
6

Church Ministry in the Epistles

Before we can feel we have done justice to the study of Christian ministry, we must continue with a careful sampling from the epistles. We will have given an overview to the question in a systematic fashion—avoiding the temptation of simply providing a random proof-text of our conclusions. We have selected Scripture from Luke’s historical account (Acts), from the early writings of Paul (Galatians), and from his later writings (1 Corinthians).

MINISTRY GUIDELINES AFTER THE CROSS

Calvary. All that the Lord had spoken to His disciples seemed to fade in a fog of confusion and fear. His last words had been directions for disciples. But how could that *now* be? The Master Discipler was gone? The One who would give direction and perspective had ascended to the Father. The answer begins to come to us in the book of Acts. For now *disciple-maker*, as a verbal concept of action, fades. But *disciple*, as a noun of substance, begins to appear. How the one-way, unilateral relationship of a discipler to a

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

disciplee disappears. It is replaced by a mutual relationship between two disciples. It is bilateral—two-way. It becomes brothers sharing a common faith and Lord and involvement in the mutual task of ministry. Lest we become overly absorbed in the discipleship concept as the all-encompassing perspective on Christian ministry, Acts and the epistles balance us out. After the book of Acts, the term *disciple* never reappears in the Scriptures, though we find similar concepts reviewed in different terms.

ACTS: REDISCOVERING OUR ROOTS

Hold on a minute. Acts is a transitional book. It seems a bit dangerous to draw ministry principles from a book that is caught up in the “changing of the guard” from the Old Testament economy of law to the New Testament perspective of grace and truth in Christ (cf. John 1:17).

However, rather than seeing Acts as a transitional book it seems better to see it as a book of transitions. That is, it does record the inception of the New Testament church—the indwelling and abundant ministry of the Spirit of God to believers and the proclamation of the gospel to people who had not heard. But to admit this is hardly to admit a defect in the book. For we must remember that all Scripture is from God and is profitable for multiple ministries in the body (cf. 2 Tim. 3:10-17). We should be able to discern principles for church ministry in the book of Acts while also discerning important interpretive matters.

Acts 2:42-47. Just as we can tell much about a plant by the life of its roots, so we can tell much about the life of the church by studying its roots in Acts 2. Because of the message of Peter’s sermon—a sermon motivated by Christ’s final directions (Acts 1)—great conviction swept through the festival crowds at Jerusalem. Three thousand people experienced repentance, conversion, and baptism on that first day. The life of the plant had sprung up

Church Ministry in the Epistles

quickly; it could not be ignored. The reason for this is seen clearly in the following:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

We find the root structure of the early church reflected in the multidimensional relationships observed from the gospel of Matthew. Once again they include the following:

- First dimension—relationship between a believer and God
- Second dimension—relationship between a believer and a believer
- Third dimension—relationship between a believer and an unbeliever

First-dimensional relationship. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). As we have learned, Christ places the highest priority on a believer’s walk with God. The greatest pursuit of man is to “love the Lord you God with all you heart...soul [and]...mind” (Matt. 2:37). The young church understood that there was no separation between loving the Lord and loving His Word, which was given by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Although it is a serious charge to label a brother a “bibliolater,” we

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

suspect the New Testament church, in the proper sense, came close to that. The members were resolute in their conviction that God's will was revealed in Scripture. They were devoted to the apostles' doctrine as a means of better knowing and loving their Lord.

Acts 2:42 shows that unity is never at a greater level than at the doctrinal level. Ephesians 4:13 instructs us that the church's goal is to be built-up "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature." Of course, our love is beyond the printed page of doctrine to the Person of the Lord. Yet we hold up the written Scriptures as our guide for godly living (2 Pet. 1:1-11).

Second-dimensional relationship. Loving our Lord leads to loving our neighbor. The vertical leads to the horizontal. This love was expressed in the early church by continual devotion to fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Those three commitments complemented the devotion of the apostles' teaching, or the Scriptures. They give us a glimpse into the internal life of the church—the lifeblood of intimacy—that continually nurtured the young organism.

Fellowship is sharing—giving what you have to others who have need. It is from the root *koinos*, which carries the idea of having things in common: both tangible, in terms of property and possessions, and intangible, in terms of relationships and attitudes. In this passage, in a strong spirit of Christian community, Luke tells us that these believers "had everything in common." They either shared their physical goods or converted their possessions to cash for the purpose of giving to anyone who had need. There is a difference, however, between Christian community and communal activity. In the American communes of the 1960s, young people, including believers, sometimes shared too much. There were times that the clear guidelines for life-style and moral conduct were violated. The Scriptures are clear on two points: first, commitment to fellowship to fellowship in the early church was not mandated—it was voluntary;

Church Ministry in the Epistles

and second, it was in the context of other equally clear standards for marital and individual behavior. Christian community (which we believe will develop in America as we realize the implications of these and other New Testament texts), cannot function properly without the input of mature Christian leaders in local church contexts, and it cannot prosper under decree or legislation. It must be rooted in the conviction of the individual believer's conscience. From Acts 4:32-35 we see that the apostles directed and donated funds and that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:24a).

But, you say, that was the early church. Certainly God cannot expect similar behavior, albeit voluntary, in the church today. Let us see what Paul says:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He that gathered much did not have too much, and he that gathered little did not have too little" (2 Cor. 8:13-15).

Surprised? The goal is the same as that worked out historically in the early church. The principle is equality: no believer is to have too much, and no believer is to have too little. This commitment to voluntarily giving to meet the needs of others in the Body of Christ is a continuing desire of God. A final caution: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

These truths were dramatically impressed on the Moore family a few years ago. They decided to sell their home and some acreage and build a smaller home on adjoining property. They were going to build this new home on the equity left over from the selling of the first home. Their motivation was essentially to free their family from a mortgage obligation and make do with a smaller home. But,

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

to allow even an interim arrangement on the undeveloped property next door, they had to drill a well so that, at relatively short notice, they could vacate their present home as they prepared to build their new, smaller, home. To their surprise, the new well went 375 feet, but they had enough money to go only 200 feet. They were beginning a theological education that they had not planned.

A few days later John was having lunch with a Christian friend who, after a good and extended conversation about many things, asked him how the well project was going. Upon explaining the situation to him, he committed to, and later wrote a check for, the considerable balance still owed on the well. He gave the Moore family the money on two conditions: first, the money was a gift, not a loan; second, they were to continue to understand their biblical obligation, albeit voluntary, to minister to the needs of others out of their “plenty.” That strongly encouraged their development of applying the principle of equality as God gives opportunity.

But this text in Acts 2 also instructs us in matters of worship. The early church was committed to the breaking of bread (public worship) and prayer (both public and private worship). The Lord’s Table seemed to be the central focus of the church meeting. We learn from 1 Corinthians 11 that the assembly regularly examined themselves (in relation to sin) and proclaimed the Lord’s Person and work, looking to His imminent return (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-28). It continued throughout the life and growth of the church: believers gathered on the first day of the week “to break bread” (Acts 20:7a).

Prayer was also vital to these young believers; substantial time and priority was given to it. Believers joined their hearts and minds together in intercession for the needs of those around them—for the dangers and problems facing the church (cf. Acts 4:23-31; 6:4-6; 12:12-17). The needs of the church regularly brought these believers to their knees in intercession to their Lord.

Third-dimensional relationship. “Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:47). In the Scriptures, the gain-

Church Ministry in the Epistles

ing of salvation and inheritance in the kingdom of God is never the final goal of the Christian life. The church was also gripped with a mandate to go to the unsaved around them.

Evangelism as a life-style was a vital feature of the New Testament church. This text ends with reminding us that these believers were “praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (2:47). That is the final part of ministry. It is *favor evangelism*: commitment to relationships with unbelievers, which, in the context of friendships, leads to new birth. This new birth, given by God, was accomplished in the midst of favor and affection between believers and nonbelievers. The precedent for this is seen in the life of Christ Himself, at the young age of twelve, and the principle is continued in the writings of the apostle Peter (cf. Luke 2:52; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Priorities and pressure (Acts 6:1-7).

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Jews among them complained against those of the Aramaic-speaking community because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timos, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a number of priests became obedient to the faith.

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

There is no gain without pain. Genuine intimacy always develops in the midst of adversity. Not only is this true in an individual believer's walk with his Lord, but also with the gathered assembly.

The book of Acts records some major growing pains of the early church. In Acts 5, the Lord took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira before the evil caused by their lies and deceptions spread throughout the church. And the church learned the lesson (5:11). In Acts 6, new problems developed. Some of the believers, of Greek origin, believed their widows' basic needs were being neglected. The church had to confront a paramount problem: maintaining the principle of equality of goods in the face of potential divisiveness based on culture and background.

The solution was found in the cooperation of the twelve with the disciples. The apostles understood their responsibilities as primarily directing the church at Jerusalem through prayer and the ministering of the Word. The serving of the widows, though no less a ministry, needed to be delegated to men of proved leadership and spirituality in the assembly. The seven were selected by the congregation of disciples, and, after being set apart by the apostles, began to meet the needs of the widows. It is observed that the spreading of the Word of God and the influence and ministry of the church was strategically linked to the same priorities seen in Acts 2. Loving the Lord and His Word and loving others, both in the Body of Christ and outside of it, remained the mainstay for the life of the church.

Spiritual and Numerical Growth (Acts 9:31).

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

After the dramatic conversion and early ministry of Saul of Tarsus, the church in Palestine grew at an increasing rate. Saul added

Church Ministry in the Epistles

a new and dynamic addition to the church that was not without its demand on the body of believers (cf. Acts 9:19b-31). Yet in Acts 9:31 we see a continuation of the same emphases that the Lord began in the church in Acts 2.

First, the body's relationship with the Lord grew. The Holy Spirit gave strength and encouragement to the assembly. The fear of the Lord brought wisdom and growth. Second, relationships in the body developed. There was a strong sense of cooperation in the assembly in protecting Saul from the Jews' plots to kill Him. And third, increased outreach to the unsaved was reflected in the church's growth.

This should always be the order. Sinking our roots deep into the soil of our love for our Lord, we branch out in love to believers around us. And that most important spiritual growth results in the gospel's going to those who do not know Christ. Spiritual growth then produces numerical growth.

GALATIANS: GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH

One of Paul's earliest epistles, evidently written before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 50, is the epistle to the Galatians. The issue was critical: these believers wanted to add to the gospel message. Paul decided to confront this challenge to the faith head-on.

Pursuing conduct consistent with the gospel (Gal. 1:6-10).

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul quickly pulls out the stops in this epistle. There was a different gospel—literally, a non-gospel—being preached. The fallacy was on two levels: first, a different content; and second, a different commendation.

The different content was the addition of the demands of the law to the grace and righteousness of Christ.

We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not be observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified....If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!....I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. That life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal. 2:15-17, 20-21).

Recognizing that no man can fully comply with the righteous demands of the Law, Paul reaffirms the true gospel, which is salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. The false gospel, that is, adding to the work of Christ merits of the law, was perversion and confusion and deserved the fullest condemnation of God (Gal. 1:7, 9). The implications were clear: “If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Gal. 2:21).

This false gospel also offered a different commendation. Paul

Church Ministry in the Epistles

recognizes the potential danger in trying to please men rather than God (Gal. 1:10). Just as a slave cannot serve two masters, so Paul cannot be a servant to both man and God. Since this gospel came from God and not man (Gal. 1:11), Paul affirms the necessity of serving God by proclaiming the true gospel.

One reason this issue was important to Paul is seen in the life of Peter. This apostle spent years struggling with the issue of partiality toward Jewish brethren. Peter's desire to gain the approval of men, that is, James and the Jewish converts, caused him to favor association with the Jews. Paul does not spare words in confronting his fellow apostle. He states that Peter was not "acting in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). Any conduct that disregards the vital facts of the gospel is implicit denial of the truth of the gospel. But, was Peter the only one with a problem?

Spiritual living—by the Spirit (Gal. 3:1-3).

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Consistency! The "Peter Principle" was also the Galatian Principle. These believers were forgetting they were in Christ. Their life in Christ had begun by the Spirit and needed to continue by the Spirit. No contribution of the flesh could cooperate with the Spirit to bring about spiritual maturity.

Paul develops this truth, and the implications of it, in terms of warfare:

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Gal. 5:16-16).

Believers are engaged in war. There is a constant battle between the flesh and the Spirit in all believers. In other words, the flesh is always only too willing to cooperate with false doctrine or wayward commendations to confuse the believer. But the intent of the Spirit of God is for a walk that is consistent with the Person of Christ Himself (cf. Gal. 5:22-25). Confusion at the foundation weakens the whole structure. An important part of Christian ministry is understanding the sound doctrines of the gospel of Christ, which will produce a life of godliness.

Spiritual ministry—by the Spirit (Gal. 6:7-10). Having planted the good seed of the gospel of Christ, Paul now speaks about the harvest:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from the nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

This arena for warfare is also analogous to the farmer's field. The habitual ways of thinking and acting produce a harvest. If our habits by the flesh result in sin, then we harvest destruction (cf. Gal. 5:26-6:1). The believer's growth is stopped based on poor decisions as a spiritual farmer. If our activities involve "doing good to all people," then our harvest is plentiful and results in a well-run race (cf. Gal.

Church Ministry in the Epistles

6:2-5; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Pet. 3:3-9). Notice the twofold emphasis. We are to carry concerns for all those around us; believers and unbelievers alike.

1 CORINTHIANS: CORRECTING CHURCH CONDUCT

As was mentioned earlier in chapter 2, the church at Corinth was full of both problems and possibilities. They were a knowledgeable church—yet proud. They were a gifted assembly—yet divided.

Co-laborers with the eternal God (1 Cor. 1:10-12).

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul;" another, "I follow Apollos;" another, "I follow Cephas;" still another, "I follow Christ."

Paul knew a storm was about to hit Corinth. Based on both known information and reports from other believers, he warns this church. There were quarrels (1 Cor. 1:11) that would lead soon to divisions (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul pleads with these believers to reconsider what they say about each other ("that all of you agree with one another") and what they think about each other ("that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought"). Verbal and mental unity were vital for church unity.

But his concerns for Corinth came from the implications of the preferences of these believers for the ministries of one over another.

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants,

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1 Cor. 3:5-15).

This grouping of believers, based on the preference of style or emphases of doctrine of some men over others, was inconsistent with the whole sense of Christian ministry and growth in the church.

Remembering the lessons of Matthew 20, Paul emphasizes the measure for a believer’s success: servanthood. Apollos, Peter, and Paul were to be regarded only as faithful servants (1 Cor. 4:1-2). The Corinthians were acting as though the work of the ministry rested on men rather than God. For purposes of emphasis, Paul says this twice (1 Cor. 3:7-8). That is joined to the other emphasis of the paragraph; men are co-laborers with God in spiritual farming. God has ordered His sovereign purposes for His church according to the means of human cooperation. That does not change the fact God is the ultimate source for growth. But, servants can plant and water in cooperative fashion with God Himself!

Church Ministry in the Epistles

This, then, is a single purpose in ministry and allows *no* place for division. The single purpose for men in the ministry, that is, cooperation with God in the harvest, binds us together. Apollos, Peter, and Paul can be appreciated for unique contributions to the church, but that is no excuse for separating contributions and valuing some men over others.

Paul made a unique contribution: he laid the foundation. Yet the builder is not to be remembered—the foundation is. The foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul reminds these believers that preferential treatment of some over others was a distraction away from the Head of the church. Man's work is to be judged according to its ability to proclaim Jesus Christ. If one seeks self-exaltation then he is in danger of judgment (cf. 4:4-5). Ministries promoted out of false motives will disappear and have no lasting value or reward. But ministries rooted in the foundation of Christ will endure. These sobering words should cause us to constantly reevaluate our ministry efforts according to these terms.

Do you feel the pressure from the expectations of our day? Conversations between believers concerning the health of respective assemblies quickly move to matters of “nickels, noise, and numbers.” At pastoral conventions the almost-exclusive measure of success is in numerical terms. But, God's concern is for the cultivation of faithful servants able to appreciate diverse ministries without entertaining divisiveness.

People have asked Ken, “How is our church going?” He answers the question strictly in terms of perceived spiritual growth in the body and in his own life, and in the impact in the community. He often notices a nervous twitch in his inquirer. “Well, that's wonderful, Ken. But, what I mean is, how is the church *really* doing?” Trying to avoid the obvious, Ken repeats his former answer and adds observations about specific issues of spiritual growth. But that does not satisfy his friend. Finally, with some exasperation, he says, “Actually, Ken, what I mean is, how large is your church?”

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

How many members are attending? What are the building plans?” Ken had been talking about a building program, but the questions were obviously coming from a different level.

It is time for candor in the Christian church. We are not going to see the Body of Christ prosper if it follows the path of traditional expectations and conventional credentials. Spiritual health is seen in spreading the Word of God and developing disciples. Numerical growth can no more be the standard for success in the church than the book of Acts can be our textbook for Christian ministry to the exclusion of the epistles and the rest of Scripture. God is concerned about developing body growers, not body counters! Remember the caution: “His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light” (1 Cor. 3:13a).

REPRODUCING MATURITY: AVOIDING THE SPIRITUAL GENERATION GAP

It is easy to forget, but worth remembering: few things are forever! Fads and fashions, notions and nations, passions and possessions. All are going back to dust. But the kingdom of God is eternal. God, His Word, and His children. We can find no other things more worthy of our time and effort.

The Spirit of God has reserved for us, in the last writing from the hand of Paul, a record of ministry priorities that answer the question of how to reproduce spirituality and Christian maturity.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Tim. 2:1-20).

The biblical starting point is very familiar to us. All Christian ministry begins with God Himself. We are to draw deeply on the

Church Ministry in the Epistles

grace of Christ as an expression of “loving the Lord”: being before doing. If Timothy, as he ministers to the church of Ephesus, can strengthen himself at his level, he can handle every pressure the ministry can offer, focusing on reproducing maturity in the lives in the assembly.

Just as love for the Lord produces love for your neighbor, spiritual growth produces spiritual investments in the lives of those around you. This is the disciple-making pattern working out in the life of the maturing church. In this passage four generations are in view; the first two are past; the last two picture the future health of the church.

The first generation, for Timothy’s concern, is Paul himself. To Timothy, Paul had been like a father (1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:19-22). Paul’s commitment as a spiritual father model led to Timothy’s strong growth in the faith. Everybody needs a role model, a spiritual parent, who can inspire and encourage spiritual growth. For Timothy, it was Paul. For Paul, it was Barnabas. Growth cannot come in the body without the ministry and models of spiritual leaders.

The second generation is the “many witnesses.” Paul did not act alone, or minister alone. That would have been inconsistent with his understanding of the church as a body and would have been counterproductive to the ministry principles we have seen so far. There were others—witnesses. They were confirmers of the faith, co-laborers with Paul. In Paul’s last written “breath” in 2 Timothy 4:19-21, he mentions at least nine fellow witnesses.

The third generation is “reliable,” or faithful, men. Just as a soldier or athlete is in training, so a saint (cf. 2 Tim. 2:3-5). His training involves concern for the spiritual condition of himself and those around him. Those around him are to take this faithful one aside and begin to teach him the truths of the grace of Jesus Christ. There is testing before serving and proving before pressure (cf. 1 Tim. 3:10). We are to prepare the young for the long race.

The fourth generation is the final stages of a ministry of multiplication. It is men who are not only faithful but who also share their

A New Testament Blueprint for the Church

knowledge and experience. In Christian ministry, the credentials are not principally academic, but experiential. In the New Testament, teaching is both content and context, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Nothing less earns the ministry title in the Body of Christ of “qualified teacher.”

CONCLUSIONS

Recently John had the privilege to teaching in 1 Corinthians 6 in their local assembly. He could not avoid 6:13a: “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—but God will destroy them both.” His children have gleefully seized upon this principle! Every time he tries to reason with them about how, since daddies have bigger bodies, they should have bigger desserts, they protest on theological grounds.

So it is in the Body of Christ. We have all kinds of teachers offering guidelines for ministry—beckoning for attention—promoting a shape for the body that is entirely unhealthy. We need more ministers like John’s children, who caution the body at the most basic level and remind us of nutritious spiritual principles.

Loving the Lord and loving our neighbor. Devotion to the Scriptures and to the Body of Christ. Worship that is proper in public and genuine in private. The gospel reaching out to those who have not heard.

That’s good food . . . for the Body!