

Malawi Trip Report - Final Report (part 2)

Last week I wrote a final report on my work in Malawi. It included a transcript of the last sermon I preached at Falls. The sermon was too long for a single article, so I include the rest of it here.

Synopsis of previous article

As God assessed the spiritual needs of fallen man, He planned the church as the organization to fulfill every one of them perfectly and completely. Just as a school educates students and a hospital cares for the sick and injured, the church saves souls and builds up her members. With Jesus as the chief cornerstone, and the apostles and prophets as the foundation (Eph. 2:19-21), the church has been fully equipped to save lost and ruined sinners and after they are saved, help them to grow (Eph. 4:11-16). The apostles and prophets were the gifts Jesus gave as the foundation of the church because they wrote the Scriptures that will guide the church to the end of the age.

Evangelists, shepherds and teachers

These are the "living gifts" that must be replaced in every generation. These are the "personnel" Jesus gave to the church to lay this foundation, no matter when (*until the end of the age*) or where (*every nation and every creature on earth* - Mt 28:20; Mk 16:15-16). Jesus promised to be with us always *to the end of the age*, and He gave His *gifts* to the church to accomplish it.

The evangelists were given to the church by Jesus to take the foundation of the apostles and prophets and lay it down all over the world. No one can hear without a preacher and the preachers who preach the Word are the evangelists.

*For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And **how shall they hear without a preacher?** 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:13-15)*

Paul told Timothy to preach the Word and do the work of an Evangelist.

***Preach the word!** Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, **do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.** (2Tim. 4:2-5)*

Thus the church needs evangelist who are preachers to convince, rebuke, and exhort sinners before they are baptized and saints after they are baptized. This is exactly what Philip was doing after the church was scattered from Jerusalem.

*1 At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... 4 Therefore those who were scattered **went everywhere preaching the word.** 5 Then **Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.** ... 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, **preached Jesus to him.** ... 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, **he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.** (Acts 8:1,4-5,35,40)*

Philip was not a deacon. The qualification for deacons are far different from the qualifications for the seven (Acts 6:3-4; 1Tim. 3:8-13). He was a preacher who preached in all the cities until he came to Caesarea. Later, Luke told us the office he held in the church. He was an evangelist.

On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and

*entered the house of **Philip the evangelist**, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. (Acts 21:8)*

Philip the evangelist first went to Samaria and through his preaching and baptizing, a new church started in Samaria. This is what multitudes of evangelists have done since that time, and will continue to do until the end of time. When a man fully dedicates his life to preaching God's word as Timothy and Philip did, they too are evangelists. It is these men who have gone all over the world since that time until today preaching as Philip and Timothy the evangelists did. In this way, the gospel has an office/gift from Jesus to move it from place to place.

This is what occurred in Malawi in the 1950's when evangelists from America came and started preaching the gospel there. As they baptized people, they found faithful men (evangelists) who would teach others also (2Tim. 2:2). These dedicated evangelists carried the gospel throughout the nation of Malawi creating the multitudes of Christians and churches in Malawi today.

There is a clear distinction between those who hold an office and those who do a portion of their work. A man who comes upon an accident and tries to direct the traffic is not a police officer though he is doing a portion of his work. A parent who teaches his child is doing the work of a teacher, but he is not a teacher. A mother who bandages her child's injury is doing the work of a doctor, but she is not a doctor. A woman who talks to her neighbor about the gospel is doing the work of an evangelist, but is she an evangelist? Many Christians talk to their friends and neighbors about the gospel, but they are not evangelists. Only those faithful men who dedicate their lives to this work are evangelists. The process of becoming an evangelist is set forth by Paul.

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim 2:2-3

Shepherds

After Jesus built His church (Mt. 16:13-19), and Peter used the keys to open the doors (Acts 2), He used His apostles to lead and direct her. But after the church moved into all the world, this was no longer possible. So while we see only the apostles leading the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1-8), after that Jesus gave the elders, who are the shepherds and overseers to lead in all the local churches. When Barnabas and Saul brought the contribution from the church at Antioch they brought it to the elders of the churches in Judea, not the apostles (Acts 11:29-30). The elders of each flock knew the needs of the saints there, so the money was taken to them.

As Paul and Barnabas continued planting churches, they appointed elders in every church as soon as they were qualified.

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Both Paul and Peter revealed the work God had given to the elders in the church Jesus built.

*17 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and **called for the elders of the church**. 18 And when they had come to him, he **said to them**: ... 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which **the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God** which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:17-18, 28)*

*The **elders who are among you I exhort**, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 **Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.** (1Pet. 5:1-4)*

Elders are the overseers and shepherds of the flock. These terms convey their authority. After

the death of the apostles, they are the only office Jesus gave to watch over and direct the local church.

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)

Thus it is only to the elders that the work of shepherding and overseeing was given. Since the shepherd is the leader of the sheep and the overseer is the leader of those who work under them, it is only this office that has authority. The elders oversee and direct the evangelists, deacons and brethren to help them in their work. They have the responsibility and they will give an account on the judgment day for the work they have done.

How far does this authority and responsibility reach? Where do the elders oversee and shepherd? Jesus placed a strict limitation on their authority. They must only "**shepherd the flock AMONG THEM.**" for this is "**THE FLOCK, AMONG WHICH the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.**" They are only elders among the flock which is in their presence. They are "among" them only when they are present with them. When they are absent from that church, they are no longer "**among**" them. This is the limit to the authority and responsibility of the shepherds in the church.

Since elders are appointed in every church based on that church's assessment (Titus 1:5-9) of their qualifications and agreement that they possess them, it is only to that one church where they serve as shepherds. Thus when an elder who was appointed in one congregation moves to another, he is no longer an elder. Elders can only shepherd and oversee the one flock that appointed them. This is known as church autonomy - leadership of each local church completely separated from all the others.

Jesus gave the shepherds as a gift to His churches, but each local church works under its own shepherds with Jesus as the chief shepherd. There is no one between Jesus (*the chief shepherd*) and His individual shepherds in each of His churches. We must be aware of the danger whenever anyone or anything places itself above the churches and below Jesus. It always begins with well meaning brethren seeking to solve some problem using their own wisdom. But it ends in apostasy. We cannot doubt God's wisdom. This is how He organized the church and we must trust Him with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding.

The government of Malawi has demanded a Board of Trustees that make up a committee. There is clear authority from Jesus to do this if necessary.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mk. 12:17)

The Board of Trustees has been created by the government of Malawi to give an account to the government. This organization was created by the government, and must render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But it has no authority over the churches or over the elders of the churches. The gifts Jesus gave to His church did not include a Board of Trustees. They must report and give an account to the government, but the elders do not report or give an account to them. There is no Scripture giving anyone the right to dictate to the elders of the church of Christ. No one, not evangelists, not deacons, not teachers or any member can take what Jesus only gave to the elders.

Every Christian must be under the direction of elders at a local work. No one is above this. If a preacher or deacon seeks to be above the elders to direct them they are doing an unscriptural thing. They have no authority from the apostles and prophets to do such a thing.

Conclusion:

Only Jesus, who built His church has the wisdom to direct and guide her. While God made Jesus the chief cornerstone, Jesus gave the apostles and prophets to complete the foundation

of His church. He sent them the Holy Spirit to reveal all truth, first through their sermons and then through their letters. The evangelists who are preachers were given the charge to take their letters to every nation and every creature. In each community where men and women obey the gospel, a new church begins. Over time as men gain the qualifications, Jesus desires elders in every church. He gave these elders the authority to oversee and shepherd the flock among them. As the chief shepherd, only He has the authority to direct His shepherds in every church. No one can set up any plan that would place themselves between the shepherds and Jesus.