

Pastoral Epistles III

Fellowship Groups & Structure

(1-Timothy 3)
Fred R. Coulter

How do you structure a church or fellowship group without having a hierarchy, but have at least enough organization to get things done?

The first thing you need to understand is that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. The Church, in that sense, is not a corporate body. The Church of God, in that sense, is all those in the world who have the Spirit of God. They may belong to various fellowship groups or affiliate with various corporate structures. The problem they had in Worldwide, and in other churches, is that:

1. they didn't understand about the love of God
2. they took the corporate structure and superimposed that upon the New Testament

Remember the book *Against the Gates of Hell* by Stanley Rader? He wrote in there that Herbert W. Armstrong held the office equivalent to the pope. I remember the first thought that came into my mind concerning the hierarchical structure of the Church was when I was in Pasadena in 1972. Of course, we were all anticipating, having their Petra boxes ready to go.

They were having big problems at that time and Herbert Armstrong said, 'Brethren, if there's any one thing that the Catholic Church has right that's government from the top down!' It was in the gymnasium at that time, the auditorium hadn't been built, yet. The wind from that statement came sweeping by like a hurricane. His jowls were moving up front, and yours were moving with the wind.

The thought came into my mind—it wasn't rebellious at all—why would God use Satan's method of government in His Church? Just a fleeting thought, and I never thought on it much after that. But at least that was a seed that, I feel, God planted in my mind.

With the fellowship groups, they start out very unorganized; maybe there's just one couple alone keeping Sabbath services at home. Sometimes it will be that way for a long time before anyone ever comes and joins them.

There is carnal control and leverage to get you to do things by misusing Scriptures. When you leave *the* Church, you're 'falling away.' This

Scripture is used—Heb. 10—to make sure that you stay in church, and to make you come and fellowship; in some cases where you don't want to. Then they put *fear* in you so that you're afraid not to come!

Hebrews 10:25: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, even as some *are* accustomed to do; but rather, encouraging *one another*, and all *the* more as you see the day drawing near." They say it says you must attend. If you don't attend you're sinning.

After a while people find out that there is so much sin by the leadership within the Church that they just stay home. They're tired of getting up every Sabbath morning, praying: 'O God, bless me with a good Sabbath; help me to have a good attitude, and let me be able to go to church and hear the sermon.' So, you go to church and you come home discouraged, frustrated and miserable.

After a while God impresses it upon your mind that you stay home, and hopefully by that time, we're able to send you some sermons or others have sent you sermons, and then you begin listening to those. I got a letter from a woman in Santa Rosa that said: 'I've stayed home three years and now I'm ready for fellowship.'

Then a small fellowship group begins, and it gradually grows. As you will find with the fellowship groups, we have a minimum amount of structure, and the structure is only to facilitate the convenience of having the get-together. That's what it needs to be.

The Church is not a place to come and air your problems. Fellowshiping with the brethren is not a place to talk about the problems of other people. We've had enough of that! A fellowship group is when you come together and worship and serve God.

How do you structure a fellowship group when it gets to a point that you need someone to lead it? There has to be leadership, and the leadership has to be motivated by God's Spirit to do the will of God.

There are plenty of people out there who consider themselves leaders. We've had them put themselves forward; that's fine. Some people may disparage me a little bit, but that's okay. When I

give someone and opportunity, I give them say, eight feet of rope. I'm the kind that I do the way the Bible does, which is, in modern parlance, you give a mission statement, which is: *go do this*. 'How do I do it?' *Whatever is in the Bible and whatever is practical, you do it!* There has to be some responsibility!

Some of these fellowship groups become like a zoo! They have all kinds of people coming in, or they have all kinds of sermons from all kinds of different people. What happens is it just divides, splits and conquers, because you don't that a lot of the sermons coming in are really *false prophets, bearing false doctrines!*

Lo and behold, fellowship groups become victims again and again. Especially if you've gone from one church to another church to another church, and you find the same old/same old wherever you go. It's like this: *You can get the person out of Worldwide, but you can't Worldwide out of the person!*

They go to United Church of God: *You can get the person out of United, but you can't United out of the person!* And right on down the line. That's why we call ourselves the nickname: *The No Hassle, Recycled Church of God*. We don't want any hassles, arguments, anything run by carnality. We want it run with the Spirit of God.

- Are we capable of doing that?
- Does not God lay it upon us to be capable of doing that?
- Are there not men who are willing to yield to God and put aside their vanity?
 - ✓ So that they can serve with humility?
 - ✓ So that they can serve where they want to serve?
 - ✓ So that they can help the brethren without the need of seeking recognition?

We've had people put themselves forward. After they are disappointed that we don't just embrace them and say, 'O good, you're fantastic.' *No!* What we do is this: If we have someone who says that they are an elder and want to come with the Christian Biblical Church of God...

Back in Baltimore they asked some questions at an open Bible study. A man said, 'Fred, what would you do if an evangelist came and said that he wanted to work you?' I said that the first thing I would say is, 'Take a backseat until we find out whether you're a minister, indeed.' This is what we do with those who are elders and they want to come and be a part of Christian Biblical Church of God. That's fine, come and fellowship with us.

Let me tell you, there is a lot of re-educating to do—wherever there may be an elder to do that—to get the hierarchy out. Many people like to get the hierarchy out of the other person, but not of themselves. So, we have to get it out of both of us. God has given us the way if we would just pay attention to Acts 20. I imagine by this time the Apostle Paul was wondering what on earth was going to happen to the Church:

- he was seeing the mystery of iniquity working
- he was seeing some of his close companions forsake him and go back into the world
- he was fighting false prophets who were deceitfully handling the Word of God
- he had to say, 'Look, let me be a fool for a few minutes, please' (1-Cor. 11)
- he had to say, 'These are ministers of God?'

In Acts 20 Paul calls all the elders down from Ephesus, and he says:

Acts 20:28: "Take heed, therefore... [watch out] ...to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers..."—not bishops. What is an overseer? *One who oversees the activities of the congregation or fellowship group, to see that it is done in order and the Word of God is taught, and that things are handled in a proper Godly manner!*

In that there is no politics. We've lived through the political system; we've lived through the personality system—I'm *not* a personality. I remember that when I was in college, I got a nickname, which is still with me today. David Jon Hill was one of the funniest men in the work, and he said, 'Fred Coulter, you've got a face that looks like a blanket with two burnt holes in it.' That's my face, but at least I can see! Some of you have blankets with no holes!

Notice that it doesn't say *overlord*. We've seen that in the Church. There was one minister in Seattle that wherever he was sent he found out who was the richest, most accomplished building contractor in the area, and he would have him build him a house, then ordain him as a local elder.

When I was ordained by Herbert W. Armstrong on the last day of Unleavened Bread in 1965, one of the political appointees was ordained with me and he built a house for Mr. McNair. I understand that someone in the Chicago area built a house for someone, too. All of that God does not recognize. Do you understand that? *God does not recognize that kind of thing!*

An overseer is one who truly, truly loves God. The main criteria and personality we used was who was the best speaker. I tell you one thing, unless you speak from the heart, all your speaking is only so much tinkling, as Paul said. That's why any speaking that is done for those of you who do speaking, for those who give sermonettes—please understand this: Do not be as hard on those who give sermonettes because you compare them with me. I speak over 200 times a year. But hopefully, if I can help you with some of the techniques in speaking, the first technique is to *love God and speak from the heart!*

You've heard the saying that when you speak, you speak so loudly that I can't hear what you're saying. I remember the first time I heard Paul under Charles Hunting. We were in college, and during a ministerial conference with all these high mucky-muck evangelists and you hear the best. Charles Hunting got up there and gave the most powerful bombastic yelling sermon! We were all just nailed to our seats with the words!

Where is he today? *That was human might, that was human personality, not by the Spirit of God!* You can look at others and ask: Where are they now? Carl Franklin graduated the same year as me. Carl is not with me because we're friends. Being friends is in addition to loving God. What Carl does is not a political thing for me. I don't ask him to back me up just to back me up, because I'm me. If I'm wrong he feels free to come and tell me. Maybe there's a misunderstanding and I can clear it up. That's the way it needs to be.

An overseer is someone who is overseeing the flock of God. It's very important for you to understand what comes next.

"...has made you overseers to feed the Church of God... [not to let the Church of God feed you, as ministers] ...which He purchased with His own blood" (v 28). That's very important and profound to understand. All of you belong to God, and whoever is an overseer is a steward.

A steward is someone who is responsible for using other people's property for the benefit of the one who owns it. The parable of the talents is a *stewardship relationship*:

Matthew 25:14: "For *the Kingdom of Heaven* is like a man leaving the country, who called his own servants and delivered to them his property. Now, to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one; he *gave* to each one according to his own ability, and immediately left the country. Then the one who had received five talents went and traded with them..." (vs 14-16).

God expects you to use them; the instruction book is here on how to use them. He expects you to constantly grow, being perfected in love.

"...and made an additional five talents. In the same way also, the one who had *received* two *talents* also gained two others. But the one who had received the single *talent* went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money" (vs 16-18). God didn't want them to do that.

If you know someone who is currently digging a hole, help them out. Send them another shovel to fill it in and give them some sermons on the love of God and the purpose of their calling, and let them get the talent out of that hole.

Verse 19: "Now, after a long time, the lord of those servants came to take account with them. Then the one who had received five talents came to *him and* brought an additional five talents... [Why? *Because they belong to you!*] ...saying, 'Lord, you delivered five talents to me; see, I have gained five other talents besides them.' And his lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things....'" (vs 19-23).

What are we being told here? *What we do here in this life is stewardship for God!* That's what it is. And when Christ returns we need to present what belongs to God with the increase. If we don't, then we're going to be like the one who began to complain and accuse God.

Verse 24: "Then the one who had received the single talent also came to *him and* said, 'Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow...'" How do you expect me to go out and gather anything when you don't sow it?

"...and gathering where you did not scatter" (v 24). No faith in God that He would provide, because God would provide. If you have no faith in God, God is a hard Master! If you're against God, He's going to be even harder! God says that He's going to 'cast His bread upon the water, and it won't come back to Him empty.' That's why He wants all of the brethren to grow. We need to be so busy yielding to God and the Spirit of God that:

- we don't have time for politics
- we don't have time for stupidity
- we don't have time for a hierarchy
- we don't have time for idolizing a man

We all have to grow, and let God fill us with His Spirit and lead and guide us in the way we need to go.

Verse 25: “And *because* I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. *Now* look, you have your own.’ His lord answered *and* said to him, ‘*You* wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather what I did not scatter. Because *you knew* this, you were duty-bound to take my talent to the money exchangers, *so that* when I came, I could have received my own with interest” (vs 25-27). This person here was worse than a Sardisite, the Church that has a name and lives, but is dead. That’s a corpse with a pulse. What happened?

Verse 28: “Therefore, take the talent from him, and give *it* to the one who has ten talents.” If this were a carnal situation, what would happen? *Well, he’s not kin!* Christ is going to say this is not communism.

Verse 29: “For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and *he* shall have abundance; on the other hand, *as for* the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken from him. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.’ There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (vs 29-30).

Remember, every one of the brethren have been purchased with the blood of Christ!

Acts 20:29: “For I know this: that after my departure grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will rise up speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. Watch, therefore, remembering that *for* three years **I ceased not to admonish each one night and day with tears**” (vs 29-31). Think on that verse! That’s a lot of warning to the very men he was talking to.

Verse 32: “And now I commit you, brethren, to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothing. Rather, you yourselves know that these hands did minister to my needs and to those who were with me. *In* all things, I have showed you that you are obligated to so labor to support those who are weak, remembering the words that the Lord Jesus Himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And after saying these things, he knelt with them all *and* prayed. Then there was much weeping by everyone; and they embraced Paul *and* fervently kissed him, being distressed most of all by his saying that they would not see his face any more. Then they accompanied him to the ship” (vs 32-38).

I hope that God has that recorded somewhere on some sort of spiritual television. One night when we’re in the Kingdom of God, God can

turn on the spiritual television, hit the remote control; wouldn’t that be something? Sometimes you can get more out of the Bible if you try to put yourself in it and think if you’re one of those kneeling down in front of Paul and listening to the words that he said. They’re really something!

Paul wrote these things when he was in prison. He knew that he was not going to come back. Timothy was a faithful young elder. Let’s see what Paul wrote to Timothy concerning overseers, then we will see how the Bible says that it should be done:

An Overseer:

1-Timothy 3:1: “Faithful *is* the saying, ‘If any man aspires to *be* an overseer, he desires a good work.’” There are some elders who many not be an overseer, but all overseers are elders.

Verse 2: “Now then, it is obligatory *that* the overseer be blameless, *the* husband of one wife, vigilant, serious-minded, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching; not given to much wine, not a bully, not greedy for selfish gain; but kind, not a quarreler, not a lover of money; one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in subjection with all respect” (vs 2-4). This is showing that the one who is ordained as an elder can have a young family.

I had someone send me a paper that said that all elders have to be old, old men. Maybe, in some cases, they can be. I said to him, ‘What are you going to do about this: “...having *his* children in subjection with all respect.” If you’re up in your 50s or 60s all your children are grown and gone.’ He didn’t know what to say. Then I said, ‘What about Samuel? Christ? The apostles? Timothy? I sent his paper back and he didn’t like it and hasn’t written again. I said, ‘If you’re going to do research, be honest! Use all the Scriptures!’

So, if you get something that someone has written, read it and see if it’s thorough. Does it cover all, and if it doesn’t then send it back and let him do it.

Verse 5: “(For if a man does not know *how* to rule his own household, how will he take care of *the* Church of God?) Not a novice, lest he become conceited *and* fall into *the same* condemnation as the devil. It is mandatory that he also have a good report from those *who are* outside *the* Church, lest he fall into reproach and *the* snare of the devil” (vs 5-7). Here are two warnings that are given.

Verse 8: “In the same way also, the deacons who serve *must* be serious-minded, not hypocritical,

not given to much wine, not greedy for selfish gain; holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. And let those *who meet the qualifications...* [that's understood in the Greek] ...also be proved first..." (vs 8-10).

This is what we do. Let them be proved. Sometimes there will be those that their vanity will hang out and people will think: Who is Fred Coulter to let this person do that? I had some complaints at one of the Feasts of Tabernacles, because I wasn't able to go. Well, that's fine; I gave him eight feet of rope and he got himself all tied up in his own vanity. That's too bad! I'm sorry that that happened. It's was an opportunity to be prudent.

Don't come and say that it was Fred Coulter putting people to do this and that, because I'm not. Give them a little room to do something, let them be proved, then we will see the sincerity of the individual. If they're not sincere, then we can say, 'Thank you for helping, we're sorry, but we don't need you anymore.' That's the way it needs to be, otherwise we will end up with the same thing that we left.

I do believe that one of the lessons that God is teaching us, that if we come back and do the same thing that we left, we return to bondage.

"...then let them *be appointed to serve, if they are found to be* blameless. In the same way also, *their wives must* be serious-minded, not slanderers, sober *and* faithful in all things" (vs 10-11). There are things that happens in a hierarchical church:

- you have a *spy system*
- you have a *network*
- you have *political deacons and elders*

What do they do? *They report to the chief mucky-muck!*

What happens then is that those who are spies are rewarded for bringing the information, and the whole church is torn apart and divided up. That's not the way to do it. God does not want women or men going around talking about people and relating private business to other people.

Let me just say this: If, as a Christian—man or woman—you cannot hold a confidence of something that was given to you—private confidence—*then you are sinning against that person and Christ!* That's why at a Feast of Tabernacles I gave the series on *Judge Righteous Judgment*.

Verse 12: "Let the deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own households well. For those who have served well

acquire for themselves a good standing and much confidence in *the* faith that *is* in Christ Jesus. These things I am writing to you, hoping to come to you shortly; but if I should delay, *you have these things in writing, so that you may know how one is obligated to conduct oneself in the house of God,* which is *the Church of the* living God, *the* pillar and foundation of the Truth. And undeniably, **great is the mystery of Godliness...**" (vs 12-16).

This last verse is the foundation for everything that went on before. Paul always ends up by keeping the overall perspective of why we're here in mind. Then there are many things in 1-Tim. 4, which we will get to in this series.

There are many things we can look at; this is something that needs to be done. 2-Timothy 2:1: "Therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that *is* in Christ Jesus." Paul makes it clear that those who are in the ministry—as an elder or overseer—have a special gift of grace that God gives them at that time. Paul says that it is 'grace given to me to preach.' It is *a gift of God!* It does not come before ordination. It's just that simple! Of course, Timothy was ordained of Paul.

Verse 2: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, these *things* commit to faithful men, such as will be competent to teach others also."

When we were in Biblical Church of God, we thought that the command to have elders in every city superseded everything else. I have to tell you that we violated the Scripture that says, 'do not lay hands on any man's son.' We made elders where there should not have been elders. That's why in the Christian Biblical Church of God we did not have ordinations until recently. This time we want to do it as close to the Bible as we can.

Let me just say that the time is now—and what I'm trying to do with the things that I teach and Carl teaches—that we are teaching everyone, but within that there needs to be those who are being taught God's way so that they can be overseers and elders in the future. Since we didn't have any for the first 14 years, I've been criticized, especially by one man who wanted to be an elder. It can cause a great deal of grief.

I don't know if those of you sitting here will be selected of God by your groups—the congregation or fellowship group that you belong to—who sees and understands that God is calling you to be a minister, *which is a servant*. But let me encourage you to educate yourselves, and to help you educate yourself, we have 'a million' sermons.

Someone called one time and said, 'Send me everything you have.' I said, 'You really don't want that!' We'll send you a 'Care Package.' Carl mentioned that the 'Care Packages' are good from this point of view: Everyone who comes to Christian Biblical Church of God starts out with the same footing. You know where we come from, you know where we're going. That's important to understand.

Verse 14: "See that *they* remain mindful of these things, earnestly charging *them* in the sight of the Lord **not to argue over words that are not profitable in any way...**" We've seen that with the Passover and so many things: arguing over words. Then a person takes a position that is really political and selfish and they run around with some false doctrine.

I knew that the *Friends of the Sabbath* thing was going to be a disaster. I knew that *The Journal* was going to be a disaster. Before it became *The Journal* someone called me and said, 'Would you write something for *In Transition*?' I said, 'At the present time I won't, because the one who is in charge of it is the same political self he has always been. But I will write for you on one condition: you're in Big Sandy and there's currently an evangelist that many have accused of assaulting Sue Ray Robinson. If you want to show that you're impartial, you go down and do an interview with Sue Ray Robinson and you put it in your *In Transition*, because you've already done one with the violator of her to give *his* story. If you do that, then I will put something in *In Transition*. If you do not, you're not honest.' ***They never did it!***

We still have some of these same things going on. If you're shocked at what Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting are writing in *The Journal* over the 'oneness of God' I've got a whole sermon series on *Who Was Jesus?* Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting made sure that they got in contact with every split-off group and their literature. So, we just went through the Bible and showed they're wrong.

Also note sermons:

- *Two Jehovahs of the Pentateuch*
- *Two Jehovahs of the Psalms*

Debunking the sacred-namers. I tell you what, we have an armament of literature that is going to be absolutely profound!

(go to the next track)

We're going to see in Titus that we do have to stand up for the Truth!

"...charging *them* in the sight of the Lord not to argue over words that are not profitable in any

way **but which lead to the subverting of those who hear**" (v 14).

- Have you seen some of your friends subverted by listening to false doctrines?
- Have not been fairly taught by the ministry so they are well grounded and know Truth from error?
- Are sucked away in a vortex of stupidity and lies?

Verse 15: "Diligently *study* to show yourself approved unto God..." Paul is telling Timothy to 'apply yourself.' There's one thing I know, brethren, I am never satisfied with what I have at the present day. The reason is because once you become satisfied, then you stop growing. God has designed the Bible in such a way that it is a whole lifetime project of study. That's important to realize. Paul is telling us, "...show yourself approved unto God..." Fruits will show in time.

"...a workman who does not *need to be* ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of the Truth; but avoid profane and vain babblings because they will *only* give rise to more ungodliness, and their words will eat away at the body like gangrene; of whom are Hymeneus and Philetus, who have gone astray from the Truth, claiming that the resurrection has already taken place, and are destroying the faith of some. Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands firm, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who calls upon the name of Christ depart from unrighteousness'" (vs 15-19).

For anyone who is going to teach, you never want to teach *your own ideas*. ***You want to teach the Word of God!*** Is there anything greater than the Word of God? *No!* That's what needs to be taught. That's why when you hear people combine psychology and the Word of God you know they're going to stray from what he was commanded.

2-Timothy 4:1: "I charge you, therefore..." To all those who would teach. If you have a notion that you want to teach, listen carefully:

"...in the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is ready to judge *the* living and *the* dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **Preach the Word!...**" (vs 1-2). You're not supposed to preach something else. Even Christ didn't preach of Himself; if He didn't how much less us?

"...Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine. For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves a *great number of* teachers, having ears itching to hear

what satisfies their cravings; and they shall turn away their own ears from the Truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths” (vs 2-4). They’re deceived, and we’ve seen that.

If you believe in Christmas, you believe in a fable. If you believe in Easter, you believe in a fable. Go to the pet store and say, ‘I want to buy a bunny rabbit, but I want to make sure that it lays boiled chicken eggs.’

Titus 1: “Paul, a servant of God... [Paul always identifies himself first] ...and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to *the* faith of God’s elect and *the* knowledge of *the* Truth that *is* according to Godliness; in *the* hope of eternal life, which God Who cannot lie promised before the ages of time, but revealed in its own set time in *the* proclamation of His Word, with which **I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior**” (vs 1-3). Think about that! You think about what Paul had to do because he *knew* that he was writing the Scriptures for God. **He knew it!** That’s something!

Verse 4: “To Titus, a **true son** according to **our common faith...**” Notice the relationship; Timothy was his ‘beloved son in faith’; here Titus is “...a true son...” What kind of relationship did they have? *A personal created relationship* because God was the One Who called them all. It is a *family relationship*, not a hierarchical relationship. There it is in the Bible very clear for us to see.

Verse 5: “For this cause I left you in Crete, so that you might set in order the things that needed to be done, and might ordain elders in every city, as I commanded you.” So, they already had it laid out what he was to do.

Again, here are qualification, v 6: “If any man be blameless, *the* husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of debauchery or rebellion. For it is obligatory that **as God’s steward** an overseer be blameless, not self-willed...” (vs 6-7). What kind of will? *God’s will!* That doesn’t mean that some people might not resist from time to time, but you still have to get across the will of God.

“...not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not a bully, not greedy for material gain; but hospitable, a lover of good, sound-minded, just, Holy, self-controlled, holding steadfastly to the faithful Word, according to the teachings of *Jesus Christ*, **so that he may be able both to encourage with sound doctrine and to convict those who are gainsayers**. For there are many rebellious and vain talkers and deceivers, especially those from *the circumcision party*, whose mouths must be stopped...” (vs 7-11).

That’s why when someone insults the Word of God, we’re under obligation to answer back and set the record straight.

Verse 11: “Whose mouths must be stopped; who are subverting whole households, teaching things which *they* ought not, for the sake of selfish gain.”

Selecting Elders:

Let’s see how they selected those who became elders. This is what we endeavor to do, and let’s understand that ordination does require the laying on of hands. Some people claim that word means to vote; we’ll see that has nothing to do with it when we get there.

Acts 6:1: “Now, in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a complaint by the Greeks against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. And after calling the multitude of disciples to *them*, the twelve said, ‘It is not proper for us to leave the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brethren, search out from among yourselves seven men of good repute, full of *the* Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.’ And this declaration was pleasing to all the multitude; and **they chose...**” (vs 1-5).

It doesn’t say how they chose, but at least they all agreed, and it was the majority. I’m sure there were some who didn’t agree; you’ll always have someone who doesn’t agree.

“...they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and *the* Holy Spirit; and Philip; and Prochorus; and Nicanor; and Timon; and Parmenas; and Nicolas, *who was* a proselyte of Antioch. *And they set them before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them*” (vs 5-6)—the doctrine of *laying on of hands*.

Some people say that you don’t need to lay hands for ordinations. What on earth is this? *This is the setting aside and the laying on of hands!* That’s the first example that we have.

Let’s see how the Apostle Paul was chosen; these are special circumstances. You know for sure that those of the circumcision party in Jerusalem would not come down and anoint Paul.

Sidebar: Do you know why the book of Hebrews does not say who wrote it? Even though it has the signs of Paul and Luke? *If anything came to Jerusalem*—which the book of Hebrews was written to the brethren in Jerusalem—*if it had Paul’s name on it, it would have been burned!* That’s why! It was

definitely Paul and Luke. In translating it, I can see that Paul was dictating it to Luke.

Here are special circumstances, Acts 13:1: “Now, there were certain **prophets and teachers** in the Church that was at Antioch...”—meaning they could foretell events or foretell the Word of God under inspiration; that’s what a prophet in the New Testament is—both.

“...including Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch), and Saul. And as they were ministering and fasting to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Separate both Barnabas and Saul to Me for the work to which I have called them.’ And when they had **fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and sent them out**” (vs 1-3). Can anything be more clear than this verse here.

This is a quick summary of the things that were done. The Greek word that is used here means *lifting up your hands*. It is also one that is used for voting, but this is not voting, because the ones who did it were Paul and Barnabas. Did they raise their hands and vote? *No, it hasn’t anything to do with that!*

As we saw, the congregation was asked for their input (Acts 6). So, now we have a different situation and this is the summary:

Acts 14:21: “And after preaching the Gospel to that city, and making many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch.” This is a summary of many weeks, maybe even months in one verse. They had many activities, a lot of teaching.

Verse 22: “Where they established the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *declaring* that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.” This was very vivid to them because Paul was stoned just a few months earlier.

Verse 23: “And when they... [Paul and Barnabas] ...had **chosen**... [appointed] ...**for themselves elders** in every church, *and* had prayed with fasting...” Obviously, this is also saying for any that they laid hands on them. You’re not going to have a vote between Paul and Barnabas as to who it’s going to be; what if it’s one to one? That’s the only place.

So, what you do when you have a difficult Scripture such as this, you *use the clear Scriptures* to give you the clear instruction as to what needs to be, as with fasting, praying and laying on of hands.

Let’s see the purpose of all of this; there is a

reason, and it’s not a political reward, it is not just to give a necessarily long service, but here is the whole reason for it. Most everyone begins with Eph. 4:11, but they don’t go too much further. The whole reason is stated later.

Ephesians 4:11: “And He gave some as apostles, and some **prophets**...”—inspired speaking, or inspired foretelling of an event that’s going to happen. I’ll tell you one thing that is true: *if you know the Word of God and you know how God works, you can say whether something is going to work or not!*

Someone got really mad at me when United Church of God first started. One week after it started I was down in Cantonment, Florida, visiting the brethren down there, and someone asked me what I thought about United. I said, ‘It’s going to fail.’ *It just started! Look at all the people they’ve got; and all the money they’ve got!* I said, ‘It’s going to fail.’ *Why?* ‘Because re-organization is not repentance. If there’s not repentance, I know from experience, it will fail.’

I don’t have to be a prophet, or claim to be a prophet, but if I know the Word of God, I know what’s going to happen. Is it failing? *Yes!* Has there been repentance? *No!* So, there are some who prophesy.

“...and some **evangelists**...” (v 11). Let’s understand that all of these are functions. All of the ministers are elders; those who are evangelizing are evangelists while they are evangelizing. If they are no longer evangelizing, then are they evangelists? *No, because they are not fulfilling that function!* Are they still elders? *Yes, because they were ordained as elders and overseers!*

In the churches we were associated with, it was some sort of great level of achievement to attain. Now we learn that the scale was down, not up!

“...and some, pastors... [shepherds; shepherd the sheep of God] ...and teachers” (v 11). There are varying degrees of teaching. I teach and I refer to myself as a minister, but I like to be thought more of as a teacher who teaches the Word of God. If the time comes that I have to evangelize, I will, but is that any great exaltation? *No!* I might be run out of town on a rail.

- For what purpose?
 - What is the function of all of this?
- You structure to the function.*
- What is the function?

Verse 12: “For the perfecting of the saints,

for *the* work of *the* ministry... [helping the brethren] ...for *the* edifying... [up-building] ...of the body of Christ; until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man... [spiritually mature person] ...unto *the* measure of *the* stature of the fullness of Christ” (vs 12-13). Is that a tall order? Is that a tall purpose?

That’s why I’ve said, what I want to do is teach you the love of God so that you may attain to fullness of the stature of Christ. That’s very important.

Verse 14: “So that we no longer be children, tossed and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men in *cunning* craftiness, with a view to the systematizing of the error; but holding the Truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ from Whom all the body...” (vs 14-16).

It is such a close, spiritual personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, that it is likened unto a single body. You can’t get any closer than that. There’s a great lesson with the Church between marriage—husband/wife—and the Church. They are to become one flesh because it is a *created* relationship. The wife is to submit herself to her husband *as unto the Lord*. And the husband is to love his wife *as Christ loves the Church*. Your whole standard is entirely different than a hierarchy. We’ve even had some evangelists brag that they ‘spanked’ their wives. What a shame! *What a shame!*

“...in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ from Whom all the body fitly framed and compacted together by *that which* every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in *the* measure of each individual part, is making the increase of the body unto *the* edifying of itself in love” (vs 15-16). That’s what the Church is to be. That’s why there are to be elders and overseers.

They are first to be proved, tried and tested, then we can see if they have the fruits or not. Then we have the congregation put the input of it:

- so that we understand if the person is qualified
- so that we understand if the person is loyal and faithful to Christ

Let’s see the whole motivation again, coming right back to square one:

John 21:15: “Therefore, when they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me more than these?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.’...”

There’s a play on words between ‘agape’—which Christ used twice, and ‘philo’—which is *friendship* love. Peter responded to Christ asking, ‘Do you *agape* Me?—which is Divine love. Peter responded with ‘philo’ love: “...‘Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.’...”

“...He [Jesus] said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’” (v 15)—who are purchased with His blood. He said to him again a second time... Why go through this three times? *Because Peter denied Him three times!* Here’s a reaffirmation: Are you really going to love Me? Did Peter love Jesus when he denied Him? *No, he did not!* So, Christ wanted to make sure that Peter got the point.

We want to make sure that those who are going to be elders and teachers with us *get the point!*

- Do you love God first, with all your heart, mind, soul and being?
- Do you love the brethren as the flock of God, to feed and serve them?

Then you can have love and loyalty stronger than a hierarchical command and control. Why? *Because it’s based on love, and there’s nothing greater to build things on than the love of God!* Is that not true? Is there anything greater? *Anything less than that is a substitute!*

Just like with me. I want you to love me because I love you, and I love Christ. I want you to love me because you love Christ and God the Father, too. Out of that comes:

- true love
- true loyalty
- true faithfulness
- true camaraderie
- true brotherhood

That’s how God wants the Church! I tell you, that’s how it’s going to be in the Kingdom of God. Do you suppose that it’s going to be any other way? *NO!* So, Jesus asked Peter the second time:

“...‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’.... [I imagine that He was looking Peter right in the eye] ...*And* he said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love [‘philo’] You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love Me?’....” (vs 15-16). Jesus came down to Peter’s level and said, ‘Do you love Me as a friend?’

“...Peter was grieved... [his carnality was coming out here] ...because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ *And* he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.’

Jesus said to him, ‘**Feed My sheep**’” (vs 16-17). That’s the whole point!

Why do we have elders ordained in the Christian Biblical Church of God? *This is the basis and foundation in which it is done!*

We are going to have an ordination here in a few minutes. Some of the congregation contacted me and said, ‘What do we do to have this man ordained?’ I said that you have to first of all have a meeting with everyone without the principal that you want to ordain and discuss it among yourselves. Ask yourselves if he has the fruits to be an elder for the local congregation? Then you pray and fast about it and many of them wrote me, and I had not one dissent. Later there was one dissent, which was after the fact.

A consensus is that the majority agreed. The one who dissented, let me beg you, please, let the Spirit of God help you give the benefit of the doubt so that we do not have any haggling and fighting and hassling over this.

I know that some will accuse me that I said thus and such. No! I’m straight on in what I’ve said. You can’t have total unanimous agreement. If I said ‘unanimous’ agreement, I meant *unanimity* which means *a consensus of the greatest majority*. So, we did have that.

We are going to have an ordination, and we are very happy to do this. I discussed it with the congregation, which is the oldest congregation with us. Carl and I went over the letters and the recommendations and covered the whole thing, and they agreed. I can’t be everywhere all the time in all places, and I can’t do all things.

I can only do what God wants me to do. But I have to follow the instructions that you set overseers for those who will be faithful in serving God and the brethren. They may not be dynamic speakers. They don’t have to be dynamic speakers, just able to teach the Word of God. If they can do it from the heart, that’s greater than some carnal lambaste of some person just up rewarding himself.

So, I’m very thankful that we have the opportunity to do so, at this point the ordination ceremony. That is a very moving occasion and I don’t think it’s proper or fitting to record prayers like this, which are for this one time special occasion. ‘

Let me just mention something else. All ordinations are public and need to be. I’m very happy to do it, and I look forward to those who are willing to yield themselves to God—love God and love the brethren—because I don’t know if I’m

going to live to see Christ return or not. That would be nice, on the one hand; but on the other hand, all the suffering and terrible things that are going to take place, it’s going to be horrendous, indeed!

So, it’s like in the book of Zephaniah, ‘What is the Day of the Lord to you?’ *It’s a day of darkness, cloudiness, death, doom and destruction—* which it’s going to be!

We need to warn the world, but we also need to make sure that the Church of God is solid in the love of God before new people can be brought in. That’s why the major work now needs to be to strengthen the brethren, not reach out and bring new people into chaos! Can you imagine bringing them into chaos? That the first time they come to church they hear, ‘If you want to keep the Sabbath you come at this time in the this building. If you want to keep Sunday, you go over to this building. If you want to have the Feast of Unleavened Bread and eat leaven, then you go over here to his table. If you want to have unleavened bread, you come over here. If you want to wash feet, then you go over here and take a towel and water. If you don’t want to wash feet, then you go over here.

That was the state of the Worldwide Church of God in the 1990s! That’s why we need to have the faithfulness, the unity from the love of God to accomplish this. As it was brought up in the congregation bringing this ordination: What about the future? What if this man goes out on his own?

I said that you cannot control the future today! But if he’s faithful today and tomorrow, the chances of him running off and doing his own thing are very remote. But even Paul said that there would ‘rise up among you’ who would do that. I think we can keep it down to a very low minimum if we follow what God wants us to do. We’re all under Jesus Christ. That’s what’s important!

I hope there will be many more ordinations, brethren. That we have *love, unity and loyalty*, because we all love and serve Christ, and we don’t have to demand it because we need command and control. That’s why that what we are doing is difficult. Anytime that you base it upon love, then you’ve got to get rid of self. Once you attain that, then it’s something that is going to last into eternity.

That’s what God wants!

Scriptural References:

- 1) Hebrews 10:25
- 2) Acts 20:28
- 3) Matthew 25:14-30
- 4) Acts 20:29-38
- 5) 1 Timothy 3:1-16
- 6) 2 Timothy 2:1-2, 14-19
- 7) 2 Timothy 4:1-4
- 8) Titus 1:1-11
- 9) Acts 6:1-6
- 10) Acts 13:1-3
- 11) Acts 14:21-23
- 12) Ephesians 4:11-16
- 13) John 21:15-17

Scripture referenced, not quoted: 1-Corinthians 11

Also referenced:

Sermon Series:

- *Judge Righteous Judgment*
- *Who Was Jesus*

Sermons:

- *Two Jehovahs of the Pentateuch*
- *Two Jehovahs of the Psalms*

FRC:bo
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