



# **CCCVAT MINISTRIES LTD**

## **PASTORS GUIDELINES**

### **V3 - 01.09.21**

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I love Pastors. I respect Pastors.

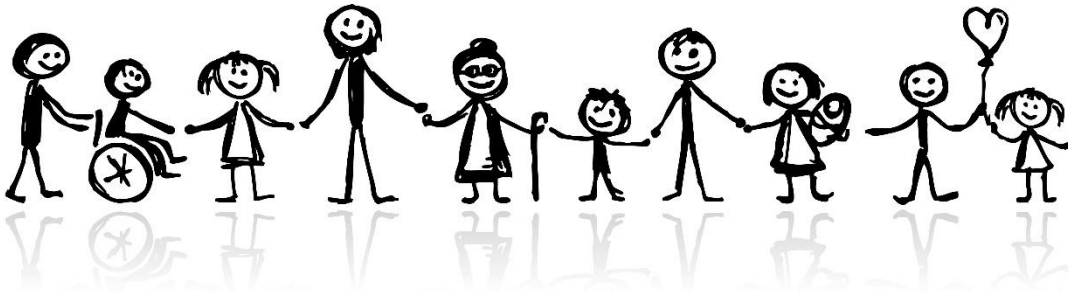
No, they aren't perfect. Indeed, they often have many struggles and challenges. As I reviewed the thousands of comments I have heard from Pastors, I began to see a pattern of silent expressions. Stated simply, there are many things Pastors would like to say, but they don't feel like they have the freedom to do so.

I compiled ten of the more common unspoken comments Pastors wish they could express. They are in no particular order, and I have chosen not to offer further commentary to them.

1. "I am struggling with depression."
2. "Don't criticize me right before or after I preach."
3. "I worry about my family in the church fishbowl."
4. "I wish the 'healthy' church members in our church would stand up to the bullies and critics."
5. "Pray for me; I need it."
6. "I don't know if we can pay our personal bills."
7. "I am so tired of attending mundane meetings."
8. "Don't ask me to do something right before I preach."
9. "I can't keep up with all the changes in culture and churches."
10. "It hurts me deeply when we lose a church member."

I know there are many more sentences of similar sentiments. What do you think of these ten? What would you add?

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### **Matthew 28:16-20 New International Version (NIV)**

#### **The Great Commission**

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

# **1 INTRODUCTION:**

These guidelines are based upon information included in the Baptist Union of Victoria's [BUV] Guidelines for Healthy Church/Pastors Relationships and contributions from CCCVaT and Dr Keith Graham.

These guidelines seek to:

- Foster harmony between the Church, Leadership and Pastor to mitigate conflict so all can function efficiently and effectively to advance the Kingdom of God by making disciples of all men.
- Convey the strategic plan of the Church to the Pastor.
- Afford the Pastor an opportunity to provide input to the strategic plan.
- Arrive at a position all parties, Church, Leadership and Pastor are in harmony regards the strategic plan and all convinced it can be achieved.
- Create a basis to develop and enhance the relationship with the Church, Leadership and Pastor.
- Ensure the Pastor is comfortable with what is expected and the remuneration is acceptable.
- To review the Pastor performance constructively.

Overall to foster working conditions where both Pastor and Church Experience confirms that working conditions for a Pastor that are fair, healthy and supportive, help nurture an effective and healthy Church. It is important for a Church and a Pastor to be clear about their expectations in ministry, by clarifying the role of a Pastor, the terms and conditions of the call, and the processes by which ministry will be conducted in partnership together.

These guidelines have been developed following a wide consultation process incorporating discussions at gatherings, input from Pastors and Churches via surveys and focus groups, and a working group made up of representation from BUV, Pastors and Church leaders. The ministry to which a Pastor has been called is of an incarnational nature; it is typically a life calling that goes beyond the local Church responsibilities out into the community. A Pastor is always 'on-the-job', i.e. a Pastor may or may not be intentionally involved in a ministry setting, yet may still be called upon to act in their role as a Pastor. This can be problematic concerning many of our employment laws and standard HR policies.

The principles of the relationship between Pastor and Church can be summarised in these terms:

- The Pastor accepts his role as a call from the Lord, and while he is a "servant of the Church" a "servant of the Gospel" a "servant of the Lord" he is answerable to

the Church Leadership team. He is one of the spiritual leaders and shepherds in the life and ministry of the Church (1 Peter 5:1-4).

- Associated with a Pastor in the spiritual oversight of the Church are the elders and deacons, Christian men and women chosen for their gifts and graces, who are also called to be examples to the members of the Church, in conduct, zeal, self-denial and generosity (1 Timothy 3:1-14)
- Church Elders/Deacons are appointed as spiritual leaders to work in mutual co-operation with a Pastor and Church members.

The relationship between a Pastor and Church is both spiritually formed and nurtured, it exists for the purpose of furthering the Kingdom of God by making disciples of all men.

These Guidelines include a range of practical issues; which underlying all of the recommendations is an understanding of ministry. The relationship between the Church and a Pastor is special and unique, involving a commitment by each party. The Pastor responds to the call to provide spiritual Leadership and Pastoral care for the membership and others and a local Church commits to provide appropriate care and support for the Pastor.

For Pastors there are a number of practical issues which these guidelines cover that can help improve the longevity, health and effectiveness of your ministry.

Church Leaders, must look beyond their own employment/HR experiences in the commercial workplace and seek to make decisions that reflect a biblical perspective, where the values of love, generosity, kindness, mutual respect and the well-being of the Pastor(s) is paramount. This approach requires that the relationship between a Pastor and leaders goes beyond a strictly employment relationship.

There are many legal requirements and regulations that apply to employment whether it be a Pastor or employee that impact on the relationship between the parties. Additionally, there are many Human Resource [HR] principles that can clarify and aid the relationship with a Pastor and leaders of the Church. Defining and applying appropriate ways to care for and support a Pastor will contribute to nurturing healthy, sustainable and effective ministry.

These guidelines surpass mandatory legal requirements and are designed to clarify expectations of the relationship between a Pastor and a Church to create an effective and healthy Church environment that advances God's work in the community.

## **2 CONTEXT:**

The guidelines solely relate to a Pastor and Church conducting ministry in a local Church environment.

Often the Leadership will have defined expectations of the role of a Pastor which it has documented in its strategic plan and the Pastor may have defined expectations of the role based upon his/her experience.

It is fundamentally important that each party be willing to hear the view of the other party and be prepared to amend expectations where they are viewed beneficial to the ministry of the church.

## **3 DEFINITIONS:**

- **CCCVaT** – CCCVAT MINISTRIES LTD, also known as Christian Community Churches in Victoria and Tasmania
- **Church** – means the body of members and employer of the Pastor.
- **HR** – means human resources; employer obligations and guidelines pertaining to employment.
- **Leadership** – means the body responsible for the governance and or spiritual welfare of the church.
- **Pastor** – means person employed by the church in the role of Pastor; an employee.

## **4 ROLE OF THE PASTOR:**

- a. There are biblical expectations of a Pastor prescribed in the bible and these must constitute the foundation of a Pastor's primary mission.
- b. The specific duties and expectations of a Pastor's role, should be determined and agreed to by the Leadership, deacons, members of the church and the Pastor and, be clearly stated in a Pastor's position description and employment agreement. These documents can then be referenced to:
  - i. Minimises ambiguity.
  - ii. Clarify expectations.
  - iii. Measure performance.
- c. Useful reference material regards Pastors and leaders/leadership is included in ***Annexures A and B and a paper on [Local Church, Church Health and Church Planting in the Christian Community Church Movement](#) by David Wraight***

## **5 SETTING OBJECTIVES, APPRAISAL AND DEVELOPMENT:**

One of the key stress factors for Pastors is lack of clarity regards the Church's expectations of the Pastor. To avoid this it is recommended that the Church follow a structured planning, development and appraisal process with the Pastor on an annual basis.

### **5.1 Strategic Plan:**

- a. The Church in conjunction with the Pastor should review the Church's strategic plan to ensure it is focussed on the prime directive passed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ and includes elements of mutually agreed expectations of the role of the Pastor.

#### ***Matthew 28:19 New International Version (NIV)***

*19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*

#### ***Ephesians 4:11-16 New International Version (NIV)***

*"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the Pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* Ephesians 4:11-16

*"Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.*

*Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."*

*(1 Timothy 4:11-16 NIV)*

*"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great*

*patience and careful instruction.*

*For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*

*But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1–5 NIV)*

- b.** A strategic plan should embrace God’s promise to provide:

*Philippians 4:19 NIV*

*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Accordingly, it should have an inspiring vision that aims to do a few things well rather than a lot poorly.

A strategic plan to deliver on the ‘Great Commission’ needs to be holistic in that each initiative or objective enhances the next so that people are nurtured and trained from cradle to grave to serve the Kingdom.

As well as being conscious of the finances and infrastructure the Church can call upon to resource the strategic plan, the parties should be conscious of the human resources it can call upon to support the initiatives and be guarded against individuals who have a particular gift, expertise or agenda they wish to pursue that may not fit the holistic program to nurture and train people from cradle to grave to serve the Kingdom.

In the strategic plan the churches expectations of the Pastor should be clearly identified and documented.

- c.** The main strategic objectives in a strategic plan are defined as Key Reporting Activities [KRA’s] and targets within these are defined as Key Performance Indicators [KPI’s].

**Example.**

- Develop a ministry to train young adults to teach the Gospel in 2024 [KRA]
  - Recruit 5 people to support the ministry by end of 2023 [KPI]
  - Recruit 20 young adults by end of year 2023 [KPI]

Each KPI needs to be assigned to an individual who will be responsible for the achieving the KPI.

- d.** Emanating from the planning process the following matters need to be documented in the Pastor’s position description.
- i. Outline of the churches expectations of the Pastor.



- ii. Key ministry responsibilities of the Pastor [KRA's].
  - iii. Objectives to be achieved in each ministry [KPI's].
  - iv. Resources the Pastor will be provided with to achieve the KPI's.
- e. Once this has been achieved and agreed upon, the Pastor will have objectives to focus on and the church the means to measure the Pastor's performance against these objectives.
  - f. The Pastor should be required to report on his/her progress meeting KPI's prior to each meeting of the Leadership.
  - g. Upon reviewing the Pastor's progress, the Leadership needs to address shortfalls and acknowledge success, all of which needs to be documented.

## **5.2 Professional Development:**

- a. Knowledge is forever expanding and the Church needs to keep abreast of this to ensure it remains relevant and equipped to serve the Kingdom. Accordingly, the Church has a vested interest in the professional development of the Pastor. The extent of professional development should be determined according to the needs of the ministry identified at commencement and or during an annual review of the strategic plan.
- b. The majority of Pastors have a theological degree and experience gained from previous roles, but don't often have the time to keep abreast of regulatory compliances applying to their role or news of initiatives that have succeeded reaching those in need.
- c. The professional development needs of the Pastor should be discussed when formulating the strategic plan and added as a KRA with KPI's. The development needs of the Pastor should focus on:
  - i. Pastor's strengths and weaknesses.
  - ii. Whether equipped to serve specific current and planned ministry objectives of the church.
  - iii. Formal studies currently being undertaken by the Pastor.
- d. Training should be considered an investment in resources, the same as investing in infrastructure and accordingly it is recommended it pay for the professional development costs of the Pastor.
- e. The Church would normally include the hours spent in training form part of a Pastor's ordinary hours however, subject to the type of training and potential time consumed in study it may be agreed that the Pastor volunteers some hours.

- f. The Church should also consider making allowances for a Pastor to undertake professional development that he/she wishes to pursue, that the Church may not consider of direct benefit to the ministry.

### **5.3 Personal and Family Support:**

As expressed, Pastors struggle with many aspects of their role and interaction with the Church which can impact on their mental health and performance.

- a. Pastors can also experience issues outside of their role with the Church such as coping living in an unfamiliar neighbourhood, with the family, friends and events impacting on their persona.
- b. To support the Pastor the Leadership should observe who in the leadership team the Pastor particularly relates to and recommends that person mentor the Pastor. Often people are more likely to discuss issues and needs with those they have an affinity with. Being aware of these issues and needs enables them to be addressed before they become a problem for the Pastor and or Church.
- c. In severe cases the Leadership should consider professional counselling.

### **5.4 Appraisal:**

- a. On an annual basis the Leadership should review the Pastor's role and what the Pastor achieved in their ministry over the previous 12 months, along with the strategic plan.
- b. The appraisal should assess their performance against KPI's and account for other ministry tasks assigned over the period and achievements.
- c. The appraisal should consider advice from the mentor, staff and members of the church and assess the physical and mental health of the Pastor.
- d. The Pastor should be questioned on each of the KPI's set to gauge his/her opinion of how they performed against these targets, their mental and physical health, and any issues they are experiencing.
- e. The Pastors opinion needs to be gauged about the strategic plan in terms of areas where he/she is succeeding with the plan and areas where they are struggling, to assess if the Pastor needs additional training, support or resources or, the pursuit of the objective needs to be suspended or concluded and areas where they are succeeding be strengthened.
- f. Review and update the position description and action plan for the next 12 months as appropriate.

### **5.5 Conflict Resolution:**

- a.** Conflicts between the Leadership and or members of the church and the Pastor are to be dealt with in accordance with the Church's constitution or CCCVaT's policy on Conflict Resolution.

## **6 EMPLOYMENT – OBLIGATIONS:**

- b.** The obligations of the Church regards the employment of a Pastor are detailed in CCCVaT's 'Church HR Guidelines'.

# Appendix A

**This appendix is given especially for those who do not have a Christian background, or who are unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches about elders/Pastors (same word in Greek), and for a prospective employee who is coming from a church background other than Christian Brethren.**

## **Elders Who Labor at Teaching: Worthy of Double Honour<sup>1</sup>**

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."*

*1 Timothy 5:17,18*

It is no exaggeration to say that this passage contains the New Testament's most significant and advanced teaching on elders. This is understandable since the church at Ephesus was mature and well-ordered. Paul spent more time at Ephesus than at any other church, and when he departed he left the church oversight in the care of a well-developed Leadership. Furthermore, this passage runs counter to almost every theory of church polity. It is such a perplexing and uncomfortable passage that most books on Pastoral care or church organization simply ignore it. But it is impossible to fully understand biblical Leadership without grasping this highly informative passage: 1 Timothy 5:17-25.

The context surrounding 1 Timothy 5:17-25, where the honor of elders is discussed, addresses the proper treatment of various classes of people: older men<sup>1</sup> younger men (5:1), older women (5:2), younger women (5:2), widows (5:3-16), non-Christian employers (6:1), and Christian employers (6:2). In these verse Paul instructs the congregation how to properly treat church elders. That is, he gives further instruction on how Christians must act in God's household (1 Timothy 3:14,15), particularly towards the church elders.

## **All Elders Rule**

Paul begins the section on church elders by writing, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor..." The word, "rule," translates a common Greek term for leading, caring for, managing, guiding, or protecting (Greek, *prohistemi* E. K. Simpson refers to this term as "expressive of superintendence."<sup>2</sup> Kelly renders it as "elders who exercise Leadership well,"<sup>3</sup> an F F Bruce translates it as "elders who direct the affairs of the church well."<sup>4</sup> The same word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 but there is translated as, "have charge over." The *New America Standard Bible's* translation of *prohistemi* as, "rule," is a bit strong and the translation "care for," which a number of scholars prefer is too weak unless one clearly understands that

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<sup>1</sup> This is an extract from the book *Biblical Leadership, chapter 17* by Alex Strauch

the care involved is that of leading the people. Therefore, it is best to translate *prohistemi* as those who take the lead, direct, or guide, keeping in mind that this leading has a distinct, Christian meaning. (Christ' teaching on humility and servanthood governs how we are to lead in God's household.)

The emphasis in this passage is on the adverb, "well," meaning excellently, commendably, or notably. Some elders do a more commendable job than others. Such elders have a greater Spirit-given interest in the work, give more time and energy to the work, gladly make greater personal sacrifices, and bear a deeper sense of responsibility for the flock. This doesn't discredit other elders, but merely states a fact. Employment, family, and life's many routine chores consume most elders' time and energy—just like everyone else's. But some elders, moved by the Spirit, give themselves to the flock in a fuller, more sacrificial way. Also, some elders have greater personal ability and gift and are simply more skilled at their task.

Such differences in commitment and ability must not be allowed to create jealousy or division among the elders. By stating God's approval of more gifted and dedicated elders and their right to double honor, all contention should be removed. These elders ought to be viewed by the congregation and other elders as a source of blessing, joy, and profit. So this verse refers only to "elders who rule well," particularly "those who work hard at preaching and teaching." These elders are "worthy of double honor."

### **Elders Deserving of Double Honor**

What God says concerning "double honor" is particularly directed to elders who labor "at preaching and teaching." "Especially" is a superlative adverb meaning most of all, chiefly, above all, or particularly. An elder who leads notably well deserves "double honor," but according to this passage those who teach are particularly deserving. All elders lead, some lead well, and some also labor "at preaching and teaching." So the double honor statement applies above all to elders who teach. Observe, too, that Paul refers to "those [plural] who work hard." In a large church like Ephesus, numbers of elders would be needed, some of whom would "work hard at preaching and teaching."

Certain elders were known for their strenuous labor in teaching the Word, something few elders are willing or able to do. Such labor involved more than the expected reading, studying, and sharing of God's Word in which all Christians should engage (Hebrews 5:12; Colossians 3:16). The labor Paul refers to is an intense, Spirit-imparted devotion to Scripture, a Spirit-imparted gift to teach (Ephesians 4:11,12), and a love and desire to fully work at teaching.

Paul uses the same term for "work" here that he uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, denoting strenuous labor that results in weariness and fatigue. Good teachers "work hard" at long hours of study, preparation, and demanding teaching situations. Teaching is strenuous, mental, time-consuming work, yet it is exceptionally rewarding. Tragically, in many churches today, no one strenuously works at teaching and preaching. Thus, many of God's people are ignorant and

spiritually immature. As God said of Israel, so He could say today, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ..." (Hosea 4:6).

Some elders work hard at "preaching," or in the original text, work hard *in word* (Greek, *logos*). The context, which is the primary consideration for translating a term with such a broad range of meaning, demands the rendering "preaching" in a general sense such as in exhorting, admonishing, gospeling, and comforting.

Throughout the New Testament, considerable emphasis is placed on the centrality of teaching God's truth. Jesus taught, and commissioned others to teach all that he had commanded (Matthew 28:20). The apostles were teachers, and the early Christians steadfastly devoted themselves to their teaching (Acts 2:42). Barnabas sought Paul to come to Antioch to help teach (Acts 11:25,26). Paul exhorted Timothy to give attention to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13.) In the order of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, the teaching gift is listed third after apostle and prophet. So, teaching is one of the greater gifts a congregation should desire (1 Corinthians 12:31). Teaching should be taken seriously by those who desire it (James 3:1). According to Paul, teaching should be taken seriously enough by those who benefit from it that they provide support for their teachers (Galatians 6:6).

The Christian community comes into existence by the Spirit's use of God's Word (1 Peter 1:23). The community matures, grows, and is protected by further teaching and preaching of the Word. Therefore, those with the spiritual gift of teaching God's Word are especially vital to the congregation's growth and protection. Scripture teaches that Christ gives gifted teachers to His church to equip His people for better service on behalf of the body: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as Pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11,12). For a brother, then, to be both an elder and a gifted teacher who desires to work very hard at teaching and preaching is a great benefit and blessing to the assembly. Sound teaching is the best bulwark against false teachers.

It might be good to focus our attention on the passage just cited (Ephesians 4:11,12), since it is a significant passage in the doctrine of biblical Leadership. According to the Greek sentence structure, shepherds and teachers are closely linked together. It appears that shepherds are included in the category of teachers. The passage does not seem to indicate, however, that shepherding and teaching are the same gift, or that all teachers are shepherds.<sup>5</sup>

Teachers are instructors who may function locally in a local church, or as itinerant among the churches (i.e. like Paul and Timothy). They may be elders or they may not, depending on the needs of the local situation. A great deal of flexibility exists as to how teachers operate.

Shepherds, on the other hand, are more than teachers since they teach, govern, protect, and practically care for the flock. While shepherds may be itinerant, their gift can be most effectively used in caring for the needs of one local flock. Since the elders' task is to shepherd

the whole flock (1 Peter 5:1-4), elders with the shepherding gift are highly effective. They are the kind of elders Paul speaks of in 1 Timothy 5:17, who are worthy of double honor.

One must clearly understand that not all elders are gifted shepherds, nor do they have to be. Elders may have other gifts. That is why it is not exactly correct to say that Ephesians 4:11 lists the gift of presbyter or overseer. Being an elder is never listed as a spiritual gift (*charisma*). Scripture is careful not to confuse the office of Leadership or deaconship with a spiritual gift. Men are appointed as elders to a local office (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:22; Titus 1:5), but gifts are given to all believers by Christ and are to be exercised anywhere in His body (Timothy's case is a unique, historical situation). Elders must meet certain objective, moral qualifications before they can serve—no matter what their gifts are. In fact, no special spiritual gift is listed as a qualification or requirement for elders. This is important to remember so good men are not eliminated from Leadership. E. J. A. Hort offers the following comment:

"Teaching was doubtless the most important form in which guidance and superintendence were exercised. But to all appearance the Ephesian Ecclesia (church), used freely the services of men who had no special gift of this kind, but who were well qualified to act as Elders in other respects."<sup>6</sup>

From the New Testament perspective, it is assumed that every elder will have his own spiritual gift or gifts. Each elder will contribute his gift to the Leadership body, whether it be shepherding (Ephesians 4:11), teaching (Ephesians 4:11), leading (Romans 12:8), administration (1 Corinthians 12:28), etc. So, then, "those who work hard at preaching and teaching" well deserve "double honor." To neglect to honor them is to restrict their labor and hinder the congregation's maturity and knowledge of the Word.

### ***What Is Double Honor?***

What is the double honor that elders who lead in a notable manner and who labor at teaching and preaching deserve? If the word "double" is given the meaning of twofold, as it is elsewhere in Scripture (Genesis 43:15; Exodus 22:4; Deuteronomy 21:17; 2 Kings 2:9; Job 42:10; Isaiah 40:2; Zechariah 9:12; Matthew 23:15), then the expression indicates honor for excellent service in addition to the general honor all elders rightly receive. Thus, "double honor," ought to be honor received as an elder plus honor received as an elder who renders commendable service. By using the expression, "double honor," Paul avoids slighting other elders of their due honor and is able to call special attention to those who labor diligently, particularly those who teach.

What does honor entail? The word *honor* (Greek, *time*), usually means respect, consideration, or high regard, and in certain instances includes material assistance. This latter sense appears to be predominant in 1 Timothy 5. Both the verb and the noun used for honor have the prevailing sense of material provision, a point that needs further explanation:

(1) Although the word itself does not necessarily mean material assistance (2 Chronicles

32:33; Proverbs 26:1; Ephesians 6:2; 1 Timothy 6:1), the concept of honor is at times closely associated with material substance (Numbers 22:17,37; 24:11; Proverbs 3:9; 14:31; 27:18; Daniel 11:38; Matthew 15:3-6; Acts 28:10).

(2) First Timothy 5:3 states, "Honor widows who are widows indeed." The widow indeed is a truly destitute Christian widow. The instruction that follows (verses 4-16) shows that honor primarily involves financial assistance (verses 4,8,16).

(3) The biblical quotation in verse 18 (not muzzling the threshing ox) demonstrates that material provision is uppermost in Paul's thought. The immediate context, therefore, shows that "honor" means respect involving financial assistance.

(4) Using "honor" rather than a more definite term is harmonious with Paul's usual choice of expression for financial matters. Paul avoids words expressing mercenary or professional ideas. He favors terms that express the grace, liberality, love, and oneness of Christianity:

- Service (Romans 15:25,27; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12,13)
- Fellowship (2 Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 1:5)
- Grace (1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8:6,7)
- Liberality (2 Corinthians 8-9)
- Bounty (2 Corinthians 8:20)
- Blessing (2 Corinthians 9:5)
- Good work (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- Good things (Galatians 6:6)
- A fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice (Philippians 4:18)
- Seed (2 Corinthians 9:10)
- Harvest of your righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:10)
- Gift (Philippians 4:17)
- Honor (1 Timothy 5:3,17)

Thus, "honor" expresses financial assistance in a thoroughly Christian manner. Christianity displays itself in every detail of a believer's relationship with his fellow Christians, including the financial. Material provision for elders, then, is really honor due the elders. Such honor conveys the congregation's concern, esteem, closeness, thoughtfulness, and loving regard for the brethren who minister in this responsible position.

(5) The rights of some in the brotherhood to receive material provision is in full agreement with other passages of Scripture (Matthew 10:10; Luke 8:3; 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:4-14; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:5,6; 2 Thessalonians 3:8,9; Titus 3:13;



3 John 6-8).

Just because all elders are honored, it does not follow that all elders should automatically receive financial consideration. Honor does not necessarily imply material help, but those who rule well deserve two-fold honor. Since the "double honor" is related to extra labor (particularly in the teaching ministry), the "double honor" has more relevant application to financial consideration than the general honor due all elders.

Finally, and most important, elders who work hard thoroughly deserve double honor. Paul says, "Let them be considered worthy." This main verb is an imperative form of a verbal root, meaning rightfully deserving or entitled to. Because of their highly responsible, sacrificial task and strenuous labor, the elders who work hard are rightfully entitled to double honor. What a rich blessing it is to have excellent elders to protect, guide, and teach the congregation! Indeed, they deserve double honor. Verse 18 supports the teaching about certain elders' worthiness of double honor by quoting two Scripture passages, one from each testament: "For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and The laborer is worthy of his wages." Here Paul indicates the reason for certain elders' worthiness of double honor. Note that Paul begins the statement by saying, "For the Scripture says." For the believer, just the mention of the word "Scripture" signals the ultimate voice of authority—God's Word (John 10:35). This is the only direct biblical quotation in 1 Timothy, so it alerts the reader to something significant. By using this qualifying phrase, Paul is saying that complete unity exists between the Old and New Testaments—both Moses and Jesus say that a laboring man, including an elder, "is worthy of his wages."

The Old Testament quotation is from Deuteronomy 25:4, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." The context of Deuteronomy concerns equity and justice in everyday life, even the right of an animal to enjoy the fruit of its labor while working for its owner. God's full intent in Deuteronomy 25:4 is explained in 1 Corinthians 9:6-14:

Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their

living from the gospel.

*Twice* in the New Testament Deuteronomy 25:4 is quoted to support the right of laboring teachers and workers to receive financial support (1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Timothy 5:18). To refuse to support laboring elders is as unjust, heartless, and selfish as muzzling an animal while it is working. Yet that is precisely what some Christians do by their vain traditions and high-sounding rationalizations that deny financial help to worthy elders. The passage clearly implies adequate living support for the worker, not token financial gifts.

The New Testament quotation, "the laborer is worthy of his wages," is from Luke 10:7. Jesus originally spoke these words to the seventy before He sent them out to preach. Paul later applied His words to all who teach and preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14). Then, in 1 Timothy 5:17,18, Paul applies the same words to elders who labor diligently at preaching and teaching, indicating that they are deserving of wages. This is God's law as taught by Jesus Christ and His apostle, Paul.

However, Scripture is silent about the practical administration of this double honor. As with similar church subjects, the implementation of the general principle is left to the discretion of the congregation and its leaders. What a congregation in London does, if faithfully seeking the Lord's guidance by the power of the Holy Spirit, will certainly be different from the action of a congregation in Communist Changsha or primitive Bomili, Zaire. Yet God's Word that encourages believers to render "double honor" to those who rule well remains unchanged.

It's important to note that Paul is addressing the entire congregation, not the elders. This truth must be faithfully taught to God's people. The congregation has the responsibility to support their elders. No matter how poor Christians may think they are, they must exercise faith and liberality before the Lord, giving to those who teach, preach, and lead on their behalf. In short, God's people must honor their elders.

### ***False Conclusions***

This passage has been used to justify dividing the elders into two separate categories—ruling elders and teaching elders. Generally speaking, this viewpoint results in the establishment of a board of lay ruling elders and one ordained teaching elder. In such a system, the teaching elder must be specially educated, licensed, and ordained. He alone can preach the gospel and minister baptism and the Lord's Supper. He is the ordained minister, Pastor, or reverend—a part of the professional clergy class. In a very real sense, he is the Protestant priest—the man who prays and administers holy things. Without him, the saints are unqualified and unfit to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The ruling elders are reduced to the status of lay elders—glorified deacons or board members— who fulfill legal requirements for the organization.

This practice, however, is utterly false, both in light of Scripture and the nature of the church. The real culprit behind this practice is the clergy-laity division. But there is no more justification in the New Testament for the ordained minister-clergyman than there is for the Pope. In fact, a

more elaborate and impressive case has been made for the Pope than for the ordained clergyman espoused by the majority of Protestants.

In the New Testament, there are no separate classes of elders, nor are there three separate offices (teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons). On the contrary, only two offices are referred to:

the overseers (plural) and the deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Paul appointed a body of elders (much like the Old Testament elder system) to oversee newly planted congregations, not a teaching elder plus a body of ruling elders (Acts 14:23). Both Paul and Peter charge the entire body of elders to Pastor the flock (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Thus, the New Testament authorizes no arrangement of Pastor or minister and elders.

***All elders are Pastors.***

In the list of qualifications, all elders are required to be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2) and exhort in sound doctrine, and refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9). Thus, the idea of elders who only rule is pure human invention—a teaching that demeans the elders and robs them of their God-given mandate. All elders, then, must be armed with a knowledge of Scripture and be able to teach, judge, exhort, admonish, shepherd, and defend the flock against false teachers. Scripture teaches that the entire Leadership Pastors God's flock, not just the Pastor.

First Timothy 5:17 does not speak of the teaching elder, but of a number of elders who labor at preaching and teaching and elders who are more capable of leading the flock. We often overlook the fact that Paul is also referring to elders without a special teaching gift who rule notably well. They, too, are "worthy of double honor." So, elders with a teaching gift and elders who rule capably deserve the congregation's financial support. By imposing "the rigid concepts of contemporary church structure upon this text, one can easily make a wrong interpretation.

There is no reason to require that a local church be permanently limited to one teaching elder (cf. Acts 13:1; 15:35), nor do all gifted teachers need to be or qualify to be elders. All gifted teachers should be given the opportunity to teach in the local congregation. Also, a gifted teacher may need to help a number of churches that need better teaching. Although teaching is an exceedingly important task, teachers should not be unscripturally elevated above their fellow brethren. They must not be given special titles, special clothes, or special credentials. They are fellow brethren whose function is to build up the saints by teaching the Word. Jon Zens also decries the elevation of the teaching elder to an almost entirely different office:

We would do well to consider all elders as equal in the one office, but as diverse in terms of personal gifts and particular ministries.

It seems to me that confusion has arisen in a very practical way by assigning men who "labor in the Word" in a category *above* the other elders. The "especially" of 1 Timothy 5:17 certainly does not allow us to view men with eminent gifts (the "minister") to be elevated

above the other elders. This text makes it clear that those who give themselves to the ministry of the Word are part of a body of equals, some of which may also be worthy of double honor.

Yet in many churches where a plurality exists, equality of elders is denied by such statements as "the Pastor is the *leading* officer of a congregation" (*Covenanter Witness*, August 30, 1972, p. 6.). There is no Biblical warrant for elevating the so-called "teaching-ruling" elder to an almost entirely different office.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this passage has nothing to do with the modern notion of a senior Pastor and his staff. Only Jesus Christ can be called Senior Pastor (1 Peter 5:4). Indeed, true biblical Leadership has nothing in common with the organizational structure of a senior elder and his subordinate staff.

### ***First among Equals***

While it is true that equal status exists among the elders, each elder has his own spiritual gift or gifts, so there will be distinct individual gifts, talents, education, and devotion among the Leadership. The church Leadership is not a faceless bureaucracy. The personality, gifts, and spirituality of its individual members make up the overall temperament and competency of the church Leadership. In 1 Timothy 5:17,18, for example, individual elders who take the lead more diligently and effectively are prominent. Those who have the spiritual gift of teaching are perceived as first among their equals.

One common misconception people have concerning joint Leadership is that it suppresses gifted or talented men. Shared Leadership, however, actually protects and sharpens talented leaders. Although the elders act jointly and share equal responsibility in overseeing the flock, all are not equal in their gifts, knowledge, Leadership ability, or dedication. Thus, one or more of the elders will naturally stand out as the motivator or leader among the others. This is what the Romans referred to as *primus inter pares*— first among equals, *orprimi inter pares*—first ones among equals. That type of Leadership is found among the twelve apostles and New Testament elders.

Among the twelve apostles, Jesus singled out three for special attention—Peter, James, and John. The Gospels show that among the three, as well as among the Twelve, Peter stood out as the most prominent, or "first." In all four lists of disciples' names, Peter is always first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). In Luke 22:32, Jesus charged Peter to ". . . strengthen your brothers." Among the Twelve, who jointly shared the oversight of the early church (Acts 2:14,42; 4:33,35; 5:12,18,25,29,42; 6:2-6; 8:14; 9:27; 15:2-29), Peter was the spokesman and leading figure (Acts 1:15; 2:14; 3:1 ff; 4:8 ff; 5:3 ff; 5:15,29; 8:14-24; 9:32-11:18; 12:3 ff; 15:7-11; Galatians 2:7-14). Since Peter was the natural leader, the preacher, the man of action, he acted as a motivator for the other eleven. Without Peter, the Twelve would have been much weaker. Surrounded by the other eleven apostles, Peter was much richer and safer from his impetuosity and fear. In spite of his recognized Leadership and speaking ability,

Peter possessed no rank or title above the other eleven, nor were they subordinate to him. They were not his staff or his disciples. Peter was simply first among his equals.

This Leadership relationship is also observed among the seven who were chosen to relieve the apostles in Acts 6. Philip, and particularly Stephen, stood out as prominent figures among the other brothers (Acts 6:8-7:60; 8:4-40; 21:8). Yet, they held no special rank or title within the body of the seven.

The same principle of *primus inter pares* operates within the body of elders. Inevitably there will be one or more leading figures within any council of elders. In a sense, all of the elders are first ones among equals in the congregation (Acts 15:22). Yet there will be first ones within the body of elders itself, particularly those elders with the spiritual gifts of shepherding or leading. According to our passage, those elders who do a more noble job at taking the lead (and above all, those who labor at teaching) are to receive double honor from the congregation. When a congregation makes material provision for certain gifted elders, those elders are enabled to give part or all of their time to the work of the Leadership, which greatly strengthens both the Leadership and the local body of believers. Just as the leading apostles bore no title or class distinction from the other apostles, so too, elders who receive double honor create no official class, special title, or appointment within the Leadership.

Of course, there is a constant danger that other elders will relinquish their responsibilities and obligations to one or two exceptionally gifted men. This danger will always exist because of man's selfish and lazy tendency, particularly in spiritual matters, to let someone else do all the work. In the Christian family, for example, many fathers have relinquished the spiritual training of their children to the mother or Sunday school teacher. The rise of an overseer above the elders, which took place in the second century, was undoubtedly due to Christians who surrendered their obligations and privileges to one gifted man. Was not Israel quick to hand over her freedom, rights, and privileges to a king like her neighboring nations (1 Samuel 8)?

In the church, however, gifted teachers, Pastors, and leaders must not monopolize the ministry or be raised to unscriptural status. As humble servants, gifted leaders are to build up their fellow brethren so that all can more fully serve the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11,12). In no way does the principle of *primus inter pares* mean that one person is authorized to take final responsibility for all decisions. No one individual among the elders calls the shots. Instead, decisions are made in mutual dependence upon one another.

Although the elders share primary Leadership responsibility within the church, every member of the congregation must also fulfill his or her responsibility and obligation to the Lord and to one another in service (1 Peter 4:10,11). As free men in Christ, the congregation cannot be passive. If it is, it may be responsible for creating a leader like Diotrephes, the church dictator, about whom John writes: "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his

deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church" (3 John 9,10).

By the Holy Spirit's design, a plurality of elders shares the responsibility of church oversight. Even though there will be first ones, or leaders, among equals in the Leadership body, the New Testament authorizes no individual elder to be above the other elders. Thus, the contemporary division between lay elders and ordained Pastor is totally without God's authorization. There are no lay elders, only elders of the church placed in that responsibility by the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament Leadership is not merely membership in a board of trustees, where members are selected to fulfill legal requirements. The Leadership is not an organizational structure that gives everyone an opportunity to make decisions. The Leadership is not a quota to be filled, or a means of roping rich, influential people into the church's organizational structure. Instead, the elders are a body of committed shepherds who have been placed in their position by the Holy Spirit of God (Acts 20:28). They are God's stewards (Titus 1:7). As such, a team of qualified, dedicated, Spirit-placed elders is not a passive, ineffective committee. Rather, biblical Leadership is a fair and powerful form of Leadership that avoids both the pitfalls of one-man rule and the confusion of a very-man rule.

## NOTES

1. Here in 1 Timothy 5:1,2, the Greek word *presbyteros* is translated correctly as older man. The context refers to age and sex, not office. Hence, the comparison is between older women and younger women. *Paul is not referring to elders and addresses in an official capacity.* In verse 17 of this same chapter, however, *presbyteroi* must be translated as elders in the sense of official community leaders, not older men. The word *presbyteros* bears both meanings, with the context determining the exact meaning.

This same issue over *ho presbyteros* arises in two of John's letters. The second epistle of John begins with the words, "The elder to the chosen lady and her children. . . ." The third epistle also begins with the words, "The elder to the beloved Gaius." At the time John wrote these epistles, he was a very old man—probably the oldest living apostle. So he most likely expected his readers to understand *presbyteros* in its primary meaning of age. If this is the case, then John is simply referring to himself as the old man, aged one, or ancient one.

Paul used the corresponding term (Greek, *presbytes*, meaning old man) in Philemon 9 to strengthen his appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. In this passage John seems to be doing the same thing. As the "aged one," John was in a unique position; at the end of the first century, no one else equaled his status. No one else could better speak the truth to his friends than John, who had personally walked with the Truth and walked in the truth for many long years (John 14:6).

2. E. K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954),

page 77.

3. John Norman Davis Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (1963; reprint ed., London: A.&C. Black Limited, 1972), page 124.
4. Frederick F Bruce, *The Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), page 307.
5. An exceptional exegetical work has been written in defense of this position by Daniel B. Wallace ("The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 [Spring, 1983]: 59-84.) Wallace articulately argues against the commonly held notion that the two terms "Pastor" and "teacher" refer to one group, "Pastor-teacher" because of the Granville Sharp rule ramifications. He concludes that in no plural construction made up exclusively of "nouns" are the two terms ever regarded as identical. This does not mean that the two terms are totally distinct, but that the first term "Pastor" is a subset of the second, "teacher" since similar formations are well attested in many other adjective and noun constructions.
6. Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (1897; reprint ed., London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1914), page 197.
7. Jon Zens, "The Major Concepts of Leadership in the New Testament," *Baptist Reformation Review* 1 (Summer, 1978): 30, 31.

# Appendix B

**This appendix will help those who do not have a Christian background, or who are unfamiliar with what the Bible teaches about biblical Leadership and for a prospective employee who is coming from a church background other than Christian Brethren.**

## **Nonclerical Leadership<sup>2</sup>**

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. *Matthew 23:7-8*

In contrast to the attitude prevalent throughout much of church history, the subject of lay renewal has recently become a widely discussed topic. "In the Twentieth Century," Kenneth Chafin observes, "the theologians rediscovered the doctrine of the laity." Commenting on how Ephesians 4:11,12 is applied today to laymen, Chafin adds, "This emphasis upon the laymen represents the most radical thing which has happened to the church in this century."<sup>2</sup> Even the Roman Catholic Church, at Vatican Council II, avoided the negative and passive concepts of laity that have historically been one of its major theological features.<sup>3</sup>

And yet, despite Vatican II's glowing terms regarding the laity, there is still an impassable gulf between clergy and laity, priest and people. Unfortunately, this is true in many Protestant churches as well. Even in churches that claim they do not support the clergy-laity division, a conspicuous division often exists in practice between the ordained minister and lay members. As Robert Girard observes, our churches have a two-caste ministry system:

There is thoroughly entrenched in our church life, an un-biblical two-caste system. In this two-caste system there is a clergy-caste which is trained, called, paid, and expected to do the ministering. And there is a laity-caste which normally functions as the audience which appreciatively pays for the performance of the clergy—or bitterly criticizes the gaping holes in that performance (and there are always gaping holes).

No one expects much of the lower or laity caste (except attendance, tithe, and testimony). And everyone expects too much of the upper or clergy caste (including the clergy themselves!).

The greatest problem in the whole business is the fact that the Bible's view of ministry totally contradicts this system. So we are found in the awful dilemma of trying to fulfill the ministry-ideals of Scripture with an unscriptural ministry system that is totally inadequate for

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<sup>2</sup> [This appendix is from chapter 18 of Alex Stauch's book \*Biblical Leadership\*.](#)



the job! And, no matter how high we raise the requirements for the clergy, it will never be adequate to approach the kind of production and life envisioned in the Bible!<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, even scholars who address the unbiblical two-caste system merely reform that which needs to be totally eradicated from the family of God. John Stott, for example, rightly attempts to expose the errors of clericalism:

... it is only against the background of the equality and unity of the people of God that the real scandal of clericalism may be seen. What clericalism always does, by concentrating power and privilege in the hands of the clergy, is at least to obscure and at worst to annul the essential oneness of the people of God. ... I do not hesitate to say that to interpret the Church in terms of a privileged clerical caste or hierarchical structure is to destroy the New Testament doctrine of the Church.

... In other words, in revealing the nature and work of the Church, the overwhelming preoccupation of the New Testament is not with the status of the clergy, nor with clergy-laity relations, but with the whole people of God in their relations to him and to each other, the unique people who have been called by his grace to be his inheritance and his ambassador in the world.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, Stott does not take his criticism far enough. Although critical of clericalism's obvious abuses, Stott still supports the clergy-laity division and uses what he admits is unbiblical terminology:

"So the question before us now is: what is the relation between these two groups, between teachers and taught, shepherds and Rock, or in modern, unbiblical terminology between 'clergy' and 'laity'?"<sup>6</sup>

If the clergy-laity terminology is indeed unbiblical, why does a fine biblical expositor like John Stott continue to use such spurious terminology? We must not forget that the terms a society uses for its leaders reveal much about the society's character and beliefs. Knowing this, the New Testament writers chose the terminology for church leaders very carefully. The terms clergy and laity, as used by people today, distort both the New Testament language and the liberating reality of the Christian brotherhood.

Every teacher of the Word has the solemn responsibility to expose and correct any practice—including the use of terminology—that misrepresents Scripture's precious truth. Moreover, although Stott claims that the clergy are only servants of the laity, his practice betrays a lingering clericalism with its unbiblical division of God's family and establishment of the clergy as superior

to the laity:

"Of course we should largely restrict the administration of Word and Sacraments to the clergy. As Article XXIII puts it: It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same."<sup>7</sup>

These words do not represent the apostolic, brotherly, New Testament Christian community; they represent clericalism. Clericalism, in addition to wrongly dividing the holy brotherhood and suppressing the masses of God's people, has done more to diminish church Leadership than almost any other doctrine. Furthermore, appealing to Leadership passages like 1 Timothy 5:17,18 as justification for clericalism only further distorts Scripture and New Testament ecclesiology.

In order to fully restore the Leadership to its proper place and role in the church, we must identify and entirely eliminate the clergy-laity dichotomy. In loyalty to the Word of God and Jesus Christ, we must completely avoid all clergy-laity terminology, because such terminology conveys concepts that are antagonistic to the New Testament church. Perhaps even more important, we must dismantle every practice that falsely divides the Lord's people into secular and sacred, ministerial and non-ministerial, ordained and non-ordained Christians. We must courageously insist on Jesus' teaching that we are all brothers—whether teachers or taught, Pastors or flock, leaders or followers.

### ***All Believers Have the Privilege of Ministry***

We must never forget that the church of Jesus Christ is a supernatural, Spirit-indwelt, Spirit-empowered, living community of Christ-like servants (1 Corinthians 12:7,25; 1 Peter 4:10). The same Spirit who links Christians together in one body also empowers and enables every Christian to serve and build up the body (Ephesians 4:1-16).

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the truly distinctive mark of the new community formed on the day of Pentecost. In contrast to the people of Israel who lived under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer, forming the body of Christ. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, a glorious, new bond—a dynamic interdependence—is created within the community of believers that is unlike any other relationship in the world. Under the new covenant, ratified by the blood of Christ, all true Christians possess God's righteousness. All are equally saints. All are priests. All are washed clean by Christ's blood. All are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. All are members of Christ's body, gifted to minister to one another.

To illustrate the new and wondrous interrelationship of all believers under the new covenant, Paul uses the imagery of the body and its many parts. In Romans 12:5 we read, "so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." This shared life, or *fellowship*, is illustrated many times throughout the New Testament by the one-another commands. For example, believers are commanded to love one another, encourage one another,

build up one another, teach one another, and admonish one another. Therefore, within the body of Christ, ministry is the sacred privilege and duty of every believer. There is no passive, inactive majority. All members are to perform a function—caring for one another, building one another up, and ministering to one another. When each and every member of the body functions as God intended, the community of believers will grow, and an amazing, living interplay of gifts and services will result. Referring to this unique, Spirit-indwelt body, Larry Richards writes,

There is no notion here of any distinction in the body between "clergy" and "laity." The work of the Spirit is in all and through all. Every believer, as a member of the *laos* of God, is a minister. Leaders in the church, as servants of the servants of God, are to guide others into the exercise of their gifts so that the whole body might grow. The "superstar" approach to ministry is clearly rejected, for each member's function is vital to the growth of the body, and thus indispensable. As there is cooperation between muscles, bones, joints, and ligaments in a human body, so in the body of Christ ministry is a coordinated or team effort.<sup>8</sup>

Since ministry is the duty of every believer, no one person or group of people is responsible to provide the total ministry for the rest of the local congregation. The concept that only certain professional, ordained men are qualified to perform "the ministry" totally contradicts the fact that the church is a ministerial body. The New Testament conveys no concept of "the laity" with all its passive, negative connotations. As God's people, we must stand in loyalty to what God says of us in His Word and reject all demeaning ideas such as the clergy-laity division.

However, the fact that the whole congregation of saints is to be a ministering body does not eliminate the need for supervision and Leadership within the body of Christ. To better understand God's intention for Leadership within His family, let's observe the Leadership example set by the New Testament churches. As Alfred Kuen says, "The churches established by the apostles remain the valid models for churches of all times and places."<sup>9</sup>

### ***The Example of the New Testament Churches***

#### ***No clerical or priestly hierarchy.***

It is a simple but profound fact that no clergy-laity dichotomy appears in the New Testament. Paul, the great church planter, taught that there is a wide diversity of gifts and services among the brethren, but no sacred clergy. In his many greetings to fellow workers and helpers, Paul never greets anyone as a clergyman or a layman. The more one comprehends Paul's teaching on the gospel and body of Christ, the more one realizes the falsehood of the clergy-laity division. In fact, the very concept of a small, professional, ministerial body that is vested with superior rights and privileges over the sacraments and the Word, and is alone qualified to "minister" would be unthinkable to the inspired, writers of Scripture. Such a concept is foreign to the New Testament writers, who taught that the whole body of Christ is ministerial, saintly, and priestly.

New Testament evidence against an exclusive priestly or clerical body in the church is further confirmed by the way in which Paul established new congregations. When he left a newly

established church, Paul left behind only a body of elders to oversee each church (Acts 14:23). Obviously that was all he felt was needed. Since all believers were saints, priests, Spirit-empowered, and complete in Christ, none of the traditional religious structures such as sacred sites, sacred buildings, or sacred personnel (priests, clerics, or holy men) were needed—or could be tolerated. The only need was for community Leadership, and Paul appointed a local council of elders to meet that need. As Alexander Hay notes, the elders are those who "preside over an assembly of priests of royal lineage. . . . They are not priests ministering to laity, but leaders of equals; not professors teaching a class that never graduates, but leaders of a team."<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to observe that even the converted Jewish priests exercised no distinct priestly or clerical function in the early church. In Acts 6:7 we read, "And the word of God kept on spreading; . . . and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." The cross of Jesus Christ brought earth-shattering changes to the old distinctions between people: clean and unclean, secular and sacred, priest and people, Jew and Gentile. Thus, none of the apostles established a new priestly body—a profoundly remarkable fact considering that all were devout Jews who had been raised under the Old Testament priesthood.

Furthermore, nowhere in the New Testament are the elders called priests. The *Douay-Rheims* version of the Bible, an official Roman Catholic translation, departs from the original Greek text of the Bible when it translates the Greek word, *presbyteroi* (literally, elders), as *priests*. New Testament writers never use the Greek word for priest, *hierous*, to describe church officers. Changing the meaning of words and concepts as originally used in Scripture is one of Satan's most successful and subtle tactics. By changing the word "elder" to "priest," Roman Catholics have changed the New Testament concept of Leadership to mean priestly ministry. In a similar fashion many Protestants have superimposed their ideas of the ordained clergyman, the professional minister, upon the texts of Scripture referring to elders. Both groups misrepresent the language and concepts of the apostolic writers pertaining to Leadership.

### ***No official titles***

It is deeply significant that the early Christians did not give lordly, hierarchical, or clerical titles to their leaders. Although both the Greeks and Jews had a wealth of titles for their political and religious leaders, the early Christians avoided borrowing such titles. Jesus Christ explicitly forbids His followers from assuming honorific titles that separate and elevate one brother over another (Matthew 23:6-10). Therefore, the early Christians used lowly, unofficial, common, and functional words to describe themselves—brother, beloved, fellow-workers, laborers, slave, servant, prisoner, fellow-soldiers, and steward. Even the Leadership terms the New Testament writers used were generic terms that could easily be applied in the Christian context.

There were prophets, teachers, apostles, Pastors, evangelists, leaders, elders, and deacons within the early church, but these terms were not used as formal titles. For example, all Christians are saints, but there is no "Saint John." All are priests, but there is no "Priest Philip."

Some are elders, but there is no "Elder Paul." Some are Pastors, but there is no "Pastor James." Some are deacons, but there is no "Deacon Peter." Some are apostles, but there is no "Apostle Andrew"

Rather than gaining honor through titles and position, New Testament believers received honor primarily for their service and work (Acts 15:26; Romans 16:1,2,4,12; 1 Corinthians 16:15,16,18; 2 Corinthians 8:18; Philippians 2:29,30; Colossians 1:7; 4:12,13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:1).

The early Christians referred to each other by personal names—Timothy, Paul, Titus, etc.—or referred to an individual's spiritual character or work: "... Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 6:5); Barnabas, "... a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith . . ." (Acts 11:24); ". . . Philip the evangelist . . ." (Acts 21:8); "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3); "Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you" (Romans 16:6); etc. The array of ecclesiastical titles accompanying the names of Christian leaders today is completely missing from the New Testament, and would have appalled the apostles and early believers.

### ***No mass of laity***

One beauty of true Christianity is that God's Spirit indwells ordinary, common people. Through those people the Spirit manifests Jesus' life. In fact, the greatest witness to the gospel's reality and power has been the changed lives of ordinary people. Everyone expects the clergy to act religiously, but ordinary men and women who are on fire for God—living holy lives, studying Scripture, sacrificing, serving, and even teaching and leading the religious community—are powerful testimonies to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This has been true from the beginning of Christianity. Jesus Christ Himself was a poor, uneducated carpenter. Everything about the way He lived, spoke, and dressed was different from the elitist religious leaders of His day. His chief disciples were also ordinary men. The established religious leaders saw this, and despised Him and His disciples because of it. Yet even they had to acknowledge the zeal and power of such laymen: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply" (Acts 4:13,14).

In true Christianity, sinners who are saved by grace and indwelt by the Spirit enjoy a new, holy, and priestly status before God. They share a privileged, lofty position as sons and daughters of God. Free in Christ, each individual can serve God and one another as the indwelling Spirit's power enables. The apostles demonstrated this marvelous new freedom and status by not placing restrictions on which community members could administer the Lord's Supper or baptize others. Unlike the clerical structure prevalent in today's churches, the early Christians—as brothers and sisters in Christ—celebrated the Lord's Supper together without the help of sacred

personnel (1 Corinthians 11:33).

This new freedom and holy status was far too glorious for Satan to leave untouched. Shortly after the apostolic era, the cleavage between the "sacred clergy" and "profane laity" began to appear. As centuries passed, God's people became beggars and slaves to powerful bishops. Even salvation was dependent upon the bishops. No longer were believers viewed as saints, royal priests, free men, or gifted members of Christ's body. As "the laity," they became unqualified and unfit to do religious work. The grand privileges of all believers became the privileges of a select few, and the holy brotherhood of free men disintegrated. Just-as Israel did not appreciate her glorious privileges and position as God's people, but desired to be like other nations and live in slavery to a king (1 Samuel 8), so, too, Christians relinquished the holy status and privileges that Christ had won for them.

The tragedy of the clergy-laity error is that it inevitably establishes a secular-sacred division between the Lord's people. Two levels of people are created—an elite clerical order that performs the community's religious functions and a mass of unqualified laymen. Such a division fragments the body, destroying the lofty status, oneness, and simplicity of Christ's holy community.

Historically, the sacred-secular division has hindered Christians from fully participating in the community and limited the exercise of their spiritual gifts. The division has also hindered their growth in faith and prayer, and diminished their eagerness to witness and mature spiritually. In fact, the wider the gulf between the clergy and laity, the farther the people are from their God and the less significant their participation in community life. Robert Munger readily sees the danger of the clergy-laity division, and contrasts it with early Christianity:

Christianity in its beginnings was a lay movement taking fishermen from their boats and nets. Jesus made them fishers of men. He dared to believe that ordinary people could become extraordinary servants of God. He would build his church upon believers like Peter. From among the common people he would call disciples who in turn he would send to disciple the nations. In our time it may well be that the greatest single bottleneck to the renewal and outreach of the church is the division of roles between clergy and laity that results in a hesitancy of the clergy to trust the laity with significant responsibility, and in turn to a reluctance on the part of the laity to trust themselves as authentic ministers of Christ, either in the church or outside the church."

Each New Testament church was led by its body of elders, who were the qualified men of the local assembly who desired to lead God's flock. In contemporary terms, they would be a body of laymen. Historically, the New Testament elders were not separated from the rest of the congregation like priests or clerics, so no one has the right to give them a clerical or priestly designation. Yet that is precisely what Roman Catholics and many Protestants do. They interpret the Scriptures that refer to local church elders in light of their particular priestly or clerical ideas.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, those who cling to the unscriptural clergy-laity division will inevitably totally eliminate biblical Leadership or subordinate it to an ordained minister. Hence, biblical Leadership is redefined according to traditional concepts rather than biblical truth.

Although this study asserts that the clergy-laity division is a false tradition, it in no way condemns or intends any hatred against clergymen. Such an intent would be contrary to the spirit of love. Many godly clergymen—servants of God's people—faithfully minister to the saints. My contention is that the clergy-laity division, as a system, is contrary to the apostolic church model and ultimately damages both the spiritual development of the Lord's people and biblical church Leadership.

### ***Leadership without Clericalism***

Just because no special priestly or clerical class exclusively performs the church ministry does not mean that the church is leaderless, or that all believers are equal in their gifts, abilities, influences, desires, or devotion to God. All Christians are priests, saints, and ministers, but not all are apostles, teachers, leaders, Pastors, and elders. Not all have the same measure of maturity, wisdom, and love for God.

There is no false egalitarianism in the Bible. God chose only certain believers to hear and see His Son. To those He chose to reveal His truth (Romans 16:25; Galatians 1:12,15,16; Ephesians 2:20; 3:3,5; Hebrews 2:3,4; 2 Peter 3:2,15). Christians depend upon the teaching of these men, as recorded in Scripture, for truth and life (Acts 2:42). Some of the brethren were publicly set apart to perform special, delicate tasks involving money and widows (Acts 6). The Spirit placed others as overseers to shepherd the local church (Acts 20:28). Some individuals fully devoted themselves to teaching or spreading the gospel, and received material assistance from their brethren as the Lord instructed (1 Corinthians 9:3-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:6; 1 Timothy 5:17,18; Titus 3:13; 3 John 5-8). Some sowed while others reaped (John 4:37). Some planted while others watered (1 Corinthians 3:6-8).

Because many Christians are weak and immature, and because false teachers and hostile forces abound, God in His loving grace provides human instruments who protect and build up His people. Therefore, teaching and shepherding are essential to the equipping of people for their ministries (Ephesians 4:11-16), and selected brethren must bear that great responsibility. However, such Leadership in no way justifies the establishment of a separate clerical order over the household of God.

The fundamental error of the clerical system is that it violates Jesus' teaching on humility and servanthood, which in turn alters the very character of the Christian community. Clericalism falsely exalts and separates those with teaching and Leadership gifts from the rest of the Christian brotherhood. It gives those select few lofty titles (e.g., Reverend) and exclusive privileges that have little to do with their spiritual gift. From its beginning, clericalism has been obsessed with power, position, control, and authority. Thus it is a continuation of the prideful,

self-centered religious structures Jesus so vigorously denounced in His day (Matthew 23:1-12).

Jesus Christ, our great Teacher and Leader, did not seek lofty status or title for Himself. Instead, by His life, He exemplified the way of humility, lowliness, and servanthood. He set the example for all who follow Him—especially those who are teachers and leaders of His Kingdom—to be humble servants (John 13:16). Therefore, Christian teachers and leaders must never seek to elevate and separate themselves from their brethren through lofty, clerical status. Instead, by God's grace, they must be the chief examples of lowliness, servanthood, and sacrifice.

In keeping with Jesus' example, it is difficult even to define the difference between those in the New Testament church who evangelize, teach, and shepherd in a full-time capacity, and those who serve as the Bible charges all Christians to do (Romans 12:11; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:15,16; Colossians 3:23,24; 1 Peter 2:16; 4:10). Precisely defined divisions such as priest and people, clergy and laity, or official and unofficial—so much a part of most religious practice—are nonexistent in the New Testament Christian brotherhood. Paul was the chief enigma of all, for he supported himself by manual labor and at the same time evangelized and taught (Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 9:6), without diminishing his divine commission as the apostle to the Gentiles. The elders, then, who take on the vital task of teaching and overseeing the brotherhood, are not special priests or clergymen. In the words of Scripture, they are, ". . . leading men among the brethren" (Acts 15:22).

## NOTES

1. Kenneth Chafm, *Help, I'm a Layman* (Waco: Word Books, 1966), page 1.

2. *Ibid.*, page 9.

3. Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), page 313 ff.

Kloppenburg states that the Vatican II doctrine "puts an end to the purely negative and passive conception of the layman, unequivocally rejects clericalism (the conception of the Church as domain of the clergy and the world as domain of the laity), gives the layman an active role in the Church, and makes him a sharer in the three powers (of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling) or total mission of the Church."

4. Robert C. Girard, *Brethren Hang Together* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), page 123.

5. John Stott, *One People* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), pages 25, 26.

6. *Ibid.*, page 34.

7. *Ibid.*, page 47.

8. Lawrence O. Richards and Gilbert Martin, *A Theology of Personal Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), page 122.



9. Alfred Kuen, / *Will Build My Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), page 253.
10. Alexander Rattray Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (St. Louis: New Testament Missionary Union, 1947), page 291.
11. Robert B. Munger, *Training of the Laity for Ministry*, cited by Richards and Martin, page 13.
12. It is interesting to note that Stott uses verses referring to church elders (who in the New Testament were not ordained clergymen or priests) to defend his concept of the clergy within the Anglican/Episcopal Church.

He argues, for example, that *prohistemi* (rule, direct, lead) and *hegeomai* (lead, guide) are two verbs used in the New Testament to designate clerical Leadership (*One People*, pages 41-42). However, these words were general Leadership terms used to describe the elders' Leadership within the early church (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17). They are totally free of clerical connotations. It is impossible to use the term *clergy* to describe first century Leadership practices and structures without imposing religious connotations that did not occur until later.

By appealing to verses that actually refer to elders to defend clericalism, Stott is doing exactly what the Roman Catholic Church has done for centuries to defend the priesthood. But in no way can the New Testament Leadership be considered a clerical caste or priestly body.