

## Part I

# **SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: GOD'S PATTERN**

We trust that previous editions have been much of a blessing to you and to us, and the Lord our God will yet help us as we serve him in this capacity.

This edition will centre on a most important subject: Spiritual leadership: God's pattern. It will be a continuation of the series we have been taking on God's pattern church. You will agree with me that if the way a local congregation conducts her affairs and the ministry they fulfil answers to building a house, then, for those who play the more important roles within the assemblies, we should trust that the word of God will have something to say about them. Spiritual leadership is a most important topic. Under the Old Testament, the church that then was had so much of her fortune tied to the spiritual leadership over them. This is more so under the New Testament. In the New Testament, there is an elevation of some sort in terms of the responsibilities of spiritual leadership in the overall scheme of things.

Since the New Testament is a one-sided covenant, spiritual leadership is part of that arrangement that hinges on God's faithfulness. God's faithfulness will make sure that men and women are raised up in the church to fulfil their God given responsibilities.

Spiritual leadership can be said to be in two distinct groupings. That is, in discussing spiritual leadership in the church, we can identify two groups or forms of spiritual leadership. These are (i) ministry gifts and (ii) spiritual administration.

If you will turn with me to Ephesians 4 read side by side with 1 Corinthians 12, you will find the first of these two divisions in spiritual leadership. And, what we are talking about is that in discussing spiritual leadership, it must be clear to us whether we are discussing how the church organises herself administratively or else talking about ministry or ministerial or whether we are talking about ministry or ministerial gifts in the church. Ephesians 4:8-11.

**“...Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.**

*(Now he that ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things).*

*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;...”*

We have the five-fold ministry or ministerial offices. These are given as the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherd (or as here called pastors), and teachers. These five-fold offices we can say are the principal ministerial gifts in the church. If you were following the reading you will realise that it is the exclusive preserve of God to place these ministry gifts within the church. This is important. The exaltation of the Lord to the highest heaven and his descent to the lowest earth, we are told in verse 10, is that he might fill all things. He led captivity captive. Men that were once bound to the powers of the flesh and to the forces of darkness are set free, and led to a new kind of servitude, being bond servants of the most high God. And they are given as gifts to the church. The calling of the apostle, the vocation of the prophet, the ministry of the evangelist, the service of the shepherd or pastor and the service of teachers are in a class of their own. All five constitute what we are seeing here; it is God's responsibility to place these in the church as the next passage shows.

Now, let us take 1 Corinthians 12:28.

**“...And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. ...”**

Here, we find that it is God's responsibility to place these ministry gifts in the church. In fact, the idea that can be got from this passage when read from the original Greek language is that God fills up vacancies that exist in his church. He sets in the church... He considers the needs of his people and raises up ministries to meet this challenge.

In the matter of ministry gifts, human persons are completely excluded in terms of their appointment. No man can appoint another man unto or into a ministry gift such as we have

mentioned above. Ministry gifts are the exclusive preserve of the Most High God; God hath set in the church...

Now, that is different from spiritual gifts, which we find discussed in I Corinthians 12. Man may be involved in the laying on of hands for the impartation of spiritual gifts. But, for ministry gifts, it is something that the Lord our God does by himself. He sets men and women into these various ministries in the church.

Then, the next observation we will like to take is that there is an arrangement in the word of God for spiritual administration, taking oversight of the affairs of the church. For, all of the work of the kingdom does not consist in teaching and preaching. There is the work of taking oversight, which concern themselves with the day-to-day affairs of the Lord's people as they meet together in fellowship.

Man may be involved in relation to setting up spiritual administration in the church. But they are guided by God's word in going about this. Now, let us look at the pattern, the arrangement in the New Testament. Turn with me to Philippians 1:1.

***“...Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are not at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:...”***

The two duty-offices we find in the above passage (Bishops and deacons) relates to spiritual administration. The word translated Bishop here (the Greek word) is *episcopus* and emphasises the duties, responsibilities of such persons. Again, the word-translated deacon simply means servants. There are two levels of spiritual leadership in the local assembly: the primary spiritual leadership being fulfilled or occupied by persons whom the Bible calls bishops, and the secondary spiritual administration or leadership being fulfilled by persons here described as deacons.

Now, you will notice that in the passage above, Paul was addressing the saints in a particular city: Philippi, that is the local assembly of God's people in that city, together with the bishops and the deacons. Thus, in every local congregation of God's people, there ought to be several bishops and deacons, several persons taking oversight, who are overseers of the affairs of the local congregation. And, of these persons, there will be some who are more matured in the things of God than the others by virtue of which they are able to fulfil primary spiritual administration while

the others assist them at a secondary level, in the work of spiritual administration. This is the pattern (arrangement) in the New Testament, and, we will be doing a little bit of reading to establish this point.

Now, God has not purposed for one individual to be a bishop over a whole city, over several cities, but that in every local congregation of God's people, be they fifty, a hundred, two hundred, one thousand, there should be a plurality of ministries, persons who take oversight of the affairs of the church. And these persons, the word of God enjoins, must have certain minimum qualifications. But the responsibility of taking oversight is always there in every congregation, and there should be bishops and deacons in every local assembly. If we take an assembly of say five hundred saints, then, there should be five, six to eight or more persons who are involved in the primary spiritual administration here discovered as bishops. This is distinct from the practice that we find in the visible church system. We are not concerned any bit with casting stones, but simply indicating what should be as the Lord is restoring all things in his church. The years of ignorance God has overlooked but God is now calling all men to that arrangement that accords to his will in his house. A little later, these tools we are gathering will prove useful in showing what effects are produced when God's arrangement are taking to heart. Most deviations in God's house occur because men set aside the divine arrangement, and put in place their own arrangements.

In a local congregation, there should be several bishops. The word bishop emphasises their spiritual responsibilities that they see to the spiritual and material well being of members of the congregation. Persons occupying secondary spiritual leadership here called deacons assist them in these responsibilities. There are two levels of spiritual leadership and administration in the church of Christ, and these are bishops and deacons.

There is another word used in the New Testament for the same position here described as bishops. That word is presbytery, translated elder. The word elder emphasises the spiritual maturity that should be found in persons who take oversight in God's house. So, while the word presbytery emphasises that these persons must be spiritually mature, the word *episcopus* (bishop) stresses their spiritual responsibility. So the two words are applied to the same class of people and can be used (and are indeed used) interchangeably, depending on what is being discussed. He that is a presbyter, the same is an *episcopos*, or putting it in the English Language, he that is an elder in God's house is also a bishop. This must be clearly understood.

Now, let us go to the scriptures to establish this position. Turn with the first to Acts 14. Certain situation developed in the early church and it was necessary to pass the information to the Lord's people everywhere. Letters were to be written to the churches. Acts 15:23.

***“...And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren, which are of the gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:...”***

Notice the letter was coming from Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a city, and in the church in that city are to be found many persons who were elders. Notice should also be taken of the ministry presence of Apostles.

Still in the book of Acts, turn with me to Acts 20:17. The reference is to Paul's missionary journey. He had come to Miletus and was to visit Ephesus next. And he needed to see those who stand in the room of leaders in Ephesus and wanted to have discussions with them. Acts 20:17-31.

***“...And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.  
And when they were came to him, he said unto them, ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,  
Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:  
And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,  
Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.  
And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:  
Save that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.  
But none of those things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God.  
And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.  
Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men.  
For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.  
Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers...”***

The word translated “*overseer*” here is the same word that is translated bishop. Paul began by calling for the elders, and he said later that God hath made these elders bishops (overseers) over the church of God to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Then in the next verse he says,

***“...For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock...”***

Certain ministerial characteristics and attitudes in persons occupying leadership positions in God's house, towards the congregation, are what are here symbolised as wolves. We have touched on this earlier. Leaders are supposed to take oversight of the congregation, and assist all to come into a greater and better position rather than exploiting them. Paul continues;

***“...Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.  
Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. ...”***

We have established two things: the same called elders (presbyters) in verse 17 were also called overseers (bishops) in verse 28 in the sense of the duties they fulfil.

Now, we go to James 5. James was writing to the Lord's people and counselling them on how to handle difficult situations in their lives, whether physical sickness, some form of afflictions, financial distress and the like. Then he comes to the matter of those physically sick James 5:14 – 15

***“...Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church....”***

The one that is chronically sick as not to be able to help himself is counselled to call for the elders (bishops) of the church. The reference is to the local congregation. You cannot suppose that an individual is sick, and bishops are gathered all over the country to pray for such one. The reference is to a local assembly, a body of people meeting in a local region. They should have this plurality of leadership and ministries, attending to the needs of such ones. We shall take verse 14 again and also verse 15.

***“...Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:***

***And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him....”***

Let's take another scripture: Titus 1:4-7. Paul was writing to Titus, his own son in the faith and a fellow labourer and he said.

***“...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.***

***For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders (presbyters) in every city, as I had appointed thee:***

***If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.***

***For a bishop (an overseer) must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to fifty lucre; (that is, monetary greediness)....”***

Please, notice that the one described as an elder in verse 5 is referred to as bishop in verse 7, and the qualifications for such vocations are given in verses 7 through 9. Thus, the one that is an elder in terms of his spiritual maturity, which qualifies him to serve in the capacity of a spiritual leader, is a bishop, an overseer in terms of his spiritual responsibility.

Now, we go to 1 Timothy 3, a very popular passage that is used to establish a practice of an overblown hierarchy in the church. 1 Timothy 3:1.

***“...This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.....”***

In the original, there is nothing like the office of a bishop, no word in the Greek rendering for the word office as it is used in this verse. But in other places where the word office is used, there is always a Greek word for it. For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, it says, "*there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, and there are differences of offices but the same Lord and there are diversities of operations but the same God that worketh all in all*". In the fifth verse,

the word office is derived from a Greek word in the original. But it is not rendered to bring out that meaning in our authorised version. In proper rendering, 1Timothy 3:1 should read this way

***“...if a man desire overseership, he desireth a good work. ...”***

Men should desire such spiritual responsibility in the house of God as being joined with others in taking oversight or overseership over the flock. The thought is not to some position of great strength where one man is exercising rulership over two, three, four, five cities or state, but of serving within a local assembly of the Lord's people (a local expression of the body of Christ), partaking or sharing with others of an equality of service, so that the burden of the work of the Lord rests upon the shoulders of not just one person but of such persons that have come up to that estate called elders.

Now, we want to distinguish between elders (bishops and deacons) who fulfilled spiritual administration on the one hand, and ministry gifts. No matter the level of spiritual awareness in a given congregation, there must always be persons who occupy the room of presbyters or elders. As you move from one congregation to another, those persons who are exercising themselves in spiritual administration or overseership may differ in spiritual maturity or qualification. That is, the elders in a given assembly may be more spiritually matured and enlightened than the elders in another congregation as you move from one local assembly of the Lord's people to another. Nevertheless, the more matured persons in a given congregation should (according to God's word) take oversight of that congregation, ensuring that God's will and purposes are served in and through them.

When we come to ministry gifts, that is something else different from general spiritual administration. Now, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, because they have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry (having been thus engraced by God) would always be part of the spiritual leadership or administration in a given congregation. In this regard, what they should be called (like all other persons involved in spiritual administration) is an elder. Thus, an apostle may be seen as elder also. A pastor (shepherd) or evangelist is simply an elder in a given congregation. When the affairs of the Lord's people are discussed, ministry gifts may play an important role by virtue of what they have received of the Lord, but they do not lord it over others who have not been called to the estate of ministry. This is important.

Take, for example, in 1Timothy 5:17. Timothy was told, "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.*" The



idea is that there could be some elders that do not have ministerial graces, that is, ability to teach and preach God's word. Not all elders may have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry, but, in a particular congregation, those who have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry share in spiritual administration.

Let us now take some scriptures to back up this observation. 1 Peter 5:1-3, Peter was writing to the Lord's people and said

***“...The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ...”***

Here, Peter the apostle called himself an elder. He was going to talk to them about the lifestyle that should characterise those who are taking oversight of a congregation of the Lord's people. And he says

***“...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, (not for monetary gains), but of a ready mind; Neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ...”***

We believe that this simple observation is necessary for us to understand certain deviations within the church that has brought so much of spiritual poverty to the Lord's people. Let's take a last and final reference; Mathew 23. This comes from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He tells us certain things, and we will see why the teachings of the apostles from the book of Acts down to the book of Revelation are consistent with the principles the Lord Jesus Christ laid down here. I will allow the reading to do the speaking, trusting that God willing, we will take this consideration in yet another edition.

Mathew 23:5-12, the Lord was speaking of the religious leaders of the nation of Israel

***“...But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,  
And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.***

**But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.**

*And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*

*Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.*

*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*

*And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. ...”*

The words elders, bishops, deacons are not titles to be carried about, paraded, they are only indicative of spiritual responsibilities in the midst of God's congregation and towards the Lord's people. So also are the callings of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and a teacher. These are not titles to be taken on. You can fulfil a ministry, without necessarily drawing attention to what you are. The key word is humility in service. It is an aspect of the *word of his patience* that we are commanded to keep (Revelation 3:10). The glory of the Lord upon us may command respect from men, but we must never demand such. We must walk humbly among our brethren and keep a humble view of ourselves in order to receive grace, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth more abundant grace to the humble.

We will be taking this consideration in yet another edition. The Lord bless you, in Jesus name. Amen.

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Part II

# SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP:

## GOD'S PATTERN

We will continue in our meditation: spiritual leadership: God's pattern. It is a continuation of our series of teachings on God's pattern church.

In the last edition, we examined the two grouping of spiritual authority in God's house. We will be strengthening the position that we establish to in the last edition, and that would mean taking on in a measure, a repetition of some of the points made. Paul said it is not burdensome to preachers to repeat themselves. Rather it is safe for those who hear to have the same things repeated (Philippians 3:1).

We began by saying that the first division of spiritual leadership in God's house is the apostolic ministries: those that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. Of course, all of the Lord's people are in some sense servants (ministers) of God. But, when we are talking of those that have come to the estate of the five fold ministry, we are referring to those who have received a definite call to the work of the ministry, and who have an anointing upon their lives along any one of the five-fold ministry that we find in Ephesians 4:11.

*“...And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some pastors and teachers;  
...”*

These are persons that are indicated in the first grouping. A little later, we shall be coming back to talk about their duties relative to the local assembly, and relative to the body of Christ everywhere (that is the church as a universal body). But, here, we simply note that when we talk about ministers, we are referring to persons who stand in one or more of these five ministries.

Then the second grouping of spiritual leadership, we see in Philippians 1:1

***“... Paul and Timothy’s, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ...”***

The second division of spiritual leadership has to do with spiritual administration. And, when we talk about spiritual administration, there are two levels in which this can be exercised: at the primary or at the secondary level. The people who among God's people exercise primary spiritual leadership are described as bishops in terms of their responsibilities, while those who exercise secondary spiritual administration are described as deacons. We could talk about ministers, and we can also talk about spiritual administrators within the church. In the course of time we would not only discuss the overlap but also take a critical look at ministry order in the local church.

Now, what is the similarity between the two, and how do we relate the two? We said that all that have come to the estate of ministry whether as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers are also elders or bishops in the church, in the sense that they do always share in the spiritual administration of the local congregation. But, whereas any minister of God can be said to be doing the work of a bishop, not all bishops have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. This must be understood.

When spiritual administration in a local assembly is in view, all persons that have come to the estate of ministry are involved in running the affairs of the church. Thus, we can talk of a meeting of elders in a local congregation as consisting of elders who have not yet received a call to the ministry, and elders who have already received a call to the ministry. Thus, not all elders have necessarily received a call to the work of the ministry.

Then we looked at the word bishop. We said the Greek word is *episkopus*. And, we said, it emphasises the duties that those who are called to serve in that realm fulfil in a local congregation. An equivalent word that stresses the spiritual maturity that is to be found in them is *presbyterus*. The Greek word *presbyterus* is what the KJV translated elder.

The same person called a bishop in terms of his responsibility is also an elder in terms of his spiritual maturity. We established this fact by reference to some scriptures in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 20:17, we read,

***“...And from Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church...”***

Always take note of the plural form of the words elders, bishops, ministers, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and deacons. They speak to us that plurality of ministries and plurality of spiritual administrators in a local assembly is God's thought for his church. So he called for the elders of the church and said to them in verse 28, *take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers* ... hath made you to take oversight.

The word overseer here is *episkopeo*. It is the verb form of the word *episkopus*. It is the same word that is used to translate bishops in other passages. The bishops are elders by virtue of the spiritual maturity they have attained. We said that the elders in a given congregation might differ in spiritual maturity than the elders in another congregation. But the more spiritually matured persons (this has no reference to physical age) in local congregations are the ones that are supposed to occupy the room of elders in that congregation. Where the ministries are greatly blessed and the church is functioning properly, those who serve in the room of elders must have attained to great spiritual heights (or maturity) and it is possible for all of them to be gifted in the ministry of the word. That is, all of the elders in such setting may have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. But, quite often, there are some elders who have not yet received a call to the ministry.

In Titus 1:5-7, the above observation is made even clearer. Paul commanded Titus to ordain elders in every city, every local expression of the Lord's people who are to oversee the affairs of the church. And in verse 7, the elder is described as a bishop in terms of the charge God has committed into his hands. And Paul says, the elder being called to be an overseer, to take oversight and exercise spiritual care over God's people must have certain qualification, which he went ahead to list. Thus, all elders by virtue of their being elders in a given congregation take oversight, exercise themselves in spiritual care towards the brethren. And again, those who have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry by virtue of their spiritual graces are qualified to serve as elders. But not all elders or bishops have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry. In 1 Timothy 5:17, we are shown that while some elders may have teaching graces upon their lives, quite often, the majority of elders do not labour in the word and doctrine, this being a separate calling. Thus, an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor or teacher is first and foremost relative to spiritual administration a bishop (an elder).

The room of a bishop cannot be exalted over any position of spiritual ministry set forth in Ephesians 4:11. That system of things that makes spiritual administration in the church of Jesus

Christ to take on a position higher than the five-fold ministry only brings about decay. The principal authorities the church is the apostles and the prophets who as such can put in place elders.

Now, we will want to examine again the word presbytery, which in 1 Timothy 4:14 is a reference to the body of elders serving in a given congregation. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul was writing to Timothy and was exhorting him to be faithful to the ministry God has given him. So, he says

***“...Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. ...”***

The word presbytery means the body of elders. And, by transference of figure, a presbyter is an elder in a local congregation of God's people. Thus, the term "*district presbyter*" is a misnomer, for it presupposes that one person is exercising himself in that capacity over a given city, a given district in a given city or over several towns or cities. There is nothing like the "*district presbyter*" but simply a district presbyter: an elder among many others in a given region.

The above leads us to a consideration of the jurisdiction wherein spiritual administration may be exercised. Now, when we talk about spiritual administration, we need to know what this means. It is something very distinct from spiritual ministry (the service of ministers, that is, the five-fold ministry). It relates to taking oversight concerning the affairs of the Lord's people. Attending to such matters as deciding on which days of the week the Lord's people are to meet together in fellowship, at what places are they to meet? When we meet, how many hours would we want to stay? What arrangement do we make to visit the sick and minister to them? How do we take care of the welfare of the poor? If there be a problem that an individual is having, how do we go about solving it? How do we exercise spiritual discipline when the need arises? These are the things that come under the sphere of spiritual administration. What then is the jurisdiction of an elder or a body of elders? The scripture shows that the sphere of authority of an elder or bishop is within a locality that is within a certain area in a city or within a given city. The elder is ordained by God to function, to exercise spiritual administration in the assembly where he fellowships, that is, in the local congregation that he belongs to. And the largest scope of a local expression of the body of Christ is a city: the church in Antioch, the church in Miletus, the church in Jerusalem, the church in Laodecian etc. Put differently, the greatest size of the church of Jesus Christ administratively is the church in a city. So, biblically, an elder is not supposed to have authority over local congregations of God's people outside the city of his residence. This is very important.

In fact, there is a denominational church called the "*Presbyterian Church*". They highlight the importance of this principle in their operations. Page 791 in Webster dictionary defines a presbytery as an assemblage of elected elders and ministers in a given area. When it is operated the way the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles ordained for the church, it is an assemblage of elders and ministers in a given local assembly or congregation. Their sphere of authority is limited to that locality. There is no such thing in the teachings of Christ and of the twelve apostles as a bishop (an elder) over four, five cities. This is the importation of man's idea and projections into the work of God and it brings about idolatry and spiritual decay.

Now, let us go again to 1 Peter 5:1, 2 where these two terms bishops and elders were used interchangeably. And that will further strengthen our understanding.

***“...The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof ... (The word oversight here is episkopeo) not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. ...”***

A willing spirit is ever ready to minister sacrificially for the blessing of the brethren rather than using the position to exploit the people. Paul said, *“I will gladly spend my life and my resources in ministering to you, even though, the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved”* (II Corinthians 12:15). There is a character disposition, a ministerial disposition that should characterise all true servants of God. We continue the reading. Verse 3

***“...neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ...”***

Ensamples in righteousness, ensamples in humility, ensamples in working hard with one's hands, as much as possible, to earn a living. We closed with this observation in the last edition, using the words of Jesus Christ in Mathew 23 to illustrate. When a position is exclusively belonging to one person, there is tendency for such a one to abuse himself and others. But when there is plurality of ministries and of spiritual administrations, then there is safety. When we operate according to the principles of God's word, we will find that God's servants are in His right hand and nothing can touch them, no force in heaven or on earth can destroy them. But when we operate outside of the principles laid down in the scriptures, we would be doing so at our own peril. And of course, a little later when we talk of the work of the ministers of God (that is those that have come to the estate of the five-fold ministry), we will find that this provision makes possible for a continuous growth in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Let us take verse 3 again.

**“...Neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.  
...”**

The reference to God's heritage shows that the people, the congregation belongs to God and not to the ministries. Verse 4

**“...And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that  
fadeth not away. ...”**

Now, when we talk of ministers, we do not refer necessarily to those that are into what is called "*full-time ministry*". Somebody can make a profession out of the work of the ministry, that is, doing no secular work but giving oneself wholly to the work of the ministry. There is a provision for that in God's arrangement. But, not all persons who have so given themselves to not working secularly to earn a living are necessarily ministers of God.

A handsome percentage of persons, who parade themselves as "*full-time ministers*" of God, are a shame to the gospel. But the work of the ministry (because of the increasing demand) may require some to give up their secular work having demonstrated in their lives that they have the capacity to work and have worked with merit. A failure, a secondary school or university dropout, who has never earned a living by working with his hands, has no business being in a full-time minister. Such are only using the cloak of "full-time ministry" to cover their laziness and slothfulness.

When we are talking of ministers of God, we are talking of persons who have received a definite call of God to the work of the ministry.

Now, in a certain congregation, there could be an expanded leadership meeting that requires the presence of certain persons that have not come of age, spiritually speaking, to use the room of elders. These ones are referred to in the scriptures as deacons. They occupy the secondary level of spiritual administration or authority within the church. But in saying that, we are to note that God equally anoints males and females. That is why some of the words in the Greek used to set forth these positions are in the neuter form showing that both males and females can exercise



them. In any case, in Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female. In the middle court (the holy place), the continuing area of life and fellowship of the believer, there is no distinction placed between males and females. In Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female, bond or free but we are all one in Christ Jesus. This is important. That is why in Romans 16:1, in referring to a deacon, a lady was mentioned. The word "*deacon*" is neither masculine nor feminine. Such terms as deaconess or deacons are all an attempt of the church to create a title or office that man may bear. But these things are callings; they are spiritual responsibilities. And they are to be seen as things to do in the house of God to the honour of God rather than a title to carry.

One of the great possibilities in the house of God when these arrangements set forth in the scriptures are set aside is that it introduces politics. If you are simply a bishop, then, of course, you have such great authority. In fact, there is a form of church government called *episkopella* and that has to do with the government of bishops over the ministers of God (called priests) and over the lower clergy: a system of government in which a whole denomination, with branches world-wide, is ruled by a college of bishops. And, of course, that is a misnomer.

Spiritual administration should be limited to a local assembly. And, when a person takes on responsibility of exercising legislative functions outside his place of residence, he is only troubling his soul. And of course, he begins to suffer spiritual decline. Because the challenge of spiritual ministry requires us to continually wait upon the Lord, waiting upon our ministries. That is what we find in Acts 6. When certain responsibilities began to creep in, the apostles said, "*no, we shall not leave the word of God to serve tables. Let another level of spiritual administration be ordained that will be able to take care of that. We will give ourselves to prayers and to the ministry of the word*". And that brings us back to the functions and services of the five-fold ministry.

One: no one on being called to the estate of ministry begins as an apostle or a prophet. All that are called must first be exercised either as a teacher, a shepherd, a shepherd teacher, an evangelist, an evangelist teacher, or an evangelist shepherd. We know that the teaching gift being the operative grace in the work of the ministry, is quite often manifested in the ministry of evangelists and shepherds apart from those who are specifically called and have an anointing to teach God's word. Now, as people exercise themselves in these ministries, after a passage of time, they receive an additional call to the ministry of an apostle or a prophet or a prophetic apostle.

Now, all of these things are not titles but ministries. For somebody to be saved five years ago and be parading himself as an apostle evokes laughter in those who have spiritual understanding. Paul, that great apostle was a believer for thirteen years with those deep encounters he had, before he was called into the ministry of an apostle. A situation where an individual who has the calling of a shepherd upon his life being a "*president*" and "*founder*" and supposing to have

spiritual administration over many territories, shows the individual as bringing too much trouble upon his soul. Not even in a local church can the calling of a pastor place an individual as head in ministry. The most abused office is that of a pastor (or a shepherd). The visible church systems have given the world to believe that the pastor is the head of a local church. This same office is often times glorified beyond proportion through recourse to administrative skills to take a lordly position over hundreds, thousands of local assemblies. The grace of a shepherd is only one of the five principal callings, not even a foundation ministry. There can be no meaningful growth in an assembly if there is no deliberate attempt to allow the other ministries to function in their God given roles.

Now, if we come back to Ephesians 4, we will find that the five-fold ministry is set in the body of Christ universal. Of the first ministries, some may be resident ministries (and quite often the shepherdic ministry is a resident ministry) while some may have travelling ministries, ministering to the body of Christ everywhere. But, for those that have a travelling ministry, when they go outside of their domain of residence, they are to exercise themselves in the teaching and preaching of God's word and other related ministrations. They are not to function legislatively. That is, they are not to tell the people what to do in terms of running their daily affairs. They may sit together with the elders in given place sharing with them from their wealth of experience. But they have no right to exercise any form of legislative function outside their domain. Thus, concentrating on their spiritual ministries, Ephesians 4 sets them forth as "*joints of supply*" principally.

A special attention would have to be given to the two foundation ministries: apostles and prophets. When persons standing in these ministries in the New Testament scriptures are studied closely in the light of what is recorded about them, they appear to have greater latitude in spiritual – administrative authority beyond all others. This is true. For example, Paul could say of himself "This is my rule in all the churches". Again, he interferes administratively in the affairs of the Corinthian church (see ICorinthians. 5). And yet again, he ordains persons into responsibility of eldership in various cities. He directs another, who also laboured as an apostle, to do the same (see for example the apostolic letters to Titus and Timothy).

The spirit of the word indicates that the principles of the word of God carry the same authority today and not necessarily persons in these offices. By the anointing of the Spirit, apostles and prophets as they fulfil their ministries travelling from one place to another, should patiently highlight principles of God's word that should arm leadership in each locality with the wisdom to handle such functions previously referred to in the italicised portion. In this way they would be giving place to the Lord Jesus Christ to confirm to the heart of the respective leadership His will.

What this means is that sometimes, a counsel given as to a possible line of action may not be wholly adhered to. That should not be taken as a breach in the Spirit. True apostles and prophets would always find that if they have in manifestation the grace of patience and love, others would invariably follow their lead.

God true servants may always leave any difficulty arising from accepting to operate within their boundaries of authority to Him who purchase the church with His own blood.

Let's sum up the foregoing. A teacher, shepherd, evangelist, prophet or apostle is called to serve the body of Christ all over the world. And he is to be received by the various congregations of the Lord's people according to the anointing of God upon his life, and according to his or her moral character. But when he goes outside he must humble himself. He may teach the principles governing a particular issue in an attempt to guide the people by the light of God's word, but the leadership in that assembly or location must receive those principles, judge them to be true and so internalise them, and administer their own affairs under the headship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of the church, whether the church universal, or the church as a local assembly, a local expression of the body of Christ.

To have a singular individual exercising a whole sphere of authority that span across congregations of God's people in different regions across the globe, is to repudiate the authority and headship of Christ over his church. And of course, when an individual begins to do that, he begins to decay, he begins to burn out. He spends five minutes in this city. And church politics will require him to move to another city. And the people will be saying, "*oh, our president and founder is coming*", and there is a lot of ceremony to give him a "*red carpet*" reception, as if the church of Christ is a secular state. And after all is said and done, nothing is ministered to the increase of the church.

Let us operate how the Lord wants us to. Then there would be is safety; then, there is spiritual increase. Anyone who has seen the glory of God and seen the work of the kingdom of God twenty, thirty years ago, and come to see the system of things operating now, cannot but weep. But God is putting all things straight. The truth we are sharing with you are but tools we are gathering. Beginning from the next edition, we shall begin to examine the application of these tools in showing how they have brought about spiritual decay in God's house, and how God is reacting against it and bringing it to judgement. We hear with profit if we repent and turn to the Lord. He is not going to bring us into judgement concerning our past if we are prepared to repent. But the axe, by the principles of this truth, which we have preached, is laid at the feet of every tree. The Bible says any tree that does not produce the fruit of repentance shall be hewn down and thrown into the fires of affliction. The Lord bless you in Jesus name. Amen.