

Apostles And Shepherds

by Derek Prince

— Study Note Outline —
AS1

Four Tape Series

- 4104 *Presbyteries And Apostolic Teams – Part 1*
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Presbyteries And Apostolic Teams – Part 1 – 4104

I. Human Leadership In The Church

- A. Two main forms:
 - 1. Local presbyteries
 - 2. Mobile apostolic teams
- B. Characteristic features:
 - 1. Each is *normally* plural
 - 2. Each is *sovereign* in its own sphere, but not independent
 - 3. They are *interdependent*: apostles *appoint* elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5); but elders *send out* apostles (Acts 13:1–3; 16:1–3; 1 Tim. 4:14)
 - 4. Each is *dependent* on God's grace
 - 5. Each can only function effectively when directed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–4, 16:6–10; Rom. 8:14)
 - 6. *Prophets* have a role both in presbyteries (Acts 13:1) and in apostolic teams (Eph. 2:20)
- C. Important differences:
 - 1. Presbyteries function within a given locality; apostolic teams are available to the whole body and have the world as their parish.
 - 2. The main task of presbyteries is order and conservation through government (1 Tim. 5:17); apostolic teams give input to presbyteries, but their main thrust is to extend the borders of God's kingdom (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–20; Acts 1:2; Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10).
 - 3. The three most authoritative ministries are apostles, prophets, teachers (1 Cor. 12:28). All three handle God's Word. However, apostles should not normally override the sovereignty of local presbyteries.
- D. Balance between presbyteries and apostolic teams
 - 1. The New Testament seems to give more attention to the work of apostolic teams than to that of presbyteries. Numerically, however, there were probably more disciples involved in conservation than in outreach. Jesus Himself led the first apostolic team (Heb. 3:1). At times, it could have numbered at least 30—including women (Luke 8:1–3). Thus, His team also demonstrated the

church in a microcosm. Most of the discipling processes actually described in the New Testament took place in the context of apostolic teams (e.g. those of Jesus and Paul). The same kind of teaching, detached from this context, will not necessarily produce the same results. The church was first manifested in a mobile form only—later in a residential form.

2. In the contemporary church, the usual emphasis is about 95% on conservation and 5% on outreach. Even if every planned activity were to be totally successful, the overall result would be certain failure. Perhaps we should consider a 50–50 *emphasis* on outreach and conservation, allowing for a higher *proportion* of Christians to be involved in conservation. However, all disciples should accept personal responsibility for the success of the Church's outreach. Apostolic teams and presbyteries are the two legs on which the Body of Christ moves. If one leg is shorter than the other, the body cannot function successfully. There are also many other parts of the body, but none can take the place of the legs.

Presbyteries And Apostolic Teams

– Part 2 –

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II. Safeguards Against Abuse Of Authority

- A. Man was created to rule (Gen. 1:26–28), but his carnal nature often causes him to seek to rule for wrong motives and by illegitimate means—resulting in some form of manipulation or domination. The New Testament offers certain **safeguards**:
 1. Plurality in both presbyteries and apostolic teams. This does not set aside the position of a leader among leaders, but this position depends primarily on respect and recognition, and should not normally be legislated or institutionalized. In a presbytery, the responsibility for decisions and policy should be corporate. It is dangerous to undermine this principle. In an apostolic team, the recognized leader may have a greater measure of personal authority.
 2. Interdependence between the two groups. Neither group has liberty to ride roughshod over the sovereignty of the other. Each needs the other.
- B. Historically, the church has tended to overemphasize conservation at the expense of outreach. This has tended to give preeminence to the ministry of shepherds (pastors/bishops). Also, the pastors/bishops control the communion/Eucharist, often considered the sacrifice essential for salvation.
- C. Much the same happened to Israel in the Old Testament. The priests abrogated excessive authority to themselves, and God had to raise up prophets to rebuke and challenge the priests (see Jer. 2:8, 34:18–20; Hos. 5:1, 6:9; Mal. 1:6–10, 2:1–3).

III. Invisible Government

- A. Jesus in the heavenlies is head over the church (Eph. 1:20–22). The church's headquarters is where its head is. From here Jesus governs His church through the Holy Spirit. Exemplified by Paul's apostleship (1 Tim. 1:1; Acts 13:2). Jesus is Lord *over* the church, the Holy Spirit is Lord *in* the church (2 Cor. 3:17). **No**

- system can take the place of the Holy Spirit.** Most Christian groups need to give much higher priority to seeking the counsel and direction of the Holy Spirit.
- B.** On the earthly level, there is **no human authority** *over* presbyteries and apostolic teams. Jesus governs these direct from heaven through the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1–4, 16:6–10). Historically, man has set other individuals or groups over presbyteries and apostolic teams, and thus frustrated the government of Jesus. The usual result is some form of bureaucracy, but this does not meet the real needs.
 - C.** Again, there is a precedent from the Old Testament. Israel found it difficult to live under God’s invisible government and asked for a human king (see 1 Sam. 8:4–22). In such a case, visible human government tends to come between the Lord and His people, and to drain the resources of the people.
 - D.** There is both room and need for other kinds of groups: Committees, councils, etc. But these must never be allowed to usurp the authority of presbyteries and apostolic teams.
 - E.** Examples of other groups:
 1. Churches in a locality appoint a committee to fight pornography
 2. A radio or TV station supported by a group of churches in an area
 3. Churches in a locality send relief to a disaster area

IV. Relationships Between Apostles And Presbyteries

- A.** Apostles were at times directed to specific sections of humanity: e.g. James, Peter and John to the Jews; Paul to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:6–9). But they did not claim exclusive authority over specific churches.
- B.** Consider the relationship of Paul to the Galatians and Corinthians. He was a father to both groups (Gal. 4:19; 1 Cor. 4:14–15). But he did not reprove them for accepting other preachers without his permission. He merely told them they ought to know better than to believe those who were false (Gal. 4:12–31; 1 Cor. 3:1–15). He rejected any claim to exclusive rights over the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:11–13). He appealed to their maturity rather than to his authority.
- C.** Both Paul and Peter wrote independently to the Galatians (2 Pet. 3:15).

V. Nature Of Apostolic Ministry

- A.** An apostle is literally “one sent forth”—to extend the boundaries of God’s kingdom. A static apostle is a self-contradiction.
- B.** When an apostle does become resident in a locality, he functions as a co-elder (1 Pet. 5:1)
- C.** An apostle normally combines in himself one or more of the other four main ministries. He is more than a successful pastor or evangelist. His ministry must include the manifestly supernatural (2 Cor. 12:12).

VI. Two Main Purposes Of The Supernatural:

- A.** To produce convinced obedience (Rom. 1:5, 15:18–19)
- B.** To produce maximum results in minimum time (Acts 14:21–23)

VII. Concluding Emphasis

- A.** Apostolic teams and presbyteries are the two legs of Christ’s body
- B.** Need for a scriptural balance between them
- C.** Jointly, they are under the direct, invisible government of Christ in the heavenlies—made effective by the Holy Spirit on earth

- D. Until apostolic teams become functional, the church should consider itself in a process of ongoing development.

The Chief Shepherd And His Under-Shepherds

– Part 1 –

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I. Introduction:

- A. Distinguish between *absolutes* and *variables*:
1. Absolutes: Things in which Scripture says absolutely we must or must not do
 2. Variables: Things about which Scripture does not give specific commands, but which are left to our decision. However, if variables would violate absolutes, they are not permissible.
- B. Most *absolutes* are in the realm of heart and conduct: faith, love, holiness, humility, meekness, purity, prayerfulness, respect for marriage and family, etc. If we bypass these absolutes and focus on variables, we miss the purposes of God.
- C. If we make **absolutes** out of **variables**, we infringe on God's sovereignty and we impose unscriptural limitations on God's servants.
- D. Historically, the Church has tended to divide over the **variables**, and ignore the **absolutes**.
- E. Basis for decisions about variables:
1. The leading of the Holy Spirit
 2. To be judged by their fruits

II. Shepherd/Shepherding

- A. In Old Testament about 160 times; in New Testament about 30 times
- B. In addition to natural use, applied to God, to Jesus and to human leaders
- C. Basic meanings: to rule; to lead; to feed
- D. Always, *sheep without a shepherd are scattered* (1 Kings 22:17; Ezek. 34:5–6; Matt. 9:36; 26:31)

III. Shepherds In The New Testament

- A. On *two levels*
1. Divine and human
 2. Begin with the divine—then work down to the human
- B. The divine shepherd
1. In the New Testament, except in similes or parables, the word shepherd is used in the singular only of Jesus
 2. Basic fact: Every committed Christian has a divine shepherd (John 10:11, 27–28; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4)
 - a. Ps. 23:1–4—As shepherd, the Lord offers total security—in proportion to our commitment (compare 2 Tim. 1:12). His ministry is unique and cannot be duplicated by any human shepherd, e.g.
 - b. Ps. 23:3—He restores my soul
 - c. John 10:27—I know them (compare Ps. 139:1–6)
 - d. John 10:28—I give them *eternal life*
- C. Contrast duties of human shepherds:

1. Take care of the flock. (Ezek. 34:3–4) This includes:
 - a. Strengthen the weak
 - b. Heal the sick
 - c. Bind up the injured
 - d. Bring back the strays
 - e. Search for the lost
2. In the life of any believer, it is the sole prerogative of Jesus either to exercise His ministry as shepherd directly, or to *delegate* some of this responsibility to human under-shepherds. It is not apparent that all the main characters in the New Testament had specific human shepherds, e.g.:
 - a. *Peter* going to the home of Cornelius, then *baptizing* him and his household (Acts 10). This was *totally contrary* to all accepted tradition and practice. Peter could have delayed his trip to Caesarea and visited Jerusalem first. But he did not! Subsequently, none of his fellow apostles told him he should have done this (Acts 11:1–18).
 - b. Paul, after his conversion, did not go to the first apostles in Jerusalem, but to Arabia, where he received *direct revelation* from Christ (Gal. 1:11–19).
 - c. Consider also the ministry of *Philip* (Acts 8)
3. If we insist that *all believers* must have personal human shepherds, we make an *absolute* out of a *variable*.
4. If a *human shepherd* seeks to fill the place of the Lord in a believer's life, it will lead to double frustration—for shepherd and for sheep.
5. Personal testimony
 I spent my first five years as a Christian in the British Army on active service. It was impossible for me to have a human shepherd. During this period I made the following *major personal decisions*:
 - a. I gave away my money
 - b. I gave up my university career
 - c. I renounced my right to return to my own country
 - d. I set the claims of God's call before those of my family
 - e. I entered into a very unconventional marriage
 - f. I adopted eight girls
 - g. I entered into full-time ministry
 - h. I believe every decision was right. In all this, Jesus was my sole shepherd. This gives no grounds for arrogance (see Ps. 25:8–12)

The Chief Shepherd And His Under-Shepherds

– Part 2 –

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III. Human Shepherds In The New Testament (cont'd.)

E. Human shepherds

1. The New Testament uses three different words:
 - a. Shepherd/pastor
 - b. Overseer/bishop
 - c. Elder (see Acts 20:17–28; Tit. 1:6–7; 1 Pet. 2:25, 5:1–3)

2. Consistently, the New Testament refers to these human shepherds in the *plural*: e.g. Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23, 16:4; 20:17, 28, 21:18; Eph. 4:11; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12–13; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1–3 (21 times)
 3. Throughout Revelation, elders are always *plural*
 4. Exceptions are minimal: 2 John 1; 3 John 1 – ? The “angels” of the churches in Revelation 2 and 3.
 5. Nowhere is any human individual referred to as the pastor of any church. Paul regularly addressed churches and their leaders corporately. He did not single out any individual leader (Acts 20:17—also opening of letters to Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians)
 6. It is important to maintain the *corporate authority* and *responsibility* of human leadership in the Church. However, in the church in Jerusalem, James seems to have held a position of special honor and authority (Acts 12:17, 15:13–22, 21:18)
 7. *Conclusion*: in the New Testament Church there was sufficient flexibility to make room for individual gifts and personalities without legislation or establishing an institution.
- F. Some main responsibilities of human shepherds**
1. To *strengthen* and *mature relationships* of individual believers with the Chief Shepherd—to teach them to hear His voice (John 10:27). He may speak through a human shepherd or in other ways—but not everything a human shepherd says is necessarily the Lord’s voice.
 2. To build *strong, harmonious relationships* between the members of the flock (1 Thess. 5:12–13)
 3. A human shepherd should never interpose himself:
 - a. Between the sheep and the Chief Shepherd
 - b. Between the sheep and the corporate eldership
- G. Organization of human shepherds**
1. No single, overall system appears to be enforced in the New Testament. In each situation, the guidance of the Holy Spirit is needed (2 Cor. 3:17). It is a mistake to impose a concept on a situation.
 2. The New Testament does depict house churches (Rom. 16:3–5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2). This suggests a situation in which a shepherd is responsible for a specific group under his care, but the New Testament provides no examples of this system being applied to a whole city church.
 3. In each situation, a system of shepherding must be judged by its fruit (Matt. 7:20). God takes account of national and individual personalities. He does not fit all believers into one rigid system.
- H. Trans-local relationships**
1. I find no instance in the New Testament of a *resident shepherd/pastor* receiving pastoral care from a person not residing in the same area. However, trans-local oversight is found in the context of an apostolic team: e.g., the relationship of Paul to Timothy or Titus.
 2. All this *does not preclude* a relationship in which a spiritual father, or elder brother offers ongoing counsel to a man with pastoral responsibilities. Such a

relationship is a **variable**, not an **absolute**.

I. Discipling

1. A function of *apostles* in their teams and shepherds in their churches— involves special training that goes beyond general pastoral care.
2. The same *two* possibilities as with shepherding:
 - a. The Lord disciplines directly
 - b. The Lord disciplines through a human servant
3. Examples of both:
 - a. Moses disciplined Joshua, but the Lord disciplined Moses
 - b. Elijah disciplined Elisha, but, apparently, the Lord disciplined Elijah (1 Kings 17; 18:1, 36)
 - c. Apparently, the Lord disciplined John the Baptist (Luke 1:80; John 1:33)
 - d. Jesus disciplined the first apostles; Paul also was disciplined directly by Jesus (Gal. 1:11–17)
4. When God initiates something new, He usually disciplines direct. Contemporary example: My own experience with deliverance.

J. Concluding emphasis

1. If we bypass divine absolutes and focus on variables, we miss the purposes of God and probably add to the division in the Church.
2. If we make *absolutes* out of *variables*, we infringe on God's sovereignty and impose unscriptural limitations on God's servants.
3. It is the sole prerogative of Jesus to shepherd/disciple a believer directly or to delegate some of this responsibility to human under-shepherds.
4. The New Testament consistently emphasizes the corporate authority and responsibility of the *plural eldership* in a local church.