

## Chapter 8

### How This Standard Works in a Church

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## 8

### How This Standard Works in a Church

*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 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: Till we all come in 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 fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*

*Ephesians 4:7-14*

Would the Christianity presently represented in your church have produced the Book of Acts to *begin* with? This is a stern and searching question. Honesty allows only one answer: No. Then what is the difference between the Christianity that *did* produce the Book of Acts and the peculiar and distorted version that we see almost universally in the American church?

In the early church, they followed Jesus' model in *building people who count*, but today *we count people* in crowds and institutions. Our model is more one of *disinfecting sinners* for a *clean* life; theirs was more a model of *disciplining saints* for *world impact*. Our practice is more like putting converts into a safety deposit box called "eternal security" rather than each believer investing his total life into other saved individuals for the production of world-visionary, world-impacting reproducers of *other* world-visionary, world-impacting reproducers . . . .

So what is the difference between the Christianity of 42 A.D. and the Christianity of 2,000 A.D.? Is Jesus different? No, we worship and serve the same Jesus they knew. Is the Holy Spirit different? No, the Holy Spirit I relate to today is the same Holy Spirit who "came" in the full release of redemptive power on the Day of Pentecost. Is the Bible different? Be very careful with this question, because the answer is "yes." *They* did not *have* a complete Bible. They were finishing the writing of the Bible through the activities recorded in the Book of Acts. So the advantage of the complete Bible lies in *our* court, *not* in *theirs*. Was the difference in

technological or travel advantages? The very suggestion is ridiculous. *We* have *every* advantage; *they* had no logistical advantage. God had arranged the universal peace of the world by Roman might, and the worldwide network of Roman roads, but these were only slight advantages compared to ours today. They didn't have television, telephone, telegraph, telethon ☞ they just had "tell-a-person." They did not have the "facts" but they had the FACTS! But so do we! Then, what accounted for the fact that *they* had impacted the entire known world in an incredibly short time, while today roughly two-fifths of the human race is totally unevangelized, and two-fifths more is very poorly evangelized. The remaining one-fifth has far more man-power and fire-power than that possessed by the early church, but to what result? Is the difference between us and them one of commitment? Some would argue long and loud that this is the difference, but it isn't. Not many people in the early church were any more committed than the typical Christian of today who faithfully attends church three times a week as well as special occasions ☞ but still has almost no influence on the 2.3 billion people who have not heard of Christ. The Christianity of the Book of Acts would never tolerate such a statistic, but today's church can continue in all of its activities and pay almost no attention to the most tragic failure on earth.

So what is the difference between the Christianity of Alexander, Rufus, Tryphena, and Andronicus of the first century and Joe and Susan and Sam and Eddie of the twentieth century? *I* say that the difference is solely, exclusively, totally and alone one of STRATEGY. *They* operated by a radically different strategy than *we* do!

Let me illustrate the *traditional institutional* model of today's American church. Picture a *bus* which travels to a destination and transports passengers along the way. The church is like the bus. The pastor is like the *bus driver*. The bus driver (pastor) welcomes the passengers on board (and they may be welcomed by their fellow passengers as well), they are *seated* and only arise to see to other necessary duties, and the bus driver (pastor) gives lectures on the scenery along the way as he drives the large numbers of passive, observing (possibly *sleeping*) passengers to their agreed destination. The typical passenger *endures* the ride, but he *never recruits another rider*, and *seldom testifies of his appreciation for the bus, the bus company, the route, or the trip*. In short, the achievement of the journey rests in the capability and efficiency of the bus and the performance of the driver. This is a far, far, cry from the Christianity of Jesus and the early disciples. The Christianity of the Book of Acts was essentially a *people's* movement (Acts 1:8, Acts 8:1 and 4) and *not a preacher's* movement or an *institutionalized* movement.

At the North Pole there is a huge cap of ice on which the snow keeps building up. Scientists tell us that if it were ever to *melt* much of the world would be covered with water. Laymen might be called "God's frozen assets." If they were all melted before God and warmed to *His vision, His purpose, His goal, His strategy*, "the earth would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

God's model for his Church is clearly declared in Ephesians 4:7-14. The general subject of the passage is spiritual gifts, but the gifts dealt with here are not the normal variety of gifts presented in The New Testament. The lists of gifts in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and 14, and I Peter 4 are generally quite different. *Those* gifts are endowments from heaven placed by the Holy Spirit within believers. The gifts *here* are actually *gifted leaders* which the Holy Spirit gives to his Church for special, at-large purposes in the church, and for the accomplishment of special goals.

Let me give an outline which will supply an overlook of the entire passage.

## The Giver of the Gifts

- I. The Giver of these gifts is presented, 8-10. Three great facts are given about Jesus:
  - A. He descended, 9, 10.
  - B. He ascended, 8, 9, 10.
  - C. He transcends, 10b.

Note one rule that emerges: though Satan's way *down* is *up*, *God's* way *up* is *down*. "He who exalts himself (like *Satan*) will be abased (brought down to the *basement* of the universe), but he who humbles himself (like *Jesus*) will be *exalted*" (like Jesus).

## The Gifts Themselves

- II. The Gifts (Gifted men) are profiled, 11.
  - A. "Apostles."
  - B. "Prophets."
  - C. "Evangelists."
  - D. "Pastor-teachers" (*one* office, *not* two).

This list would provide the material for limitless study and speculation. For example, the question of the first two gifts mentioned is, do they exist in *today's* church? The "apostle" as an official position could only exist in the early church because the specific qualifications (seeing Jesus and being with Him) cannot be met by anyone after the first century. The office of "prophet" seems to be a distinctive *Old Testament* office. Also, Ephesians 2:20 speaks of these officers as the "foundation" of the church. Today, we are far up in the building of the superstructure. The foundation is important, but only *in its place*, *not* in the superstructure.

However, unprofitable speculation may cause us to miss the main point. The rule has often been stated, "like leader like follower." The follower will be like his leader (Luke 6:40, the words of Jesus). So when Jesus gave to His Church four leaders with distinct and distinguishable gifts, *He is clearly telling us what He intends His entire Church to be.*

## Apostle

The word "apostle" means "*one sent away from*," so he intends *His entire church* (!!!!) To be a *going* and *sending* fellowship. Many take refuge from the responsibility to *go* in the idea of *sending*, but this cannot be justified in the New testament. Today's church? It is filled with *coming* people → people whose Christianity is defined by the faithfulness by which they *come* and serve. The very word "apostle" tells us why Jesus *chose* them

(Ephesians 1:3, Acts 1:3). The word “chose” is a middle voice verb, meaning that Jesus chose them “for Himself,” not primarily for their growth, their health, their wealth, their happiness, even *their* fulfilment. A misplaced emphasis has created a “consumer-friendly” Christianity, which is a radical misreading of the New Testament. The New Testament presents *God* as the *consumer*, and *we* are His fuel. Jim Elliott prayed truly, “Make me thy fuel, O flame of God!” What did Jesus choose us for? To *go* where *He* wants us to go—“away from,” not “to”—to be, say, and do *whatever He wishes*. So the only proper goal for any Christian must include a strategy to impact the very ends of the earth. Can we possibly see any proper limits on such a strategy in the Book of Acts? Oh, they tried to limit it to local, introverted attention, but *God* sent a *persecution* that scattered them like seeds (the very word that is used in Acts 8:1, and Acts 8:4, and in I Peter 1:1) *out* and *out* and *out* through the mixed soil of the Roman Empire. Be wary, Christian, because a giant latter-day persecution is closing in fast on the American Church. Violent fundamentalist Islam is storming the world, and only the poor and weak church of Jesus Christ is in its path. The technological achievements and blasphemous atheism of science and humanism have made potential persecutors everywhere. So the days of Christianity in its comfortable, convenient, fortress mentality are numbered. Another dispersion, or scattering of Christians, is on the way. And God is the Sower! You see, though we are conveniently hard of hearing about the responsibility to go, God is very serious about it.

### Prophet

The word “prophet” means a “forth-teller” (not primarily a “foreteller” of truth). A prophet is a *truth sayer* not a *soothsayer*. A prophet was a “herald,” a “proclaimer,” a “testifier.” So when Jesus gave gifted prophets to His Church, He is showing that He intended His Church to be a non-stop, always faithful, always bold, always speaking, fellowship of people. “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.” This accomplishes several Divine purposes. It matures the speaker, because any person will pursue his spoken confession, whatever the confession is. It glorifies God, because He dwells in the praise and testimony of His people. And, it presents the Gospel to every listener. Never should any Christian check the temperature or pulse of the world before he speaks—else he never speak at all! We are speaking first *to* God, and *about* God, and *for* God, and therefore we must not be silent. “I believe, therefore have I spoken.” The prophets, preachers, teachers, and leaders of the church must speak fully, clearly and boldly—and all believers must do the same.

### Evangelist

The word “evangelist” means a “good newser,” one who “good newses” Jesus to people, and people to Jesus. The Gospel admits some very bad news concerning Satan and his evil devices, man and his sinful condition and practice, God and His Holy reaction against sin, and hell as the final asylum of the hopelessly inverted sinner. But sadly, the church has proclaimed the *bad* news far more often and far more forcefully than it has proclaimed The Good News. The great and dominant message of Scripture is called the “Gospel,” *euaggelion*, the “Good News.” Nobody has truly received the good news until he feels good about *God*, about *Jesus*, about the *Holy Spirit*, about *himself*, about his *salvation*, about his *present destiny* and *final destination*, and about the *ultimate outcome*

of all things. God intends His Church to be glorious and victorious in its presentation of good news.

### Pastor-Teacher

Then the word “pastor-teacher” yields a final truth of what God expects of His Church. The word “pastor” means “shepherd,” and it tells us that He intends His people to *lead*. In order to lead, the Christian must clearly and confidently know *who he is, what he has, where he is going, how to get there, what his purpose is today and every day, and how to accomplish his assignment*. Any person who knows these things clearly and confidently can lead anyone. The word “teacher” indicates that Jesus intends His Church to be a truth-telling, educational, feeding fellowship. And this is the assignment of every believer. “By all means” (I Corinthians 9:22) ☞ spontaneous word, prepared testimony, formal teaching and preaching, the dissemination of tracts, books, magazines, letters (God is *high* on letters), cassette and video tapes, radio and television, face-to-face and at a distance ☞ the Christian’s goal should be to influence, to bend, to sway, “to win some.”

These are the “gifts” that are profiled; thus, the assignment, responsibility and pattern of the church may be clearly seen.

### The Goals for the Giving of These Gifts

III. The Goals are proclaimed, 12, 13.

- A. To enlist members, 12b.
- B. To equip the members, 12a.
- C. To employ the members, 12b-16.

### To Enlist Members

We are to “build up” the Body of Christ by the use of these gifted men and their emerging followers. So a new standard of enlistment must be immediately employed by the church. The full terms of enlistment must be immediately employed by the church. The full terms of the Christian “contract” must be stated and accepted from the first moment of decision ☞ self-denial, cross-bearing (these are “front-door” requirements, not maturity additions), inside-out living, devotional and vocational Bible study, worship and warfare prayer, etc., etc. And these cannot be instilled as lifestyle by a 1-, 2-, or 3-hour-a-week exposure.

Where, in our evangelism, is a standard and practice for rejecting and dismissing the idolatrous rich young ruler? And this devastating standard was employed by Jesus in dismissing a polite, orthodox, earnest, seeking inquirer (read Matthew 19:16-26 carefully). Incidentally, the young man’s question, “What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” was actually asked *twice* of Jesus. A lawyer (“expert” on Moses’ law) asked it in Luke 10:25 in another setting altogether. And neither time did Jesus give what most of us would consider an “orthodox, plan-of-salvation” answer. He applied the “mid-way test” at the *front door!*

You see, the word “believe,” which is simplistically used by us to state the way of salvation, is itself a compound of two words, “by life,” and it means “to *live* by.” What you *behave* is what you *believe!* All the rest is airy talk, “much ado about nothing,” pious words, often “full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing.” This is the Christianity which *discusses* but never *does*, “*glories*” but never *goes*, “*delights*” but *disobeys*, *purges itself* for the sake of *cleanliness* but never *pours itself out* for the sake of *conquest*, *pours in* to fill the church (on Sunday morning) but never *pours out* to fill and impact the farthest reaches of the earth . . . . We must clearly state as an entrance requirement that the New Birth (which is performed and proscribed only by God) is necessarily followed by the New Life (which is equally produced and proscribed by God). So we need a new enlistment in today’s church, an enlistment which understands the full revelation of Jesus. After all, should not a signee read and understand the entire contract before he “signs on the dotted line”?

### To Equip the Members

Then, every member is to be “equipped” for his individual “work of ministering” (4:12a). This sentence contains one of the most expansive and definitive words of the New Testament. It is translated “perfecting” in the KJV, but (as usual) no single translation can possibly convey the full meaning of this word to us. One translation says that the gifted men are given to the church to “equip” its members; another says, “to fully furnish”; another, to “outfit” the members. One thing is certain: *all Christians*  $\Rightarrow$  *without exemption, exception, or exclusion*  $\Rightarrow$  are to be so equipped, or outfitted, or furnished. The introverted institutional model of today’s church is that the pastor is the star on center stage, while the “laity” are left with odd jobs as stage hands, lighting technicians, and custodians. This model must be altered so that the pastor becomes the “outfitter” and the people the ministers. The clearly stated purpose of the outfitting is that each Christian may engage in “the work of ministering.” You see, the day you were saved, **YOU WERE CALLED INTO THE MINISTRY!** Your pastor is not any more of a minister than *you* are! In fact, *you* are to *minister*; your *pastor* is to *equip you* for the ministry. You see, we need to rid the world of *laymen* and **PUT EVERY CHRISTIAN INTO THE FULL-TIME, VOCATIONAL, GOING, PROCLAIMING, GOOD-NEWSING, LEADING AND FEEDING, MINISTRY!!!!** What a singing, shouting, overcoming, marching, penetrating, victorious army the church would be! Eugenia Price said, “The greatest sin of today’s church is that it has almost totally *tamed* the Lion of Judah.” We have tamed all the risk, all the threat, all the danger, all the martyrdom out of Christianity, so more interest, challenge, and excitement can be generated by a sports event or a rock concert than by the “all banners flying” march of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The word “equipped“ is a cosmopolitan word. A study of the use of the word in the New Testament would both exhaust and shock us. In Greek, the basic word is “katartismos.” The “kat” part is a prefix, and the “mon” part is an ending. Strip these away and you will get to the heart and the basic meaning of the word translated “equip” or “outfit” or “furnish” or “prepare for action.” The root form is “artis”  $\Rightarrow$  from which we get our word “artisan.” Eureka! The word “artisan” means a “skilled craftsman.” Eureka!! The business of the pastor-teacher is to turn *every believer* of his constituency into an *absolute skilled craftsman* in *handling, understanding, living by, being dominated by,*

*ministering with, etc., the Word of God.* This assignment consumed Jesus as *a strategy for Twelve Men* in hands-on, close-up, round-the-clock, on-the-job training for approximately three years. Again, what does the word “Christlike” mean? What does the word “Christlike” mean? If we cut away His Strategy, and omit His Great Commission, and disregard His Model, why should we bemoan the condition of the church and the world? We are only living with the commodity *we* produced. Remember that Perception leads to Process, and Process leads to Product. If the Product is wrong (and who can deny that it often *is*), then the *Process* must be wrong . . . .

Look again at the word “equip.” Research reveals that it was a widely used word in the Greek-speaking world of the first century. And it carried many shades of meaning:

- (1) *To pacify a city that was torn by faction.*
- (2) *To set a limb that has been dislocated.*
- (3) *To develop certain parts of the body by exercise.*
- (4) *To restore a person to his right mind.*
- (5) *To reconcile friends who have been estranged.*
- (6) *To fully furnish something or someone for a given purpose.*
- (7) *To order things properly, or to correctly arrange things.*
- (8) *To put something on the path of progress.*

Before you leave this list too hurriedly, look back over it and translate each statement into the job description of the leaders of the Body of Christ. Then, translate each statement into the life and conduct of all the followers, because disciples will become like their teacher (Luke 6:40).

### To Employ the Members

So the traditional roles of “clergy” and “laity” must be reversed. The “laity” become the troops in the front lines (fully armed, fully aware, and fully active), and the “clergy,” with the gathered church, exist to support them. Charles Colson was right when he wrote, “each of us as believers must see ourselves as ministers of the Gospel. We don’t simply attend church, consuming a religious product.” The Christian who has no personal ministry which eventuates into powerful world impact is a *distorted version* of a Christian. The goal is the full-time employment of every Christian in living the Christian life and penetrating and impacting the world by means of the strategy of Jesus. Again, the building of world-visionary, world-impacting, multipliers emerges as the Top Priority (as in the Great Commission). In order for the church to correct its tragic distortions, it must practice a new and different *recruitment*, a new and different *equipment*, and a new and different *deployment*. May God open the eyes of our hearts and flood them with light (Ephesians 1:17-19)!

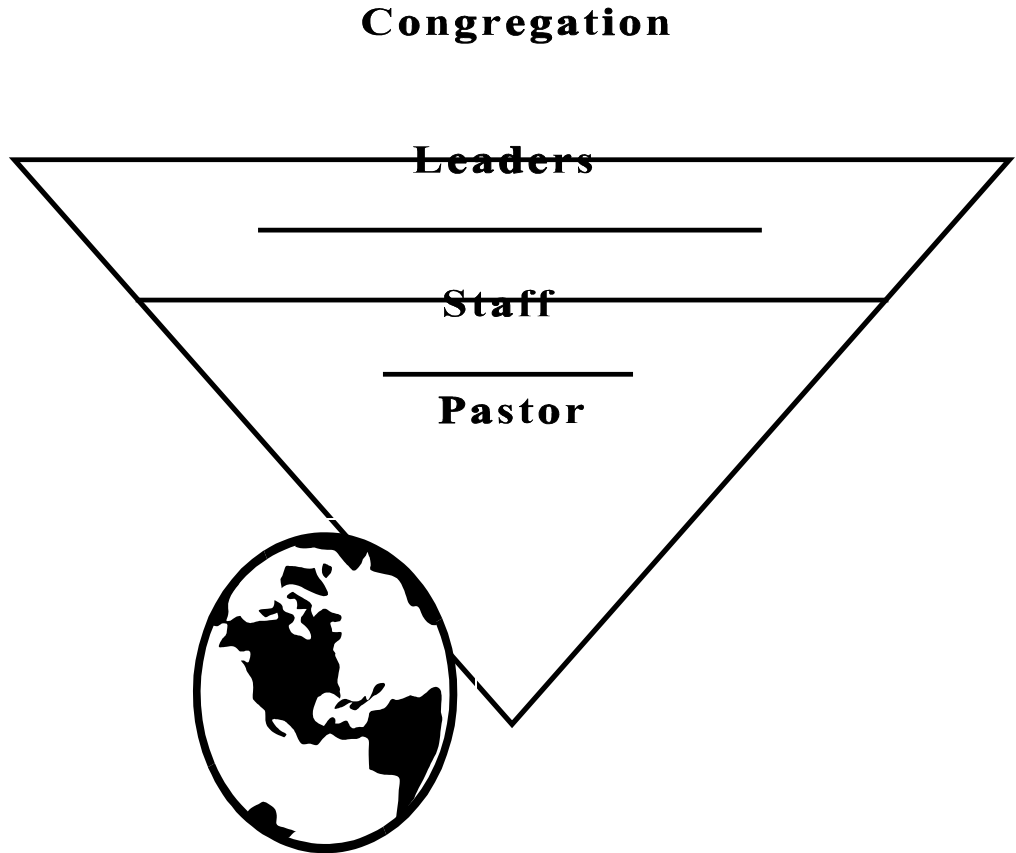
So the immediate purpose inside a fellowship of believers is to “equip the saints.” This will require a full-orbed, all-cylinders-functioning training of every believer. The ultimate purpose is to “build up the church”  $\Rightarrow$  *qualitatively*, by *edifying* it on the *inside*, and *quantitatively*, by *enlarging* it from the *outside*. How far outside? *Each church* must see its assignment as “*the uttermost part of the earth.*” So it must extend its “supply lines”  $\Rightarrow$  its personnel, its finances, its plans, strategies, and actions  $\Rightarrow$  to the very



ends of the earth. Remember, the light that shines farthest shines brightest *at home*.

### Models of a Local Fellowship of Believers

Let me conclude this study by diagraming two models of a local fellowship of believers. One is the usual model in the American church, the other is the practical model called for in our text.



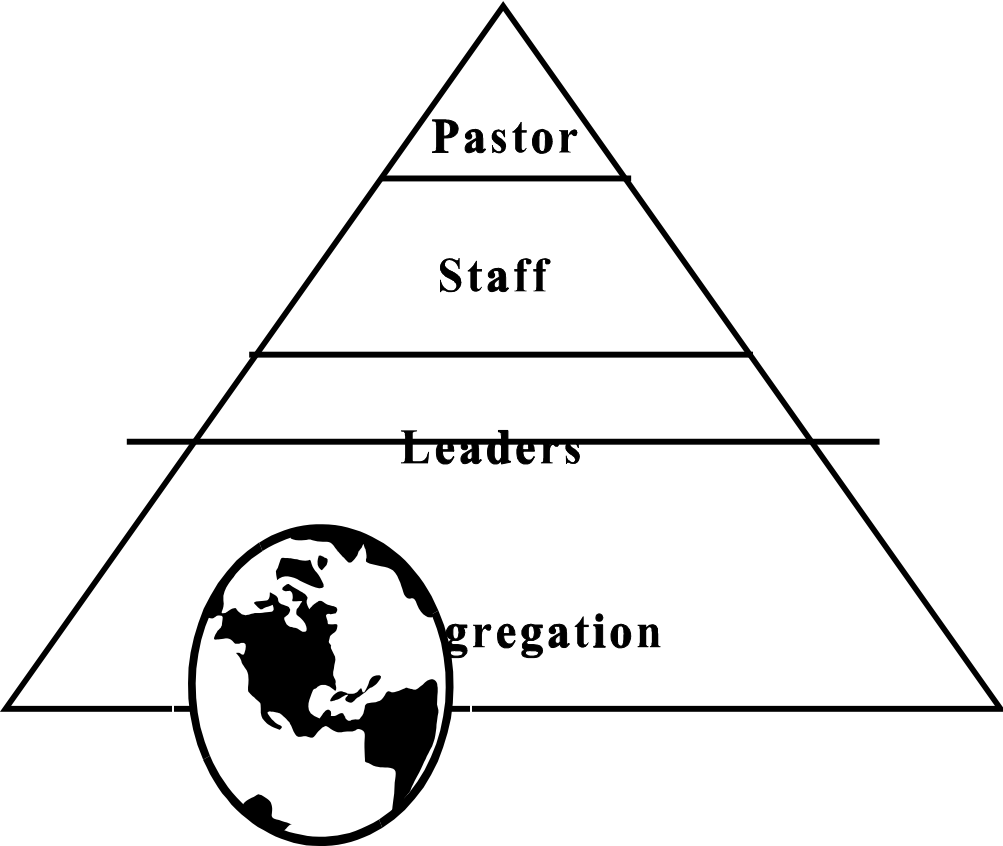
In the first model, the congregation is made up of auditors, observers,

supporters and unfulfilled believers. When the commitment narrows and sharpens a bit, the more committed person becomes a leader in the fellowship. As the commitment sharpens more (usually centering *only* in the local body), church staff members emerge. And behold, the most committed person in the church is usually seen to be the pastor! The distortion of this model is evident. So the weight of the body and of its responsibilities rests largely on the pastor. The pastor carries innumerable responsibilities *inside* the body and is often the only one who sees or addresses responsibility *outside* the body. *Special* programs entice the most committed members to the “special” works of soul-winning, missions, special community services, etc. But the burden of performance, achievement and world impact falls largely upon the pastor.

The results of this model are three-fold:

- (1) A very discouraged leadership. Over 1,000 pastors a year are leaving the Southern Baptist preaching ministry. Over 300 a month are being forcibly removed (“fired”) from pulpits across the Southern Baptist Convention. Does this embarrass us? It certainly should! And it can be corrected.
- (2) A largely “carnal” (self-centered, self-gratifying) church membership. In this model, the members recognize no assignment except church attendance, institutional loyalty, and auditing support. Is it any wonder that they remain carnal?
- (3) A largely unevangelized world. Most of the human race have either *not* heard the Name of Jesus at all, or they have only “barely” heard it. The Christianity of the Book of Acts addressed an even more hopeless situation and completely changed it in a shockingly short time. The situation can be changed just as dramatically today, but not by the continuation of the same crippled model.

The other model is almost the precise opposite of the former one.



In this model, the pastor has the first responsibility chronologically. His position is one of *responsibility*, not of *prestige*! The responsibility of such a position is immeasurably greater than any prestige that might be gained from it. In fact, it could almost be stated as a rule: any profile of the body that eventuates in the ever-enlarging reputation (for success, ability, etc.) of its leader is highly suspect from a Christian viewpoint! Flesh courts attention, recognition, decoration, and this is only *one* weakness flesh is heir to! Flesh cannot be trusted with the kind of accolades that are given to super-status, super star leaders.

The pastor's first responsibility in this model (an American church, thus limited, model) is to equip and infect his staff, and this includes the vision of disciple-making to penetrate the entire world. This common vision should determine the ministry of each staff member, and should dictate his goals for the disciples *he* is building. The pastor is also responsible to equip and infect the leaders, but now he has an incredible advantage. The leaders are now being "doubly equipped" with a common vision and strategy, one directly from the pastor, the other from the staff. And now pastor, staff and leaders will be united in equipping all the saints for their work of ministering. When this expectation is implemented, the "dead weight" will fall away and the "rich young rulers" will be gone. But the *eyes, mouths, ears, hands, knees, and feet* of the body will be seeing, speaking, hearing, doing, kneeling and walking, in complete consolidation  $\Rightarrow$  always moving *out* toward the ends of the earth. The local fellowship is not the *primary place* of ministry (though much ministry takes place there), it is the *powerful base* for ministry. The people are automatically showing and sharing Christ *wherever they are*, and they are consciously structuring strategies to personally penetrate to the ends of the earth. At this point, I want to strongly recommend that each reader obtain and master a book by David Bryant entitled, In the Gap. It concerns the vocation of every believer to stand "in the gap" at the *widest* places between the evangelized and the unevangelized in today's world. One of my own men called it "the best book I have ever read outside the Bible."

What is the outcome when the second model becomes a reality? Again, there is a three-fold result:

- (1) The most excited and fulfilled leaders on earth.
- (2) Ever enlarging numbers of "spiritual" believers (Christ-centered, God-honoring, Spirit-filled, world-impacting saints).
- (3) An increasingly evangelized world.

The strategies for implementing the second model are inherent in the Mandate and Model of Jesus and the Mandate and Model of Ephesians 4. But we must be very careful. God's *ultimate* purposes depend on the fulfilment of His *immediate* purposes. Are you yourself being discipled  $\Rightarrow$  close-up, "hands-on," with on-the-job assignments for world impact? Are you building into others  $\Rightarrow$  close-up, "hands-on," with on-the-job assignments for world impact? Selah!