

# The Greatest of These is Love (1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13)

Expository Lessons from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

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## I. Introduction and Review

- a. In Paul's **First Letter to the Corinthians**, he addresses a number of problems in the church. The first was related to division within the church.
- b. Here, Paul addresses the topic of miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and how they were contributing to division in the church. This discussion began with the previous message and will continue beyond what we cover in the current one.
  - i. In the previous message, Paul spoke about how the church is like a body, made up of many parts. While the parts are different, they are all unified into one body, with all parts caring for one another. This is a beautiful picture of how the church is designed to function: as one body with all the different parts caring for one another.
  - ii. There is no sense of envy, jealousy or competitiveness. If one part suffers, the other parts suffer with it. Likewise, if one part is honored, all the other parts are to rejoice with the honored part.

## II. Each of Us is a Member of the Body of Christ

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 12:27**.
  - i. "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." (**1 Corinthians 12:27**, NKJV)
- b. Here Paul sums up what he had been saying before.
  - i. The human body can be seen as a type or figure of the body of Christ, the church.
  - ii. In this allegory, we each individually correspond to different parts or members of the body (the eye, ear, feet, nose, etc.).
- c. **Question:** This famous concept of the church being like a human body composed of many different members: Did Jesus ever teach anything like that?
  - i. I read something recently by a man named Theophylact that led me to explore this question further. Theophylact lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in

Constantinople in the Eastern Roman Empire and became a Bishop in the church in Bulgaria. He is better known among Eastern Christians, especially among those of Greek-speaking, Slavic or Serbian heritage. The following quote is from his *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew* (a verse-by-verse commentary on the first gospel), written c. 1090 AD. Note that the translator used the KJV rendering of Bible verses.

1. “And if thy right eye causes thee to sin, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into gehenna. And if thy right hand causeth thee to sin, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into gehenna. (**Matthew 5:29-30**)
2. “When you hear ‘eye’ and ‘hand’ do not imagine that the Lord is speaking about parts of the body, for He would not in that case have specified ‘right eye’ and ‘right hand’. He is speaking instead of those who appear to be friends, but who are in fact harming us. Take, for example, a young man who has friends living in debauchery, and who is harmed by their bad influence. Cut these off from you, the Lord says, and perhaps you will also save them, when they come to their senses. And if you cannot save them, you will at least save yourself. But if you continue in your affection for them, both you and they will be destroyed.”
  - a. (Source: Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Matthew*, translated by Christopher Stade; Chrysostom Press, 1992, p. 52)
- ii. Let us consider what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:29-30** in light of a similar statement He made, found in **Mark 9**.
  1. “But *whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble*, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where “Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.” (**Mark 9:42-44**, NKJV, where Jesus is quoting from **Isaiah 66:24**)
  2. Here Jesus speaks of *someone causing another person to sin* and then introduces his illustrative teaching on ‘it would be better to have your hand cut off’, etc.

3. **Question:** In this passage from **Mark 9**, does cutting off the hand correspond to *cutting off another person* (the one who is causing another to sin)? Does He mean it is better to lose one person than to lose everyone?
  - iii. The possible insight from Theophylact (who is writing relatively late, but clearly is reading from and influenced by much earlier writers) was new to me. What did the earlier Christian writers have to say about this teaching of Jesus about cutting off members of the body? I found two pre-Nicene writers (those who wrote before 325 AD) who commented on this passage from **Matthew 5**.
    1. Clement of Alexandria had a more “conventional” explanation of the passage, according to how I had understood it; namely that Jesus is speaking about *our physical eyes and hands*, actual parts of our physical bodies. See Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 288.
      - a. Many times I have used this kind of understanding of what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:29-30** in discipling young men who struggling with the sin of lust. Often, this involves their sinning with their eyes (for example, via pornography or looking lustfully at a woman) or with their hands.
      - b. With this understanding, one can make a powerful point regarding the level of intensity Jesus wants us to have in dealing with the sin of lust in our own lives.
    2. However, another early writer uses the passage from **Matthew 5:29-30** in addressing heretical teachers and expelling them from the church.
      - a. That reference is found in the *Acts of Peter* (referring not to the apostle Peter, but rather to a bishop of Alexandria, Egypt, who lived c. 300 AD and died a martyr). There is an account of Peter, the bishop, confronting heretics in the church, who were followers of Meletius and Arius:
        - i. “Meanwhile, the detestable wickedness of the Meletians increased beyond measure; and the blessed Peter, fearing lest the plague of heresy should spread over the whole flock committed to his care, and knowing that there is no fellowship with light and darkness, and no concord betwixt

Christ and Belial, by letter separated the Meletians from the communion of the Church.

- ii. “And because an evil disposition cannot long be concealed, upon that instant the wicked Arius, when he saw his aiders and abettors cast down from the dignity of the Church, gave way to sadness and lamentation. This did not escape the notice of this holy man. For when his hypocrisy was laid bare, immediately using the evangelical sword, ‘If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee,’ (**Matthew 5:29**) and cutting off Arius from the body of the church as a putrid limb, he expelled and banished him from the communion of the faithful.
  1. (Source: *The Genuine Acts of Peter*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 6, p. 262)
  2. The point made in this statement is that *Arius was like a gangrenous limb that had to be cut off in order to save the rest of the body*, in accordance with what Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:29**.
- iv. **Bottom Line:** Perhaps Paul’s teaching on the church being like a body was related to what Jesus taught in **Matthew 5** and **Mark 9**. Certainly, our eyes and feet can lead us into sin. However, people (even other Christians) can lead us into sin as well.
  1. All of the parts of the body should love and look out for one another.
  2. However, if a limb develops gangrene, it is better to remove it, to save the rest of the body. It is better to lose one part of our body, as painful as that is, rather than to lose the entire body.
  3. As Paul taught in **1 Corinthians 5:8**, “a little yeast leavens the whole lump (of dough)”. That is why the wicked person should be expelled, to save the rest of the body.
  4. Similarly, Jesus explained in **Matthew 18:15-18** that a brother in serious sin needs to be confronted. And if he refuses to repent, he is to be expelled from the community and treated as “a heathen and a tax collector”.

### III. Various Gifts within the Church

#### a. Read **1 Corinthians 12:28-31**.

- i. Several (most, perhaps all?) of the roles mentioned here by Paul involve miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including:
  1. Apostles (inspired by the Holy Spirit);
  2. Prophets (inspired by the Spirit);
  3. Workers of miracles;
  4. Those having the gift of healing;
  5. Those having the ability to speak in tongues (other understandable languages that they had never studied, as apparent in **Acts 2:4-11**); and
  6. Those with the ability to interpret tongues (again, referring to other languages).

#### b. This passage reminds me of similar things that Paul said in **Ephesians 4**, regarding unity, and various gifts given by the Spirit.

##### i. Read **Ephesians 4:1-16**.

1. Similarities between the two passages (from **1 Corinthians 12** and **Ephesians 4**) include:
  - a. An appeal to unity.
  - b. Presenting the church as one unified body, but with many different gifts distributed among those within it.
  - c. The roles of apostle (first), prophet (second) and teachers are mentioned specifically.
  - d. Gifts had been given to fully equip the church, the body of Christ.

##### ii. Clement of Alexandria wrote about both of these passages together.

1. "And since the omnipotent God Himself 'gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;' (**Ephesians 4:11-13**) we are then to strive

to reach manhood as befits the One who Knows God [*in the author's terms, literally, 'the Gnostic'*], and to be as perfect as we can while still abiding in the flesh, making it our study with perfect concord here to concur with the will of God, to the restoration of what is the truly perfect nobleness and relationship, to the fulness of Christ, that which perfectly depends on our perfection.

2. "And now we perceive where, and how, and when the divine apostle mentions the perfect man, and how he shows the differences of the perfect. And again, on the other hand: The manifestation of the Spirit is given for our profit. For to one is given the word of wisdom by the Spirit; to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith through the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing through the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another diversities of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: and all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, distributing to each one according as He wills." (**1 Corinthians 12:7-11**)
  3. "Such being the case, the prophets are perfect in prophecy, the righteous in righteousness, and the martyrs in confession, and others in preaching, not that they are not sharers in the common virtues, but are proficient in those to which they are appointed. For what man in his senses would say that a prophet was not righteous? For what? did not righteous men like Abraham prophesy?"
  4. "...'But each has his own proper gift of God,' (**1 Corinthians 7:7**) —one in one way, another in another. But *the apostles were perfected in all*. You will find, then, if you choose, in their acts and writings, knowledge, life, preaching, righteousness, purity, prophecy."
    - a. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata or Miscellanies*, book 4, chapter 21; found in ANF 2.433)
    - b. In passing Clement mentions that while some may have certain particular gifts, we ALL must strive to be living according to righteousness. We can't use our gifts to delude ourselves that having such a gift exempts us from universal spiritual requirements!
- iii. Here Clement of Alexandria, consistent with the other early church writers, speaks of "the apostles" as referring to those who had been with Christ, who had the full range of miraculous gifts.

1. From the above statement by Clement of Alexandria, after quoting from **Ephesians 4**, he wrote:
  - a. "...‘But each has his own proper gift of God,’ (1 Corinthians 7:7) —one in one way, another in another. But *the apostles were perfected in all.*
- iv. **Question:** In the church, do we have apostles among us today? (Or should we?)
  1. The term “apostle” in the New Testament generally refers to the Twelve. Nevertheless, in some cases it refers to others who had been with Christ who had similar gifts.
    - a. However, this use of the term “apostle” did not continue past the first generation of disciples. After all of those “apostles” died, that designation was no longer applied in the same way.
    - b. The term “apostle” is from a Greek word that means “the ones sent out”. As is the case with many other terms we find in the New Testament, it was a word in common usage that was given special additional meaning in the context of the church (similar to what we find with other terms such as: baptism, elder, overseer, shepherd, and church).
  2. The successors to the apostles were the bishops/overseers and presbyters/elders. The church's office of “apostle” did not continue beyond that first generation.
    - a. For more on how the early church viewed the apostles, and their understanding that they were succeeded by bishops and elders (rather than by additional generations of apostles) see *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, articles on ‘Apostles, Twelve’, ‘Apostolic Faith’ and ‘Apostolic Succession’.
  3. This is worth noting, especially against the backdrop of a book that has become popular in some Christian circles today, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, by A. Hirsch and T. Catchim. That book in particular, and others by them, attempt to make the case that:
    - a. The **Ephesians 4:11-12** passage is the definitive passage on church leadership structure, with the

resulting five-fold leadership structure summarized in the acronym 'APEST'.

- i. "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors [= shepherds (ESV)] and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," (**Ephesians 4:11-12**, NKJV)
  - b. The early church almost immediately went AWOL in departing from the divine plan in no longer having apostles after the first generation of apostles died off.
  - c. These authors then claim to have rediscovered a critical Biblical directive that had been lost for millennia, one that virtually no one has been aware of since the first century!
  - d. This is the missing 'secret ingredient' that has impeded the church from evangelizing the world, they conclude, is the absence of modern-day apostles! In their view, modern apostles might be somewhat akin to venture capitalists who would stir up the religious world and be 'church planters'.
  - e. Sadly, these authors rely on one verse taken out of context, which some, hungry for evangelism, apparently buy into.
4. For a more detailed critique of 'The Permanent Revolution', see a short article by our brother Dan Tillinghast, included as an appendix to these notes.
  5. In direct contrast to what is being advocated in 'The Permanent Revolution', Paul (**1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, Acts 20**) and Peter (**1 Peter 5**) taught in the New Testament that bishops/elders were to direct the affairs of the church. Furthermore, the early Christians who came right after the apostles confirmed that understanding and put it into practice.

#### IV. A More Excellent Way

- a. Read **1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13**.
  - i. After discussing the various gifts given within the church (in **1 Corinthians 12**), Paul now points to a "more excellent way" than having any of these wonderful gifts.



- ii. He explains that without this (love), even if we have the impressive gifts or do impressive spiritual things, it will benefit us nothing.
  - iii. He further explains the characteristics of the kind of love he is talking about.
- b. A few comments about the word “love” here.
- i. This passage uses the famous Greek word, *agape* (ἀγάπη) for “love”.
    1. The verb form of this Greek word: *agapao* (ἀγαπάω).
  - ii. Many sermons have been preached in the greater Christian world (Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist, you-name-it) where the claim is made that the true meaning of ‘*agape*’, the Greek word used here, is not the same as our English word ‘love’. The case presented to justify this misleading conclusion is generally as follows:
    1. Unlike the English language, in Greek there are several different words to describe various types of ‘love’ (including: eros, phileo, storge and agape).
    2. [A false statement] ‘Agape’ is the Greek term for love that refers to the special, highest form of love. This is a divine, selfless type of love that ultimately comes only from God.
  - iii. While this reasoning may sound scholarly and spiritual (and who knows Greek, anyway?), it isn’t true! In fact, that assertion is rather easy to disprove with any interlinear Greek/English New Testament. Consider the following two passages where the term “love” appears.
    1. “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (**John 12:42–43**, NKJV)
    2. “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” (**2 Peter 2:15–16**, NKJV)
    3. The word “loved” in the Greek in both of these passages is...you guessed it...*agape*!
      - a. I could provide several more examples from the LXX. However, these two, which anyone can confirm in an interlinear Greek New Testament, should suffice.

4. Clearly, the meaning of this Greek word 'agape' is not limited to some higher, spiritual form of love.
- c. Why this matters.
- i. Young men in our group asked that we study **1 Corinthians** now (it was not my idea) because they wanted to get solid and unified on some controversial doctrinal points that divide much of the modern Christian world, topics such as:
    1. Head covering,
    2. Permanence of marriage / remarriage after divorce,
    3. Head covering,
    4. Resurrection of the dead,
    5. Church discipline for those in sin,
    6. Lord's supper / communion,
    7. Etc.
  - ii. Yet here Paul points to love as the paramount thing.
  - iii. Example of an old friend of mine, Douglas Jacob, who was asked to speak to an International Church of Christ (ICoC) church in Athens, Georgia:
    1. They asked Douglas, who was visiting, for a critique of their church. They even included the admonition, "...And don't hold back / no holds barred!" He took that to heart and gave them frank feedback.
      - a. I believe this honest exchange and willingness to self-reflect and get feedback shows a great heart on the part of both Douglas and that church in Athens, Georgia.
      - b. May we imitate that kind of humble, truth-seeking and truth-telling spirit exemplified by that exchange.
    2. One of the points made by Douglas in his critique: "*Really*, if we want to be honest with ourselves, what are effectively the *two greatest commandments* in this fellowship of churches?"
      - a. His response (which I believe the audience also would affirm):
        - i. **Acts 2:38** (regarding baptism/conversion), and

- ii. **Matthew 28:18-20** (regarding evangelism/discipleship).
- 3. HOWEVER, as important as those things are, they are not the most important things. Churches go astray by focusing on good things (especially 'specialties of the house' that other groups are not strong on) while ignoring the most important things.
  - a. In many churches, if there are one or two things that they see in the New Testament that they are following (while most other churches are not), over time those things manage to become...surprise surprise...the most important commands in Scripture!
  - b. Therefore, the church ends up patting itself on the back that they are the best church, the one most favored by the Lord. In some extreme cases, they can convince themselves that they are "the one true church" on the face of the earth!
    - i. This tendency plays into the prideful, sectarian spirit so common to man.
    - ii. Unfortunately, the most 'radical' churches can be among the worst offenders!
      - 1. Let us strive to avoid falling into this trap of Satan, which appeals to the pride and sectarian tendencies of men.
- 4. However, according to Jesus and confirmed here by Paul, the MOST IMPORTANT things are *loving God and loving one another*.
  - a. Jesus taught what the two greatest commandments are.
    - i. "But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" *This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'" (**Matthew 22:34-40**, NKJV)

- b. Jesus added in Sermon on the Mount that we must love our enemies as well.
  - i. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, *love your enemies*, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (**Matthew 5:43–45**, NKJV)
- c. Paul clearly states that love is the most important thing.
  - i. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**, NKJV)
- d. Read **John 13:31-35**.
  - i. “So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, “Where I am going, you cannot come,” so now I say to you. *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (**John 13:31–35**, NKJV)
  - ii. Jesus revealed His special *new commandment* the night before He was crucified, at the Last Supper.

- iii. He told the apostles that they must love one another as He loved them. The same, of course, applies to us.
- iv. *This* would be the sign to the world that we are His disciples.
  - 1. The 'sign to the world' that we are His disciples would *not* be the distinctive clothing.
- e. **Question/Challenge:** What are the two greatest commandments in your own life? In this church? What would others say about you, and about the church fellowship you are a part of?
- d. From John Chrysostom, on the importance of love and how this is the distinguishing mark of a follower of Christ:
  - i. "Therefore Paul says that the love which we are speaking of is the mother of all good things, and prefers it to miracles and all other gifts. For as where there are vests and sandals of gold, we require also some other garments whereby to distinguish the king: but if we see the purple and the diadem, we require not to see any other sign of his royalty: just so here likewise, when the diadem of love is upon our head, it is enough to point out the genuine disciple of Christ, not to ourselves only, but also to the unbelievers. For, 'by this,' says He, 'shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another.' (**John 13:35**)
  - ii. "So that this sign is greater surely than all signs, in that the disciple is recognized by it. For though any should work ten thousand signs, but be at strife one with another, they will be a scorn to the unbelievers. Just as if they do no sign, but love one another exactly, they will continue both revered and inviolable by all men.
  - iii. "Since Paul himself we admire on this account, not for the dead whom he raised, nor for the lepers whom he cleansed, but because he said, 'who is weak, and I am not weak? who is made to stumble, and I burn not?' (**2 Corinthians 11:29**)
  - iv. "For should you have ten thousand miracles to compare with this, you will have nothing equal to it to say. Since Paul also himself said, that a great reward was laid up for him, not because he wrought miracles, but because 'to the weak he became as weak.' 'For what is my reward?' said he. 'That, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel without charge.' (**1 Corinthians 9:18**)"

1. (Source: John Chrysostom, *Homily No. 32 on 1 Corinthians*, Section 14; on **1 Corinthians 12:27-13:3**)
2. See also prior sections in the same expository sermon by Chrysostom contrasting Joseph and Potiphar's wife, illustrating what true love for others looks like, and what it produces.

## V. Defining the Love that Paul Speaks Of

- a. Most churches speak a lot about loving God (while neglecting what the Scriptures say about fearing Him and keeping His commands).
- b. However, the love that is frequently preached is not much more than a warm feeling of affection.
  - i. Consider how Jesus *showed his love* for us: voluntarily suffering and dying for us.
  - ii. Jesus showed us the meaning of love *by His life*, even more than by His words.
  - iii. The call of Christ is to walk as He walked. To follow Him in how we live. It is a way of life, not a theology lesson.
- c. **Challenge:** Let us reclaim the *Biblical definition* of the kind of love God is looking for in us. That kind of love is defined here by Paul.
  - i. "Love *suffers long*..." (from **1 Corinthians 13:4**, NKJV)
    1. The Greek verb 'to suffer long' = macrothumeo / μακροθυμέω.
  - ii. Being "longsuffering" is an attribute of God Himself. Recall how the Lord described Himself when Moses asked to see God:
    1. "Then the Lord passed before his face and proclaimed, "The Lord God, compassionate, merciful, *longsuffering*, abounding in mercy and true,..." (**Exodus 34:6**, LXX, OSB)
  - iii. I find the phrase "suffering long" or being "long suffering" (as found in some of the older, classic translations of this passage, such as found in the KJV, NKJV, ASV) more convicting than "being patient" (as found in many of the more modern translations).
    1. When I think of being *patient* (in contrast with being *impatient*), I think of waiting for someone without getting annoyed.
    2. On the other hand, when I think of *suffering long*, that strikes me as much different!

- a. I think of Jacob who served 14 years to get Rachel.
  - b. Read **Genesis 29:20** and **31:38-42**
3. Consider other passages in the NKJV translation where a similar expression occurs.
- a. “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, *longsuffering...*” (**Colossians 3:12**, NKJV)
  - b. “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with *longsuffering*, bearing with one another in love,” (**Ephesians 4:1-2**, NKJV)
- d. Along with being longsuffering, reflect on the other attributes of true Christian love that Paul highlights in **1 Corinthians 13**, aspects of the kind of love God seeks, but which the world has little appreciation for. This type of love is in very short supply.
- e. This is the type of love that Jesus is calling us to show to others.
- i. “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.* You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” (**John 15:11-14**, NKJV)

## **Concerns about The Permanent Revolution**

Dan Tillinghast

On the recommendation of church leadership, I began reading *The Permanent Revolution*, and it did not take long to see that it is the source of some teachings that I've been uneasy with at FOTW.

The authors state very clearly that they are the first ones since the apostles to cover the teaching of five-fold ministry. Let me give some quotes:

Page 6: "Yet in the many millions of theological books that have ever been written, we cannot find serious exploration of the topic of fivefold ministry as a living and vital piece of the church's genetic coding"

Then in the next paragraph: "How can we explain this? How did it come to be such a profoundly unexamined teaching? The only conclusion we can reach is that this must ultimately be the work of the Devil."

Page 57: (Regarding Eph 2:20): "for similar hermeneutical reasons used in Ephesians 4, we reject the traditionalist, procrustean interpretation that this applies only to the original apostles and prophets."

Page 98: "If we are willing to lay aside our historical and all-too-habitual prejudice, and be willing to fully comprehend the role and function of the apostle, we would be amazed at how the Western church has been able to sustain itself for over seventeen hundred years without a fully legitimized form."

Page 304, footnote #23: "Applying this to the trajectory of early Christianity, the early experience of ecclesia was drawn from the Greco-Roman household structure, which naturally supplied the initial organizational template for the church in the beginning. The leadership roles emerged organically, from below, and were a natural development considering the connection the early church had with the household, its primary meeting place. Over time, these roles became formalized and gave birth to models of leadership like those we see in Rome in the writings of Clement with his promotion of the elder-deacon model, or in the writings of Ignatius promoting the three-fold bishop-elder-deacon model of leadership. Because these roles ensured the smooth operation of the community along with a higher degree of stability, they formed the templated pattern of organizational that later became a formalized, rigid hierarchy, consisting of a single bishop ruling over a collection of house-churches with a council of elders and administrative deacons. Over time, the clearly biblical roles and functions of apostle (and prophet and evangelist for that matter) are referred to less and less as the more operative, somewhat more bureaucratic approaches to leadership replace them.

To summarize some of the concerning points made in these quotes:

1. Leadership in the early church was a natural development, rather than following the Scriptures and the Apostles.
2. Subverting the role of apostle was a work of the Devil that began with men like Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome.
3. Leadership in the church ever since that time has never been "fully legitimized".
4. The role of apostles today in setting church doctrine is just as foundational as the original apostles.

The solution proposed by these authors is to throw out the roles of Bishop / Elder / Deacon, which they consider a human institution (in spite of clear scriptural support), and to establish an APEST model in its place.



In reading the book, I was reminded of Huldrych Zwingli's words, "In this matter of baptism - if I may be pardoned for saying it - I can only conclude that all the doctors of the church have been in error from the time of the apostles. They have all ascribed a power to the water which it does not have and which the apostles did not teach."

The authors of *The Permanent Revolution* are making the same sort of claim, that the church has been in serious error since the beginning of the second century, and thanks to them, now we can have a legitimate church. Like Zwingli, they display a high level of trust in their own misunderstanding of the matter, as well as a high level of arrogance.

As a church that claims to be restoring the Historic Faith, I find it very disturbing that we would accept an innovated model of leadership based upon a rejection of the earliest Christian writers, men that we know were connected to the apostles.

As students of the early church, it has been our practice to identify where there is unity among early Christians who lived in different times and places, in order to sort out what is true and apostolic. The authors of this book find no agreement or validation from ANY of the early Christians, and are forced to reject their testimony entirely, because none of the early Christians understood Ephesians 4 the way these men do.

No early Christian writer anywhere says that Paul / Peter / John etc. appointed apostles to succeed them. Rather the Early Christian writers are united in testifying to a succession of bishops that started with the apostles (Acts 1:20 and 1 Peter 5:1 tell us that the apostles regarded themselves as bishops / elders). Open up the Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs under the topic of Apostolic Succession, and you will find very many quotes all testifying to the same thing.

Ignatius, in his letter to the Romans, said, "I do not command you as if I were Peter or Paul. They were apostles." If there were apostles in Ignatius' day, he wouldn't have mentioned Peter and Paul. The office of apostle was already a thing of the past. This makes sense, because the criteria laid out for apostles in Acts 1:21-26 restricts it to the first century.

I also find it disturbing that the authors had the audacity to call the leadership roles of Bishop, Elder and Deacon a "natural development" based on societal patterns of the day. Do they actually not know that the Scriptures detail those roles specifically, and give requirements of godly character and maturity? And what they propose instead is that these giftings are discerned by personality!?

Having been in the ICOC previously, I have seen what can happen when leadership roles are given according to personality. The leadership that God calls for is clearly laid out in scripture, and is known by godliness and maturity. The church loses much when we fail to implement this kind of leadership; yet here we are, over ten years in now, and it still appears to be a long way off.

When I read that "God gave gifts to the church", it has never before occurred to me that God meant we should reconfigure our fellowships according to these gifts. I take that statement with a sense of assurance that God has provided these gifts, not that we need to identify which one we are and rearrange ourselves accordingly. If we do this, I would liken it to what God commanded regarding an altar, that the stones were not to be hewn with any tool, otherwise it would be defiled. We are defiling the church when we add our psychology to how it needs to be constructed.

## **An alternative perspective from the early church**

I realize that rejecting this perspective regarding apostles may leave some questions about other apostles mentioned in the N.T. and in the Didache; and I believe there are good answers.

In Bercot's Dictionary, under Seventy Disciples, there is this quote from Tertullian: "He chose seventy other apostles besides the Twelve. Now, the twelve followed the number of the twelve fountains of Elim. Therefore why should not the seventy correspond to the number of palm trees in that place?" Tertullian is alluding to Num 33:9, which says "At Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and we camped there"

The idea that the seventy whom Jesus appointed in Luke 10 are to be regarded as apostles is supportable by the text:

Luke 10:1 (NASB) – Now after this, the Lord appointed **seventy others**, and sent them...

Luke 10:3 – Jesus says to them: "I send (Gk. *apostello*) you out"

As you read on in that chapter, it becomes evident that Jesus' purpose for selecting the seventy is the same as for the Twelve (stated in Mark 3:14-15), that they might be with Him, that he might send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out demons, and He gives them the same sense of being His representatives, when He says, "whoever listens to you listens to Me, and whoever rejects you rejects Me".

These seventy are sometimes simply referred to as disciples rather than apostles. This seems to be the case for Timothy in Acts 16:1, "behold a certain disciple was there named Timothy".

The early Christians name a few of these seventy. For example, Clement of Alexandria says Barnabas was one of them. Eusebius of Caesarea wrote, "The names of the apostles of the Savior are clear to everyone from the Gospels, but no list of the seventy disciples is in circulation anywhere. Some have said, to be sure, that Barnabas was one of them, and the Acts of the Apostles and Paul writing to the Galatians have made special mention of him. They say Sosthenes was of these as well. Together with Paul, he wrote to the Corinthians. Tradition also holds that Matthias, who was listed among the apostles in place of Judas, and Joseph Justus, who was honored with him at the same casting of lots, were considered worthy of the same calling among the seventy. They say that Thaddeus was also one of them."

This view explains the references to other apostles in the N.T. and the Didache, and it allows that everyone who has ever rightly been called an apostle meets the criteria of Acts 1:21-ff and 2 Cor 12:12. This in turn explains why Paul defended his apostleship by saying that he had seen Jesus (1 Cor 9:1) and described himself as "untimely born", having not fulfilled the period of development, ie. walking with Jesus during the days of His ministry, that the others had.

My conclusion is that those who are called apostles today must fall into the category of false apostles, because we know from the early church that there was no continuing apostleship. As a church, this is a very bad situation for us.

Several years ago when the proposal was made to appoint apostles, I had doubts about it, but I trusted the leadership. I was present at the appointing of apostles and spoke my approval. Now that I have seen what the case for it is based on and where it's going, I believe we are very much in error. I would like to see the church do away with the office of apostle.