

2 TIMOTHY 1:11

APPOINTED, NOT HIRED

“I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.”¹

His face was red and his eyes were narrow slits as he raged, “We hired you, and we can fire you.” I was equally determined as I asserted with a firm, steady voice, “No one hired me; God appointed me.” Ignoring my assertion, the enraged man informed me that he was the “Chairman of the Church.” He continued his tirade, loudly proclaiming that what he wanted, he got; what he didn’t want wouldn’t happen. Tragically, this incident was not exceptional in modern church life; such despicable despots are not an anomaly among the churches of this day. Petty tyrants on a power trip are distressingly common among the churches of our Lord.

I caution the people of God, the Holy One is quite capable of guiding His holy people without the intervention or oversight of any individual. He managed to direct the people of Israel through the wilderness for forty years and He is well able to oversee the advance of any congregation in this day. Shockingly, professed leaders among the faithful seem often to fall into the trap of imagining that God is dependent upon them—as though without their expertise or without their firm hand holding the tiller the church will soon cease to exist. Yet, no individual is indispensable for the spiritual progress of a congregation. In fact, it is fair to say that if a congregation is guided by such an individual, or even by a group of such individuals, that congregation has ceased moving forward and has either begun to regress or it awaits the final pronouncement of “hic jacet.” Employing a biblical argot, it is likely that the Head of the Church has already inscribed “Ichabod” above the door of that particular congregation.

If I should begin to act in a domineering, autocratic manner, or should the congregation begin to permit any individual or group of individuals to act in an authoritarian, overbearing fashion, the advance of this congregation will be halted and the work will suffer. The Spirit of Christ dwells among His people. What else can Paul’s cautionary word mean when he writes, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:16, 17]. If anyone should begin to act presumptuously with the congregation of the faithful, they are presuming against God Himself. And just as God removed Ananias and Sapphira, so He will hold such individuals accountable even now.

That brings us to the message for this day. Paul asserts that he was appointed and not hired. His service was offered up as though fulfilling the appointment he had received. With this brief statement, the Apostle compels all who read his words to grapple with the manner in which God directs His church. Understanding the work of God is vital for a healthy church.

HIRING A PREACHER — The contemporary church model consists of members and adherents ruled by an elected board. The model is an ecclesiastical adaptation of modern democratic political life. The elected board searches out staff, including a preacher who is hired to act as sort of a CEO. This preacher is answerable to the board who reviews his performance on some ongoing basis. Should he fail to please his masters, he will be dismissed. Consequently, the modern preacher is careful not to offend and careful to make people feel good about themselves.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The hired preacher's tenure may be long, but it is most frequently of short duration. Among modern churches, the tenure is often measured in months rather than years. One denomination has a reported average pastoral tenure of approximately eighteen months, a figure that is not incidentally frequently cited as the average tenure for youth pastors in evangelical churches. Among one of the largest denominations, the average pastoral tenure is 3.6 years.² Pastors with productive ministries tend to remain for longer periods, meaning that many pastors remain in their pulpit for less than two years.

George Barna writes of this rapid turnover, "Our work has found that the typical pastor has his or her greatest ministry impact at church in years five through fourteen of their pastorate. Unfortunately, we also know that the average pastor lasts only five years at a church— forfeiting the fruit of their investment in the church they've pastored. In our fast turnaround society where we demand overnight results and consider everyone expendable and everything disposable, we may be shortchanging pastors—and the congregations they oversee—by terminating their tenure."³

Undoubtedly, most pastors accept their position in a given congregation in anticipation that they can make a difference. I am confident that most pastors want to honour God and they want to make those under their teaching strong in Christ the Lord. I know there are charlatans who seek only to climb the ecclesiastical ladder, securing a more prominent position for themselves. However, most pastors *want* to honour God—they *want* to build strong Christians and strong churches. Yet, such aspirations seem more often dashed than fulfilled.

The reasons for truncated tenures such as just described are undoubtedly multifaceted. Some pastors leave their present church to move to a congregation that provides better support—family needs dictate such moves. Few pastors serve for financial gain. Most pastors invest far more time in service to the people than those outside the pastorate will ever realise.

Conflict accounts for many pastors leaving their charge; and conflict is more common among the churches than many could ever imagine. Having served multiple congregations both in the United States and in Canada, I estimate that major conflicts occur in a particular congregation on an average of about every two years. The conflicts may be resolved by the pastor leaving or by other church members leaving; seldom are the conflicts resolved biblically.

Other pastors believe (perhaps with good reason) that they are *getting stale*; they seek "greener pastures." **Boredom and burnout** account for others leaving their charge. Another reason given for leaving a pastorate includes the present oversight creates *too much pressure*. Still, it seems that *being fired or forced to leave* is a major reason for pastors leaving a pastorate.

For years, I have heard church leaders (usually leading churches in obvious decline) recite a little ditty, "Pastors come, and pastors go, but the church remains." It salves the conscience after a church brawl that ensured that yet another pastor would be sent packing; however, such attitudes are abhorrent in light of Scripture; the unspoken assumption held by such leaders is, "This is *our* church." With the departure of each pastor, the decreasing number of attendees in the congregation asserts—either openly, defiantly or tacitly, "This is *our* church."

² Thom S. Rainer, "8 Traits of Effective Church Leaders," June 11, 2009, http://thomrainer.com/2009/06/11/8_traits_of_effective_church_leaders/ accessed 20 May 20, 2015; Dennis C. Cook, "Three Point Six: The Tenure of Ministry (Part One of Two)," July 18, 2011, <https://churchmusictoday.wordpress.com/2011/07/18/three-point-six-the-tenure-of-ministry-part-one-of-two/>, accessed 20 May 2015

³ A Profile of Protestant Pastors in Anticipation of "Pastor Appreciation Month," September 25, 2001, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/59-a-profile-of-protestant-pastors-in-anticipation-of-qpastor-appreciation-monthq#.VVzXKqIGTfs>, accessed 20 May 2015

The contemporary concept has grown out of something that is never found in Scripture. The congregation is desperate for a pastor (after all, you can't be a church without a pastor), and so they set out to "call" a pastor. Perceptive people realise that the concept of "call" is church talk for "hire." The board accumulates a series of resumes from people, each of whom is either exploring a "call" or openly declares that he (and even she in modern church life) is "called" to pastor that church. Except for one great exception, the term used for a shepherd (pastor) in the New Testament always speaks of someone who takes care of real sheep or of the Lord Himself. To be sure, the verbal form is used by both Paul and Peter as they direct overseers/elders to shepherd the flock of God. The one significant exception is given in the encyclical that we know as the Letter to the Ephesians.

Of course, Paul is speaking of Christ's ascension gifts to the churches when he writes, "He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" [EPHESIANS 4:11-16]. The Apostle writes of "the shepherds and teachers"; this is the sole place where the term "shepherd" (or "pastor") is applied to elders/overseers.

As mentioned previously, Paul had urged these same Ephesian elders, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood" [ACTS 20:28, HCSB].

Peter uses similar language when he writes, "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" [1 PETER 5:1-4].

To identify the overseer of the church as the pastor is legitimate. However, appealing to Scripture, the term "pastor" is seen to be exceptional rather than common. Nevertheless, when a church is without a shepherd, that congregation usually solicits resumes from hopeful "candidates" who need a job or who wish to move to another place. Perceptive individuals know that they will be there about three point six years and then they will be gone. However, all involved spiritualise the hiring and the firing by appealing to a "call." If the preacher is "called," he is being called to be the next to come and to go. He will go to his new charge anticipating that he will change the pattern of death that marks the congregation.

This reminds me of the riddle, "How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?" The answer is, "One; but the light bulb has to want to change." The new preacher with his newly minted call dreams of accomplishing great things for God; but the keepers of the ancient ways have to want to change. Unless God Himself intervenes, the power brokers will, in the end, have their way, ultimately proving that this was "their" church. Tragically, far too many churches have passed beyond the point of no return. They bear the name "church" on their stationary, but they long ago ceased to be the community of faith. The group has become a religious society that performs religious ceremonies according to their business model.

I know that in presenting the aforementioned scenario I've painted with a broad brush. Undoubtedly many pastors do seek to honour God and do struggle mightily to ensure that those under their oversight are taught and nurtured in the Faith. Unquestionably, among the churches of our Lord are found godly individuals praying for their congregation and seeking God's glory. Nevertheless, the scenario presented is sufficiently common as to define too many congregations. Because this is true, knowledge that such conditions are more common than we might otherwise imagine should challenge all churches—read that as “all Christians”—to examine the attitude resident and tolerated within the Body concerning ecclesiastical structure.

If the congregations of this day are to hope to approximate the biblical model, each Christian will be compelled to confront the attitude that leadership is hired or elected in favour of the biblical concept of appointment. Each Christian is responsible to reject even the hint of a professional ministry that is hired to do the work of the church. Each Christian is responsible to refuse to permit himself or herself to fall into the trap of permitting the worship of the Living Christ to become a spectator sport. Each believer is appointed to be engaged in the greatest work ever entrusted to mankind—glorifying God and turning the lost to life in the Risen Son of God.

THE BIBLICAL MODEL — “I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher.” Whether we speak of a preacher or whether we speak of a teacher, if that one is not appointed by the Sovereign Head of the Church, he is a pretender and unfit for the service to which he lays claim. Paul quite boldly asserts that he was appointed to the offices he claims. Note in particular that he places his appointment as a preacher before laying claim to being an apostle and teacher.

In the earlier missive to Timothy, Paul had spoken of the responsibilities he bore. He wrote, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” So, he urged that Christians be taught to pray and intercede for others, that they be instructed to lead a life marked by thanksgiving and that they seek the salvation of the lost. This is important in Pauline theology because Christ our mediator gave Himself as a ransom for all. Therefore, the Apostle testified, “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” [1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7]. Again, note the primacy of preaching in the Apostle's estimate.

Let me speak to this issue for a brief moment. We live in a wicked day when preaching is depreciated in far too many of the churches of our Lord. Many of God's choice saints receive biblical nourishment primarily through listening to the few great preachers who can be heard via radio or seen on television or who have published books of their sermons for people to read. Surely God meant that His people would be built up, strengthened, nourished through the preaching of the Word by those who occupy the pulpits of His churches. Even when preachers do occupy the pulpit, by the choices they make preaching is often relegated to an inferior position in the service of worship. Perhaps this is to be expected when pulpit committees focus more on administrative abilities than on pulpit abilities and when churches are willing to exalt dance, or music, or drama, or book reviews rather than the act of preaching. When credentials and connections are esteemed more highly than character and divine appointment, it cannot be otherwise than that the pulpit should be weak and ineffectual.

James MacDonald recently penned an article in which he cautioned preachers against debasing the ministry of preaching.⁴ Preachers debase their appointment when they attempt to entertain rather than reveal the mind of Christ through preaching the Word. Again, preachers debase the act of heralding the truth of God when they begin to share rather than preach, when they intellectualise rather than declare the mind of Christ revealed in His Word or when they seek to woo dyspeptic saints rather than confronting the wicked ways of their listeners.

Finally, MacDonald states his concern that preachers are content to deliver twenty-minute sermons. He writes, “For us it takes five minutes to set the rig up and another five or ten minutes to take it down. If you’re only preaching for 20 minutes, that gives you five minutes to drill. You’re not going very deep, are you? It takes some time.”

When Paul writes that he was appointed a preacher, the word he employed is frequently translated “herald.”⁵ The Greek term is *kāru*; the word spoke of an individual whose duty was to make public proclamations on behalf of the one who sent him. Now, follow me here, the Word of God declares that those who hear the herald hear the Master who sent the herald. Jesus says, “Whoever receives the one I send receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives the One who sent Me” [JOHN 13:20]. This saying was sufficiently important that Jesus iterated it. Matthew quotes Jesus, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” [MATTHEW 10:40, 41].

Just so we understand the significance of Jesus’ words, Luke has recorded yet another instance of this saying. “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” [LUKE 10:16]. Note that the emphasis in this instance is on hearing! Let me be very clear on this point, Jesus’ words leave no room for pride in the preacher. In fact, the preacher bears a crushing weight! MacDonald perceptively notes, “I tell people the weekly message preparation is the crucible of my sanctification. Never get in a habit of getting up in the pulpit when things aren’t square everywhere.”⁶

It is essential that the preacher be appointed and not hired. However, the fact that he is appointed raises several questions that must be addressed. Who appoints the preacher? What does appointment signify? Is there a cost associated with appointment? The answer to these particular questions is implicit in what the Apostle has written.

WHO APPOINTS? Paul asserts, “I was appointed!” Who appointed him? It was Christ, the Risen Son of God, who appointed Paul. The Apostle himself makes this claim when he presented his apologia before Agrippa. You will recall that he openly and boldly testified that the Living Christ had said, “I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you” [ACTS 26:16].

⁴ James MacDonald, “5 Things We Do Today Instead of Preaching the Word,” 5/28/2015, SermonCentral, http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/james-macdonald-5-things-we-do-today-instead-of-preaching-the-word-2189.asp?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=scnewsletter&utm_content=Split+Test+160+Part+1:+SC+Better+Preaching+Update+20150528-A, accessed 30 May 2015

⁵ E.g. Holman Christian Standard Bible; New English Bible; New International Version (1984); New Jerusalem Bible; New Revised Standard Version; Revised English Bible; Today’s New International Version

⁶ MacDonald, *ibid*.

2 TIMOTHY 1:11
APPOINTED, NOT HIRED

Paul's appointment as a preacher, as an Apostle and as a teacher was emphasised by Ananias when he was dispatched to baptise Saul. When Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus, he said, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." He continued by testifying, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptised and wash away your sins, calling on his name" [ACTS 22:13b-16]. God appointed Saul to be a preacher. And all who dare proclaim this Word as a herald in this day must be appointed if they will succeed in the task before them.

WHAT IS THE APPOINTMENT? Again, the Apostle claims, "I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher" [2 TIMOTHY 1:11]. Appointment implies that the one appointed carries authority. Paul names three specific positions/responsibilities he received from the Master. Consequently, few of us would argue that he did not have divine authority whenever he acted to fulfil those responsibilities. Likewise, if a man is appointed to serve as an elder, does it not follow that he carries divine authority in the conduct of his office? If that man is hired, then he must consider how to please those who hired him. However, if that man is divinely appointed, he must please the one who appointed him. This is the intent of Paul's words that were penned shortly after our text. "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him" [2 TIMOTHY 2:4].

When the Jerusalem congregation picked out from among the members seven men who met the stated qualifications, the apostles and elders appointed them to their service. "Brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty" [ACTS 6:3]. These "proto-deacons," for that is what they were, carried the authority of the apostles and elders as they conducted their work on behalf of the congregation. In similar fashion, when Paul wrote Titus, "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" [TITUS 1:5], those elders Titus appointed implicitly carried apostolic authority in conducting their duties. There is no apostolic succession in appointment to holy office, as some argue; there is, however, a doctrinal succession in divine service. And those who serve as overseers must focus on divine priorities. Similarly, they must not allow themselves to be distracted from first things. The preacher must conduct himself in the knowledge that he does possess authority entrusted to him for the purpose of glorifying God through equipping the saints for the work of ministry, through calling the lost to salvation and through building up the Body of Christ.

I do want to take a moment to stress a truth that is easy to overlook. I've alluded to the fact that pulpit committees often seek administrators rather than preachers. However, the ability to declare faithfully the truth of God's Word in a vibrant, winsome manner is central to the appointment to holy office. Recall the character requirements given to the faithful in Paul's first letter to Timothy. "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach..." [1 TIMOTHY 3:1, 2]. Clearly, the ability to communicate divine truth is essential for appointment to eldership.

This particular quality is witnessed elsewhere as well. In this final letter to Timothy, Paul will write, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" [2 TIMOTHY 2:24-26]. The servant of God must be able to teach.

Writing Titus, Paul's admonition mirrors what he wrote in the first letter to Timothy. "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" [**TITUS 1:5-9**].

The message of life in Christ the Lord is held as a sacred trust to be communicated to each generation. I said earlier, "There is no apostolic succession in appointment to holy office, as some argue; there is, however, a doctrinal succession in divine service." That doctrinal succession is seen in Paul's instruction to Timothy. "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" [**2 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2**].

IS THERE A COST THAT ACCOMPANIES APPOINTMENT? Though it is not directly part of the text today, note the twelfth verse: "I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do" [**2 TIMOTHY 1:11, 12**]. Appointment as a servant of Christ carries authority. However, the authority comes at a cost. The appointee must never demand acknowledgment from those to whom he is sent. He must exercise his authority with discretion.

The concept of authority conveys an unstated point that the position of a preacher should be honoured. To make this statement implies privilege, and privilege may, indeed, be part of the benefit of divine appointment. However, the one appointed to divine service must never demand accommodation, or he will demonstrate that he is undeserving of the honour of the office. We have examples and admonitions provided in the Word that must be taken seriously. For instance, consider the instruction which the Apostle provided the Corinthian Christians.

Paul lays out the case for congregational support, and hence, entitlement of the servant of Christ, rather convincingly in the First Corinthian Letter. "This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

"Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?" [**1 CORINTHIANS 9:3-12a**].

To be sure, the congregation has an obligation to honour Christ through honouring those whom Christ appoints. However, the minister of Christ (whether a preacher or a teacher, an evangelist or a missionary, or even, as in the case of Paul, an Apostle) must be very careful not to be demanding to receive honour. It is one thing to teach the assembly of their responsibility; it is quite another to demand of the people of God that they fulfil those responsibilities. Paul was speaking of himself as an Apostle, though he expanded it to include other ministerial labours when he included Barnabas in the discussion.

2 TIMOTHY 1:11
APPOINTED, NOT HIRED

When speaking to the Ephesian elders, Paul could say without contradiction, “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak” [ACTS 20:33-35a]. In acting as he did, Paul was putting feet to the Master’s teaching given when He sent the Apostles out to serve. “These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay. Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food” [MATTHEW 10:5-10].

Though Paul had the right to receive support (hence, he was truly entitled), note how he viewed this right. “We have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

“But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:12b-18].

In his life and ministry, Paul provided an example for elders—an example which is codified when he gave qualifications for congregational oversight. “An overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain” [TITUS 1:7]. Assuredly, Paul should have received honour as an Apostle. However, he makes it clear that he was unwilling to demand honour or provision from those to whom he was sent. Likewise, the elder must be very cautious in demanding what he believes to be his entitlement from those to whom he is sent. We are taught, “Freely you received, freely give” [MATTHEW 10:8b NET BIBLE].

Note that the issue is not merely one of surrendering one’s rights arising from divine appointment; those appointed may take it that they will be treated meanly more than occasionally. Paul speaks of life as an Apostle when he writes, of “far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.” He continues with a recitation of life as one appointed by God, writing, “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.” Difficult as all this may be, there is the weight of the churches. “Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:23b-29]? For this reason Paul invites elders to “share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8].

Peter, also, has provided instruction for those who will serve by divine appointment. “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” [1 PETER 5:1-3].

THE REASON FOR DIVINE APPOINTMENT — The words “for which” that Paul penned turn us back to what has immediately preceded this verse. The overseer’s *raison d’être* is succinctly given in the preceding verses. “Share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8b-10].

I alluded to this purpose earlier when I briefly discussed the Apostle’s statement in the earlier missive. There, Paul asserted, “I was appointed a preacher and an apostle ... [and] a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” [1 TIMOTHY 1:7]. Paul taught that his appointment was in order that to teach Christians to pray and to intercede for others and to instruct those who follow Christ to live lives reflecting gratitude toward God; but especially was Paul appointed so that he might teach believers to seek the salvation of the lost. Again, Paul asserted that this was essential because Christ our mediator gave Himself as a ransom for all. In other words, Paul brings everything back to Christ—to His sacrifice because of our helpless condition.

The purposes for Paul’s appointment are virtually identical in either instance. In the verses preceding the text, it is because Christ has appeared, abolishing death and bringing immortality to light through the Gospel. In the earlier missive it is because Christ has provided for salvation. This is reason enough for divine appointment. And yet, no one dare take this appointment upon himself. As the writer has testified of Aaron as High Priest in another place, “Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was” [HEBREWS 5:1-4].

Why does God appoint elders? Rephrasing the question, we might ask why elders should not be elected. Isn’t the congregation of the Lord a democracy? Again, why should the Spirit of Christ choose whom He wills to serve according to His own choice? Why isn’t it possible that each individual could choose to perform whatever tasks they choose? These are important questions that we need to address in order to ensure that we honour the Master.

Among the first questions to be addressed is this—why does the Spirit of God distribute gifts according to His plan rather than permitting us to expressing our personal desire in the assembly of the Lord? The simple answer to this question is that the congregation belongs to the Lord. Neither an individual nor any particular group can claim ownership of the assembly of the Lord. Possibly for legal reasons we have trustees and/or directors to administer the properties and goods of the congregation; but no committee or board owns the congregation of the Lord. Trustees and directors must always be accountable to the elders. In this vein, it is vital to point out that the church of the Lord Jesus is not a democracy—fifty percent plus one does not make an action right or proper. We seek direction from Christ who is the Head of the church.

If the Spirit of God appoints to holy office and gifts His people according to His will, then we are wrong to elect people to holy office, regardless of how qualified we feel them to be. Should we not rather seek to affirm what God has chosen to do, recognising His work? The distinction is not insignificant! The one approach exalts man and his opinion; the other expresses humility before the Lord. In recognising God at work we become co-labourers with Him. In electing to holy office, we become usurpers of the work of the Spirit.

God appoints whom He wills for the benefit of the congregation and to the praise of His glory. The same truth holds in the manner in which the Spirit apportions gifts to the saints. We are taught in the Word, “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7]. Whatever the Spirit has done, it is done “for the common good.” Each gift and each appointment is to benefit all!

Paul continues by noting, “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-11].

Divine appointment is *an expression of God’s compassion for His people*. When God appoints to holy office, He *demonstrates His authority over the church*; His appointment reveals His sovereignty in life and especially over the life of the Body. Finally, divine appointment *ensures that the congregation does not drift into chaos*. Soon after writing the passage to which I have just referred, the Apostle will testify to these same Corinthian saints, “God is not characterised by disorder but by peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33].⁷ Thus, it is to be expected that He works among His people to bring peace and order. And His work is as true of His work in our midst as it is among all His churches.

The message we just received was intended to be informational. It does, however, demand a response. Each Christian hearing the message is challenged to examine his or her attitude toward those whom God has appointed. Do you see yourself as an arbiter of God’s appointment? Or do you recognise that you are part of the Body to which He has appointed you, and as part of that Body you are a co-labourer with Christ? If we don’t guard our hearts, reviewing often how we respond to Christ’s work in our midst, we will begin to think of this as “our church.” We will be offended by new ideas, new means of outreach and even by new people if we are in control. However, if Christ is in control, we will rejoice in His constantly powerful and constantly changing means of employing us to the praise of His glory.

If you are not part of this Body, what excuse can you give? Is it because you are yet lost? Or has your heart grown obdurate and unyielding? The call of this message is ever and always a call to faith in the Living Son of God and to obedience to His call over your life. May He work powerfully in your life and in the life of this Body. Amen.

⁷ NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2005)