

Isaiah 9 verse 6-7

For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of armies will accomplish this.

This was Isaiah's prophecy 2700 years ago. Part of this prophecy has already taken place, Jesus was born and given as the ultimate sacrifice for us all. His rule has begun in the hearts of many and there shall be no end to that rule. That rule will go on now, on earth, in His church and eternally. Peace comes only in God's government. So much for His promises, how does it work out in practice?

Ephesians 2 verse 19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Paul speaking to us the saints, shows Jesus as head of the church.

A saint is someone who is set apart for God's special purposes. As a result, every follower of Jesus Christ is a saint.

Ephesians 4 verse 11-12

And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

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His church is to be established by the Apostles and Prophets. Apostles and Prophets, Evangelists and Teachers are Jesus' gift of individuals to rule and establish the church with delegated authority. In the initial stages of growth in the church the responsibility of government rests with the five ministries. Some say that Pastors and Teachers are one ministry, nonetheless all five are offices of Christ.

Apostles

An apostle is one who is sent by Christ Himself to do a particular job for Jesus. He is a church planter and oversees the establishing of the word of God, usually assisted by a Prophet, or may well themselves have the Prophetic thrust necessary to lay foundations in individual and community lives. The Apostle will act rather like a housewife. They will know what the people need for their growth and bring in other ministries to help to and be looking for gifts and leaders to emerge from within the new church family. They receive revelation and direction from Jesus.

Galatians 1 verse 6-12

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, 7 which is not just another account; but there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! 10 For am I now seeking the favor of people, or of God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ. 11 For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which was preached by me is not of human invention. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2 verse 1-2

Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

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2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that somehow I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Prophets

A prophet is basically one who sees - they see what God wants and declares it. He will see through all the wooliness and brings God's word to the people. A prophet sometimes leads a precarious life. They sometimes have to tear down in order to build things God's way. Many churches lack the prophetic, many Pastors feared the Prophets of old and still do today. Yet they have a vital role to play in strengthening and encouraging the people of God. They bring a sense of direction towards vision. A people without a vision perish. Apostles and Prophets have authority in the church until the leaders emerge from within. And as the church grows the needs of the people increase. Teachers and Pastors teach and care for the people, they also train them for the work of service which the saints will do in the church community. We need more Pastors who can teach, firstly teaching by the example of their own lives, then training others in the ways of the Lord. As leadership begins to emerge we can see that there are two offices that will emerge. These being Elders and Deacons.

Elders

Titus 1 verse 5-9

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is beyond reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of indecent behavior or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be beyond reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not overindulging in wine, not a bully, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, righteous, holy, disciplined, 9 holding firmly the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

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The first sentence of this scripture gives an indication that some Elders left in disagreement. He knew that amongst the faithful ones there may well be Elders emerging. God blesses the faithful ones, the rebellious ones move from place to place never really knowing the peace that being in His government brings.

1 Timothy 3 verse 1-7

Do not lay hands upon anyone too quickly and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.

The qualifications for the Elders are high, that is why Paul tells Timothy not to lay hands on anyone too hastily. Elders are those who oversee, are exhorters and when necessary, refuters.

1 Timothy 5 verse 17 -25

The elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." 19 Do not accept an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. 20 Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 21 I solemnly exhort you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. 22 Do not lay hands upon anyone too quickly and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. 23 Do not go on drinking only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. 24 The sins of some people are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. 25 Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.

Deacons

A Deacon is basically one who serves. Although the word *Deacon* is not mentioned in the Acts 6 account, they are required to be an extension of the Pastoral team that cares and tends to the various needs of the church community. Men and women of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, we should all aspire to have these qualifications.

Acts 6 verse 1-6

Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

1 Timothy 3 verse 8-13

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not insincere, not prone to drink much wine, not greedy for money, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then have them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Deacons must be husbands of one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Summary and Conclusion

Stevenage Christian Fellowship is at a very exciting stage of development, there is a need for caring and tending to the sheep. There has been an increase in this area and it is necessary for us to recognise and appreciate what has emerged. Will you be part of the answer? Anyone can see what is lacking. But would you be willing to be, to aspire to be an Elder or a Deacon. Have you considered what God may call you to? We all have a place in His church.

Acts 2 verse 41-47

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all the believers were together and had all things in common; 45 and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 4 verse 32-35

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need.

Acts 14 verse 23

When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had believed.