

Chapter 16

Two Myths— Holy Men and Holy Buildings

Although it may often be hard to admit, many times we base our theology more on our preconceived ideas and our past experiences than we think. Many Baptists grow up with a Baptist understanding of the Scriptures, and they are convinced that “their” brand of theology is correct. This also applies to the Methodists, the Lutherans, the Charismatics . . . including you and me! So then, we need to be sure that what we believe about the church is based on the Scriptures and not on our own traditional understanding of the way things have been done in the past.

The Berean Christians refused to take everything that Paul preached at face value. They went home and studied the Scriptures to be sure that the things that Paul was saying were really true.

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11).

Is it possible that certain traditions that we consider to be completely scriptural, in reality, are not based on the Bible? Could it be that the real reason we do these things is because our spiritual parents and grandparents did them? We are creatures of habit who tend to gravitate toward our own traditions.

Did you ever hear of the young mother who always cut the ends off of the ham before baking it in the oven? When she was asked why she always followed this procedure, she said, “Because Grandma did it that way.” Little did she know that Grandma’s roast pan was too small for the entire ham; that was the only motivation Grandma had to cut off the ends! We need to know why we do what we do.

In the church, we constantly find ourselves following certain traditions. Some traditions are good; however, we need to be sure that our ways of thinking about the church are the same as God’s. If they are not in accordance with the thoughts of God, we are probably following dead traditions. These traditions, then, are nothing more than myths. They must be replaced by the Word of God. Otherwise, the church will never be built from house to house, city to city, and nation to nation.

Let’s look at two traditions that many Christians believe that hinder the work of the Lord in today’s church. These myths must be replaced by the truth of God’s Word. I call them “the holy man” and “the holy building” myths.

The Holy Man Myth

Many Christians today have set up the pastor of the local church as the “holy man.” They have elevated the pastors and the priests as holy men who stand between them and the Lord. The Scriptures teach us otherwise. The Bible tells us that we are all kings and priests (see Rev. 1:6). We all have direct access to the Lord through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

A pastor is literally a “shepherd.” He cares for the “sheep.” This caring for the sheep has nothing to do with his position but with the gifts and calling that the Lord has placed on his life. He just loves people! A pastor is a people person.

In today’s world, with the tradition of calling the leader of the local church a pastor, the pastoral title has been elevated above the other

ministry gifts in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. This can be detrimental to the growth of God's Kingdom. Here's why. The pastor becomes the "holy man," and he performs his services in a "holy building." Instead of each believer realizing that he is a vital part of the Lord's spiritual army, the believers begin to look to this "holy man" rather than the Lord. Then we give him a title—Pastor Bob or Pastor Jack.

First of all, a most important thing to consider is that the primary leader of the local church is called by the Lord and anointed for leadership. Does he have a leadership gift and a calling from the Lord to be the leader of the church he is leading? Imagine a band playing. Is the lead singer always the leader of the band? Or is the drummer the leader? Perhaps the guitarist leads. It depends—the real leader is that person who has the ability and the "call" to lead the band, regardless of his ability to play a certain instrument.

We believe the leader of a local church should have a shepherd's heart for God's people, even though the ministry gift in operation in his life may not be that of a pastor. If he does not have the gift of a pastor, it's important that he has an individual serving alongside him with a pastoral gift to look after the needs of the people.

Of course, if the primary leader of the church truly has the gift of a pastor, we are not saying it is wrong to call him the pastor. We just believe that it may not always be the best terminology to use. The term senior elder or lead elder may be a more scriptural term to use according to our understanding of the Bible.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3).

All Believers Are Called to Minister

The holy man myth tells us that the pastor is responsible for the entire ministry in the church. The truth is that all believers are called to be equipped to be ministers.

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Our view is that this holy man myth must be replaced by the Word of God in order for the church to be effective today. The pastor's responsibility must be to equip believers to minister! Thousands of pastors are burning out today because they are missing this truth. They spend the bulk of their time ministering instead of training the believers to minister. Without building on an underground pattern, it is almost impossible not to burn out! Remember, Jesus said that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. But it must be His burden!

For example, if there is a need for counseling, rather than automatically expecting the pastor to have all the answers, believers should allow the pastor or another qualified individual to train them to counsel and exhort others. The next time they can be the ones the Lord uses to set people free.

Another way this myth surfaces in the traditional church is that the pastor is expected to preach every Sunday. We believe the Lord's best is for the church to be built as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers encourage and equip believers from house to house and from congregation to congregation. If any of these gifts are not yet developed in your local church or house church network, bring in the fivefold ministers and their ministry gifts from other parts of the Body of Christ. These proven ministers will help to identify and cultivate the gifts from within your local church or house church network.

Proven Ministers—The “Fivefold Ministry”

There are five gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-12, often called the fivefold ministry gifts. Our understanding is that the fivefold ministry gifts are equipping gifts given to us by Jesus Himself to train and encourage the Body of Christ. They are not necessarily synonymous with governmental leadership positions, like elders. Many times these fivefold ministers will serve in areas of church government; however, it is not primarily because of the ministry gift that they have but because the Lord has called them to this area of governmental leadership.

Our view is that many of these “fivefold” ministry gifts are for trans-local ministry, not to be used solely in one small group, house church, or congregation, as seen in Acts 15:22, 30-32, 35. We have come to believe that these gifts should be used from house to house and from congregation to congregation as much as possible. Sometimes the pastor, who has a shepherd’s heart for the people in a given area, may not travel as much as the other fivefold ministers. On the other hand, some pastors may serve as “pastors to pastors” and subsequently be more involved in traveling ministry.

We have also discovered that most people with fivefold ministry gifts have a “gift mix.” For example, someone may be a prophetic teacher or a teaching evangelist. It seems to us that the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher must learn how to function together in order for the church of Jesus Christ to come to a place of maturity. Is it possible that much of what we have seen regarding the five gifts working together has been manufactured in the minds of man more than it has been the plan of God? We have been involved in various teams and have made sincere attempts to somehow cause these gifts to work together. We have simply not seen the fivefold ministry work properly yet. But we believe it is the will of God for the fivefold ministry to function together and to equip and encourage the church as the Body

of Christ matures in the days ahead. We wait with great expectation what the Lord will reveal to us in the future.

From our limited understanding, here is one reason that we believe it has not worked yet. The gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher are anointed leadership gifts for the purpose of equipping, encouraging, and training the church, rather than governmental leadership positions in the Body of Christ. We may have a tendency to confuse these two types of leadership in the church—anointed-equipping leadership and anointed-governmental leadership.

Apostles are given to the church to help us receive a vision from the Lord to reach the world. Prophets are given to train us to listen to the voice of God. Evangelists are called of God to stir us and train us to reach pre-Christians. Pastors are commissioned by the Lord to encourage us and show us how to make disciples! Teachers have a divine anointing to assist us in understanding the Word of God. These ministry gifts should be ministering to every level of the church: individuals, families, small groups, house churches, congregations, movements and the church at large.

Will some of these fivefold ministry gifts be involved in leadership as an overseer or an elder? Of course they will. We just cannot try to program it! We are of the persuasion that the church that is going to grow is the church that makes sure they are receiving a regular impartation from each of these ministry gifts while realizing that only Jesus has all of the gifts. This is the reason it is important for people with the various gifts to minister the Word at the small group, the house church, the congregational gatherings, and large corporate meetings. We need to hear from each of the five ministry gifts.

If your small group or house church is lacking a zeal for evangelism, ask an evangelist to come to your meetings and minister to you for a few weeks. Then see if any of the believers in your group are willing

to go with him to explain his faith with a person who has not yet made a decision to follow Christ. You will be amazed at the results!

Although we confirm the need to sit under the public preaching of the Word, preaching and teaching are not the only ways we can receive an impartation from these gifts. For example, the best way to receive an impartation from a pastor may be to join him while he imparts the truth of the Word of God to someone who is in a crisis. Perhaps the church has been too narrow-minded about the way we can be equipped by the fivefold ministry.

For more on how the fivefold ministry was created to work within the local church and house churches, read Ron Myer's book, *Fivefold Ministry Made Practical*.¹

Deacons Are Ministers

Some believers teach that deacons are no longer needed in today's church. In other Christian circles, people believe that deacons function as the leadership board of the local church. We are fully convinced that literally thousands of deacons need to be released to prepare for the coming revival. These deacons are not a church governmental board but instead a group of servants who are released to obey the living God. The word deacon literally means "a servant" or "a minister."

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry

of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:1-7).

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain (1 Timothy 3:8).

Deacons serve in hands-on ministry in the church. Again, we have come to believe that the closest scriptural example that we have of a small group leader is the ministry of the deacon. We are not saying that small group leaders should be called deacons; however, we do believe there is a resemblance between New Testament deacons and small group leaders. Although there may be many types of deacons, the small group leader seems to function in many ways as a New Testament deacon, in that he is called to practical spiritual service.

The Holy Building Myth

The Church is people, or literally, “called-out ones.” The buildings and meetings that are used must serve the people and the purposes of God. The people cannot be serving the building or the meeting.

We sometimes call this the “holy building” myth. Somehow the Church today has been led to believe that the church building is a holy place. Nearly everything spiritual is supposed to center around the holy building. In reality, it is we who are believers in Jesus Christ who are holy, not a church building.

I was talking to a pastor on the staff of a large mega-church one day, and he told me that there were so many meetings and programs in the church building that the people did not have time to really minister in the small groups that were being established from house to house. I asked this pastor, “Why don’t you close down some of your midweek meetings in your building to give God’s people more time to develop relationships and practical outreach in the small groups?”

I will never forget his response. “If we stop having some of our public meetings, our offerings will go down. And if our offerings go down, the large building that we are meeting in will be used as an airplane hanger instead of a church facility.” The mortgage on the building had to be paid. They were slaves to their building.

What is the first thing that you think of when someone uses the word “church”? Most of us think of a building that has been dedicated to the Lord for His people to meet in. But that is not a church. The Church is people!

During one of my first trips to Scotland, I was introduced to a new term, “haggis.” When I inquired about this new word, my Scottish friends decided to play a trick on me. They told me that a haggis was an animal that lived on the hills. Due to the hills being so steep, they felt that it was important for me to know that the haggis’s legs were longer on one side than on the other so that they could walk on the side of mountains without falling over. Ridiculous! And yet, when I thought of the word “haggis,” I would visualize this peculiar animal roaming the hills of Scotland. Later I was told the truth. Haggis was actually a food to eat, not a rare, lopsided Scottish animal!

Until we begin to visualize the Church as she really is—a group of people bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, who are in a relationship with Him and with one another with a vision to reach the world—we will continue to think in terms of buildings instead of people. It is like an army thinking that the real army is the barracks instead of the soldiers.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus was not thinking about bricks and mortar when He said that He would build His Church. He was thinking about His people whom He would empower with the Holy Spirit and send from house to house into every strata of society for the furtherance of His Kingdom. Let's make a decision today to change our way of thinking. Instead of emphasizing "going to church," let's be the Church.

Let's dream together in the next chapter about the Church truly being the Church that Jesus Christ intends to come back for.

Questions for Practical Application

1. How can we "honor" our leaders without making them into "holy men"?
2. What is the responsibility of every believer?
3. What effect do the fivefold ministry gifts have on the church? How can these ministry gifts help a small group or house church or congregation?
4. How is a small group leader similar to a deacon?