

Biblical Pastoring

A challenge to modern church leaders

The UK church is in trouble. No thinking person would deny this as we see churches closing down, historic denominations facing extinction and congregations shrinking by 2,000 people a week or more. Many conservative evangelical churches have congregations that can be counted on two hands. Converts seem to be few and far between despite massive efforts of one sort of methodology to the next. The more new strategies appear to attract sinners, the more the church bleeds. Some evangelical writers have even stated that the UK evangelical church is statistically facing extinction within 50 years if something doesn't change.

The real cause of the trouble is the structure and life of the church. No reader of the apostolic writings can possibly deny that the churches men build today are nothing like the churches built by them. In the centre of this unbiblical structure is a wrong strategy of leadership. This paper seeks to look at some of these wrong strategies and to challenge men to adopt Biblical principles.

In this article there is interaction with a number of church principles that I maintain are Biblical, but are rarely evidenced today. There is no space to defend each of these claims here and I refer you to my paper *A Biblical Challenge To Current Unbiblical Church Practices* if more information is required.

What are the current problems in pastoring?

An unbiblical bondage to a building

The church was never meant to be restricted either to a building or by a building. Apostolic churches always met in homes. This was God's plan so that churches (*ekklesia* always means people) could be fluid and respond to any situation immediately. If the church in Jerusalem faces persecution, the church simply scatters and plants new churches in homes in Samaria. If a house-church grows too big to pastor or function, it simply divides and plants a new church down the road.

House churches have no capital costs, no maintenance costs and numerous advantages. Since the primary symbol of the church is the family, God's household,¹ the home already has the atmosphere of togetherness, fellowship, friendship, informality and love. Since the primary way the church meets is to manifest mutual *koinonia*, a small meeting in a house has many advantages for encouraging mutual edification and shared ministry. Since the key purpose for gathering is to break bread and remember the Lord's death for us, an intimate, home setting is an ideal way to celebrate the Lord's Supper without formality.

¹ Heb 3:6, ... Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are. 1 Pt 2:5, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house. 1 Tim 3:15, The house of God, which is the church of the living God. Eph 2:19, You are no longer strangers and foreigners ... members of the household of God. Gal 6:10, The household of faith. Gal 3:26, For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Jn 3:1, Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Eph 3:14-15, The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

Buildings cause bondage.

- They force the congregation to sit in ways that militate against fellowship, being seated in pews or rows of chairs.
- They breed formality and organisation.
- They focus attention forwards to a single man, instead of seeing the Lord in each other.
- They generate subsidiary problems - loud music of some sort becomes necessary to support singing, when it should have no place. Overhead projectors or computers become fashionable which distract people's attention. PA systems become necessary. Many now have computer based Power Point presentations, which actually distract from the message. All these have ongoing costs and require volunteer efforts for unbiblical and unnecessary works.
- They either end up having too many people for Biblical sharing to occur naturally, or have too few people to make any sense gathering in a building at all.
- Children's works become necessary to remove them from a formal meeting. A Biblical house-church, being like a family, keeps the children present and is not boring for them.
- They waste the Lord's money, which should be spent on the poor, the needy, evangelism, good works and itinerant ministers.
- In times of persecution, it becomes easy for a totalitarian government to permanently strike the work - just by closing all the visible churches. It is difficult to damage a work that meets in inconspicuous homes.
- Church structures tend to be determined by the building instead of by the people.
- Evangelism is hampered. Witnessing tends to be focused upon bringing outsiders to services in a building (which is difficult) instead of the church reaching out to their community around the house-church and inviting folk in for tea.

Buildings are the bane of the true church. The apostles never had them, neither did they develop large meetings that required them. All normal church gatherings were in homes and were run like a family being based upon mutual edification and *koinonia*.

A lack of house to house visitation

Richard Baxter wrote his own challenging work on pastoring (*The Reformed Pastor*) which ought to be required reading for every church leader. He worked assiduously in Kidderminster, largely through home visitation. As a result he changed the whole social ethos of the small market town just south of Birmingham. One man had an enormous influence by caring for the souls of his flock and by working hard to apply that care. His motto, *as a dying man to dying men*, ought to be the clarion cry of pastoral work for every true saint. Baxter's statue stands as a memorial to his effective ministry to this day near the canal.

This is hard work indeed, and very time consuming; which is one reason why leadership must be team based. The NT knows nothing of a solo pastor or even a senior pastor. Local church eldership is always plural and equal in the NT. If there are sufficient leaders for the work, home visitation is not arduous.

There is no choice on this matter. Paul models this for us in Acts.

I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house ... I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ... for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:20, 27, 31)

He also teaches the practise of dealing with people individually in his letters;

Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. (Col 1:28)

In this Paul follows the practice of his master. Jesus preached to crowds, since preaching is primarily the means of proclaiming the Gospel, not teaching saints. But to his disciples Jesus dealt with them in dialogue, answering many questions.

And when they were alone, he explained all things to His disciples. (Mk 4:34)

Preaching is for the simple presentation of main truths, but personal application of that is vital to develop believers in sound doctrine. As well as preaching, Paul urged the following:

Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Tim 4:2)

Patiently convincing (literally, 'refuting'), rebuking (i.e. admonishing), exhorting (literally 'to call to one's side'), and teaching (i.e. doctrinal teaching) all imply personal work and dialogue (see later). This means personal application of doctrine to people in their homes where they can talk freely with time to deal with issues that arise.

I applaud pastors that seek to do this to the best of their ability; however, a great many leaders fail to see the importance of it. It is of greater value in establishing souls than preaching a sermon every week; and yet many churches have little regular, pastoral visitation. In large charismatic churches it is almost unheard of.

A lack of catechising and Biblical instruction

Catechisms are out of favour in these days. Many think that they are partisan works that lead to brainwashing; that Biblical exposition on Sunday is enough and people can work out their own theology. This is mere folly.

Firstly, Sunday sermons are simply not enough to help members gain a sufficient knowledge of scripture and theology, far more is required. People do not take in more than a few per cent of what is taught in a sermon (godly theologians have always accepted this), and often nothing at all is remembered. Even if it is, little of that is catalogued by the mind in a meaningful fashion. The sermon is not the key Biblical norm for teaching converts anyway. I cannot develop this further here.

Many pastors see their chief role as being sermon makers and the flock's role as sermon fodder. Leaders spend much of their time working on sermons for two effective performances on Sunday, and this has many evils. Firstly, it makes the pastor look wonderful; how knowledgeable, deep, studious, and eloquent he is. Secondly, it makes the congregation feel that they can never achieve such brilliance, and so they don't try; they forget that the pastor has spent hours working on those few minutes of speech. They also don't feel the need to spend much time in detailed bible study since they will never be a pastor and never as good as their pastor. Hard study is seen as unnecessary for 'ordinary' members but something for professionals.

This widens the already unbiblical gap between clergy and laity, even if the church doesn't hold to these titles. Pastors should meet the people where they are, get underneath them and edify them by supporting them and lifting them up. Modern pastoring stands above people, talks down to them and lays burdens upon them that they cannot carry.

Biblical instruction is mainly by dialogue (indeed that is often the Greek word used, which is translated as 'preach'). This means that pastors must engage in conversation, discussion, question and answers, argument, debate, defence, exhortation and encouragement. Pastors must scratch where people itch, and they will never do that if people have no

opportunity to say where they are itching. Pastors can preach for months to a congregation and never once strike the issue that is worrying the whole flock - because they never knew.

One of the best ways to prepare people for effective Christianity is to catechise them when they are converted. This was standard practice for hundreds of years but is now widely abandoned. People need to have hooks to hang their understanding on; they will never systematise Biblical teaching themselves unless they are unusually gifted. The basic framework of Biblical understanding and sound theology must be taught people on a personal, one-to-one basis. This must continue until the person had reached an acceptable level of understanding. For some this may be a few months, for others it may be much longer.

People must have a proper understanding of systematic theology. It is pointless criticising creeds, catechisms and confessions as leading to a party spirit; people will develop their own party spirit left to themselves, but it may be a very bad one. If you don't teach people the dangers of wrong theologies, how are they going to know what to accept and reject? They will read the latest paperback and listen to various tapes and will soon accumulate much bad theology if they haven't been forewarned. Winds of spurious doctrine come howling through their door all the time. Prepare them by teaching a sound theology, easily appropriated in a simple evangelical catechism. Continental converts that were brought up the sound and warm theology of the Heidelberg Catechism grew to be strong and able believers almost to a man. The benefits of the Westminster Standards nurtured spiritual strength to generations of English Puritans. The lack of catechising is one reason why the current UK church experience is one of the most ignorant in history, riddled with heresies and malpractice of all sorts.

Teaching involves impartation of doctrinal understanding. The Greek words used [*didasko*, *didache*, *didaskalia*] have more to do with instruction of doctrine than mere academic or objective knowledge.² God's people must grow in their theology; instead today people abhor the term 'theology' and claim that they are not called to study such things. The reality is that if they don't they will become a plaything of devilish error. All believers are called to be theologians, since theology is the study of God and every Christian should want to grow in his knowledge of his heavenly Father.

It is not enough to simply expound scripture week by week and think the job is done. That is emphatically not enough. People must learn doctrine, they must learn how to apply scripture by seeing Biblical doctrines systematised and collated. They need to understand the difference between Arminianism and a sound Biblical teaching of salvation. If they don't they will accrue Arminian ideas by default. They need a good explanation of eschatology in order to have a clearly defined hope that will affect their performance every day of their lives. If folk don't understand that all things are ours and that God will give us the blessings of creation in a full measure in the new world, they will want to experience these joys now and waste time. Sacrificial pilgrim lives flow from a clearly defined hope.

Pastors must teach doctrinally. Folk must learn the difference between good and evil or they can never grow:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs

² Rm 6:17; But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine [*didache*] to which you were delivered.

to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:12-14)

The pastor's job is to change converts into teachers and release ministry. This comes by teaching principles of God's word, not just expounding books, which is much easier. Good pastoring makes disciples exercise their brains and learn to discern evil for themselves.

A failure to see the goal of equipping and releasing ministry

What does Paul state is the purpose of leadership ministry? He says it is to equip the saints, enable them to share their gift and thus foster growth of the body. The church grows as people grow in their ministries to each other:

And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- (Eph 4:11-15)

What two key things do pastors do?

1. **THEY EQUIP PEOPLE.** What does this mean? The Greek word *katartismos*, [Strong's 2677 *katartismo,j*] means a process of adjustment that results in a complete preparedness, full training to make someone qualified. Luke 6:40 is a commentary by Jesus on this word: A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher ['perfectly trained' is from the same root word]. In Classical Greek it referred to the refitting of a ship in harbour to make it seaworthy. The end is to get the ship out to sea, to get the minister (everyone, not the pastor) doing their work of ministry. SERMONS DO NOT ACHIEVE THIS END, and were never meant to. Teaching is a vital Biblical ministry but the New Testament never tells us that this training is done just by sermonising, but by training. This means close personal contact, deep Bible study, dialogue, questions and answers, debates, catechising (as a start), house visitation, praying together, ministering together and so on. Training is a relationship, much like an apprenticeship. Just preaching a sermon once or twice a week is nowhere near enough.
2. **THEY EDIFY THE BODY.** What does this mean? It means to build people up as one builds a house stone by stone. People have to be individually cared for. The gathered community of saints is much more like a Yorkshire dry-stone wall, where many shapes and sizes of flint are fitted together, than a brick wall. You can build one way with one person, but must deal very differently with another. There are no prefabricated buildings in the church, people are slowly and carefully built up as individuals. Again this means spending quality time with individuals - all individuals.

How long do they do this?

They do this until we all come to the unity of the faith and the full-knowledge (*epignosis* - not just knowledge) of the Son of God and the body is a mature man like Christ. In other words, it does not stop this side of glory.

What seven goals should pastors have for their flock?

- That they should be mature men not children.
- Not tossed back and forth by every wind of doctrine (which describes exactly what people are like in the church today who are not being pastored properly).
- Not be tricked by men - i.e. false by teachings.

- Not fall into deceitful plotting - i.e. through devilish temptations.
- That they speak the truth.
- That they speak truth in love.
- That they grow into Christ - not just learn about him.

We could amplify each of these points. They all indicate that the pastor must spend much time with individuals dealing with them carefully until they develop and are fully trained. A pastor has failed his ministry if any of his charges remain as children in doctrine. A pastor is measured by the maturity of his people not by his eloquent sermons.

The pastor's work is with his people above and beyond every other claim on his life - including preaching. This why the Bible uses the word 'shepherd' for the leader. The pastor (shepherd) is someone devoted to his flock above all else. Anything that takes his time and attention away from his flock is a temptation to sin against his calling. This includes privileged status functions on preaching circuits, conferences, distant meetings, district or national strategies, inter-church strategies, media broadcasts and so on. Everything a pastor does ought to be directly related to some kind of usefulness to his flock. If an activity is not promoting his flock in some way - it should be terminated.

A failure to work in equal teams

Biblical church leadership is always plural; the local church was never meant to be under the authoritative leadership of one man.³ Many pastors today are worn out, burned out, or wiped out. Depression, quitting and medical retirements are on the increase. It is now becoming common to hear leaders (and others) state that they will not join another church on their retirement. Something is terribly wrong.

The chief error is the lack of team ministry. Now some churches give superficial assent to team ministry by having a full-time pastor and a group of elders; but it is as rare as horse feathers that this group functions, in practice, in parity. Always the senior minister, the full-time leader, calls the shots and sets the strategies. The other elders are really there to be a support and to help preach and counsel occasionally. This error leads to two failures:

1. The 'pastor' can become an authoritarian leader, even if he is sincere and godly. He determines strategy and the direction of all meetings. Respect for his supposed position leads everyone to comply with what they believe God is telling him. This is close to the superspiritual sacerdotalism of Romanism. The pastor here has become a sort of mediator between the people and God - this is a terrible state of affairs but is very common. In some charismatic churches it is publicly stated that the leader hears from God for the people and they must comply.
2. Where all is left to the leader, or where there is no eldership support, the 'pastor' eventually burns out, wearying himself with well-doing, carrying everyone's burdens with no one to carry his own. Frequently this causes stress to marriages and children. One man was never meant to carry this burden.

Biblical church ministry is meant to be by mutual edification. The whole church is called to minister to each other.⁴ The eye can't tell the hand it doesn't need its ministry or it will

³ Churches are to appoint elders, not an elder. Note the plural form in Acts 20:17 (Ephesus) 21:18 (Jerusalem); Titus 1:5 (Crete). There is no such an animal as a 'senior pastor' or a 'minister', let alone 'reverend', 'priest' or 'moderator' and we should never call leaders by special names - not even 'pastor'. We are specifically told by Jesus to avoid giving special titles to church leaders [Matt 23:8-10]. Focusing ministry on one man distracts attention from the fact that all are called to be ministers, all are priests.

⁴ Rm 14:19, 15:2; 1 Cor 12, 14:5, 12, 26; Eph 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11.

starve. Where mutual ministry is operative, there is far less stress on individual leaders, and even leadership stress is minimised by a team of men sharing this pressure equally.

But this means that there has to be trust and delegation. Leaders must trust their flock to serve as well as build them up in their gifts. This means letting them grow in it and get it wrong sometimes. Where the church functions Biblically as a family in the context of a house, this is no problem; but where there are unbiblical structures and venues it is more difficult.

Building for the team ministry of all is one thing, but it is of crucial importance that the leadership team must be equal. There must be no seniority amongst leaders, this is where all the problems begin and end. The church is not a commercial enterprise run on worldly management strategies, it is the household and family of God which is dead to the world and its ideas. Leaders in the church are all equal and function together in harmony. One will be better gifted in one area more than another will, but together they balance; though all should be able to teach.

The leadership team should also pray for the Biblical norms of function - this means that there are not just pastors and teachers but also evangelists, apostles (church planters) and prophets (teaching and encouraging with inspiring power). The argument about whether these gifts have ceased is lame. We cannot cut parts of verses out of our Bible - these gifted men are clearly part of the church leadership team and there is no suggestion that they have ceased. We always need church planters, and these apostles have no more authority than anyone else in their home church. We always need prophetic men, most often where there are failures and problems, men who show the way God wants a church to go.

The church doesn't need imported celebrities, modern evangelistic methods, unbiblical meetings, advertising, inter-church strategies with apostate groups, crusades, and so on; it just needs faith to let God's strategy operate. It is a simple strategy that is not hard to understand - the shepherding of the church is by a team of gifted, equals who serve the people and get the people to function. Such a church will grow organically without artifice.

A lack of doctrinal confrontation

The English Puritan preacher William Perkins famously stated that the essence of a Biblical pastor was to bring the sheep into the fold and then defend them from wolves; for him 50% of the job was defence.⁵ This is what shepherds do, evangelise and nurture; both are necessary. Nourishment always means feeding and protection; plants need watering but also the removal of pests. If sheep are fed but are not protected from predators, they will be preyed upon and end up as victims of one heresy or another. This means that errors must be confronted, the sheep must be warned.

The amazing thing is that many pastors completely fail to do this. [A smaller group does nothing but contend and confront, failing to feed; but this is not a general problem.] One of the reasons is that confronting key issues will often upset someone in the congregation. As a result of this fear of upsetting one or two people, the majority is left in danger. This is just plain wrong. There are ways of teaching that can deal with this problem sensitively, but it must be done.

⁵ I would emphasise that the job of the pastoral team is, 1) to win souls; 2) to feed the sheep (teach); 3) to defend them from error and sin; 4) to train everyone in their gift; 5) to release new ministry; 6) to plant new churches; 7) to do all to the glory of God.

We live in times that are unprecedented in church history. There are more heresies abounding today than at any point in church history. Paul and the Lord himself warned us of these days; how can we then ignore the need to warn and confront? People are surrounded by errors in popular books, tapes, CDs, DVDs and even television channels. They will receive these teachings and if they are not wise, they will submit to them. The fault for this is the pastor's, if he has failed to warn the flock.

The pastor has little time in comparison to the free time his sheep have to listen to error, therefore, he must systematically confront all the errors that are abounding today so that his people are prepared and warned. This is a vital task that cannot be overstated.

Many pastors have fallen foul of the modern disease of hyper-toleration. Everything is to be tolerated (except Biblical Christianity it seems), and nothing is to be condemned outright. This is not an option for the godly. We are commanded to:

- Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose them**. (Eph 5:11) [*Expose* means, to severely reprehend, convict, refute, find fault with, bring to light, bring shame upon, admonish, reprove call to account.]
- Exhort, and rebuke with all authority. (Titus 2:15)
- Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. (1 Tim 5:20)
- You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. (Lev 19:17)
- Let the righteous strike me; *It shall be* a kindness. And let him rebuke me; *it shall be* as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it. For still my prayer *is* against the deeds of the wicked. (Ps 141:5)

The church must not only reprove those who teach errors, practice aberrations or commit sin, but must withdraw from such:

- Come out of her [Babylon], my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. (Rev 18:4)
- If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, [the doctrine of Christ] do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 Jn 1:10-11)
- For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Tim 3:2-5)
- If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness ... From such withdraw yourself. (1 Tim 6:3-5)
- And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. (2 Thess 3:14)
- But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. (2 Thess 3:6)
- For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Cor 6:14)
- Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. (Rm 16:17)

If the Lord's people are to withdraw from heresies and wickedness, they need to know what the heresies are. Pastors must warn their flock about wrong teaching. This is serious and yet it is everywhere ignored.

John tells us not to have fellowship with someone who does not hold the doctrine of Christ, not to even let them through the front door. In recent years, an internationally famous evangelical Bible teacher held very serious heretical views about the Lord. Not only did no

mainstream church leader confront him, but he was welcomed into many UK conferences and churches to speak; his tapes and books were on sale everywhere.⁶ This is an example as to how weakly leaders obey scripture. According to the apostle, everyone who welcomed this man shared in his evil deeds. Do they not fear this judgment?

The temptation to build empires

This is a human failing that is observed in every walk of life; talk to any office worker. It is a trait that should never be evidenced in church leaders. The desire to hold power over groups of people is a devilish attribute. Paul had great ambitions for the church, but they did not include holding sway over people or geographic areas. His ardent desire was to plant churches where Christ was not named. For this reason he desired to press on to Spain.

Even in churches that he planted himself, Paul had no aspirations to maintain a hold on power. In remonstrating with the wrongdoings of the Corinthians he did not act in an authoritarian way, but pleaded and persuaded, laying out an argument as to why they should do this or that.

Pastors generally convince themselves that building an empire is a good strategy that will glorify God, and sadly it happens all the time. Instead of multiplying churches by dividing and beginning a work in a house, they may seek to ‘assist’ another work that ultimately brings it under their control. They may begin to encourage members to attend meetings in other churches or unbiblical area meetings with churches of varying evangelicalism. In this the profile of the pastor is raised, especially if he begins to take some kind of responsibility in these area strategies. The pastor then gets invited to preach elsewhere and host various meetings.

Some have developed a strategy to hold conferences on popular subjects in strategic towns that give the leaders involved a higher profile. Usually there is an entertaining atmosphere provided by loud rock bands that is supposed to be ‘worship’. After the conferences a new work is initiated, perhaps in a hotel or a school (never a house) which always draws members from existing churches who are dissatisfied for some reason. These churches cannot compete with this vigorous new experience. In due course, an old church building is rented or purchased; sometimes a new building is erected or a warehouse converted and a new work is begun. The original pastor now has a more global authority, covering more than one church.

Another idea is to host ‘seeker-sensitive’ meetings where the focus is upon the sinner instead of Christ. Worship becomes aligned to modern pop culture and music; messages are watered down and all threats against sin are removed. The Gospel is weakened but made more inclusive and superficial. Various methods of attracting, contacting and holding newcomers are practised. As numbers increase, so new churches comprising large numbers can be planted.

There are numerous strategies for empire building, but all of them elevate man, most often the leader at the centre, but occasionally a system or methodology. None of this is Biblical.

Firstly, NT church leadership is always plural and equal. It is always in the hands of local elders who operate as a team. There is no senior pastor and no dominating figure.

⁶ I felt it right to confront this error and wrote to him myself. I entered into unsatisfactory correspondence with his editor and chief leader for some time.

Furthermore, crucial strategic decisions should be reached by consensus with the whole church in discussion (Acts 15). These features prevent one man becoming an authoritarian figure.

Biblical churches are small, certainly small enough to meet in the typical houses of the local community. Buildings are never rented or purchased for the local church to worship in because the apostles saw the need to maintain *Koinonia* with the home/family structure. This means that as growth occurs the church simply splits and begins a new work in another house. The church thus spreads like salt or yeast in a community, invisible but having considerable effect.

This Biblical strategy keeps the focus upon people, removes the need for wasting money and enables the church to respond to any situation. At first, the new church requires ministerial assistance from the sending church. It is only at this point, for a short time, that one church has any kind of responsibility over another. As a new church plant matures, the sending church appoints local elders who then become solely responsible for this new church. While it is expected that cordial relations and inter-church gifting will operate, there is no empire building and no domination by one man.

A propensity to add to Biblical leadership

In keeping with the world, as situations change so new leadership functions and structures are created by many modern churches. Historically, this was the case in the Charismatic Movement, but it is increasingly becoming a pattern in evangelical churches. Such functions would include: worship leaders, children's leaders, associate pastors, counsellors, leaders of leaders, teen leaders, administrators, secretaries, financial positions, evangelistic leaders, apostolic leaders ruling several churches, apostolic leaders ruling several national churches (i.e. archbishops), music leaders and so on - the list is endless.

None of these have any Biblical sanction at all, not one. If we are to honour God we must shun all such unbiblical practices.

The leaders of churches are elders and no one else. The local church is shepherded by a team of elders in equal authority. If the church is built according to apostolic patterns, such as being small in numbers and meeting in a home, then none of these extra-biblical leaders are necessary. They only become a requirement when the church is built in an unbiblical fashion and run on worldly management systems.

Elders function according to their gift. All should be able to teach but one will be a better pastor while another will be a better evangelist. One may be an effective church planter (apostle) but another will inspire the church as a prophet and have a ministry of encouragement. The function does not give enhanced status; the only authority is in eldership. For instance, an apostle has no more authority in his home church than anyone else. If he is an elder he has an elder's authority, that is all.

There is no way any church can develop these extra-biblical leaders and remain evangelical in the real sense of the term. Arguments may be put forth that scripture doesn't forbid them but this is sophistry. Scripture doesn't forbid taking heroin, but we know that such behaviour is ungodly. If we are free to create any leadership capacity we like, then the

instructions in the NT have no validity at all. The true regulative principle for interpreting scripture is that we can only do what scripture commands.⁷

Some evangelical churches may feel they are obedient in this but still have a false diakonate. Many conservative churches have no elders but have a team of deacons that have spiritual authority. This is unbiblical. Deacons are not shepherds but are practical workers that have no authority to govern but care for the needs of the community of saints.

This propensity to create new leadership functions is a symptom of the worldliness of the modern church. In some circles, church strategies and functions are taken directly from commercial management dossiers, even to the level of calling new church leadership functions by the same business buzzwords. So churches can have 'counselling directors', 'team co-ordinators' or 'strategy developers' for instance.

If we wish to build the church as God commands, we must avoid all such tendencies to develop false leadership.

The dependency upon salaries

Let me be forthright from the start - there is no such thing as a salaried leader in the New Testament. It isn't that salaries were uncommon, indeed they were the norm for certain jobs. Soldiers had salaries, the priesthood had a sort of salary, government officials had salaries. However most common people earned their money on the basis of cash in hand for a given task or commodity. So salaries were not unheard of, yet the apostles never mention them.

Then again, there is no description of an elder receiving a salary, or indeed no requisite that an elder should be full-time, and the elder is the only leader in the Biblical church. There is a place for itinerant ministries receiving gifts, and for those fully engaged in preaching the word (most likely as an itinerant minister). But for the normal local church leader full-time ministry was completely unnecessary.

Where there is leadership by team-ministry, where there is a godly college of equal elders sharing the load, there is no need for one man to be in full-time ministry, and therefore, no need for paying for the living of a leader.

Where a man has to be full-time, due to his calling to teach, travel and be in the word frequently, there is still no indication of a regular salary. The whole point is that the minister should be living by faith and trusting the Lord for his living, just as the apostles and the Lord himself modelled. Where this applies, the man is constantly kept on his toes to be in utter dependence upon God for his livelihood. This is a good place to be in, even if difficult.

Paul mentions a 'double-honour' in 1 Tim 5:17. There is no reason in the context for this to mean payment, despite the frequent claims of preachers. The word's primary meaning is simply 'honour' or 'value', but can mean the price of the value. It does not mean 'stipend' or 'wages' as some claim. This is a parallel passage to Paul's statement in 1 Thess 5:12-13, where Paul commends elders to be esteemed by all. Any elder should be honoured by virtue of his office, but an elder who leads well or teaches well should be especially esteemed, hence a double-honour.

⁷ The false regulative principle is that we can do anything at all if scripture doesn't specifically forbid it.

The next verse states: **For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The labourer /is worthy of his wages,'** and thus many commentators have drawn the conclusion that v17 is about wages. At the very most Paul is saying that if an elder is losing money by virtue of his preparing for so many teaching demands or by his hospitality, that the church should honour him and make up the difference. This is very good, but it is not an apologetic for a salary.

By all means gifts should be given to elders to ease their burden, especially if they have families. But this does not mean regular wages. The bane of leadership is a salary that results in complacency on the one hand, plus reliance upon whoever holds the purse strings on the other.

I have very often seen leaders fail to follow a strategy that they knew was Biblical, that God had revealed to them clearly, because they knew it would put them at odds with the men that paid their wages. This is deplorable, but an obvious problem if you have a mortgage and no other meaningful employment. This situation should never occur, and it can't if the living of full-time men is dependent upon the multifarious gifts spontaneously given by many different people as the Lord leads them.

For centuries this was how independent churches maintained leaders, but today the church has become like the world in the way it is managed.

Do I know of people who practice this? Yes I do. I have friends in the US, France and the UK who believe NT church principles and live by faith as leaders. One friend manages to be a house-church leader and teach abroad at least for two months of the year, taking his family to the US, but has no salary or fixed gift. He has always known the provision of the Lord. Another continues an international teaching ministry via the Internet but trusts the Lord to support his family of six.

Conclusion

A failure to function as a father or a nursing mother
 If there is one aspect of shepherding that undergirds everything else it is the need to carry out one's gift like a father in a family (1 Cor 4:15) or a caring mother (1 Thess 2:7). The chief ministry of a shepherd is to feed the sheep that belong to the master (Jn 21:15-17).

The church is a family and leaders are like fathers in that family; they function in terms of practical love and a serving spirit towards all above everything else. Nothing in their lives distracts them from their desire to give themselves wholly for their children in the faith.

My contention is that, even amongst sincere leaders, the chief model for leadership is management. Even if this is not admitted, the fact is that most pastors manage their churches rather than father them. Indeed, there is no alternative since other church features are usually unbiblical also: meeting in a building, having no equal leaders, meeting in formal services without *koinonia* etc. Pastors in these situations are forced to be managers in order to keep the whole thing running, and this unbiblical effort leads to burnout.

One error leads to another and then another. Since the church meets in a building full of rows of seats, the focus is on a man. This leads to destroying any possible chance of mutual

ministry by the members. It also elevates the pastor. This leads to the sermon as being the chief (often only) form of communicating truth. Pragmatic issues with large numbers mean that the Lord's Supper is not celebrated weekly. Problems with building maintenance, rates and rents lead to finance being diverted away from Biblical spending (on the poor). Since the pastor is full-time, he needs to be given a manse (another wasted expense). And so it goes on.

When dealing with weak people Paul became weak (1 Cor 9:22). When dealing with the hurt, Paul was deeply sensitive. When dealing with seekers or the argumentative Paul was persuasive (Acts 28:23). When dealing with the proud and sinfully arrogant Paul used discipline. Paul was a father to his people. Paul loved his people as a father or a nursing mother and used all the means a parent would use with his children.

Such a stance can only operate if the whole concept of being a manager is thrown out of the window. The Lord's people are not to be managed, but loved and fed. If all pastoral strategies were based on love most of the problems in the church would be minimised.⁸

Now most pastors would agree with this in principle but make all sorts of excuses. Most pastors are good men who really want to serve God and I am not writing this to attack good men. But the problem remains that we are not building the church Biblically. There is no argument about this. Theological seminaries teach Biblical church structures as part of NT doctrinal analysis, but then tell their students that they can never actually apply this in practice today (I was told this by a very famous seminary principal).

This isn't good enough. How can we expect God's blessing if we deliberately ignore his instructions?

What is needed today is men who will fearlessly determine to obey God in all things and build according to his very clear instructions in the New Testament. With church planters like that, we may yet see the end-time church blossom as a godly testimony to the Lord in these days.

May it be so. Amen

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⁸ There will always be problems with sin, error and personal tragedies