostle to the elders and people alike in 1:1, and in 5:1 he simply asserts to the elders among them that he and they are co-equals in the divine order of government in the church. We should accept that assertion at face value, not look for hidden agendas behind it (CP Ac 14:21-23).

Here for the first time in scripture we see elders being appointed in the local church. They were already presiding over the church at Judea when Paul and Barnabas took the relief money there from Antioch (CP Ac 11:29-30). They were also already presiding with the apostles over the Jerusalem church when Paul and Barnabas went there to settle the question of gentile circumcision at Antioch (CP Ac 15:1-6). In Ac 14:21-23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they had previously pioneered on their first apostolic mission journey in Ac 13 (CP 1Ti 1:1-4; Tit 1:4-5). We learn in 1Ti 1:1-4 that elders who had already been appointed in the local church at Ephesus were teaching error so Paul left Timothy there in the foundation ministry of apostle to straighten them out. Tit 1:4-5 teaches that Paul likewise left Titus in the foundation ministry of apostle in Crete to appoint elders in the local churches there. We see in all these scriptures a definite biblical pattern whereby elders are appointed after local churches have been established by apostles. The elders collectively then become the presbytery, responsible for the direction and government of the church. This is not teaching that elders are appointed by men, but that those functioning in the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11 are acknowledged and ordained to ministry in the church by the apostle or the ruling body of elders in accordance with the divine will (CP 1Ti 4:14; 2Ti

1:6; 4:5). The word "presbytery" in 1Ti 4:14 is referring to the ruling body of elders who prophesied over Timothy and laid hands on him to bring forth his ministry gift of apostle (CP 1Ti 3:1-7). The term "desire" in V1 means to stretch oneself out in order to grasp or touch something. It includes the idea of reaching after or seeking. However believers desiring the office of bishop/overseer/elder/presbyter must have the desire first confirmed by the word of God as outlined in V2-7, and also by the church as outlined in V10.

This means that nobody can be ordained an elder based solely on desire, burden, vision, administrative ability, business acumen, the call of God some may feel they have on their life, or even Bible College training. The requirements for ordination are stipulated by God and stand as absolutes in God's order for church government. Moral issues are not all that is involved. Spiritual maturity and faithfulness in service are just as important. Men must first prove their faithfulness in lesser areas of ministry before seeking promotion to the highest office in the local New Testament church. In all the scriptures we have studied pertaining to apostles so far we find a definite pattern to how God raises up men in leadership ministries. First they proved their faithfulness in the little things. Then God promoted them to the bigger things, just as Jesus teaches in Mt 25:14-23 (CP 1Ti 3:8-13). V13 here teaches that those who serve faithfully as deacons obtain for themselves a position of trust and influence in the church. This is a definite promise of promotion for those faithful in the lesser things first. There are still more scriptures proving the plurality of elders as the ruling body co-equally in the local church which we need to examine (CP Php 1:1). "Bishops" here are the ruling elders or presbyters (CP 1Ti 5:17). "The elders that rule well" are those who preside over the local church (CP He 13:7, 17, 24). "Them who are to be obeyed" again are the ruling elders. *Obey* here means to assent to; follow (CP Jas 5:14). James also teaches a plurality of elders ruling the church co-equally here. He does not refer to any one man but to the plurality of elders co-equally.

The number of elders in any church will depend entirely upon the size of the congregation. The apostle who pioneers the church may be the only one to start with, but others should be appointed as quickly as they are seen to be functioning in any of the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11, and can satisfy the requirements God has laid down for their ordination in 1Ti 3:1-7 and Tit 1:4-9. They then become co-leaders in the church with the apostle (CP Ac 15:1-27; 21:17-25). These scriptures clearly confirm all that the foregoing scriptures teach - that the direction and government of the local New Testament church is not vested in the ministry of one man alone as it is in the contemporary church, but in the plurality of elders co-equally. James alone did not decide on what action to take concerning the question of gentile circumcision in Ac 15 as some teach. The Greek construction of the phrase "wherefore my sentence is ..." in V19 according to **Kenneth Wuest's "Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament"** is "...wherefore as for myself, my judgement is ..." James is simply putting forward his

opinion on the issue the same as Peter did in V7-11, only he was more explicit than Peter by also proposing what action they should take. The fact that they all agreed to the action proposed as Chapter 15 clearly emphasizes, proves the co-equality in the plurality of elders involved.

There were a number of apostles present with the elders in Ac 15 but only James was present when Paul returned to Jerusalem in Ac 21. On both occasions though the elders were co-equal with the apostles in receiving Paul and his companions and in the decision making process which ensued. There is nothing in any of these scriptures to indicate that James, who appears to be resident apostle in the Jerusalem church in Ac 21, outranked the elders who presided over the church with him. However, the mantle of spokesman for the apostles and elders falls upon the apostle as the one set first in the church in the foundation ministry. In the absence of the apostle the next in line is the prophet, and after him the teacher. This is the divine order (CP 1Cor 12:28). There is no need to look beyond what scriptures teach about government in the New Testament church (CP Rev 1:11-20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). The general consensus among Christians as well as most Bible commentators is that the "angels" of the seven churches Jesus addresses here are "pastors" because of the common belief in the contemporary church that "pastors" are the local New Testament church leaders, yet the word "angel" is from the Greek word **angelos**, which means a messenger - one sent to announce or proclaim, which is also what apostles do. Angels and apostles have similar meanings but because it is generally believed that the office of apostle ceased with the first century church, the apostle is no longer recognised as the foundation ministry in the contemporary church, and he has been replaced by the "pastor", notwithstanding that nowhere in scripture is the term "pastor" ever used to define rank, authority or title of anyone - man or woman in the New Testament church. As noted earlier we will examine the scriptures proving that statement in our study on "pastors" (CP 3Jn 9-10). The wisdom of God is seen in the plurality of elders as leaders in the church because it safeguards the church from being ruled by despots like Diotrophes.

Now let us look at some of the characteristics of false apostles before moving on. Scriptures warn against them and we need to be able to correctly discern them. It is very easy to be deceived by them because they are so charismatic (CP 2Cor 11:4-15). False apostles are counterfeits of the devil the same as all other false teachers, and the only sure way to guard against being taken in by them is to test their teaching according to God's word (CP Ac 17:10-11; 2Pe 1:16-19). In 2Pe 1:16-19 Peter teaches us that scripture is the only proof text we have with which to measure any teaching in the church against, and even though we may also be eyewitness to a truly great spiritual experience as Peter himself was at the transfiguration of Jesus, if any teaching does not have its authority in scripture, then we must disregard it completely, the same as the church at Ephesus did (CP Rev 2:1-7). Christians are commanded to test every teaching that comes into the church (CP Ac 17:10-11; 1Th 5:21; 2Pe 1:16-19; 1Jn 4:1).

PROPHETS: from the Greek word **prophetes** means "a proclaimer of divine truth". Prophets are placed second in the order of ministry gifts Christ gave to the church to prepare and equip it for service (CP Eph 4:11-12; 1Cor 12:28). Yet there are many who teach that together with apostles the ministry gift of prophet no longer exists; that it ceased with the first century church. But as our study on apostles show, that is not correct (CP Mt 24:14; Jn 17:18-21; Eph 3:1-12; 4:7-16; 5:25-27). Scriptures clearly teach that Christ has given the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11 to the church and ordained them all to remain there while ever the church exists. They are all vitally necessary - "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry" (CP Eph 4:11-12). *Perfecting* in V12 means "to make fully ready", which defines the completed process outlined in V13-16 (CP Eph 4:13-16). We learned all these truths in our study on apostles but they need to be re-stated here. All the ministry gifts Christ gave to the church will remain there until God's purpose for the church is accomplished, which can only ever be when it has fulfilled its mission on earth and is taken up to heaven to be with Jesus (CP Eph 2:19-20). This further emphasizes the continuing importance of apostles and prophets in God's purpose for the church and underlines the reason why they are placed first and second in the order of ministry gifts Christ gave to the church. God includes them with Jesus as the foundation of the church. *Foundation* in this context is used metaphorically of the ministry of the gospel and the doctrines of faith - the church is built upon the teachings of the apostles and prophets. It is their responsibility to bring clarification and illumination concerning God's word to the church and to those they are establishing in the faith. They are both teachers and preachers.

Those who teach that the ministry gift of prophet ceased with the first century church equate the prophet's function in the contemporary church to the "pastor's" sermons and preaching. Nowhere in scripture however is the term "pastor" ever used to define rank, authority or title of anyone in the New Testament church which we also learned in our study on apostles, yet there are many men designated prophets: Paul (or Saul as he was known then), Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene and Manaen (CP Ac 13:1); Agabus (CP Ac 11:27-28; 21:10-11); Judas surnamed Barsabab, and Silas (CP Ac 15:22,27,32). Barnabas, whose name actually means prophet, was so named by the apostles (CP Ac 4:36-37). Remember that Paul, Barnabas and Silas were also apostles as well as prophets, and we will find that they were evangelists and teachers as well. They functioned in all the ministry gifts, as also did Timothy and others, as we shall see shortly. The function of prophet as one of the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11 in the New Testament church is not to be confused with the gift of prophecy, one of the nine gifts, or manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the church (CP 1Cor 12:7-11). These are not ministry gifts but manifestations of the Spirit which only operate at certain times when the need arises and according to the earnest desire of the believer (CP 1Cor 14:1-4). The gift of prophecy here is potentially available to every believer baptized in the Holy Spirit but it is only for specific occasions, whereas the

ministry gift of prophet is a permanent ministry. Furthermore, every prophet has the gift of prophecy but not everyone with the gift of prophecy is a prophet (CP Ac 21:7-9). Philip's daughters prophesied, but they are not designated prophets in scripture as Agabus is who prophesied over Paul in their house (CP Ac 21:10-11). Also, as with all the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11, every prophet is a qualified elder in the New Testament church, but not everyone with the gift of prophecy is.

There is more teaching on the gift of prophecy as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament than what there is on the ministry gift of prophet (CP 1Cor 12:1-11). These are all manifestations or gifts of the Spirit which includes the gift of prophecy in V10 (CP 1Cor 14:1-9, 15-19, 22-25, 29-33, 37). It is generally agreed that all these scriptures refer to the gift of prophecy not to a prophet, though V29-33 and 37 can refer to both. By their very definition prophets speak by inspiration and divine revelation but they are not infallible and their utterances must be subject to evaluation by other prophets, the church and the infallible word of God (CP Ac 17:10-11, 1Cor 14:29-33; 2Pe 1:16-19). Ac 17:10-11 and 2Pe 1:16-19 are used in our study on the teachings of false apostles but they are applicable here also. They both teach that scriptures are the only proof text we have against which we must measure every teaching in the church.

Now let us look at some of the characteristics of false prophets in the New Testament church. Jesus, Paul, Peter and John all warn against them and we need to be able to discern them. Jesus said they come in sheep's clothing. That means their deception is subtle – they have the outward appearance of a true prophet but inwardly are ravening wolves. But Jesus said we shall know them by their fruit. That is why it is so important to be thoroughly grounded in God's word, because the only way we can ever test any teaching in the church is by the word of God (CP Mt 7:15-23; Ac 20:29-32; 2Pe 2:1-3; 1Jn 4:1-6). All teaching must be tested against the revelation of God's truth in scripture. John's admonition to the church in 1Jn 4:1 to "try the spirits whether they are of God" makes it obligatory upon Christians to examine and prove every teaching in the church (CP Ac 17:10-11; 1Th 5:21; 2Pe 1:16-19). Scriptures are the only proof texts we have, and if any teaching cannot be proved by them then it must be disregarded, irrespective of who is teaching it.

EVANGELISTS: There is no confusion in the contemporary church over evangelists as there is with apostles and prophets. Evangelists, from the Greek word **euaggelistes**, are preachers of the gospel; ones who declare the good news of Christ (CP Ro 10:13-15). Evangelists preach to the unsaved, whereas apostles and prophets preach to both the saved and the unsaved. But evangelism is not only about preaching, it is also about the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and of power (CP Mk 16:16-20; Ro 15:18-21; 1Cor 2:4-5). Jesus not only preached; He also demonstrated the power of God over all the forces of evil that brought sickness, disease and death to the human race: He raised the dead; cast demons out of people, and healed them of their sicknesses and

diseases. He made the lame to walk, the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He even exercised authority over the course of nature (CP Lu 8:22-56). These are but a few of the miracles Jesus wrought when He preached. He brought the good news of the gospel by word and deed and not by word only (CP 1Cor 4:20). The demonstration of the Holy Spirit and of power are signs that awaken others to a consciousness of the presence and the power of God and raise their faith in Jesus for salvation (CP Ac 6:1-10; 8:4-8). Over five thousand people were saved as a result of one miracle - the healing of a crippled beggar - in the first century church (CP Ac 3:1-4:4).

It is incumbent upon all Christians to preach the gospel (CP Mt 28:18-20). But they are not evangelists as such (CP Ac 8:1-17, 26-40). Here we get a clear picture of the work of an evangelist according to the New Testament pattern. Philip preached the gospel, many people got saved and were then baptized in water. God confirmed the word Philip preached with signs following: there were miracles performed, demons cast out and people were healed. There was great joy in that city (CP Mk 16:16-20). It is pointless to speculate why the new converts were not baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues until the apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them and prayed for them. That still happens today -not everyone is baptized in the Spirit immediately they are converted to Christ, and it is reasonable to assume that is what happened then too. The "Philip" we are reading about here is not the apostle Philip, one of the original twelve disciples Jesus called, but one of the seven men appointed to minister to the Greek widows in the church at Jerusalem (CP Ac 6:1-6 with 21:8-9). Although Philip was the only man designated an evangelist in scripture every apostle was also an evangelist (as well as a prophet and teacher). They had to evangelize first to lead people to Christ in order to plant churches and establish them in the faith (CP Ac 8:25; 13:1-5; 2Ti 4:5). The other six men chosen with Philip to minister to the Greek widows in the church of Jerusalem also became evangelists, although Philip is the only one among them named an evangelist in scripture. Stephen was the most prominent before he was killed (CP Ac 6:1-10).

Those scriptures all confirm that Eph 4:11 does not teach that there are five orders of ministers in the church appointed to discharge five different kinds of duties as most Christians in the contemporary church believe. In 2Ti 4:5 Timothy, who was already functioning in the ministry gifts of apostle and teacher, was reminded by Paul to do the work of an evangelist as well as his other duties. While evangelists may not establish churches like apostles, or bring forth new revelation like prophets, or a deeper understanding of God's word like teachers, they are as essential to God's purpose for the New Testament church as any of the other ministry gifts of Eph 4:11, and thus are also qualified elders in the church and just as committed to preparing and equipping God's people for service as are apostles, prophets and teachers. To teach as some do that evangelists are not essentially concerned with the feeding, tending, caring for and overseeing the church is to ignore the plain fact of scripture. Let us look at those scriptures again (CP Mt 24:14; Jn

17:18-21; Eph 3:1-12; 4:7-16; 5:25-27). Those who teach that evangelists are not essentially concerned with overseeing the New Testament church need to be reminded that every one of the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11 have been given to the church "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry", and that this defines the completed process for which all who function in the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11 are responsible. God has committed the direction and government of the New Testament church to all who qualify as elders, not just some (CP Eph 4:11-12).

In closing this part of our study it is interesting to note that nowhere in scripture are we warned to beware of false evangelists in the church as we are warned to beware of false apostles, prophets and teachers. By definition evangelists cannot be false - they only proclaim the good news of Christ and preach the message of salvation to the lost.

PASTORS: The term "pastor" is derived from the Greek word **poimen**, which means a "shepherd". **poimen** is used 18 times in the New Testament but it is only translated "pastor" once (CP Eph 4:11). The other 17 times it is translated "shepherd". It is used 11 times either directly or indirectly in reference to Jesus (CP Mt 25:32; 26:31; Mk 14:27; Jn 10:2, 11-12, 14, 16; He 13:20; 1Pe 2:25); Jesus uses it twice in reference to others (CP Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34), and it is used 4 times of the shepherds who visited the baby Jesus (CP Lu 2:8, 15, 18, 20). These scriptures prove the statement made earlier in our study on apostles that nowhere in scripture is the term "pastor" ever used as it is in the contemporary church to define rank, authority or title of anyone - man or woman - in the New Testament church. Rather, scriptures clearly teach that it defines the nature or character of the work for which the elders in the New Testament church, collectively and co-equally, are responsible. It is the elders constituting the presbytery to whom God has committed the direction and government of the local New Testament church. Let us once again examine the scriptures that teach us this (CP Eph 4:7-8, 11-16; Ac 20:17-28; 1Pe 5:1-4; 1Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:4-9). These scriptures not only confirm that it is the plurality of elders co-equally to whom God has committed the direction and government of the local New Testament church, but they also teach that the elders are men only. Contrary to what a great many Christians in the contemporary church believe there is no provision in scripture for the ordination of women to public ministry in the New Testament church.

As we learned previously in our study on apostles, both **episkopos**, the Greek word for bishop/overseer, and **presbuteros**, the Greek word for elder/presbyter only refer to a male in the New Testament, thus signifying that men only are ordained of God to pastor the New Testament church. Also, the fact that anyone aspiring to be an elder must be the husband of one wife if married is further confirmation that elders can only ever be men (CP 1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:6). There is no provision at all here for the inclusion of women as elders in the New Testament church. Likewise deacons also can only ever be men. Like bishops, they too must only be the husband of one wife, if married (CP 1Ti 3:8-13). The term deacon primarily

denotes a servant - one who ministers to the needs of others - without reference to the character of the work. In the New Testament, **diakonos**, the Greek word for deacon is used to refer to domestic servants (CP Jn 2:5,9); civil rulers (CP Ro 13:4); Christ (CP Ro 15:8; Ga 2:17); the followers of Christ in relation to their Lord (CP Jn 12:26; Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7); the followers of Christ in relation to one another (CP Mt 20:26; 23:11; Mk 9:35; 10:43); the servants of Christ in relation to preaching and teaching (CP 1Cor 3:5; 2Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Eph 3:7; Col 1:23,25; 1Th 3:2; 1Ti 4:6); a servant of the church (CP Ro 16:1); servants in the church (CP Php 1:1; 1Ti 3:8,12), and false apostles - servants of Satan (CP 2Cor 11:15).

We can see from those scriptures that the term deacon has a much broader application than most Christians in the contemporary church realise. The general conception of deacons among Christians in the contemporary church is that they do most of the menial tasks in the church – they open the hall up for meetings, switch on the lights, arrange the seating, distribute the emblems for communion, and take up the collection, etc, but as is seen here scriptures do not teach that. The confusion surrounding deacons in the contemporary church emanates from the teaching that the role of deacons in the New Testament church is defined in Ac 6:1-6, yet scriptures do not designate the seven men in Ac 6:1-6 who were chosen to distribute the alms and minister to the material needs of the Greek widows in the church at Jerusalem as deacons (CP Ac 6:1-6 with 1Ti 3:1-13). It is obvious from 1Ti 3:1-13 that the office of deacon in the New Testament church is more than dealing with temporal things as distinct from spiritual things. Temporal things have to be dealt with, but to limit the office of a deacon to just dealing with temporal things is to limit the effectiveness of the church in God's eternal purpose. In the context of 1Ti 3:1-13 it is significant that the term deacons is used side by side with bishops, or elders. This indicates that deacons are assistant ministers or that they assist the ruling elders in the performance of their duties. They are the scriptural counterparts to the non-scriptural assistant pastors and elders in the contemporary church (CP Php 1:1). The qualifications for deacons, like bishops, and their role in the New Testament church, are defined in 1Ti 3:1-13 not in Ac 6:1-6 as so many Christians in the contemporary church have been taught. It should be noted here also that although deacons assist the elders in the performance of their duties they have no ruling authority in the New Testament church. Their ministry office as 1Ti 3:13 clearly teaches is a proving ground leading to greater responsibilities, but it is not a leadership position to start with, and for any local New Testament church to be under the authority of a "board of deacons" is totally unscriptural. We cannot supplant God's order for the church and replace it with another. He has decreed the church to be under the authority of ruling elders, not deacons.

This leads us now to the question of women being ordained to public ministry in the contemporary church when there is no provision for it in the New Testament. Scriptures clearly teach that women are precluded from any leadership position in the New Testament church. There are numerous references to

women in the New Testament but nowhere do scriptures teach that they were ordained to public ministry in the church. In searching the scriptures we can only find male leadership in the New Testament church as the model for relationship between the sexes, and we should accept that as God's order for the church without any additions, subtractions or alterations whatever (CP 1Ti 2:8-14). Opinions differ among Christians as to whom this scripture refers - whether women generally or wives specifically. The Greek word **gune** means either, and whether a woman generally or a wife specifically is meant depends upon the context in which it is used. Here it refers to women generally because all women who profess godliness, regardless of their marital status are to dress modestly and not draw attention to themselves in the assembly by any form of immoderate conduct. Paul is dealing with the general conduct of all women in the church here. It has to do with church order and the position of men and women in church worship and work, not with the relationship between a husband and wife as in 1Cor 14 (CP 1Cor 14:34-35). In 1Ti2:8 Paul wants *men*, as opposed to *women*, to conduct public worship in the church. In V12 he prohibits women from holding any position of authority over men in the church. Women cannot be teachers to instil doctrine and instruct men, which confirms what other scriptures in this study also teach, that men only are ordained of God to pastor His church. Women are precluded from this office.

Paul is not forbidding women to educate, proclaim the truth, exhort, pray or prophesy. That is their God-given right as scriptures clearly attest (CP Ac 2:17-18; 18:24-26; 21:8-9; 1Cor 11:5; 14:13; Php 4:3; 2Ti 1:5; 3:14-15; Tit 2:3-5). Women can teach other women, girls, and children (boys and girls), and they can assist their husbands in their ministerial duties, but they are prohibited from holding public office in the church and exercising authority over men. This has nothing to do with the culture surrounding women in Paul's time either, as many in the contemporary church teach to justify the ordination of women today. There is no allowance in scripture whatever for God's word to be altered to suit the cultural changes in women that would justify their ordination to public ministry in the contemporary church (CP Psa 119:89; Lu 21:33; 1Pe 1:23-25). God's word never changes - it is exalted even above His name (CP Psa 89:34; 138:2). What Paul forbade in 1Timothy is still forbidden. In 1Ti 2:13-14 Paul explains that his opposition to women in public ministry is found in the original order of creation, and in the circumstances of the fall of man (CP V13-14): man (Adam) was formed first, then woman (Eve). Adam was not deceived but Eve was, and as a result women are prohibited from ever being teachers or exercising authority over men in the New Testament church. This confirms what other scriptures teach against women in any leadership position in the church. The Greek word **gune** is also used in 1Ti 3:11. Here though it is clearly used in the context of a husband and wife relationship. It is not describing women deacons but the wives of men deacons if they are married, the same as the preceding passage refers to male elders and their wives, if married (CP 1Ti 3:1-13).

Scriptures do not teach that Phebe was a "deaconess" in the church at Cenchrea. They simply teach that she was a servant of the church there, and as we have already seen the Greek word **diakonos** can refer to anyone in a serving capacity, from domestic servants, to civil rulers, to Christ (CP Ro 16:1-2). We get a better insight into Phebe's ministry in the church at Cenchrea from a study of the word "succorer" in V2 which defines her as caring for the affairs of others – who helps and aids them from her resources. *Succorer* is from the Greek word **prostatis**, which is the feminine form of "patron" or "protector". It was used by the Greeks to describe those who care for and entertain strangers in their home. Phebe was evidently a woman of means who ministered to the needs of others in the church at Cenchrea and looked after Paul and his companions on his apostolic mission journeys there. There are many women named in scripture who served with distinction in the first century church, but none in a leadership capacity. (See also following study: "Women and God's order for the New Testament church").

There is another issue pertinent to this part of our study that needs to be raised here. It concerns titles men and women in the contemporary church use to signify their rank and authority in the church. The most common title used is "pastor" which is a complete misnomer considering the word is never used in scripture to define the rank or authority of anyone in the New Testament church. But even more important is the fact that titles are totally opposed in scripture. Jesus himself condemned them (CP Job 32:21-22; Mt 23:2-12). We cannot mistake what these scriptures mean. God is totally opposed to titles and Jesus forbids Christians seeking after, or receiving them. Titles may count for something in hierarchical or denominational religions where they are used to distinguish between the so-called clergy and the laity, but they are totally unscriptural. Mt 23:8 teaches that there is always to be a brotherly relationship between Christians regardless of their ministry gifts (CP V8 with Mk 10:35-45 and Lu 22:24-27). Jesus was the embodiment of every ministry gift in the church yet He was the servant of all. He teaches us in these scriptures that every ministry gift in the church is to be one of service - not with titular power, but servant power (CP 1Cor 4:14-15).

Here we see that Paul was a father in the Lord to the Corinthian church, but he was never called "Father" Paul. Paul only ever referred to himself by his first name and to everyone else by theirs. We only have to read the first verse of every one of his epistles, and the last chapter in Romans (Ch 16), to see that, and Peter, John and James were the same. No elder in the first century church had a title conferred upon them, and if Jesus condemns them how can contemporary church leaders justify them. If Jesus forbids Christians using titles such as "rabbi", "father", "master" and "teacher" in Mt 23:2-12, that also means "pastor", "doctor", "reverend", etc. It is argued by contemporary church leaders that they need to use their title to obtain respect and recognition in the world order. Be that as it may, there is no need for it in the church itself, yet that is where it is used the most and it should not be so. It is the titles which

distinguishes ministry that created the *clergy system* in the church in the first place.

TEACHERS: Teachers are placed third in the divine order of ministry gifts for the church (CP 1Cor 12:28). They are the New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament scribes, viewed as in a special sense acquainted with and interpreters of God's word. The scribe's duty in the Old Testament was to give progressive instruction of God's redeeming purpose, which is also the teacher's function in the New Testament (CP Mt 13:52). This is how **Kenneth Wuest's "Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament"** renders that verse,

"...and He (Jesus) said to them, because of this, every man learned in the sacred scriptures who has accepted the precepts and instructions with reference to the Kingdom of heaven is like a man who is a master of a house, who is of such a character that he dispenses with hearty enjoyment out of his treasure-house, things new as to the quality and also things mellowed with age by reason of use."

Teachers in the New Testament church do not teach the mere letter of the word or doctrine as such, but being blessed with revelation in the word they teach prophetically, presenting deep truth in such a way as to build up faith in the church, helping to prepare and equip it for God's service. The teacher's function is to teach, to instruct, to educate, to train, to discipline, to nurture, to influence the understanding of those being taught. The special task of teachers is to zealously guard the gospel entrusted to them. They are to vigorously contend for the truth of scripture in the face of any teaching in the church that does not conform to scripture, and faithfully point the church to the original message of Christ and the apostles (CP 2Ti 1:8-14; 2:2; 3:16). Teachers must never forget that the letter (of the law) kills, but it is the Spirit that gives life (CP Jn 6:63; 2Cor 3:6). The supreme goal of all instruction in God's word is not Bible knowledge in itself but an inward moral transformation that expresses itself in love, purity of heart, a clear conscience and faith without hypocrisy (CP 1Ti 1:4-5). The biblical concept of teaching and learning is not primarily to impart knowledge or to prepare oneself academically. It is to produce holiness and a righteous lifestyle conforming to the ways of God (CP He 12:14). A teacher's own life must illustrate perseverance in truth, faith and holiness. Teachers should be able to speak with authority; they must be a voice and not just an echo like the Old Testament scribes and Pharisees. They must be sound theologians able to teach wholesome doctrine (CP 1Ti 6:3-4; 2Ti 1:13; 1Pe 4:10-11). A teacher's life is one of study and personal preparation but they must always remain teachable themselves (CP Ro 2:21; 1Cor 2:9-13). If teachers are not able to be taught themselves, they will not be able to teach others. They must always beware of pride of intellect, for knowledge "puffs up" (CP 1Cor 8:1-2; Jas 3:13-18).

Many Christians believe that religious education teachers and Sunday school teachers exercise the

ministry gift of a teacher in the New Testament church but that is not correct. Those with the ministry gift of teacher are also qualified elders in the church, but religious education teachers and Sunday school teachers are not necessarily so. Also, there are many women who teach Sunday school and religious education, but as noted in our study on apostles and pastors they are prohibited from ever being teachers or any other public ministry in the New Testament church. There is a grim warning in scripture to Christians aspiring to be teachers in the New Testament church (CP Jas 3:1-2). *Masters* (KJV) means "teachers", but it also includes every leader in the church because they are all instructors in God's word - they all give instruction to a congregation - and no one has a more solemn responsibility in the church than those who teach the sacred scriptures. James warns Christians here not to aspire too hastily to be a teacher because they increase their liability for judgement if they do. The warning about unbridled tongues in Jas 3 teaches that true faith is evidenced by the words we speak. Primarily it is directed to teachers and includes all church leaders, and secondarily to all Christians. It is very easy for teachers to sin with their tongue. Teachers have a tremendous influence over the people they teach and they must give very careful consideration to not only what they say, but how they say it (CP Jas 3:3-12). The ministry gift of teaching is one of great responsibility and must therefore be entered into with extreme caution.

There are false teachers in the New Testament church just as there are false apostles and prophets and there are many scriptures warning against them, and like false apostles and prophets they may outwardly appear to be genuine spiritual leaders and true ministers of the word, but inwardly they are ravening wolves, full of dead men's bones, given over to extortion and excess, and full of hypocrisy and iniquity (CP Mt 7:15-23; 13:25-30; Ac 20:29-30; 2Cor 11:12-15; Tit 1:10-14; 2Pe 2:1-3; Jude 4; Rev 2:20). False teachers, again like false apostles and prophets, may not always be immediately recognisable but their doctrine will betray them to Christians who test their teachings against the pure word of God, as we are commanded in scripture to do (CP 1Th 5:21; 1Jn 4:1-6; 2Jn 7-11). Christians must never just accept any teachings at face value, even those handed down in the church, unless they have been tested against the revelation of God's truth in scripture (CP Ac 17:10-12). The Bereans only believed because scripture confirmed that what Paul and Silas taught was correct (CP 2Pe 1:16-19). Here Peter stresses the importance of scripture as the only sure proof of anything that has to do with God. If it cannot be confirmed in scripture we must disregard it completely (CP Rev 2:1-2).

There is one more thing that should be noted here: while there are many false teachers in the church, there are also many false Christians willing to receive them (CP 2Ti 3:1-7; 4:1-4). However, the judgement that will be passed upon false teachers will be much more severe than that upon other sinners (CP Lu 12:41-48; He 10:26-31). These scriptures teach that just as there are degrees of glory in heaven according to our earthly works, so there are degrees of

punishment in hell and the worst will come upon false teachers. True teachers and all other spiritual leaders in the church must guard and defend the gospel committed to them even when others depart from the faith. They must defend it against attack and challenge the church if it is tempted to lay aside the truth. This is essential to ensure their own salvation and the salvation of those who hear them (CP 1Ti 4:16; 2Ti 3:12-17). That concludes this part of our study.

The effectiveness of the church depends upon whether or not it acknowledges and receives all the ministry gifts of Eph 4:11. They are all essential to God's purpose for the church and it cannot function as God intended unless they are all acknowledged and received. Many Christians believe that the contemporary church is generally ineffective in its witness in the world and devoid of power over the works of darkness because it esteems the ministry gift of one man over all the others, and while ever it does God's purpose for the church cannot be accomplished. The church needs to recognise, as scriptures clearly teach, that one-man rule is not God's order for the church. That is why Christ gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some teachers to collectively and co-equally pastor the church: to govern, to guide, to gather, to guard, and to ground the church in the ways of God; to prepare and equip it for God's service (CP Eph 4:11-16). No one ministry gift is more important than another. Each has its own special value which adds a dimension and supplies an emphasis that is not present in any one of the others. As noted earlier in this study, all these ministry gifts were embodied in Christ and He gave them all to the church as an extension of His own earthly ministry to bring Christians to maturity, so that they will each acknowledge their individual responsibility to be an effective witness for God, and minister His word in the world.

Let us now look at other gifts and ministries in the church which God also works through to reproduce the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in the church. These are called the gifts of the Spirit (CP 1Cor 12:4-7). *Diversities of gifts but the same Spirit* in V4 means that there are different gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit - the visible and tangible evidence of His activity - operating through individual members of the body (the church), to edify (build up), and sanctify (set apart), the whole body. *Differences of administrations but the same Lord* in V5 means that all the ministries in the church are intended to serve the church in one form or another, reflecting the servant ministry of Jesus Himself. Paul's assertion that there are "diversities of operations but it is the same God that worketh all in all" in V6, signifies that all gifts of the Spirit are direct operations of the power of God in believers producing sure results. **Kenneth Wuest's "Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament"** puts it like this:

"And there are different distributions of various kinds of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are different distributions of divine energy motivating these gifts in

their operation, but the same God who by His divine energy operates them all in their sphere."

Every member of the church has a spiritual gift, and the Holy Spirit displays God's power through each member as a means of helping the whole church. All the gifts of the Spirit contribute to the common good - the life and growth of the church. They are distributed among the members of the church as the Holy Spirit sees fit (CP V8-11). Let us have a closer look at these gifts.

Word of Wisdom is a wise utterance applying the revelation of God's word or a flash revelation given by the Holy Spirit for a specific situation or problem that may already exist or which will arise in the future (CP Ac 27:27-44). This is not to be confused with the wisdom we are to seek from God for our daily living (CP Jas 1:5).

Word of Knowledge is an utterance inspired by the Holy Spirit that reveals certain knowledge about people or circumstances which the speakers could not possibly know by themselves. It is often connected closely with prophecy (CP Mt 16:13-17; 17:24-27; Lu 22:10-12; Jn 4:5-19; Ac 5:1-10; 27:8-26).

Faith, as a gift of the Spirit, is the supernatural ability to believe God implicitly without human doubt, unbelief or reasoning, for the extraordinary or the miraculous to happen (CP Ac 3:1-8; 14:8-10; 28:1-6). This is not to be confused with the faith we received to believe for our salvation (CP Ro 10:14-17). Neither is it to be confused with the faith given by God to every Christian with which to appraise or measure the character and extent of any spiritual gifts they have (CP Ro 12:1-3). Nor is it to be confused with the faith we have to exercise to believe that whatever we ask according to God's word, He will do it for us (CP Mk 9:23; 11:22-24; 1Jn 5:14-15).

Gifts of Healing are supernatural powers bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon certain individuals, empowering them to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases or any physical ailment whatever without any human aids or the use of any medicines (CP Lu 13:10-13; Ac 28:7-9). Gifts of healing are not to be confused with the authority of believers to lay hands on the sick or to pray over them for their healing, or to stand in agreement with other Christians believing for someone to be healed (CP Mt 18:19; Mk 16:18; Jas 5:14-15).

Working of Miracles is a supernatural power to alter the normal course of nature and to counteract natural laws (CP Mk 4:35-39; Jn 2:1-11; 6:1-14, 15-21; Ga 3:5; He 2:3-4). Working of miracles manifested many times in the Old Testament too - when Moses held out His rod toward the Red Sea (CP Ex 14:15-29), also Elijah performed 16 recorded miracles, and Elisha recorded 32 (CP 1Ki 17:1-2 - 2Ki 2:12 with 2Ki 2:13-9:3; 13:20-21), etc.

Prophecy is a supernatural utterance in the speaker's native tongue. It is a spontaneous utterance of a revelation directly from God under the impulse of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the faith of the congregation

and to build up their spiritual life and moral resolve to remain faithful to Christ and His teachings. It can also expose the condition of an unbeliever's heart and bring him or her to a conviction of their need for God. It is the gift of the Spirit believers should covet the most (CP 1Cor 14:1-12, 22-26, 39). The gift of prophecy here should not be confused with the ministry gift of prophet in Eph 4:11 which Christ gave to the church to prepare and equip it for God's service. That is a ministry gift given only to certain ones in the church whereas the gift of prophecy as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit is potentially available to everyone baptized in the Spirit (CP Ac 2:17-18, 19:1-6).

Discerning of Spirits is a special ability to properly discern and judge prophecies and to distinguish whether or not any utterance is inspired by the Holy Spirit, demon spirits, or the human spirit. It is also the ability to detect the spirits behind certain human activities (CP Mt 24:4-5; Lu 9:51-56; Ac 8:18-23; 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 1Jn 4:1-6).

Divers Kinds of Tongues are supernatural utterances in other languages not known to the speakers. The speakers are communicating directly with God under the influence of the Holy Spirit, completely bypassing their minds. They may be offering up prayers, praise, blessings or thanksgiving to God, or they may be bringing a message for the congregation from God. Speaking in tongues must be regulated in meetings. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers to know that God is present in the midst of the congregation, but they will also put unbelievers off if the congregation does not regulate their use (CP Isa 28:11; Mk 16:17; Ac 2:1-11; 1Cor 13:1; 14:1-23, 27-28).

Interpretations of Tongues is the ability bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon individuals in the congregation to understand and make known the meaning of an utterance spoken in another language. This ability may be given to the one making the utterance or to someone else. Those who have the gift of tongues should also pray for the gift of interpretation. Tongues in the congregation must be accompanied by an Holy Spirit inspired interpretation that communicates the content and meaning of the utterance to the congregation. This is to edify (build up) the church. Tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy. Tongues on their own do not edify but prophecy does (CP 1Cor 12:10; 14:5-13, 27-28). These are what the contemporary church calls the nine gifts of the Spirit. Some of the gifts may manifest through individual believers on a regular basis, and some believers may have more than one gift manifest through them, but it is unscriptural to assume that because someone exercises a spectacular gift that they are more spiritual than someone else with a less spectacular gift. Neither does having a gift mean that God approves of all the possessor does or teaches (CP Ac 10:34-35; 1Cor 12:20-25).

There are many other gifts, graces, talents, ministries and functions in both natural and spiritual areas to minister to the body of Christ, and it is the responsibility of every believer to find their gift and minister accordingly (CP 1Cor 12:28-31).

The gift of **helps** here does not refer to the function of deacons in the church as many suppose but to the practice of those who devote themselves to helping others in need in the church (CP Ac 20:34-35; 1Cor 16:15). *Addicted* in 1Cor 16:15 (KJV) means "devoted". The household of Stephanus was devoted to ministering to both the material and spiritual needs of other Christians. While Christians are expected to help all in need for God to be glorified in their works (CP Mt 5:16), other Christians needing help must come first (CP Ga 6:10).

Governments in 1Cor 12:28 (KJV) is derived from a Greek word **kubernesis**, which means to pilot, to steer, or guide a ship. Here it is used metaphorically of those who constitute the governing body of the church - the elders or presbyters (CP Ro 12:3-13). Gifts of grace are inward desires as well as abilities given to believers by the Holy Spirit. In V3-4 Paul exhorts believers to stay within the sphere of service for which the Holy Spirit has fitted us. We are to avoid self-exaltation and render mutual service in the measure of the gift we each have. Our estimate of our gifts is to be governed by how much faith God has given us. *Office* in V4 means "function". The list of gifts both here and in 1Cor 12:28 is not exhaustive, but representative of ministries in the church.

The gift of **ministry** in Ro 12:7 refers to every sphere of service in the church: ministering to both the physical and spiritual needs of others in the church (CP Ac 6:1-6); visiting sick Christians and those in prison (CP Mt 25:31-40); older women ministering to younger women (CP Tit 2:3-4); being given to hospitality (CP Ro 12:13; He 13:2). It also includes music ministry, teaching religious education in schools, personal evangelism, handing out tracts, etc, the list goes on.

The gift of **exhortation** in Ro 12:8 is the special ability and power to proclaim God's word in such a way that it encourages the hearers and stimulates and strengthens their faith in God's word so as to produce in them a deeper dedication to Christ. Paul had the gift of exhortation and he is exercising it in Ro 12 where he delineates - shows by describing - our responsibility to God. In V1-2 he exhorts us to place our whole being at the disposal of God as a living sacrifice separated from the world and totally conformed to the way of God. In V3-8 he exhorts us to find our function in God's work and in V9-21 he exhorts us to fulfil our function in holiness (CP Ro 12:1-21).

The gift of **giving** is the virtue of one who is free from pretence and hypocrisy, with an openness of heart manifesting itself in the liberality of the giver

who generously supports the work of the gospel and contributes to the physical and financial needs of others in the church. This was undoubtedly one of the spheres of service in the church at Cenchræa for which Paul commended Phebe in Ro 16:1-2 (CP Ro 16:1-2; 2Cor 8:1-8; 9:10-15).

He who sheweth mercy - the gift of **mercy**, also in Ro 12:8, defines those who are called to function specially in the sphere of Christian relief or acts of charity to the sick, the poor and the afflicted in the church. It is a gift that has to be exercised with a readiness of mind, joyful eagerness and gladness of heart (CP Ac 9:36). Dorcas' "almsdeeds" here were the outward expression of her gift of mercy. *Almsdeeds* means active compassion or mercifulness.

All these scriptures prove that every Christian has a gift or a sphere of service in which to minister to the church. The important thing is to find our gift or sphere of service, and minister in it (CP 1Pe 4:10). But it is also important to remember that Christians have a measure of responsibility in all spheres of service; to the unsaved as well as the saved. Every Christian is a servant sent of God, whether it be to other members of the church or to the unsaved. The fact that we may not be an evangelist does not free us from the responsibility of personal evangelism (CP 2Cor 5:17-19). We may not be a teacher but that does not exempt us from teaching God's word (CP Mt 28:18; 2Ti 2:2). We may not have the gift of exhortation but that does not prevent us from ministering to those in need of exhorting (CP Ga 6:1-2; 1Th 5:11; He 3:12-14; 10:23-24). We may not have the gift of giving, but we are all responsible for giving liberally into the work of the gospel and to those in need (CP Lu 3:9-11; Ga 6:6-10; Eph 4:28; Jas 2:14-17; 1Jn 3:16-19). Finally we may not all have the gift of mercy, but we are to show mercy nonetheless (CP Pr 14:31; 21:13, 21; Mt 5:7). There are many more scriptures designating our responsibilities to God but these will suffice for now. This concludes our study on the church. It is not expected that everyone who reads this study will agree with its findings completely. Sincere Christians disagree on many important issues in the church and it is quite likely that some of the issues raised here will also be the subject of some disagreement. In that case let us agree to disagree in love. Sometimes though it is only when we find something difficult or disagreeable in the Bible that we discover our real understanding of the inspiration and the authority of scripture, and it is what we do with the passages which contradict our convictions that reveals whether we consider ourselves above or below scripture - judges of it, or judged by it. This could be one of those times.