

Which direction is the Church going to?

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Foreword

In 1992 a new church was established in addition to the traditional denominational churches in Jászberény as a result of a crusade held by a renewed church in Budapest. The members of the new church had not been Christians before and had not belonged to any denomination. It was of the great grace of God.

After the initial problems and difficulties of the first two years, which were caused first of all by the fact that people were inexperienced and also the big distance from Budapest, out of this state of emergency God began to develop something. Men from the church with more experience (who came to the Lord 2-3 years earlier and had good witness from God) were appointed as elders by the pastor in Budapest the way it is written in the Bible. Having no previous tradition, the new elders of our church could only follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and what was written in the Bible. We looked for the answer for all our problems in the Bible and in most cases we found it.

After a time it struck us that we were doing things that were in contrast with what we had seen in other churches. From this time on, being consistent on the Word, we began to develop the practice of a Biblically functioning church.

The Lord often flows out His prophetic Spirit in midst of the church glorifying Himself with a lot of new songs and revelations. Day by day we experience what the fact that the church is the body of Christ means and that the members work for each other according to their ministries. The prophetic Spirit encourages us to share our visions approved by practice with others.

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I believe that if Jesus could be so bold as to entrust the the first 12 apostles (being fishermen and other illiterate people) with the Church after three years, the same way He is able to build His Church on "lay" people with the power of the Holy Spirit today, too.

Between 1995-98 we began to draft the spiritual vision the Lord had lead and is still leading us into step by step. As the result of several years' work we have managed to publish this book in its present form so that it could be available for others as well. This book is not a light reading written in an easy style, rather it is a study of the Word of God. Human traditions effect our Christian practice so powerfully that many times written Biblical thoughts seem to be strange. So we might need to study this book several times before we can be conscious about those Biblical principles which have already been forgotten and are written about in this book. The present book wants to focus on Biblical principles we don't often speak about.

If you have a desire to see church life rise to a new quality level and to feel the spirit of freedom and life in our everyday Christian walk then go and start using what the Spirit through this book prompts you.

An assiduous study and application will lead you to the renewal of your personal conviction and church life.

I wish you great joy and a prosperous Christian life the way we ourselves have and experience the blessings of God in our everyday lives.

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Sándor Abonyi

Introduction

We are living in the last times and this is what the Word says about this period of time: “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” Different spiritual movements are increasing with an incredible speed.

Today we have reached a stage when not only those communities that call themselves Christians or Christian-like churches – who, in fact, preach false doctrine – are claiming to be considered legal churches, but different eastern religions do so, even communities that proclaim themselves satanic.

Unfortunately, even the communities that call themselves Christian are rather divided nowadays.

Some interpret certain Biblical verses in different ways, while others create their own traditions by adding some human practices to God's Word. They denominate their communities names that distinguish them from others and live within their denominational limits. Some present day denominations unfortunately do not consider conversion as a basic requirement any more. Here arises the question: can we acknowledge them as Christian communities at all?

Only those can follow Jesus who have not only been saved and baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins but have stepped further into the baptism provided by the redemption of the Lord. He is the one that baptizes with Holy Spirit and fire.

In the previous century there were huge revivals all around the world due to the outflow of the Holy Spirit.

Different Pentecostal communities sprang into being, then in the following 30 – 40 years a charismatic movement developed that spread to the whole world. Through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit this movement has

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brought a lot of blessings and a true renewal into the Church, which had been spiritually almost dead. At the same time this spiritual renewal has also become the source of a lot of disorder. (Similar turmoil characterized the Pharisees at the time of Jesus, too, when they could not handle the new science of for example casting out demons.)

Many people who aren't able to get renewed, be born again and filled with the Holy Spirit are baffled not knowing if this new wave is truly from the Holy Spirit or comes from other spirits instead. Spiritually insensitive people easily commit the sin of blasphemy, while the careful just watch the signs and fruits this movement is bearing.

The visions and Biblical thoughts written in this book in the first place investigate the different occurrences from the point of view of the charismatic movement and try to provide explanation and further direction. In the first place - when expressing Biblical visions - I want to draw attention to the Biblical function of spiritual gifts, the necessity for good fruits, Biblical church leading, the importance of the prophetic and apostolic ministries and the priesthood of all believers. Today much distortion and deficiency can be found in the Church. These distortions and deficiencies can be basically traced back to the deficiency in leadership. Therefore we must place special emphasis on Biblical church leading, which is also the guarantee for Biblical church functioning. So it is of extreme importance that believers should be taught about, shown and be demonstrated Biblical church leading. It is strange that apostles and prophets, who are the foundation stones in the building of churches, can't be fit into the present practice of church leading. Why is it very important to have Biblical vision and practice

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concerning church leading? Because what we aim at is to restore the model of Biblical church and church leading in the Church so that walls can go down between churches and denominations and unity according to the will of God can come.

Many times during construction work we also have to pull down things that prevent the new building from being constructed. Sometimes this process might be painful, but it is necessary and important for the improvement; and all this must happen in love.

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1. Function and usage of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our days

It is wonderful to experience the Biblical truth that the age of apostles was not finished with the first apostles, but it has been going on since. The Holy Spirit works the same way He did at the very beginning. We can hear a lot of testimonies proving that even now and we ourselves can experience it day by day.

We cannot explain those wonders of God when, similarly to the first Pentecost, we get filled with the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit begin to work in us. We can only admire God when we start speaking in foreign languages that we have never learnt. We are amazed at the wisdom of the Lord He uses when speaking to us through prophecies. He rouses admiration when, through our praying, real healings happen. We marvel of the power, joy and peace that can be given by the Holy Spirit alone.

When we first experience the work of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives what we would like to do most is to run out into the streets and tell everybody about our experience with the Lord.

Which are these gifts? It is very important that we know and recognize them.

„Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.”

Co. 12.1.

„Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worked all in all. But the manifestation

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of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit. To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worked that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.” Co. 12. 4-11.

Mostly at the beginning, the functioning of the gifts may suffer distortions and can cause disorder because of the deficiency in the practice and knowledge of Biblical rules. This problem characterized the lives of the first churches, too. Similar problems were present also in the life of the young Corinthian church; therefore it was necessary for the apostle Paul to explain how the gifts of the Holy Spirit work (1Co. 14.). So it is also very important for us to know these verses and in all cases we need to remain under the control of our born again minds.

We know from the Word of God that the Holy Spirit is “the spirit of power, love and soberness”. Experience shows that we are most likely to break the following verses:

„If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge”

Co. 14. 27-29.

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Nobody is infallible, not even if God speaks through him or her! We need to be submissive, but at the same time we should encourage our brethren to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

„Follow after love and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy.” Co. 14.1.

Having in mind the interest of the building of the Church, the Word encourages us to prophesy. So we should encourage our brethren to prophesy, but we need to have wisdom in handling it. It is a wonderful feeling to experience the joy of the Holy Spirit; it is very good to stay in it. But it is also wonderful to have the power of the Lord manifested in our service and have wonderful healings and deliverance in our midst.

Who are the Charismatics? Charismatic problems

Those who have the gifts of the Holy Spirit work in them are called Charismatics nowadays. However, a Christian is basically charismatic, because Jesus Christ was charismatic, too. So only those can really follow Christ (be real Christians) who have the gifts of the Holy Spirit work in them. Nevertheless, despite the gifts of the Holy Spirit being manifested in the Charismatic movement, it is under the threat of different dangers.

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A vision

In the summer of 1994 I spent several days in the presence of the Lord and I received a lot of revelations and a spiritual vision from Him:

I saw the globe in an open vision with the continents on it. There I saw a large flow extending from North-America through Europe as far as Korea. It was an enormous flow. The Holy Spirit showed me in a spiritual way that it was the Charismatic movement in the world today, but there was something wrong with the movement. Following this vision the Lord turned my attention to the warning which had been written to the church in Laodicea.

“I know your works that you are neither cold or hot: I would you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing and know not that you are wretched and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked. I counsel then to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich and white raiment, that you may be clothed and that the shame of the nakedness do not appear and anoint thin eyes with eyes lave, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent.” Rev. 3.15-19.

Then the Holy Spirit led me to the following verses:

“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day.

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Lord, Lord! Have we not prophesied in Your name? and in Your name have cast out devils? and in Your name done many wonderful works? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you: depart from Me, you who work iniquity.“

Mat. 7.21-23.

So one of the dangers is to sink in the power of the Holy Spirit and to desire a permanent good feeling to such an extent that it is not the ministry, the deeds and the fruits that are important any more but the enjoyment of the feeling itself.

Church members have such a good time together in their communities that they seldom if ever think about preaching the Gospel and are mostly concerned about themselves. With time the pleasant atmosphere deteriorates and results in a lukewarm attitude: „Lord, *it is good for us to be here*, if you wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” - said Peter to Jesus on the mountain.

Another danger is the emphasis put on the signs and miracles. The verses above from Revelation and Matthew are quoted only sometimes and if ever are, we think they have nothing to do with us and we feel sorry for those people Jesus calls *evil-doers*.

Who are those in our days that are performing most of the wonders in the name of Jesus? Can they be the traditional churches who are averse to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and, what is more, they even speak against it sometimes? No way! They are endangered because they cannot distinguish between the work of the Holy Spirit and evil spirits (Satan), as we can read about it in Matthew 12.22-32.

The people who are performing a lot of wonders and great things in the name of Jesus, which the Word speaks

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about - and as we can see from the Word they are many -, cannot come but from the Christian movement of our days called Charismatic movement which attracts masses of people. The Word speaks here about *wonders done in the name of Jesus* where the power of the Lord is really present. These people take the visible manifestations as a absolute proof of their being the greatest servants of the Lord and are characterized by a kind of "charismatic pride".

Similarly to the time of Jesus, signs and wonders attract a lot of believers (and unbelievers as well), but Jesus never liked the wish for signs.

"*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them, and departed.*"

Mat. 16.4.

In the Charismatic movement there is natural and rightful demand for different charismatic manifestations and miracles, because Jesus promised that *signs will follow the believers*. The desire to experience the Lord's presence always through manifestations unfortunately has become recently a kind of basic need. If people don't fall at worship time or if they don't shake and laugh, the presence of the Holy Spirit is questioned. In such cases preaching sometimes serves the aim of bringing forth the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the church service itself becomes a kind of miracle show. Mind not to have *the tool become the target!* We should not let the demand of the crowd, the signs and miracles swindle us or else we will be surprised at the judgment just like those very charismatic people the Word speaks about.

We should not run after miracles! God has created natural rules in order to provide order on earth. He has

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right to change the natural rules, for example to stop the sun in the sky if needed. Exception proves the rule. If God very often changed natural rules created by Him by performing different miracles all the time it would mean that He does not consider them important, so there would be chaos on earth.

Purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit

Charismas from the Lord are very good things, *which are given with the purpose to serve and not for amusement or to feel something nice. Christianity is not a spiritual “body building”. The purpose is not the exhibition of power and externals.*

Jesus calls our attention to the fact that we should not look for signs and miracles, because they are able to mislead us, but rather we should look for the fruit.

„You will know them by their fruits.... A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bears bad fruit.”

Mat. 6.16-18.

The Word of God warns us against danger, but we are likely to ignore these words. Warning words may not be as pleasant for our ears as some other frequently quoted verses. The whole scripture is inspired by the Lord, so we must be careful neither to add nor take away from it!

Not denominations or organizations will be saved, but *people who are doing the will of the Father.* When Jesus told us that only a few will find the narrow road he did not mean that all who live in the world will go to hell and that all who belong to some kind of a church (hopefully to a Charismatic one) will surely be saved.

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From the quotation above from Matthew we can see that it is not the signs following us that are the sure guarantee to be saved! It would be horrible to get the kind of surprise on the day of the Final Judgment the Word tells us about! Then we would excuse in vain: But Lord! Haven't I prophesied, cast out devils and done mighty things in your name?

2. How can we know someone is a Christian?

There is a great variety of churches and movements in our days and it is extremely difficult to know which one is genuine and that who a real Christian is. What are the characteristics on the basis of which you can decide for sure who a genuine Christian is?

- ❑ a profound knowledge of the Bible?
- ❑ a restrained life lived through religious standards?
- ❑ praying more hours a day, sometimes even in the streets, carrying a Bible?
- ❑ signs that follow the believers as the Bible says?

The characteristics on the basis of which you can distinguish one person from another are those that nobody else possesses. This way Christians also have characteristics that are definitely owned only and exclusively by them. It is a vital question in our world confused by different religions.

So which are those characteristics the Word tells us about on the basis of which we can know for sure if somebody is a Christian?

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Jesus says:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”

Joh. 13.34-35.

According to the statement of Jesus there is something in His disciples (Christians following Jesus) that they can be recognized from: the love from God they love one another with. It must be a love that draws everybody's attention. This love is not based on emotions or sentiments, but is an attitude no one can falsify or imitate.

Where does the Word write about this love and its characteristics?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” Gal. 5.22-26.

We can see that the love apostle Paul tells us about is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in Christians. Only those born again Christians are able to bear it who live according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Apostle Paul writes the following about the Christians in Corinth:

“So that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:” Co. 1.7.

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What does that mean? It means that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit worked in that church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not natural human abilities, but supernatural gifts, abilities from the Lord. These gifts all worked in the church of Corinth without exception. It would be very nice to have the same in many present day churches! However, there were some difficulties concerning the right usage of the gifts in the church of Corinth, the same way there are in present day churches. Therefore apostle Paul regulated the using of gifts and made clear the relationship between gifts, ministries and the fruit. We had better pay attention to that for it was also written for our benefit.

It is wonderful if we have the gifts functioning. Apostle Paul was also happy about it. However, we should not forget that these gifts were given for service with no other purpose but to build the Body of Christ.

The Word says:

“But earnestly desire the best gifts: and yet I show you a more excellent way.” Co. 12.31.

What is the more excellent way that stands over gifts and is even more important than gifts? According to the Word it is Godly love.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, *I am nothing*. And though I bestow all

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my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profited me nothing.”

Love

- ❑ suffers long, and is kind;
- ❑ love envies not;
- ❑ love vaunts not itself, does not puff up,
- ❑ does not behave itself unseemly,
- ❑ seeks not his own,
- ❑ is not easily provoked, thinks no evil;
- ❑ rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
- ❑ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

"Love never fails: but whether there be prophecy, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."

Co. 13.1-8.

"Follow after love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy."

Co. 14.1.

What do these words mean?

They mean that we may speak in tongues, prophecy and may do wonders by faith and distribute all our riches, but it is worth NOTHING if we don't have love. We can easily check if we have this love or not. We just have to examine ourselves if we have the characteristics the apostle Paul mentioned as the characteristics of love. These are the very characteristics people can recognize from that we are Christians. This is what Satan is not able to imitate, because the source is the Holy Spirit. The reason why supernatural gifts are not characteristic signs

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of Christians is because Satan is able to bring forth similar signs as well.

“For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to deceive, if it possible, even the elect.” Mat. 24.24.

“And he does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.” Rev. 13.13-14.

We can find plenty of examples in the Word where Satan does miracles. We have to remember that the magicians of the pharaoh in Egypt could change the stick into a snake the way Moses did and that Baal's priests could prophesy as well. Therefore we can expect the same with the false prophet who will prepare the way before the Antichrist.

Now we can see that signs can easily deceive us and as the Word says “if it is possible, even the elected ones”! It is because signs are not characteristics of Christians but are just signs which follow the believers.

“And these signs shall follow them who believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went

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forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”

Mar. 16.17-20.

God anoints His Word and verifies it with signs. But we have to be careful because Satan can do similar signs to mislead us. There is only one thing and it is *love, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, that infallibly distinguishes Christians* from the people in the world who follow the emotions or wishes of the flesh and from other people who are involved in occultism, might they have good intentions.

In our material world pursuing the wishes of the flesh, intolerance is especially high, envy, arrogance and pride are common and we can too often experience fight for money, infernal and brutal actions, anger, falseness (lie, swindle) and malicious joy. If we, Christians, in a world that so sharply shows the signs of the last times can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit ,which is love, our lives will undoubtedly become so striking in the eyes of people (lights of the world) that nobody will miss it for sure. Even those fleshy people who are not able to sense spiritual matters will notice the kind of behavior of Christians they are incapable of doing due to their fleshy nature. These are the simple and obvious things the Lord has invented to make Christianity desirable and draw people to Himself.

This was the reason why Jesus gave the new commandment to his disciples to love one another as He loved them. This new commandment is still valid and nobody can give other command. However, there is somebody who won't rest and keeps trying day by day. It is Satan, who draws our attention to follow signs and miracles and leave love behind. It is because he is not

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able to produce love, but signs he can. This is how he prepares the way for the Antichrist misleading many, if possible, even the elected ones. Let us be watchful and not allow him to mislead us! Christianity is not an alternative spiritual movement, but the community of believers who know God, have been born again and cleaned from their sins by Jesus Christ doing the will of God.

Following the truth in love

The TRUTH the Bible is talking about is an absolute truth in every case.

„Jesus said to him, I am the way, *the truth*, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me. „ Joh. 14.6.

The Bible – as the written Word of God - tells about an existing truth for all cases and this truth is Jesus Christ, the Word that became flesh, who says:

„...for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto *the truth*.” Joh. 18.37.

God wants „ all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” 1Ti. 2.4.

What shall we do then?

„But seek you first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;” Mat. 6.33

So truth has to be searched for.

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What is a *righteous man* in the light of the Bible like?

- does what the Law commands Romans 2.13.
 - has the Lord on his or her side 2 Chron 19.11.
 - the righteous is as bold as a lion Proverbs 28.1.
 - is anointed by the Lord Psalm 45.7.

The righteous man becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God. This state fills you with joy and peace, but it doesn't mean that you can live your life without problems. On the contrary, *the Lord allows a lot of trials in your life to test your persistence:*

- The Lord tests the righteous: Psa. 11.5.
 - Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all. Spa. 34.19.
 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake: Mat. 5.10.

Why is so little said about righteousness nowadays even in Christian circles? One of the most frequently used words in the Bible is righteousness. In our every-day Christian walk we seem to overlook righteousness and fall into the trap of unrighteousness due to following "love", which is not from the Lord, sometimes even tolerating sin.

What is the relationship between righteousness and the love of God? How can we follow righteousness at the same time acting in love?

Love is not always pleasing to us.:

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„For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.” Heb. 12.6.

All these things are happening for our good with the purpose to have us as true sons and not as illegitimate children. We need to remember how Jesus drove out hawkers from the temple in Jerusalem saying:

„Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.” John. 2.17.

Let us also remember how Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and hypocrites who kept tempting him:

„Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”
Mat. 23.15.

„Woe to you, you blind guides,...” Mat. 23.16.

„You fools and blind:...” Mat. 23.17.

Should a Christian today announce the truth in such a direct and open way he or she would be immediately thought to be extremely unloving and rude. However, the Word says that the love of God does include it, for Jesus himself did accordingly.

Jesus said:

„....as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” John. 13.34.

The relationship between truth and love can be understood from the following words:

„....I am the way, *the truth*, and the life:...” Joh. 14.6.

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„Let all your things be done *with love*.“ Co. 16.14.

„But speaking *the truth in love*, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:“ Eph. 4.15.

If you do not walk in *truth* means you walk in *falsehood!* It is mostly through the ministry of the prophets that we can get a picture of the importance of proclaiming the truth and the consequences that follow.

We know that prophets are the people of God the Lord is fond of, whose ministry is to proclaim the truth. Henceforth they are not popular people everybody likes. We know well how much they suffered in Old Testament times, and what is more, they were usually murdered by their own nation.

„O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone them which are sent to you, how often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not!“

Mat. 23.37.

God chooses people and gives them power and authority to declare the truth to the people (like in ancient times, the same today). The way people resisted the truth and killed the prophets in those times, we should not think it is any different today. If we are really Christians, we must learn to accept warning and reproof with joy, because they are for our good. Anger and resentment or murdering of prophets are not reactions the Lord wants us to have if we are faced with the truth we do not like.

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3. Can we lose salvation?

God calls us, but we must endure to the end of our lives so we don't become unworthy in some way, because

„But he that shall endure until the end, the same shall be saved.”
Mat. 24.13

There are serious temptations on the way which even apostle Paul could not spare for himself.

He writes about them in the verses of 1 Co 9.24-27:

„Know you not that they which run in a race run all, but one received the prize? So run, that you may obtain. And every man that strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beaded the air: But *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*”

King Saul's example, how he became unworthy

Let us have a good look at the type of dangers that threaten us, due to which we might become unworthy, even if God has called us.

We have an example to demonstrate it with and study it, which is the story of Saul, the first king of Israel. King Saul was called and anointed by God through the prophet Samuel. Saul prophesied with the prophets, however, he suffered defeat in the denial of the flesh, therefore God

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rejected him. Let us have a look at it in detail why and how it could happen:

„Samuel also said to Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint you to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore heed the voice of the words of the LORD.

Thus says the LORD of hosts I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now *go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass...* ".

„And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is over against Egypt. And *he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.* Then came the word of the LORD to Samuel, saying *It repented me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and had not performed my commandments.* And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal.” 1Sa. 15. 1-12.

Saul knew the will of God, but he didn't perform according to that:

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- ▣ Against the expressed will of God he did not listen to the word of the Lord. He spared Agag and the best of the animals because he wanted to please the people.
 - ▣ He was impatient, could not wait for Samuel to come and showed the offering instead of him. (He performed the ministry of someone else.)
 - ▣ He had an altar built for himself after the victory giving glory to himself.
- Despite the exhortation of Samuel he began to make excuses instead of confessing his sin.

We know that though God had rejected him as king and had chosen David instead of him, who was dear in the sight of the lord, Saul still remained a king for many years. Similarly, a lot of people are ministering nowadays despite the fact that God has already rejected them.

The message of the story of king Saul

We surely identify a lot of problems of ours when reading the story of king Saul. Cases come into our minds when God showed us what to do but we did not obey fearing that people might get hurt or even leave the church.

We must ask ourselves the question: Where am I now? What has the Lord called me for? Have I taken the place which is for me or perhaps the place of somebody else? Or perhaps the Lord has already found me unworthy without me noticing it? Is it that I do not dare to confess my sins and repent only make excuses instead?

What kind of altars have *I* built for myself? Our church (some pastors say: my church) is the best!

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What ways do we ensure publicity for ourselves - taking glory away from the Lord? (flags, coat-of-arms, marching songs, T-shirts with the name of our church on, celebration of anniversaries, etc.)

I'm the best, most successful pastor or church leader! *I'm* the best worship leader! *My* preaching is what people like most! *I'm* the best solo singer or the best musician!

Are these questions and statements familiar to us?
The *letter to the Laodiceans* says:

“I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” Rev. 3.18-19.

We can see how important it is to stand our place, be in our own ministry and fulfill the will of the Father for us.

What should we do then?

We should

- turn away from our sins,
- get filled with the Holy Spirit again and again
- find the will of God for us and fulfill it without fail,
- desire the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but above all to prophecy (build not only ourselves, but the Church, too),
- bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit (show visible fruit in what we do),

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What are these fruits?

- *Love* from God: as it is described in 1 Co 13.

- *Joy*: What is the source of our joy?

“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

Luk. 10.19-20.

- *Peace, forbearance*:

Not the way the world gives them. Could we praise God in prison like Paul and Silas did closed in pillory?

Acts 16.23 - 25.

- *Goodness*: Do good actions accompany our faith in all cases?

- *Faithfulness*: How much can we remain faithful to the will of the Father day by day? Despite all trials can we stick to the Lord, our church and our brothers and sisters?

- *Gentleness*: Jesus sent out his disciples saying to them:
„Be as gentle as pigeons ... ”

Do we behave like pigeons, disciples sent to the world?
Are we disciples at all in the biblical sense of the word having been empowered by God, or just church members?

- *Moderation*: We should not carry matters to the extremes, because it is childish behavior. We should ask for wisdom from God!

Which direction is the Church going to?

4. Condition and leadership of the Church today

We all know very well the present condition of the Church. Church principals bear different titles which express subordination and superiority. The unification of the Church with the state and the creation of state churches in the past centuries resulted in the formation of the same organizational structures within the Church as in the world. As a consequence, state can control the Church.

Manfred Haller writes the following about the condition of the Church:

„The majority of Christians belong to different historical churches or other communities or sects and the number of these groups adds up to thousands. In most villages and towns on the earth where there are Christians living we can find two or more places where they meet in so-called churches. However, even in a settlement with only one "church" in it it is by no means a local church but a local representation of some kind of a denomination. All of these "local churches" are connected to an alliance of a denomination or mother church which they bear the name of and which they belong to.

These local groups are lead by the organizations or movements they belong to. How can the Church be dissipated to such an extent? The history of the Church shows that the origin of most denominations and churches can be traced back to a certain movement or person God called forth to carry out His will. These men

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and women often had the task to discover and enlighten biblical doctrines forgotten long before which they did laying down their whole lives. The Lord supported their ministries and through them He could draw many people into relationship with Himself. People, receiving help in some way or another, gathered around the ministry of those men and women. *Today all churches and denominations have a doctrine, certain knowledge or experience their founder preached and taught making it the foundation of their church, which the members are committed to represent, preserve and defend.*

Each of these churches, though having their own distinctive characteristics, try to preach the Gospel and operate their churches in a biblical way.

If we compare the New Testament pattern for churches with the diversity of denominational churches, we can definitely say that what they have in common is that none of them represent Christ in the given settlement but their own ministry, organization, experience or knowledge out of which their churches developed.

Watchman Nee writes the following concerning the condition of the Church:

„There are Nicolaitanes in the Church and Christianity sank into Judaism. The Lord loves those that refuse the class of mediators. Those who were washed by his blood were made direct participants in spiritual issues. The Church must stand on this ground or else it will become Judaism.”

“... In the Catholic church we can find priesthood, in the Anglican church the clerical system and in the independent churches the pastoral system. In each we

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can find the mediator class competent in spiritual things. But God wants to found a Church where He can directly preach the Gospel without a mediator class. The church that is over as soon as the whole Gospel operates in it cannot be a true church.”

“...The Bible only knows about brothers and sisters. There are people with pastor skills, but no pastoral system. The pastoral system is based on human traditions.”...

“... Kings and heads of states do not listen to the people, but expect the people to listen to them. In politics people want to become kings the same way they want to become kings in religious matters as well. This is how state churches are created. And the people do not consult the Bible what the real Church is like. They do not find out from the Bible whether it is God's will or not to have a state church. The way independent churches came into being later is the same. Their creation was due to the proclamation of certain doctrines. A church was created when somebody realized the importance of adult baptism. The Presbyterian Church was formed on the teaching of the presbyterian system. The formation of new churches was not due to the church's seeing what a church is about but rather - churches were formed on the ground of different doctrinal systems.”

William Mac Donald writes similarly about the condition of the Church:

„ ... we must truly admit the fact that we can find neither the concept of professional clergy nor ordained and employed pastors in the New Testament. We can't read anywhere about one person authorized to lead a local church.

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So the idea of a special class of clergy or ordained and employed pastors not only cannot be supported by the New Testament but - as we are convinced - opposes it. First of all it affronts the basic principle of royal priesthood (1Peter 2.5-9.). In Old Testament times a special class of men existed whose task was to mediate between God and the people. However, in Christianity all believers are priests endowed with all the privilege and responsibility of priesthood. The one-person leading system practically silences worship and blocks the priesthood ministry of believers. Moreover it frustrates the free practicing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the church (Co. 12.14.) by arbitrarily limiting the ministry to one official person or group of people. Furthermore it sets up limits in the actual practicing of baptism and in the partaking in the Lord's Supper as well, though such distinctions are unknown in the Scripture... One person priesthood has the additional danger of people gathering around a person instead of the name of the Lord. It is easy to see if it is a person that attracts people to a local church or not, for if that person leaves, attraction also leaves the church immediately. Whereas if the saints come together because the Lord is among them, they will remain faithful (to Him) even if a person leaves.

Theoretically not, but practically professional priesthood contributed to a great extent to making the truth that Christ is the Head of the Church obscure. (Eph. 1.22.)

In some cases they openly deny this. For the statement that the present professional priesthood is the equivalent of the New Testament board of elders, we have the following answer: The New Testament local church always had more than one leader (bishops, supervisors, elders) and they lead the life of one or more churches not only one individual."

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In the above global reviews we can clearly see the present condition of the Church thanks to the clear vision of Manfred Haller, Watchman Nee and William Mac Donald. Today, as we can perceive, the Church is lead by Nicolaitanes and false apostles:

“But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.” 2Co. 11.12-13.

“I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you can't bear them which are evil: and you have tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars:” Rev. 2.2.

“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate” Rev. 2.6.

5. What is a local church?

There is a lot said about the Church both in our every-day Christian walk and also in the Bible. The Church is the most important creation of God here on Earth and the Word says that it is the Body of Christ. Do we really know what the Church is when we use the word and speak about it? The Bible also very often uses the word church. We are inclined to think that it is easy to define the concept of church: a group of believers having faith in God. There are such a lot of different organizations in the world and within the church. What is the difference then between an organization and The Church? In order to gain clear vision on this issue let us have a look at some examples in the Word and the writings of some servants of God who are enlightened concerning this question.

The divided Body of Christ

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you said, *I am of Paul; and I of Apollo's; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?* was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” 1Co.1.10-13.

“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able.

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For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men? For while one said, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollo's; are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollo's, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollo's watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planted any thing, neither he that watered; but God that gives the increase.” 1Co.3.2-7.

We can see that the gathering of groups around one person ment problems even in the first churches which became a source for divisions and against which Paul most resolutely warned the believers.

How many “Pauls” and “Apolloses” are there in the present day Church? How many of them collect the believers around themselves heading and controlling the "flock" in one person? Making use of their personal influence they establish national, even international organizations and in an unscriptural way they often cause divisions among born-again Christians living in the same town gathering them into organizations of different names. It is a condition that reminds us of the one in Corinth. If you study the Bible you will only come across church names like "the church in Corinth, in Ephesus, ...; apostle Paul, evangelist Philip, and elders of the church in Ephesus.

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Local church, as the Body of Christ

Jesus speaks in parables many times and mentions common and lifelike material things to explain spiritual reality. He says that the Church is similar to the human body, and sets up similarity between the members of the church and the parts of the body (eyes, feet, hands, ears). *The Word calls the Church the Body of Christ.* Remembering this makes us able to understand a lot of other things.

Human communities are always directed by somebody and are organized into one form or another. These organizations are characterized by the fact that all have a (human) person organizing it who brings about a structure which is naturally headed by him or her. These organizations are always directed vertically with the founder at the top. *The head of such organizations* is always a man or a woman who founded the organization. The bigger an organization is, the more difficult it is to control and one person is not enough to keep it together. So it becomes necessary to have subordinate leaders under the top leader as it is usual with organizations. This is the pattern followed by the Church as well due to its easy controlling system. Satan is extremely happy about it, because this way man became the head instead of Christ. So those church organizations that bear the above signs of having 2-5 layers of subordinate leaders are not scriptural and cannot play the role and carry out the mission the Lord planned for His Church. *The Church is the Body of Christ which is not an organization established by man but is the creation of God. The Church is an organism, alike the human body, where the head is invisible because the true Head is Jesus Christ*

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and the Holy Spirit is the person who is organizing the Church.

Look at the following quotations written about the Church as the Body of Christ by different servants of God.

Manfred Haller writes:

„You are the Body of Christ – wrote Paul to the Corinthians referring to all believers living in Corinth. Paul's letter was addressed to the Church of God that was in Corinth. From this we can understand that the Church of God in Corinth and the Body of Christ are one and the same. Body is the visible, material part of our beings. If we want to define the Church as the Body of Christ we can say that it is the visible, material part of the invisible Lord Jesus Christ. There is no invisible Church as such! The New Testament shows the Church everywhere only one way: in the form of a local Church, which means all the believers in a particular place who have been born from Christ and are living in Christ. The Bible knows only one definition for the Church: Christ is everything in each member. This was true for Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, etc. wherever churches existed. The same is valid for today for every place of the earth. The Church is a spiritual reality which is not submitted to “historical development”. The same way as “Christ is exactly the same person yesterday, today and tomorrow” the Church is the same at all times, because it is His body. It is Christ in all born again men and women. The so-called “Historical development of Christianity” is nothing else but the history of the "flesh", the natural man and that of "old Adam.”

Watchman Nee writes as follows:

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„The unity of Christians has to be realized in Christ. Therefore we studied the Bible thoroughly. Step by step it became clear for us that whatever exceeds the borders of a place (town or village) is not church and whatever does not expand as far as the borders of a place is not church either.”

Strong and disillusioning statement is said by Watchman Nee. That means that according to the Bible God has one, only one church (consisting of born-again people) in a given place. From this follows that those communities which exceed the borders of one settlement calling themselves "church" are not churches in the biblical sense but are organizations only. The will of God is to have biblical churches and not organizations.

It is interesting to have a close look at Paul's letters. Can you see who the letters are addressed to? The following verses show that *Paul in all cases wrote to all the saints sanctified in Christ Jesus living in a specific town and not only to a part of them.*

“Into the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, ...”

Co. 1.2.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints, which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: “

Eph. 1.1.

“Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: “

Phi. 1.1.

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“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse:...”

Col. 1.2.

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, *into the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ:...*”

1Th. 1.1.

From these verses we can clearly see what the local church is: *all the saints in Christ Jesus who live in the same place.*

There are some letters where Paul extends the addressing of the letter to more local churches at the same time writing to more than one church. In some other cases asks them to read out the letter in some other churches as well. *Paul's letters are not pastoral letters (written by a pastor) but letters of an apostle to churches the Lord has trusted him to take care of.*

These groups of churches were not organizations neither did they bear names. *Paul had never established organizations with himself being the boss, on the contrary, as seen in the Corinthian letter, he most definitely protested to such ones.*

Letter to a church and to other saints around:

„Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, *unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:”*

2Co. 1.1

Letter to some churches:

„And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galicia:”

Gal. 1.2.

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The following verses are addressed not only to the Corinthians but to all saints in all places who call onto the name of the Lord.

„Into the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:“ Co. 1.2

We can see that according to the Word of God distinction has to be made between :

- local church (the body of Christ in a town; all the saints in a specific town)
- apostolic field (e.g. the group of those local churches which Paul was responsible for)
- the Church of God (The Body of Christ), as the whole of local churches on earth

The huge number of "churches" and "denominations" we have on earth now does not exist in the Word. *According to the Bible God has only one church in one place and all born again believers belong to that.* Consequently, it is not a church but a kind of organization unless all believers belong to it living in the same settlement and if it does not expand to other places either. God has only one church on the earth. The great variety of different "churches" and "denominations" are nothing else but human organizations which split the Body of Christ. It is the will of God to have churches which are exactly the way the Word of God says they are to be.

We pray that all those church leaders who divide the Body of Christ today could receive biblical vision from

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God. Let us pray that all jealousy, self-respect and self-justification leave the Body of Christ, that at last all believers (though living in the same neighborhood or family but representing different denominations and their teachings) could be parts of a biblical local church.

We pray that the organizations calling themselves “churches” or “local churches” but are really not could give up their own structures and organizations for the sake of unity they want so much in order to have the BODY OF CHRIST formed. .

The local church in practice

How can we understand what a local church is in the light of what has been said above? What does the terminology "one place - one local church" mean? What does the Word write about its function?

In the present situation - when in a settlement (a capital, a big town, a village) there are several groups of more denominations having their own boards of leaders (one pastor or elders) – how can it be realized? A lot of misunderstanding could be avoided if we read the Word carefully because one is bound to think of the present practice immediately and not the biblical way.

Here are the answers to the questions above in the light of the Word. The Word says:

“I will give you thanks in the great congregation: I will praise you among much people.” Psa. 35.18

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“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but proclaimed it to you, and have taught you publicly and *from house to house*,” Act. 20.20

“Salute the brethren, which are in Laodicea and Nymphas and *the church, which is in his house.*” Col. 4.15

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church.” Act. 20.17

From these verses we can see the following as regards to the local church:

- a local church in a place has *only one leadership (elders or presbyters)*
- but a *local church can gather both in public and in houses*
- a *local church can be under the supervision of only one apostle*

The Word is very practical and doesn't speak about believers of a capital with more million inhabitants gathering at the same place.

The present situation is the following:

- more denominations have “churches” or „home groups” in the same settlement
- they have their own leadership each
- they belong to a central board of leaders

Recently efforts have been made to break through the walls of denominations. Believers from different denominations (organizations) gather together, have meetings where they have communion. Furthermore leaders from different "churches" in a settlement come together to pray, to get vision together or to preach the gospel together. These are very good signs showing that

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God's people desire biblical direction, but this is not biblical unity. From the present signs we can see that God is working on the renewal of the Church and the creation of local churches and a lot of other things point to the right direction. However, it is necessary to see the goal and the good beginning needs continuation in order to accomplish the renewal of the Church.

In fact, different denominational "churches", groups, home groups that exist in the same settlement (in the same town) biblically could qualify as *a small church and these home churches should make the local church – big church – in a settlement under one leadership (presbyters) and one apostolic team*. Nevertheless, at present we can see a strong effect which separates these small churches from each other though they are situated in the same settlement: their denominations' head-offices, which are in different towns though, control the small "churches" in other settlements as well. As a result, we have several denominational "churches" in a settlement each belonging to its mother church which is situated in some other town.

Paul warns against these dangers of division.

"Now this I say, that every one of you says, *I am of Paul; and I of Apollo's; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?* was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" Co. 1.12-13.

We can see in the Word that it is the local church which is in the center and therefore it is necessary to have strong local churches. However, it can only be realized if the leaderships of denominations weaken and in the end fully stop functioning so that home churches in the same

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settlement could belong only to one apostolic team. In the Word we can find a general principle for churches: All believers have to belong to the local church where they live. There they are known and there they can live their communion day by day and in a natural way they can be supervised as well.

What hope can we have to have this present chaotic situation put right? In human ways it is not possible. Neither a kind of ecumenism with human power nor melting every church into one denomination's "church" could give the solution. God is the one that will accomplish these things and if He plans something He will also finish it. When and how are these things going to be realized? I don't have a vision for that. If a big Christian persecution or the mighty work of the Holy Spirit or something else is which will break down the present walls, I don't know. In any case it is good if we know from the Word what is right and we keep to it because God will surely do according to his Word. If we are able to see the goal we can work with God as his partners and not against Him.

Which direction is the Church going to?

6. Leadership of the local church

What does God think about leadership and the form of leadership? How can we know it? Is it a fundamental question in the Bible or not?

Even at the time of the Old Testament this is what He said:

“And you shall cry out in that day because of your king which you shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.” 1Sa. 8.18-20.

“And the LORD said to Samuel, *Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king.* ...” 1Sa. 8.22.

In these verses we can see a situation when the church and the elders were not satisfied *to have only the elders* of Israel to lead them. They wanted a king over the elders to lead them in one person like it was with other nations. Therefore God gave them what they had asked for, because He saw that they wanted a king anyway. However, He called their attention to the result their decision would bring about through the prophet Samuel. It is possible that a thing starts very well, as it was with king Saul – first king of Israel – who started as an anointed king. In some way it can work out well:

“If you will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the

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LORD, then shall both you and also the king that reigned over you continue following the LORD your God: “

1Sa. 12.14.

From these verses we can see that if the "king" (pastor, leader of a church) rules over believers both the pastor and believers will only be saved :

- if they fear the Lord and serve Him
- if they are not disobedient to the Word of the Lord
- if they follow the Lord their God.

That it is not the perfect pattern God wanted to give his people is clearly explained:

“...I will call onto the LORD, and he shall send thunder and rain; that *you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking you a king.*” 1Sa. 12.17.

Let us not be wicked either and let us not wish for a "king" (one person leader of the church) over the elders. However, if we insist on having a "king" by all means, God will fulfill our request the same way He gave a king to Israel as well. Mind you that in this case the warning of prophet Samuel is also valid for us as well.

In the Book of Kings we can see the history of one person leadership. The outcome is generally negative for both kings and people in Israel. But how does all this relate to our present age and what relationship can it have with church leadership?

The first New Testament churches lead by elders started very well, but during the centuries that followed a clerical elite was formed with great authority, who gathered

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enormous riches, vast lands and had their own armies (see the warning in 1 Sa 8.10-17.).

The pope had authority over kings and nations for many centuries. He nominated and destroyed kings, sent Christians to the stake. Using a phrase from the Bible we could say that the pope became the king of kings and the lord of lords. Popes consider themselves regents of Christ on Earth and their infallibility has been made a doctrine. The person who comes not through the clouds and thinks himself on earth god in one person, god in flesh, a divine one is called “Antichrist” in the Bible.

Sometimes it only depends on circumstances and possibilities how strong the power of a church priesthood which is built by layered subordination can be. Reformed churches and centralized charismatic churches are unfortunately not free from this mistake either. Unfortunately they have also adopted this bad practice.

Contrary opinions

A lot of teachings say that Timothy and Titus were also one person leaders, that is to say: pastors of churches. We should read carefully the book of Acts and the letters of Paul and we will find that Timothy, Titus and others were ministers sent to a local church with a specific reason and for a specific period of time.

They never became leaders in one person for any church, rather were entrusted with the task to “to warn, to reprove and to exhort”... or “ to do the work of the evangelist”, ...etc.

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Others might identify the “angel of the church” in Revelations with the pastor of our present day practice. However, the “angel of the church” can only be those people in any church who are able to get revelations from the Lord in a spiritual way for a specific church. It may be a prophet whose ministry cannot work properly in the present day practice of the church and through whom the Lord may reprove the pastor who cannot hear the voice of God similarly to how it was in the days of Eli who was reproved by the young Samuel.

Let us have a look at what the Word tells us about it:

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things said he that holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; “

Rev. 2.1.

“But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. *He that has an ear, let him hear* what the Spirit said to the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

Rev. 2.6-7.

We can see that this person is not necessarily one of the leaders but can be any member of the church who has ear to hear the voice of the Spirit.

Which direction is the Church going to?

There must be a pastor or else it will not work

Many people don't dispute - because it is indisputable according to the Word - that the local church has to be led by more people (presbyters, elders), but saying that it doesn't work in this form they think it is necessary to have a leader over them. The insistence on the traditional leadership by one person is due to the following:

- ❑ deficiency of confidence in God's Word
- ❑ lack of well operating patterns
- ❑ human ambition to overtake control

The majority of people represent this attitude. There are some people teaching against the Word of God in this matter because they don't have a vision concerning biblical leadership according to the Word. Obviously, they follow some unbiblical patterns in practice as well. There are people who have good vision concerning this issue and they also teach it but follow a different practice not thinking this question could have such big importance saying that it will do both ways. The Word of God speaks differently about this problem and even calls it evil when in 1st Samuel the elders ask for a king over themselves.

Causes of distortions

According to the original plan of God not even in the time of the Old Testament was the leadership model of one person required (king over the elders) though the Holy Spirit had not yet been filled onto all people as it was after Pentecost. According to the Word, not only some people of God can have the Holy Spirit but all. Unfortunately there is the wide-spread view that there are "professional believers" (priesthood) and non-professional (lay) believers. It was true for Old Testament times, however, it has basically changed in the time of the New Testament. Unfortunately, from this point of view most present churches are in the state of the Old Testament.

We should notice that what was started by the first apostles and what we can see in the lives of the first churches in the Acts and the Letters is valid for us, too. Nobody should strive to become a one person leader of his/her church with reference to the "good king" example of David, because the New Testament gives us a better pattern to follow. We can surely identify pastors of a lot of churches who want to be good kings but somehow do not succeed in doing so.

It is no wonder they do not succeed, for a person born in sinful body, even if born again, is tempted in the body. So a human can be mistaken and cannot take the place of the anointed one, Christ, and cannot function as the "head". During the last few centuries we got used to traditional forms to such an extent that we do not really understand what the Bible writes about. The models of our environment affect us so much - as it is with other

Which direction is the Church going to?

nations as well - that we take it rare and extraordinary if the Biblical patterns are realized.

We have to believe that the question of church leadership is extremely important and God will not leave us in darkness concerning such a fundamental question.

Biblical leadership of the local church

After all this let us have a look at what the Word says about the structure and leadership of a local church. The Bible tells us about elders (presbyters, bishops) who are principals of a church in a specific settlement.

Some related verses:

“The elders, which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd (Jesus) shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. “

1Pe. 5.1-4.

We have to discover that elders are mentioned as pastors in the Word - *feed the flock of God* -, over whom there is no one person as a leader (chief pastor, head principal, etc.). *However, the Word mentions Jesus Christ as chief pastor*, who is the Head and to whom the elders of all local churches have to give account of all things.

Which direction is the Church going to?

When Apostle Paul had the elders of the Ephesian church called to himself, he wrote similarly:

It is the Holy Spirit who would like to be the one person leader over all churches and it is Him who makes some experienced superiors of the church overseers (elders) to watch over that the Holy Spirit can remain the leader at all times. The Holy Spirit is able to filter human mistake only through more people. The Holy Spirit can lead every church through prophecies, therefore the Word writes that "two or three persons should prophesy at the same time and others should judge." If a single person is trusted with leading, might he or she be very spiritual, sooner or later some kind of a deviation happens or with the Holy Spirit leaving bare human control takes over. Therefore with the appointment of a board of elders (presbyters) the leadership of a local church is set in order.

"For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed you:" Tit. 1.5.

The leadership of any local church can have only one level. The words elder, bishop, superior, presbyter are only synonyms and in fact refer to the same ministry. Translators might use different words in the translation of the words but they depict the same concept:

Which direction is the Church going to?

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them *which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord*, and admonish you;” 1Th. 5.12.

“*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, ...*” Heb. 13.17.

It is the Word that authorizes the elders to do *pastoral ministry, and as we can see from the following verses to teach and to pray for the ill, too.*

“*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.*” 1Ti. 5.17.

“*Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:*” Jam. 5.14.

From the above verses is it clear that *local churches are led by elders and they are the ones who accomplish pastoral duties and are also responsible for the carrying out of all management duties in the church. This is supported by the letters of Peter, Paul and James.*

Derek Prince writes similarly about this question in the 3rd volume of his book titled „The Foundation Series”. Derek Prince is an independent Bible-teacher word-wide who is impartial in this question and he comes to the following conclusion:

„...we need to analyze shortly *the structure of local church leadership the way as it is shown in the New*

Which direction is the Church going to?

Testament. The structure is very easy: there are only two function levels (categories). These two categories are “elders” and “deacons”.

Which direction is the Church going to?

According to Derek Prince:

- „*the primary task of elders is to provide spiritual leading and guidance to the church.*”
- „*the primary task of deacons is physical service round the tables, that is to serve the natural, physical needs of a church.*”

(Naturally, out of a deacon's ministry later other ministries can develop as we can see it in the ministry of Philip evangelist as well.)

According to the Bible elders are therefore not assistants of the leader or pastor of a church, “deacons” who help the pastor, but they are the spiritual leaders of the church and are responsible for all things. God is so rich that He does not want to lead any churches only through a single person, but He gives more leaders (elders who are really pastors) to every church. These pastors should not dominate over each other, rather they are partners in the ministry.

7. How does eldership function?

Now let us go into details concerning how the more than one person leading of a church can function. The answer is the following: *in human ways it cannot!* As a matter of fact this is also a case of leading through *one person*, but this person is not human but the *Holy Spirit*. It is the Holy Spirit who leads the church through the prophetic Spirit and through more people in a Biblical way.

Eldership is not leading by a “committee” consisting of more people - as many people are inclined to think. Eldership means that many people are lead by the Holy Spirit and they act in unity of thoughts and deeds.

Is it necessary to have pre-eminence among the elders?

We should examine what the Word writes about presbyterian leadership in a church. Is it necessary to have a first among the equals? It is necessary to discuss this topic for this question spontaneously comes from our human way of thinking and many are of this opinion. However, the thoughts of God are not the thoughts of people.

In the mind of God elders are all entirely equal, there is no pre-eminence among them. Peter was not pre-eminent either, as a lot of people reckon. The expression “Peter stood up with the eleven” means that he was equal with the other ones. The reason why he spoke first was that they could not all speak at the same time avoiding this way chaos. (For example:the fact that Aaron spoke instead of Moses does not mean that he was over Moses (he was the boss). He spoke only because Moses didn't want to speak and therefore God gave Aaron a gift to speak.)

Some negative examples from the Word:

“ But they held their peace: for by the way *they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*”

And he sat down, and called the twelve, and said unto them, *If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*” Mar. 9.34-35.

“I wrote to the church: but Diophretes, *who loves to have the pre-eminence among them,* received us not. Therefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words: and not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to putting them out of the church.” 3Joh. 1.9-10.

“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Mat. 20.28

“And *he is the head of the body, the church:* who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; *that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.*” Col. 1.18.

We can see clearly from the Word that there is no pre-eminence in the Church. God doesn't allow it even if somebody is an apostle. Peter as an apostle calls himself a *partner of presbyters.*

“The elders which are among you *I exhort, who am also an elder,* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:”

1Pe. 5.1.

Why is it important to speak about this? Because of the following: if there is a person who is the first among

the equals, who has more rights than the others or in some well defined cases is over the others in certain aspects, then the seed of one person leadership is already in the ground and it is only a matter of time when it is grown and bears fruit.

Is it necessary to have anybody as a spokesman (representative) among the elders?

A solution might be if somebody among the elders as an appointed spokesman presents the opinion of the others. From the following verses Peter may seem to be a spokesman when speaking in the name of more people.

" And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:"

Act. 15.13.

As we can see from the above examples Peter didn't stand up alone but with the eleven. This expresses the equality of elders but it was him who actually spoke inspired by

the Spirit. In another case we can see that it is James who stood up and asked permission to speak. It is the Holy Spirit that appoints the person and the occasion He wants somebody to stand up and speak.

The equality of the apostles is also shown by the following story: when at the house of Cornelius apostle Peter began new and important things initiated by the Holy Spirit (the Holy Spirit had filled the gentiles too), he had to give account to the other leaders. They decided together, with joint responsibility, about the things that had happened there.

Pillars

In the Word we can find that among the leaders some people are considered pillars according to the grace given to them.

“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” Gal. 2.9.

Pillars have the privilege to hold big burdens. Consequently they are several times in the center of attention, as for example Peter and John, but beside them there were the other apostles as well (the elders of the church in Jerusalem). The rest of the twelve apostles are little known about, nevertheless, they were apostles (the elders of the church in Jerusalem), too. With the presentation of Peter and John together the Word wants to express precisely that no single person but two people together at least who are to represent any church. It

doesn't mean that the pillar is a boss, because three bosses within the twelve could not have existed at the same time.

The importance of elders in a local church

Here arises the question whether there is any difference between the importance of the elders. The Word does speak about certain differences. We can read about presbyters whose *rule should well be counted* and who are pillars.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine”
1Ti. 5.17.

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear. I charge you before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.”
1Ti. 5.19-21.

The elder of a church is an experienced, tested believer living an unimpeachable life which is an example to follow for other believers. However, the authority of the elder is set within boundaries by the Word, and God surely knows very well why it has to be so.

The fact that already two or three witnesses are enough to accept a charge against an elder means that the Word doesn't allow big authority for an elder to have in the church.

Some words about authority

Different Bible translations use the words authority, greatness, power and richness as synonyms.

“And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” Gen. 13.2.

“For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.” Est. 10.3.

“His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.” Job. 1.3

“But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it makes no matter to me: God accepted no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me.” Gal. 2.6.

“Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherished her children.” 1 Th. 2.6-7.

Leadership based on human authority and submission is not biblical. We have false understanding of the Word if we try to verify it by referring to the submission of the soldier to Cornelius centurion, because the kingdom of God is not a dictatorship.

God did give authority (empowerment) to us in the name of Jesus to destroy all works of the devil. This authority is only valid to be exercised over evil spirits and never over people. This was the new science shown by Jesus when He started his ministry. He took authority over evil spirits who were in the people and drove them out, but He never took authority over the people the evil spirits were in. These people could keep their free will and could carry out their own decisions. God gave the right to all people to decide freely over their lives. Man is allowed to choose good but is also given the right to choose bad if he or she wills. God advises us to choose good, because it is only the Creator who knows what is really good for His creatures. If man is not allowed to make his decisions it may lead to the formation of dangerous sects for a leader derived from the truth can browbeat many people into decisions they don't really want.

The elder as an example

The Word obviously demands all elders to live committed lives to be examples for believers to follow.

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.”

1Pe. 5.2-3.

The Word is spiritual, however, it is very practical at the same time, for it shows younger believers how to follow Christ through the example of experienced believers. This is why the Word suggests that believers

should pay attention to the lives of their elders (especially to the end of their lives) and learn from that.

“Remember them, which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: *whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

Heb. 13.7.

It is interesting to note that right after mentioning the elders as examples the Word says that

- ⑩ *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*
- ⑩ *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.*

This means that the life of Apostle Paul (and the end of his life) is an example for us to follow even in our days. The lives and work of present day elders should be judged on the basis of his example. What great courage and unimpeachable life is needed for the elders of churches to be able to state together with Paul:

“*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example.*”

Phi. 3.17.

“*Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*”

Co. 11.1.

“For even hereunto were you called: because *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps:*”

1Pe. 2.21.

“For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

Joh. 13.15.

The perfect example for us is Jesus therefore both elders and believers have to follow him. At the same time elders should be examples for less experienced believers, the same way Jesus is an example for them. No way is an elder a boss (absolute authority: dictator), but he is an example believers watch and obey him " for their own interests because elders watch over their souls."

Requirements for elders

Let us have a look at the requirements elders must meet according to the Word.

“This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of an elder, he desires a good work. An elder then must be

- ⓐ *blameless,*
- ⓐ *the husband of one wife,*
- ⓐ *vigilant, sober, of good behavior,*
- ⓐ *given to hospitality,*
- ⓐ *apt to teach;*
- ⓐ *not given to wine, no striker,*
- ⓐ *not greedy of filthy lucre;*
- ⓐ *but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;*
- ⓐ *one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*
- ⓐ *Not a novice,* lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

 Moreover *he must have a good report of them which are without*; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” 1Ti. 3.1-7.

Today we would call it requirements for leaders. I believe that originally God thought this valid for all male leaders not only church leaders. Unfortunately, in the ungodly world of the last times these requirements can- not at all be expected of the leaders of the world.

Cabinet members are obviously known to be money-grabbers, corrupted, immoral and aggressive. Unfortunately the present condition of the world has an influence on the Church also, therefore if we look at our surroundings we can only find a few elders who are blameless. In the churches there are women-pastors, young pastors with only theoretic, theological knowledge, money-grabbers, competition, conflicts among denominations, the stressing of success and in some cases fornication. These are the things that are most characteristic of our church-leaders today. However, it would be necessary to have good testimonies towards the world as well.

God expects both leaders and believers to respect God's Word from this point of view, too.

What can we do about this?

- We have to see clearly that God has not modified the above requirements in the meantime neither has He authorized anybody to change the Word.
- It is necessary for leaders to have sincere repentance.
- And finally, if nothing else helps, elders have to be admonished.

Admonishing elders

Man is not God, therefore elders are not infallible either. Since elders are not devoid from temptation it might happen that they need to be admonished because of something. If an elder's life is not immaculate or does something wrongly the Word tells us what to do in such a situation.

“This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” 2Co. 13.1.

“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.” 1Ti. 5.19.

We can see that *it is enough to have two or three believers as witnesses in a church to admonish an elder, like any other believer. These things are not meant against elders but are important for each one of us.*

If elders cannot be or simply are not admonished if necessary, it will result in serious consequences for the Church, the Body of Christ. If the life or work of an elder can have anything against, he is a bad example for the others so he can cause a lot of problems in his church. God expects an elder to take an admonishment seriously and if it is rightful, to accept it and to change his life and work into the right direction. If he doesn't accept the admonishment or accepts it only formally without actually changing his deeds, he is disobedient to God and cannot be taught. Such a person can become a dictator in the future and it is possible that it becomes too late for him to change his ways and to find the place of repentance. *Believers have to subject themselves to the*

Word and keep the stages of the admonishment of elders. If this does not help, then God rejects the elder who has become unworthy and instead of him God finds a better one.

To ensure the purity of church life and in order to build the Kingdom of God it is very important for believers to exercise their responsibility to admonish the elders of the church. It is also in the interest of elders to have their attention called in time until it is too late. It is very important for elders to learn to accept admonishment and to remain in humility.

Can we find any examples in the Bible for the admonishment of elders? Certainly, there are a lot of examples for that in the Word. Prophets in Old Testament times admonished kings very often, but we can see plenty of other examples as well:

- Prophet Samuel admonished king Saul because of his disobedience.
- Prophet Nathan wisely admonished king David because of his adultery.
- Prophet Elijah admonished king Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Apostle Paul admonished the apostle Peter because he was a hypocrite among the Jews.

Relationship between the ministry of elders and other ministries

Even if somebody has an apostolic ministry, he does not have the right to rule over the elders, to be their superior or boss.

“The elders which are among you I exhort, *who am also an elder*, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:”

1Pe. 5.1.

In the Word we can find several verses where the leaders of the church are called *apostles and elders*; though most of the time they are mentioned as *elders*. Why are they called different names? Apostles usually go around visiting different local churches. They spend a longer period of time here and there, but mostly have a permanent residence, as well. Apostles are partners of presbyters in the work of the church where they live. In the case of having no apostles in a church elders themselves form the group which make decisions. This was the case in the church of Jerusalem, too.

“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to *Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders* about this question.”

Act. 15.2.

“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

And *the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.*”

Act. 15.4-6.

This central decision had a very big importance and was aimed to bring forth unity in a debated question that had divided Jews and Christians at that time. Later in the

Bible we don't find decisions of such big significance. Things that needed to be corrected were written in letters (e.g. Paul's epistles) or communicated via delegates. They came in form of commands or recommendations. A lot of verses speak only about elders as leadership for a church, similarly to the example we find in Heaven where the elders are fallen down before the King (Rev. 4.10.).

The Ephesian letter mentions five ministries (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher). The relationship between these ministries and the elders can be seen from the following verses:

The apostle, who is also an elder:

“*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.*”

1Pe. 5.1.

The prophet, who is also an elder:

„Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, *Judas surnamed Barnabas and Silas, chief men among the brethren.*”

Act. 15.22.

“*And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.*”

Act. 15.32.

The elder as a teacher:

„Let the *elders* that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who *labor in the word and doctrine.*”
1 Ti. 5.17.

The elders, who are also pastors:

Apostle Paul tells the Ephesian elders:

„*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to feed the church of God,* which he had purchased with his own blood.”
Act. 20.28.

From the above verses we can see that an elder is a leader in the church which task often comes together with the ministry of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher or a pastor. From the Word we know Philip evangelist as a deacon of the church at Jerusalem. Such relevances are obvious from the Word, however, it is not clear if Apollos, who was a famous teacher, or Agabus, the prophet were also elders or not.

The daughters of Philip evangelist were prophets, but they can't have been elders, because ladies cannot serve as elders according to the Word.

The leading of the Holy Spirit in practice

Some church leaders to whom I talked to made the following statements:

✠ It is impossible for any church to have no leader, because in that case it cannot function and there will be chaos and turmoil there.

▣ If a church is lead by more than one person it is like as if a committee lead it.

The characteristics of eldership in a church could be put the following way:

- ▣ It is not that the church is lead by several people (a committee) rather
- ▣ it is the Holy Spirit who does the leading in one person through the elders and the Spirit of Prophecy in the prophets in a church.

When Paul called the Ephesian elders to himself he wrote:

„Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which *the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to feed the church of God*, which he had purchased with his own blood.” Act. 20.28.

In fact it is the Holy Spirit who would like to be the leader in any church and therefore He makes some people overseers (elders) so that as experienced supervisors they should watch over that the Holy Spirit remains the leader in every time.

Decision making in the church: the Holy Spirit decides

What might be the most interesting is the way God wants decisions to be made in the church. Because of man's human sinful nature it is difficult for intolerant people who would like to dominate over others to accept it. Let us look at a few verses regarding this:

,As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, *the Holy Spirit said*, Separate Paul and me Barnabas for the work whereunto *I have called them*. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Act. 13.2-3.

,*It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord*, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us*, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;”

Act. 15.25-28.

,*Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, are thus minded: and if in any thing you were otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.* Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example.”

Phi. 3.15-17.

What can we establish from these verses?

1. Minister to the Lord and fasting as long as He reveals his will: Who decides is the Holy Spirit.

,*As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said,”*

Act. 13.2a.

2. *Its necessary that the revelation of the Holy Spirit should confirm things that had been revealed to somebody earlier.*

„Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Act. 13.2b.

3. Human practical activity should only come after the spiritual part has been done.

„And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

Act. 13.3.

4. *Decision must be made in total unity among each other and with the Holy Spirit, avoiding majority voting, because this is what we and the Holy Spirit really like.*

„It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men...”

Act. 15.25.a.

For the realization of this elders must be in unity, because only if they are in honest community knowing each other's mind very well can they really know what they should agree about.

„For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things,”

Act. 15.28.

5. *If unity has not been reached (we do not have the same understanding) due to understanding things in different ways so thinking differently about things,*

the first rule becomes effective: *Let's start praying and God will reveal his will for us.*

„...and if in any thing you be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you...” Phi. 3.15.b.

6. *Provided we have come to agreement with somebody can we start doing things which we should also do in unity.*

„Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”

Phi. 3.16.

It is clear, that God only promotes unity which is based on praying and fasting, where the leader is the Holy Spirit who can guarantee leading if we are in complete unity of action. However, He does not promote us heading forward if we have different opinions. In case we do, we have to lay the differences aside until God creates unity through revelation. So many are the problems in present day churches that originate from not keeping ourselves to the rules the Scripture prescribes us to follow when making decisions!

In the light of the things above we should ponder upon why is it that there is weakness, drop in number and splits within and between churches because of traditional differences in opinion and lack of persistently praying believers.

Obedience

Obedience is a basic matter in the eyes of God, but what or whom should we obey to actually realize our obedience?

Man - because of his sinful character – is basically rebellious. Everybody has to learn obedience for his or her own sake, because if we are “small gods”, who do not obey anybody, we are like Satan, the father of rebellion.

„Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account,...” Heb. 13.17.

Believers, being in their best interest, do well if they obey their elders except they are asked to do things like Peter and John were: not to teach in the name of Jesus. Their natural answer for such question was:

“....., We ought to obey God rather than men.”
Act.5.29.

Everybody has to learn obedience, not even Jesus could be an exception. According to the Word in the “school of obedience” there are “two main subjects” and these are suffering and humility.

„Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;” Heb. 5.8.

„And being found in fashion as a man, *he humbled himself*, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Phi. 2,8.

According to the Word obedience is very diverse. The obedience of believers is more than obeying to one person, because it can lead to autocracy and insults the believer in his or her personal freedom and in the practicing of his or her "priesthood".

Obedience to the Lord and the Word:

„Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Jam. 4.7.

„And Samuel said, Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as *in obeying the voice of the LORD?* Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” 1Sa. 15.22.

Obedience to the heavenly vision:

„Whereupon, O king Agrippa, *I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:*” Act. 26.19.

Obedience to elders:

„*Obey them that have the rule over you,* and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” Heb. 13.17.

Obedience to one another:

„Likewise, you younger, submit your-selves to the elder. Yea, *all of you be subject to one another* and be clothed with humility: for God resisted the proud and given grace to the humble.” 1Pe. 5.5.

Wives' obedience to their husbands:

„...Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” Eph. 5.21-24.

Obedience of children to their fathers and mothers:

„One that ruled well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;” 1Ti.3.4.

Obedience of the young to the old (elders):

„Likewise, you younger, submit your-selves to the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisted the proud, and given grace to the humble.” 1Pe.5.5.

Obedience to higher powers:

„Let every soul is subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ” Rom13.1.

Obedience to every human ordinance of man (civil laws):

„Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;” 1Pe. 2.13.

We can see how diverse is the obedience the Lord expects us to perform. If we are able to keep these commands of His in our lives - which is not easy in such a rebellious spiritual world – *it is enough if an elder is a model for the flock and he does not need to give commands.*

It is very useful for us to learn obedience to all directions, because both obedience and disobedience have consequences.

Consequence of obedience: blessing

„Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A *blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God*, which I command you this day:”

Deu. 11.26-27.

Consequence of disobedience: curse

„And a curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which you have not known.” Deu. 11.28.

„For which things' sake the wrath of God come on the children of disobedience:” Col. 3.6.

„For the froward is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the righteous.” Pro. 3.32.

„For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you has rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.” 1Sa. 15.23.

8. Realization of eldership

There are some people - unfortunately little in number for the time being - who are of the opinion that plural leadership is Biblical. They have a desire in their hearts to realize this model, but they don't know how it functions and how to take the first steps into this direction.

Biblical teaching on eldership

It is necessary to provide a biblical teaching for both leaders and believers about eldership, so that they will be able to accept the fact that eldership is not emergency or anarchy only because there isn't an appointed man to whom everybody can go with all their problems. We have to see that one person is not entitled to step into the place of God, no matter how anointed he is. One person can't be *the head* of a local church and he can't be the only channel for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Resignation of a pastor from his privileges

Having accepted the above biblical doctrines, every present one-person church leader has to come to a personal decision; can he resign from his priority over elders and is ready to become a partner of the elders with equal authority? In case he is unable to come to this personal decision he has to overcome his Ego or else he cannot go forward.

If he is able to make this decision, but he is hindered in the realization by his official status, state salary or church flat, he has to have confidence in God and start getting rid of these bonds step by step. What order should

he follow when doing this? First of all it is necessary to be personally lead by God, because it won't go without Him. We have to cast our fears away and trust in the Lord. Doing so is not a blind jump into nothing, on the contrary, it is confidence in God and his Word, an obedient step in faith. We are called and empowered by God and we don't have to please people.

If you are afraid of how to get on a living after all that, you can choose among the following possible solutions:

- If you have a trade you can make a living on, ask the Lord whether you should practice that profession. (Paul's way)
- If your own church is able to support you from donations and is willing to do so, it is also biblical: "the worker is worthy of his reward".
- The solution for accommodation depends on personal possibilities, but mainly on the getting and following the Lord's will.
- The problem of an office is no problem, if it is not one person who has to do everything. If more people lead the church and they divide the work among themselves it is not necessary to have an office, because they can do their tasks in their own flats. We know it from our own personal experience.

Establishment of presbyterian leadership in a functioning church

Different ways lead to the realization of the Presbyterian leadership depending on the existing leadership in the local church. The most important is to maintain the continuousness of leadership to prevent different disorders (chaos) in the process of change.

1st situation: there is one pastor and elders with restricted power, where the pastor has all the authority and the elders hold only deaconial ministries.

This is a most favorable situation, because in this case the pastor only has to resign from his privileges and the elders have to undertake bigger responsibility.

2nd situation: There is one pastor and more elders, but the function of the elders is only formal.
The gifts of the Holy Spirit just partly work.

In this case the pastor first of all has the task to teach the elders so that they can reach maturity. If necessary, he should ask for help from other experienced servants of God. Only then should he resign from his privileges, having raised elders who are able to work in unity without depending on one pastor. If the pastor resigns sooner than it is needed, it can cause chaos in the church, but these mistakes do not come from the presbyterian leadership but are the consequence of wrong realization.

3rd situation: A temporary pastor is entrusted, who is the partner of the elders, however, has privileges.

The situation is very easy, because the temporary pastor just has to resign from his privileges and the elders have to begin functioning with equal authority similarly to the case above.

4th situation: Guest-pastors living in other towns “lead” the church.

Leading from a far away place (remote control) does not work and is not a biblical way. It is necessary to step forward quickly according to the following:

„The elders which are *among you* I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.”

1Pe. 5.1.

Out of the more experienced men in the church elders have to be appointed and taught so that they can take over leadership with total rights as soon as possible. The manager of these changes can be the guest-pastor who, having started the presbyterian leadership, steps out of the leadership, but can keep ministering as an experienced guest-minister.

Establishment of presbyterian leadership in a new church

Most mistakes and deficiencies can be experienced in this area. Establishing a new church in a different settlement is a big and not easy task. Here we have to lay down and emphasize some important rules from the Word, which have unfortunately not been kept recently, though the Word gives clear guidance on this line:

„But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things, which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, *It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you:* but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Act. 13.45-46.

„And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that *we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.*”

Gal.2.9.

„Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. *And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.*”

Rom. 15.19-20.

We can see from the above verses that the apostles shake hands brotherly to agree among each other over the division of the areas where they are to preach the gospel. It was a thing of honor for them not to build on each other's work. They also set up a priority to preach the gospel to unsaved “Jews” (religious people) and just then to the gentiles (people in the ungodly world). We should read the Acts carefully, because it gives answer for every question. We don't need to make up any human ideas. The Word does write in this book how the Good News need to be preached and how new churches should be established.

1st rule: Don't to establish a new “church” (a new group for your organization or denomination) in those places where there is some group or church with born again people already working, because it will divide the Body of Christ and work schism! If God gives you work in such a place, you have to have your work built together with the elders of the existing church working at that place.

2nd rule: The establishing of a new church and the appointing of elders – according to the Word – is an apostolic task. If you are sure to have the calling of an apostle, it is all right, you can go ahead and do it, if not, you don't know what you are doing and you can cause a lot of harm to others and you are an irresponsible man.

3rd rule: The evangelist – in co-operation with an apostle – can go ahead of the apostle to a new place, but it is necessary after the evangelist leaves for the apostle to step in and continue his work: establish a new church and appoint elders.

The first disciples in Ephesus did not even hear about the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul had to compensate for the deficiencies: baptize them in the name of Jesus and fill them with the Holy Spirit by putting his hands on them. Later he spent two years in Ephesus and fought against the evil powers building the church.

In another case we can see that Peter and John had to hurry into Samaria to finish the work that had been started by Philip evangelist. If a “baby” after its birth cannot receive the suitable milieu and it does not get what it needs for its growth, it will die or in a better case it will be underfed, retarded in growth. If the work of an evangelist is not followed by apostolic work, it is like we put the "baby" out to freeze to death.

4th rule: The establishing of any church (teaching disciples, appointing elders) is really an apostolic work and if it is possible – as we can see it in the Word – it is necessary for the apostle to live at the place where the establishing of the church is taking place. We should have in mind that Paul, who was an apostle, during his first journey established churches spending two years in Ephesus, 1.5 years in Corinth and several months at other places teaching the disciples day by day.

5th rule: After the establishment of a church the apostle - having made disciples and appointed elders -, leaves the church entrusting it to the local elders. After the apostle is gone the believers can work independently, without a guardian. Later – like Paul did during his second journey – it is possible to make corrections through personal visits and letters.

Teaching believers living on their own (discipleship)

Believers need to attain full age so that they can rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit and become God-dependent and not "pastor-dependent". All believers day by day have to be able to fight their personal fights independently, led by the Spirit. They also need to have power to fight not only for themselves, but for others as well.

However, it is much more comfortable for believers to always listen to a visible person and obey him. They do not really want to change this comfortable situation because of the following:

- ▣ They would need to have a committed life and a sensibility to hear the Lord, which requires a fighting attitude.
- ▣ Many believers wish to have a false peace of mind and do not know that it does not work this way. They need to be taught how to have the peace of God.

God expects all believers to become disciples. The Word says: "Go and make disciples all nations." It means that first we ourselves must become disciples so that later we can make other people disciples. It is more than simply pastoral care. Discipleship tasks in the biblical sense are drafted at the sending out of the first 12, later the 70 disciples.

9. Biblical ministries, apostolic leadership

We should rely on the Word alone leaving behind all previous convention and tradition. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested in several places in the world and many times in very spectacular ways, but why are there distortions? We can read in Ephesus 4.11-12:

*„And he gave some *apostles*; and some *prophets*; and some *evangelists*; and some *pastors and teachers*; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*

When writing about the proper ways of the functioning of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul also gets into details concerning the ministries as the necessary parts of the body in 1 Co. 12.12-28.

„For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

....But now has God set the members every one of them in the body, as it had pleased him.

.....And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

.....That there should be no disruption in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

*.....Now you are the body of Christ and *members in particular*. And God had set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that*

miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

Importance of apostolic and prophetic ministries

Not by mistake is that Paul mentions the apostolic and prophetic ministries among the first ones, for they are considered foundations stones in the Church as for their importance and place. „And are built upon *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom *all the building fitly framed together* grow unto a holy temple in the Lord.”

Eph. 2.20-21

We can well believe that Paul, as an apostle, had the proper vision concerning this matter through the Holy Spirit.

What for and why are these ministries given?

„*Till we all come unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children*, tossed to and from, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.“

Eph. 4.13-16.

So we can well see how important it is from the point of view of the building of the Church to have each of these biblical ministries - as channels of the gifts of the Holy Spirit - working at their proper places to their own measure.

What is the condition of the Church today like? Do biblical ministries work and do they work the proper way? In the churches where the gifts of the Holy Spirit have visibly been working recently they are mostly powerfully manifested through one-one great servants of God. (It is something similar to the Nile's flooding in Egypt which used to be a blessing whenever it flooded and people took great advantages of it, however, at the same time, the inundation also caused damage and disorder. We know how great a blessing it could become when its flow was finally controlled and irrigation canals could be shaped.)

Ministries complete each other

,*And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of you: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”*

Co. 12.21.

,*That there should be no disruption in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another..”*

1 Co 12.25.

In addition to the leadership of the local churches let us have a further look at another very important question, namely what the Bible tells us about the supervision over more than one local churches. We need to read Acts and Paul's letters carefully.

The churches that belonged to the supervision of the apostle Paul made up an apostolic area. See the attached biblical model at the end of the book. According to the Bible the “supervision” of more local churches is the task of an apostolic group as it can be seen well in the case of the team which was created around Paul (Paul, Silas, Timothy, Titus and Markus).

We can see there the following:

- After the foundation of a local church and the appointment of elders, it was the elders that looked after the local church.
- However, the supervision and building of local churches was the task of an apostolic team.

Tasks of an apostolic team

Studying the Bible we can discover what tasks an apostolic team has. These are the following:

- The establishment of new local churches (preach the gospel, lay biblical foundations) as it was with Paul: evangelisations in different towns, staying several months in the newly grounded churches.
- The appointment of elders in each local church (Titus 1.5.),
- Supervision over the clean preaching of the Gospel and pure doctrines.
- Spiritual guidance and instructions in difficult questions (Paul's letters to the local churches and to a few people).

- ▣ Make ministries in local churches complete by filling the needs (for example: warning, teaching and evangelisation)

The characteristics of apostolic leadership:

- ▣ There is no constant residence (head-office).
(The ministers travel to local churches and not the other way round.)
- ▣ Personal visits, sending and calling back ministers.
- ▣ Apostolic letters written to local churches.
- ▣ Personal apostolic letters to partner ministers
(for example: Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy).

Now let us have a look at the ministries that have a most relevant role according to the Bible in the building of churches, consequently in the work of an apostolic team, as well.

Biblical ministries and their characteristics

In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus - as we studied earlier – we can read the following:

„And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ...From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, made increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Eph. 4.11-16.

The Bible speaks about different ministries, which are to build the Church. They are the following: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*. It is sad that these Biblical ministries can hardly be discovered in present day churches, so no wonder the Church is not being built the way it should be.

What characterizes these ministries today? The ministry of the evangelist is a spectacular, successful ministry all over the world. The ministry of the pastor is mostly understood as a single person church leader, in many places minimizing hereby the ministry of presbyters who are biblically the true leaders of a church. In some cases we can meet teachers and prophets who are independent of churches. I believe that there are a lot of servants of God who are really apostles, but out of false modesty they do not dare to call themselves apostles or they just do not know that they are apostles. The apostles in the Bible call themselves apostles with a naturalness, however, in the case of Paul it was necessary for him to prove that he was an apostle. The biggest problem might be that we seem to have forgotten about the fact that the apostolic ministry exists even today. There is the bad practice in theology of referring to the apostolic letters as pastoral letters. Modern theology banished apostles from the present day Church. This disheartening situation led to the one person pastoral system, where no place remains for the ministry of apostles. We often quote Heb. 13.8. : “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever”, but this also means that He still gives each ministry - including apostles – the same way today as yesterday.

The above verses have to be applied not only to the miracles, but to the five main ministries as well. In order to change the currently experienced abnormal situation in

the Church it would be very important to know and to name these ministries their names so we can have them function filled with their biblical content.

We should not forget that the Church is built upon the foundation stones of apostles and prophets and not on the ministries of pastors and evangelists! The most important is that the churches function in a biblical way - led by presbyters without a single person leader over them and that it should become obvious who the apostles, prophets, pastors and evangelist are so that they can properly build the Church. We can see that though the ministry of pastor exists, its content has been totally changed. It is of very much importance to recognize biblical ministries. The following review can help us to do so, where we can see the main characteristics of the different Biblical ministries:

The apostle

Specific tasks: includes each ministry gift.

1Co.3.10., Eph. 2.20.

- ability to establish churches 1 Co. 9.2.
- ▣ lay the grounds of churches,
- ▣ spiritual father for churches founded by him.

The prophet

Specific tasks: speaks messages from Good through the Holy Spirit 2 Pet. 1.21., Jam. 5.10.

His messages concern

- ▣ the present and the future,
- ▣ persons and historic events,

- he has revelations, visions, which are to be judged (The status of the Old Testament prophet is different from the prophet of the New Testament, because the apostolic ministry did not exist at that time.)
- he is not an autocratic leader, rather an adviser,
- he cannot receive visions for everything (he is not an oracle!),
- the ministry of the prophet is more than only to receive a few revelations (his task is not only to give information, but many times he has to fulfill a commission which might be very dangerous and painful).

The evangelist

Specific tasks: a delegate of the Good News

- preach the good news and salvation,
- preach Jesus starting from any verse,
- is directly empowered by God (see Philip),
- has gifts to perform miracles and to heal the sick
- is able to lead people to the decision of salvation,
- mostly he is the one that baptizes the converts
- but is unable to found churches therefore he needs the help of an apostle.

The pastor(s) (elders, presbyters, bishops, principals)

Specific tasks: look after the flock

- watch over the flock,

- ▣ be models for the flock,
- ▣ the pastors (the elders in the local church) lead and represent the church,
- ▣ warn, minister to the sick.

The teacher

Specific tasks: nurturing (feeding)

- ▣ has anointing from God, his teaching is interesting, constructive, not dry,
- ▣ many times his ministry functions together with other ministries,
- ▣ openness to learn (the humbleness of mind).

Conditions to start any ministry:

- ▣ a call by God and the recognition of the call (being convinced in our spirits, God speaks to our spirit through dreams, visions or revelations),
- ▣ confirmation by the revelations of others,
- ▣ being empowered with gifts for the ministry,
- ▣ devotion to the Call,
- ▣ obedience to the will of God.

It is very important for each minister to function in his own ministry and according to his own measure. If we believe the Word these ministries are in function nowadays, though in some kind of a deformed way and they are not called by their names.

Here arises the question if it can be guaranteed not to have the Holy Spirit departed from the church or elders fail to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit under an apostolic supervision and presbyterian leadership?

There is NO such guarantee. However, we can see God's wisdom even in this case, too, because He wants to lead His people through the Holy Spirit by more people.

,Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that *you come together not for the better, but for the worse*. For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.”* Co. 11.17-19.

What does it mean? It means that those elders that have fallen out of the leading of the Holy Spirit and aren't able to find Him will come apart from the living part of the body together with their supporting members. If no good can be expected from their gatherings in the future it is better if they divide so that the living part can live and the dead part does not hinder the living one. This is the wisdom of God. God wants no dead churches where the Holy Spirit is not present and the believers are persecuted “in the name of God”. Such churches are worse than the none existing ones. Church splits we think a horrible thing to happen and try to prevent are in fact parts of God's plan and they need to happen. This is the only way the living church can survive and is able to pass on the Gospel.

False ministries

If there are Biblical ministries, there are also false ministries. What false ministries do we know about? A few false ministries one can see day by day:

- ⓐ the pastor, who is a one-person leader in a local church,

- ◻ the head pastor, who is in fact a “pastor in chief” and the superior to some other pastors,
- ◻ pastoral carer,
- ◻ ministry of deliverance
- ◻ etc.

The firstly mentioned false ministry is an unbiblical, deformed form of the earlier detailed presbyterian leadership and the secondly mentioned false ministry is the deformed form of the apostolic ministry.

The pastoral carer and the ministry of deliverance is similar to a disciple's ministry, but with reduced competence.

What is the problem with these ministries? The pastoral carer helps the soul of people, what is basically a good thing to do to some extent, because soul should be also strengthened so that the spirit can bear strong spiritual burdens. However, the overemphasizing of these things leads to the development of psycho-Christians.

Deliverance is a good thing and is also biblical, however, as a separated and independent ministry leads to false results. The one who has such a “ministry” is inclined to see devils even in things where there aren't any and this might lead to deformations in the personality and with time he himself might need deliverance.

The real problem is that ministries have been created and named with names which are not in the Bible. Therefore the Word will not be clear for us and the biblical ministries will be distorted.

Should not we follow the Word in this area as well? How do we dare to take the courage to find other ministries than the Bible writes about?! The other

ministries not detailed here (exhorter, giver, etc.) need to have the empowerment of the disciples, too.

10. Co-operation between ministries (model of house building)

God created the Body of Christ, which is the Church, with great wisdom. The Church of God is one and indivisible. God didn't create separated denominational "churches", rather the present condition of the church can basically be characterized by schisms. When God's Word speaks about the *building of the Church*, the *example of house building* is used several times to support understanding. In the Church ministries like stones are built into God's house. When we preach the Gospel we collect stones for this building. This *house-building has been started 2000 years ago and we are building the same house now. This house is a huge house. One of the corners of this house is at Jerusalem - „I take down a corner stone at Zion” – and the other end of this house is at the latest end of the Earth.*

If somebody has ever built a house he must know that it has to follow instructions. People can't start building a house unless

- they know the exact site to build on,
- they know what it will look like,
- they estimate the costs and the necessary material,
- they have the skill.

Many people think it is not necessary to have a masterbuilder for the construction. It is not important to have a plan. "I know how to do it. I myself will do it." Unfortunately a lot of houses have been being built in such an amateurish way. Some kind of huts or small

hovels can be constructed this way and they might stand for a while, but a huge house with one corner in Jerusalem and the other corner at the far end of the Earth can't be built this way. This big task needs to have craftsmen, masterbuilders, who know how to do it, because they are professional workmen. If we want to build a very big building in a professional way it needs professional workmen (craftsmen), who are skilled. In this case it is important to decide about the following:

- ⓐ Where are we going to build the house, what exposure does the site have? (What visions has God given us to preach the Gospel?)
- ⓐ What do we want to build? (a new house, want to have renovation or to enlarge an existing building)
- ⓐ Do we have plans (visions) concerning the specific building?
- ⓐ In case we have a plan, we need a very good masterbuilder (an apostle), who is able to execute the plans.

It is the masterbuilder (apostle) who directs and coordinates the tasks of the workmen and also he is the one that lays the foundations of the building.

„...as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation and another built thereon....” Co. 3.10.

The masterbuilder is not an entrepreneur doing everything himself but he has partners. He knows which craftsmen are needed for the building and also knows the skills they are required to have. He knows the craftsmen very well. He knows who is a good bricklayer, a carpenter, a tinsmith, a purchaser,... etc. Out of the craftsmen he selects the ones into his brigade (ministry

team) he can start building the house with and also complete it. This masterbuilder is very wise, because

- he knows what it means to build a house,
- he doesn't want to do all the work alone,
- he knows the order of the building process and also what he can expect of each craftsman.

He knows that first of all the foundation has to be laid and therefore it is important to dig deep down. He has to find hard, rocky soil, on which it is possible to build a good foundation. The Church builds on the ground stones of apostles and prophets and Jesus Christ himself is the corner stone (Ephesus 2.20.). Likewise building a house, the foundations are needed to be laid first and then examined if they are massive enough to bear a building. If we look at a house, we can see nothing of the foundation. Only the visible part of the building can be seen, which is over the ground level. If somebody started building a house according to the picture he can see, he would surely forget about the foundation, because it is invisible and he would think that it is not necessary at all. Needless to say, he would make a big mistake. Though the foundation is invisible, it is the most important part of the house.

First of all, we have to lay the foundation with the help of an architect (prophet) and a wise masterbuilder (apostle). After laying the foundation, the master (apostle) trusts another craftsman with the building of the walls. (*teacher*).

„...as a wise masterbuilder I have laid the foundation and *another builds thereon....*”

Co. 3.10.

„I have planted *Apollos* watered; but God gave the increase.”
Co. 3.6.

Having laid the foundations and if his work is not needed there any more, the apostle goes to another building site to help lay down the foundations. He has to be present at the foundation work! During this time he also has an eye on the construction work going on at the previous place and sends craftsmen there as the different stages of the construction demand it. When the walls stand, the apostle will send there the roofers. The last stage in the construction of a house is the putting on of the roof, which protects the building from the outside. This work equals to the appointment of the elders. They are the ones that have to protect and *supervise* the building, which is the local church (the flock).

„Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he had purchased with his own blood.”
Act. 20.28.

As we can see, through the model of construction the Word gives a nice example for the building of the Church. With an amateurish work small huts can be constructed which might stand for a while, but the moment a big storm (attack) comes, the house can be broken (splits). A well-founded building is able to stand the storms, but the ones with weak foundations will collapse. A wise apostle is farseeing and builds a foundation which stands the trials.

„Therefore whosoever heard these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built

his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heard these sayings of mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Mat. 7.24-27.

In the Church there have been a lot of “botcher work” done recently. There aren't too many signs of biblical constructions. Now the building of *the Church* seems to lack foundation (apostles and prophets) and is *built onto the sand*. It will come tumbling down if floods come and winds blow. It is the Lord's long suffering and mercy that still keeps the Church despite its present condition. However, the big storms that will tower before the last harvest will cause big loss for the Church, because it has no foundations.

“...And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Mat. 7.24-27.

11. Restoring of the Church

We have to rediscover in the Word the following:

- the Holy Spirit has been poured to all flesh,
- each believer is a priest,
- each believer is empowered the same way the first disciples were,
- Jesus Christ is the only chief-Shepherd, who is the head of the Church,

- each biblical ministry has to function in our days as well,
- the Church has to be built on the foundation of apostles and prophets,
- these ministries have to be recognized and be provided with area to function, but this is only possible if we quit the unbiblical practice of one-person leadership. God's ways are wise and merciful. He has to provide a good solution for this problem as well.

God speaks through His servants, the prophets again, as He usually does in his plan whenever something important is going to take place.

„Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealed his secret unto his servants the prophets.”

Amo. 3.7.

In the past few years several prophetic writings have been published one after the other about the restoring of the Church. The prophetic word is like a lighted torch we had better pay attention to! As God used John the Baptist to prepare His nation for the Messiah's arrival, the same way now God uses prophets to prepare the believers for the big changes of the coming period:

- restoring leaders in the Church,
- demolishing religious practices which do not come from God,
- restoring of the apostolic ministries.

These prophets are for example Rick Joyner and David Minor, whose prophecies show the way how God wants to restore His Church:

- ⓐ WIND of HOLINESS will blow through the Church and everything that doesn't come from God will be demolished,
- ⓐ It will pull down human rule and will demolish every organization that has been established in the name of the Lord but has no contact with Him.
- ⓐ It will demolish walls between denominations which were built by their leaders and will join the believers in Christ.
- ⓐ Those who don't strongly hold onto Jesus but onto something else, will be swiped away.
- ⓐ Common presbyterian leadership will be established in towns and people will wonder at the unity of God's people.
- ⓐ God will bear witness to his chosen, by then unified people by performing mighty miracles.
- ⓐ With the biblical ministries restored and with the apostles placed into their ministries a new type of leadership will be created which, through their humbleness and unity - will be able to overcome the chaos of the last days that is to come to the whole world.

This is the way God prepares his people for the big harvest that is to take place before the Lord returns. The Church, in its present condition, is not ready to carry out this task. Let us have oil in our torches and let us not become foolish virgins by the arrival of our Lord,

because for many, the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief comes at night.

Let us pray to remain watchful so that the Lord can find
us doing His work.

12. New wineskin, royal priesthood, discipleship

Something happened at the first Pentecost. The Jews, gathered from all over the world could see the people who had been filled with the Spirit of God and said they looked like they had drunk sweet wine. Whoever saw the disciples, wondered at their behavior and deeds.

New wine is different from old wine. Old wineskin complies with old wine, but new wineskin is necessary for new wine. New wineskin needs to be filled with something new and this is the power and authority of the Holy Spirit.

„do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the Promise of the Father ” ... „but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses...”

The Gospel can be preach only with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is only new wineskin that is able to hold new wine. *The Spirit of God has been doing something since the first Pentecost not only with our bodies but with the body of the whole Church as well. Something new has begun in the Church, too.* Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and we as living stones are built into these Church. “As living stones you have to build up to a spiritual house”.

In order to have the Church powerfully built up as a healthy body according to the plan of God, it is necessary to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the biblical ministries functioning in a healthy, biblical way. Organization structures taken over from the world still functioning in the Church are not suitable for this

purpose, for „no man puts new wine into old wineskin: else the new wine does burst the bottles and the wine is spilled and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new wineskin”. Mar. 2.22.

A dead “church” can vegetate within old structures, but the Church which consists of the army of the called disciples empowered with authority demands new wineskin (new structures: organizational forms), because otherwise it will burst the old one.

Christian organizations with different names usually led by one person have the following deformities:

- ⓐ There is only one person (pastor, churchleader) who God can usually speak through, or else power will slip out of the hands of the appointed leader.
- ⓑ One personal rule in a church makes an apostle impossible to function, because the pastor will close all ways through which the apostle could supervise the church and such intentions of the apostle would be taken as manipulative intrusions.

The Church that was created at the first Pentecost came into existence on the basis of the New Testament which had outlawed the high priest system of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament Church

- ⓐ all born-again believers are authorized priests by the Word, therefore they are not an audience, but ministers.

„But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that

you should show forth the praises of him who had called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;” 1Pe. 2.9.

„How is it then, brethren? when you come together, *every one* of you had a psalm, had a doctrine, had a tongue, had a revelation, and had an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” Co. 14.26.

 all believers have the same power the first sent out disciples had.

God, in the first place, is not quantity but quality-centered. We can see that through the example of the group of Gideon.

The Church doesn't need members merely registered in the church, but rather ones that realize the command of Jesus: „*teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*”

Mat. 28.19-20.

What did Jesus teach and has been teaching the disciples through the Holy Spirit ever since? What was and similarly recently must be the authority the disciples were given (first the 12 and later the 70)?

The authority of the disciples - in the name of Jesus – has not changed since that time, because we know that „Jesus is same yesterday today and forever”. This empowerment is for the following: to heal the sick, to raise the dead and to cast out demons.

The first 120 the disciples, who prayed together after Jesus had died at the first Pentecost, empowered by the Holy Spirit turned the world upside down in a generation's time. We need the same power and authority in every believer's life so that we can spread the Gospel the way we were commanded in Jesus's mission command. *The aim of believers' growing in faith and knowledge is to become disciples.*

And those who believe will be followed by miracles:

- they will drive out demons in the name of Jesus,
- they will speak in strange tongues,
- if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they won't be harmed,
- they will place their hands on sick people and these will get well.

We have to understand that the one person high priest like ministries and sometimes offerings are Old Testament practices. God created the apostolic, prophetic, etc. ministries in the phase of the New Testament by the pouring out His Holy Spirit to prepare the saints for their ministries. The Church of God does not consist of passive church members who always need to be served to, but disciples, who themselves without exception serve according to the measure of their gifts.

It is an important task to restore psychically hurt church members, but too much engagement with the psychic self can lead to an extreme growth of the psychic man resulting in emotionally dependent Christians. Contrary to this, the Church needs spiritually free, independent, matured Christians, who have become disciples.

13. The calling

What is calling? What are the differences and the relationship between

- the gifts of the Holy Spirit,
- the ministries,
- and calling?

The differences and relationship between them can be seen in Appendices No. 1 and 2.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural human abilities which God gives to born-again believers who obey Him as He wills. It is up to God which gift, through whom and when He wants to operate. The gifts are not given for our glory and entertainment, but for the purpose of building the Church.

The ministry is a specific field (area) where everybody works using his or her gifts. If we consider the gifts and ministries enumerated in the appendix furthermore remember the lives of the servants of God in the Bible, it is noticeable to see that certain gifts are most frequent to operate in certain ministries.

Calling is the object of life for a believer to live for; for the realization of which God has called him or her personally. A few verses related to calling:

„As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul *for the work whereunto I have called them.*” Act. 13.2.

„Moreover, whom he did predestine, them he also called: and whom he called them he also justified: and whom he justified them he also glorified.”

Rom. 8.30.

„But as God had distributed to every man, as the Lord had called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.”

Co. 7.17.

„I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, “

Eph. 4.1.

The following faith heroes accomplished mighty tasks in their lives, but every one of them had a specific personal task which had to be accomplished only by him or her. We know that many of them managed to do it without fail, however, there were some that could only partly realize it. We are going to look at some examples, the kind of calling the following persons had:

Calling of Jesus

He was the *Redeemer*, who died for our sins to give us eternal life. No one else on earth has ever had this calling.

„For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Mar. 10.45.

Jesus is the embodied Word, the Son of God, who gave us a model how to follow the Father's will.

„For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” Joh. 13.15.

Calling of Mary

To give birth to the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and to bring Him up decently.

„And beholds, you shall conceive in thy womb, and brings forth a son, and shall call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:” Luk. 1.31-32.

Calling of Abraham

To be the father of God’s called people.

„Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get you out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show you: And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make thy name great; and you shall be a blessing:”

Gen. 12.1-2.

Calling of Joseph

To save the Jews at the time of the big famine in Egypt.

„...nor angry at your-selves that you sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.”

Gen. 45.5.

Calling of Moses

To lead the Jews out of the Egyptian captivity.

„Come now therefore and *I will send you onto the Pharaoh, that you may be bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.*” Exo. 3.10.

Calling of Apostle Paul

To preach the Gospel to the gentiles, kings and the children of Israel.

„And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it *shall be told you what thou must do.*” Act. 9.6.

„But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, *to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*”

Act. 9.15.

We could add several additional examples how God called His servants. With the help of the examples above we can draw the following conclusions:

- Each servant got a very well specified task to accomplish in life.
- They mostly received their callings already at the beginning of their faith lives, which they kept in mind to know what to accomplish. Therefore they didn't lose sight of the target (vision) and were able to fight for it.
- This way they had enough time to prepare for their callings.

- The realization of the personal tasks they had been called for demanded a relatively short period of their lives or their ministries.
- In most cases the time for the servants to enter their real callings comes only after a long time of preparation filled with trials.

Let us have a look at a few examples from the Bible:

- ⓐ Jesus started His ministry when He was about 30 and it took no more than 3 years.
- ⓐ Joseph fulfilled his calling that had been shown to him at a very early age after many trials and many years in prison.
- ⓐ Moses stepped into his vocation having spent 40 years of preparation in the desert, at the age of 80. His ministry lasted about 40 years.
- ⓐ God revealed apostle Paul his vocation through Ananias, right after his salvation in Damascus. However, he lived a retired life for more than 10 years in Tarsus until Barnabas went to call him to Antioch. From there he was sent out by the Holy Spirit together with Barnabas to accomplish what God had called him for.

So we can see well how important it is to know exactly what we are called for. The Holy Spirit reveals it to each one of us in different ways. We should be patient and take the different trials with joy knowing that they are to prepare us for our vocation.

We should be careful to step into our vocation at the right time.

- Moses's urging intent to fulfill his calling ended up in the flesh and murdered an Egyptian, therefore he had to escape.

- Apostle Paul - right after his radical conversion, having in mind his calling – immediately got down to work in Damascus, but this phase of his life did not belong to the ministry he had been called for.
- Jesus told his mother Mary at Khana's wedding party when he changed the water into wine, that His mission had not started yet.

We should have persistence to complete God's plan in our lives according to our calling.

- However, there were some who fell out of their vocation at the end of their lives; having not completed their calling (for example: Moses, Gedeon and Samson).*
- And there were some whose missions were totally successful (Jesus - He said: „It has been completed”; Mary; Abraham; apostle Paul)*

„According as his divine power had given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that had called us to glory and virtue.”

2Pe. 1.3.

„Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.“

2Pe. 1.10-11.

How many believers know the vocation they are called for? It is an essential issue, the object of our lives for which God has called us.

How can we carry out the work the Lord has entrusted us if we do not know what it is? If somebody is

not sure about the calling he or she has, should ask God
to reveal it, and He will.

Postscript

From the point of view of world evangelism the restoration of the Body of Christ, the biblical functioning of ministries are at least as important as the discovery of the importance of getting filled with the Holy Spirit at the end of the last century.

We have to re-discover in the Scripture what the Church is, what biblical ministries are and that they are to function even in our days. We have to be able to recognize these ministries and provide them area to function. It is necessary for the apostles and prophets of the present age to recognize and undertake these ministries even if they are many times not spectacular and sometimes mean much trouble and moderate financial means.

I believe that a new trend will become stronger and stronger among born-again Christians and in the Charismatic movement. After a noisy period many times producing "troubled waters", a cleaner phase will follow with better and more fruit. Instead of forcing blessings and pursuing signs and miracles, faith and holiness working in love will be centered on.

This will shake and move off many people from their traditional places. This new "wave" will sweep away many and those who are not able to adapt to this new situation will not find their places (own ministry). If somebody doesn't learn to depend directly on God Himself instead people, will get into danger. We should watch and pay attention to how the Holy Spirit is moving and working in our days and what God's will for this period of time is. We should follow with attention the apostles and prophets God has called and speaks through. We should not commit the fatal mistake of "killing"

them. We should let and not hinder the realization of God's plan so that Jesus Christ can come back soon. Are we expecting Him to come? He will come back for His Bride. The restoring of the Church must happen, because the Church – Christ's Body, the Bride - has to be glorious "without freckle and herpes", where the members are working in love and unity.

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