

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR-TEACHER IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

What is the role of the Elder / Pastor-Teacher / Bishop [Overseer] in the overall ministry of the local Church? Is he the Church CEO? Does he run the Church? We must understand God's design of the Church in order to understand the role of the Pastor-Teacher.

God's Design of the Church

A local Church is a limited, local expression of the Body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12:27 Paul wrote, "Now you are *a* body of Christ and members in particular." The "you" is plural in Greek and therefore Paul is addressing the whole assembly of Corinth, not individuals alone. This is why the translators of the King James Version translated it "ye" rather than "thee". If we were from the South, we might translate the word "you all." Then we should note that the definite article "the" placed in the King James Version does not translate a definite article in the Greek. The absence of the definite article points to the quality not the identity. For this reason, Paul is not telling the Corinthians that they are **the** Body of Christ but rather they are a quality or sample of the Body of Christ. The local Church is a sample or small expression of the larger Body of Christ, which is made up of all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church. This is helpful, for those statements concerning the Body of Christ generally apply to smaller samples of that Body or in practical terms they will apply to our local Churches.

1 Corinthians 12 gives one of the most important concepts of the Body of Christ and thus also of the local assembly. We read in verse 12, "For as the Body is one and it has many members, but all the members of the body, being many is one body, so also the Christ." Just as my human body has hands, arms, legs, feet, eyes, ears and so on, in this same way, the Body of Christ is made up of diverse members. The diversity is in the sphere of the differing gifts which have been distributed throughout the body. "Now there are differences of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are differences of ministries and the same Lord, and there are differences of operations but the same God . . ." (verses 4-6a). So we know that in a any local Church, generally you will find a diverse gifts / ministries / operations.

No member of the Body of Christ should ever look down on himself because of what he isn't or to highly on himself because of what he is. Paul wrote, "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?" (verse 15). He went on to write that the body is not all one member. Every one in the Body of Christ is where God was pleased to put him or her (verses 18-19). If God was pleased to place you in that area of ministry, shouldn't you be pleased to be there? Similarly, since each member is where God wants them to be, no member should ever look down upon a member that does not have the same ministry. In fact God has given a special beauty to those gifts which seem to us to have less honor and a special necessity for those which we might feel we could get along without (verses 21-24). I as a Pastor-teacher can not look at others as though they are less important because they have not received the gift of Pastor-teacher. Wise Pastors soon realize that there are members of the local assembly who by their gifting can do certain works in the Church more capably. As part of God's gift of salvation, believers are fitted for a diversity service. Each believer in addition to this common salvation, is given that special area of service we know as a spiritual gift (1 Peter 4:10), "As each has received a quality of gift, so minister **it**."

Remember these are *spiritual* (1 Corinthians 12:1) and *things of grace* (verse 4; Romans 12:6). These are not earned nor can a person be taught or trained for that which God has not already gifted them. Some have understood Paul's expression "covet earnestly the best gifts" in 1 Corinthians 12:31 to mean that a believer can desire and thus obtain more gifts or different gifts. In keeping with the context of chapter 12, Paul wrote to the whole assembly and told them that they

ought not only give attention to the showy up-front-gifts but to those gifts for which God has given the Body a special necessity (verses 22, 23). The Corinthians were zealous for the show but apparently were neglecting some real needs in the Church by demeaning those with less spectacular gifts. Therefore they were to seek those who could exercise such gifts.

Now, it is helpful to understand those gifts listed in God's Word. It has become popular to find gifts outside the Word of God. Some Christians claim to have the gift of music, gift of singleness, etc.. Let's consider briefly those gifts which are still operating in the Church.

In Romans 12 we find six active gifts mentioned:

1. Ministry (v. 7) is the ability to serve others. It is likely this may refer to menial work on behalf of other believers. This is the same word translated "deacon". The deacons had the menial service of the Church's material possessions.
2. Teaching (v. 7) is the gift specially related to teaching doctrine ["teaching" - K.J.V.] that is not necessarily intended for practice but is to be believed.
3. Exhortation (v. 8) is the ability to charge or call others to activity. It is great to have someone other than the Pastor encourage people to practice what they've been taught.
4. Giving (v. 8) is the ability to see material needs of other believers and then meet them or know how best to see that they are met.
5. Ruling (v. 8) is a word more accurately rendered "organization". It refers to those who have the ability to organize details in a Church. This one can see that believers are in the right place within the local Church so that their special God-given gift may be most effectively used, matching needs with gifts.
6. Mercy (v. 8) is the special ability to attend to those believers who are suffering, to cheer them and see their needs are cared for. This suffering may be physical or mental.

In 1 Corinthians 12 amid a list of gifts, we find four which are still active.

1. Faith (vv. 9) is the special ability to take God's will for the Church as solid, in order that the Church might do God's will. This is above the normal exercise of faith expected of individual Christians.

Teachers (v. 28) - see above

2. Helps (v. 28) is the special ability to lay one's hand to a matter and help. Such a one takes an individual by the hand and helps them or walks them through a spiritual need - perhaps a one on one aide. Its Biblical use emphasizes working with the spiritually weak so they may better learn the Christian life.

3. Administrations (v. 28) is the special ability to steer or guide the Church on God's course for her.

The last two gifts are found in Ephesians 4:11.

1. Evangelist is the special ability to lead the unsaved to a saving knowledge of Christ. Frequently this is done outside the local Church. The New Testament supports the idea that such a one will frequently be used with those whom he has had little or no previous contact.
2. Pastor-teacher is the special ability to lead and feed a local expression of God's flock and to watch out for the spiritual dangers to that flock.

These are the gifts still active today. In keeping with the character of a body, many of these gifts will be used together. For example a believer with the gift of faith and a believer with the gift of administration may cooperate to steer the Church in the path which is consistent with that taught and demonstrated by the Pastor-teacher and encouraged by the Exhorter. A believer with the gift of mercy may be cheering a suffering saint who is also being helped so that such a believer is not

left behind or forgotten as the Church moves on so he does not hold the Church back from God's will.

The Pastor-Teacher

Since God has designed the body in such a way that its potential needs may be met by variously gifted believers, what does the Pastor-teacher do in that assembly? We find in Ephesians 4 that he is among four gifts given for the equipping of the saints for ministry (verse 12). Some disservice has been done by the addition of an "the" before "work of ministry" in the King James translation. The absence of the article reminds us that Paul referred to a sample of ministry. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:6-8, there are diversities of gifts, ministries and operations. One of the responsibilities of the Pastor-teacher is to see that believers are being spiritually adjusted so that they can carry out that particular ministry for which God has gifted them. For example, one with the gift of mercy will be able to show mercy far more effectively if he/she knows how to be spiritual, how to properly use the Fruit of the Spirit and how to minister in keeping with God's Word. Here teaching is of great importance. Sometimes, simply the instruction that each believer has a special area of ministry and is important to the local assembly, for more than putting money in the offering plate and being another body in a pew on Sunday, has great impact. For too long the Church has been suffocated by the Clergy - Laity mentality. We are supposed to be out from under the influence of Romanism and yet often act as though we are not.

Peter wrote the Elders to "shepherd" the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1, 2). I'm sure most know that the word "feed" or "shepherd" refers to the act of pastoring with emphasis upon feeding. These elders needed to pastor by overseeing the flock. Oversight would refer to the Pastor's responsibility to watch over the flock for spiritual dangers such as the wolves Paul referred to in Acts 20:28-31. The pastor needs to be alert to those who have the best interests of the Church at heart versus those who may even be gifted but want only to gain a following. Timothy, who was filling in as a pastor-teacher in Ephesus, was frequently reminded of the spiritual dangers and wolfen men mainly within the Church. Paul told him that if he laid the facts concerning the errant teachers and men before the believers that he would be a good minister of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 4:6).

Peter also instructed the elders to be types or examples for the flock, not lords (1 Peter 5:3). The Pastor-teacher does not say, "do this" and then wait for the people to ask "How high?" The Pastor-teacher teaches God's Word and then lives it out before them. Often this is the toughest part of being a Pastor-teacher. God doesn't expect us to live it out only when we are teaching in that particular area of doctrine. God expects our daily-grind-kind-of-conduct to be an example (2 Timothy 2:12, 13). When the Pastor-teacher teaches the Word, the people can say, "It works! I can see it in his life!" This was why Paul gave such a thorough list of qualifications for the office of Overseer in 1 Timothy 3:1-9. This example by life is how the shepherd leads the sheep.

Teaching, watching over, and being an example are the three chief responsibilities of the Pastor-teacher. What do you expect of your Pastor-teacher? Do you measure him on his administrative skills? God doesn't. That would be the responsibility of those so gifted. Those so gifted should be chosen to serve as the deacons to oversee the affairs of the Church's material possessions. Do you measure him by his organizational skills for how smoothly a service moves? God doesn't. Why not find a believer so gifted to organize the service and allow them to minister for the benefit of all. Do you measure him by his regular hospital calls and time with the sick? God doesn't. Certainly someone in your assembly has the gift of showing mercy and will probably help to cheer and care for those in a far more effective manner than he. Do you measure him by his ability to see that the Church building and grounds are maintained? God doesn't. Someone

with the gift of ministry would do this wonderfully. Do you measure him by his one on one counseling? God doesn't. Some one with the gift of helps may be far better to take them by the hand and support that person.

Frequently we are directed to 1 Timothy 5:17 "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." Doesn't this passage describe elders "ruling"? The word translated "ruling" is the same word for the gift of organization. Ruling is not an accurate understanding of this word's meaning. The only other place it is used in 1 Timothy is in 3:5. Again the meaning should be one who organizes his household well. This was especially important when Churches met in homes. Their homes were much smaller than our homes today. There were no nurseries to send the little ones off to; no junior Church or youth Church. All the believers stayed together. In this environment it was necessary that the Elder be able to keep his family organized so as not to disrupt the assembly and also to set an example for others. Additionally, when Pastor-teachers do work outside the confines of the assembly it is necessary to effectively use his time. An organized family would make this possible. Those elders who not only were effective in their teaching and leading but also in organizing their families were worthy of double honor.

Then Paul points to two very important qualities, "especially those who labor in word and doctrine." The word labor emphasizes sweat and toil. "Word" does not have the definite article "the" with it. Therefore, Paul is not referring to God's Word but word in general. With his family organized this Pastor-teacher is able to labor in how he will teach God's Word. His toil is in how to accurately communicate truth; what to say and how best to say it! The word "doctrine" refers to doctrine which is believed but not practiced. Since the elder is shepherding the sheep primarily with reference to their daily conduct this will not be his usual emphasis. If he has time to also toil in doctrine which isn't practiced then he is especially worthy of double honor. By paying attention to context and the grammar of the passage, we can understand that this passage is consistent with the responsibilities of the elders as we have seen thus far.

Yet the Pastor-teacher, like all Christians, will be able to do other things in a limited manner. He can, in a God led manner, do these but less effectively than one gifted for service in such areas. Many of us Pastors have done these things countless times and are willing to do them again. But we must also remember that by our continual picking up the ball, those we are trying to teach will not learn to pick it up and serve. We should not excuse ourselves from other areas of service simply because we are gifted as Pastor-teachers but neither should we become so preoccupied in doing these other things that we neglect that for which God has gifted us. Those of you who are not Pastor-teachers can help by watching out for the various needs in your Church. As God gives a opportunity you may find that God has gifted you in this area. You may find that you are gifted elsewhere and can more effectively meet the needs of your Church in another area of service. But in the end, as we are Spirit taught, Spirit led people serving where God has placed us, our local Church will operate more like God designed. It will operate like a real expression of **the body of Christ**.