

**Church Polity: In Defense of One Pastor**  
by Benjamin Townsend

**1. Where do you begin in explaining your position on church polity?**

My doctrines on church polity begin with Jesus Christ. Paul told Timothy: (1 Tim 6:3-5) *“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”* Paul had received all his doctrine from the Lord Jesus. (Gal 1:11-12) *“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* I do not believe Paul did or taught anything inconsistent with the doctrine of Christ.

Also, the other Apostles learned all of their doctrine from Jesus Christ. Acts 2:42 states that the Christians “continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine.” The Apostles had received their doctrine from the Lord during the past three years, and specifically the last 50 days (Luke 24:44, Acts 1:2). None of their teaching went contrary to what Christ had taught them. (Matthew 28:19-20 *Go ye*

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*therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*)

Christians were commanded not to neglect the doctrine which the Apostles received from Christ and gave to them. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 3 explains: *“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;”*

For example: Speaking in tongues was used by God to show the unbelieving Jew that the early churches were truly of God (cf. 1 Corinthians. 14:21-22). True churches down through the centuries did not use tongues, but rejected it as part of church doctrine. A good question would be, If “tongues” was in every church in the New Testament, why have local churches rejected it for 2000 years? The answer would be that “tongues” was for that time, because the local churches did not have the Scriptures to guide them. Notice that Jesus never taught on the doctrine of tongues. When it comes to “tongues,” why isn’t the argument, “Well, the Scriptures teach that the early churches had the gift, and if we want to be like the early churches and follow Scripture, then we should speak in tongues.” No one in the church that Jesus called out to assemble spoke in tongues until it was necessary three years later. It ceased when it was no longer necessary.

There are several other examples to prove this point. Prophets were used in the book of Acts to foretell the future. When the Word of God was completed, a Prophet,

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in the sense of one telling the future, was no longer needed (Acts 15:32; 21:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 14:29; Ephesians 3:5; 4:11). (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.) The false doctrines of baptismal regeneration, infant baptism, and household salvation are other examples of only using the book of Acts to prove doctrinal positions of the early churches. I believe we must receive the teachings in the book of Acts by first filtering them through the teachings of our Lord in the Gospels and the book of Revelation.*

### **2. When did the church begin?**

I believe the church of Jesus Christ began in Matthew 4:17-23 with the calling out and assembling of His first disciples. State churches, including Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian, Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalists, et. al., believe the “Church” started on the day of Pentecost. The form of church polity to which I adhere therefore goes back three years before Pentecost. The Scripture which I use to support this is Matthew 16:18 (*...upon this rock I will build my church...*). The local church (Ekklesia = called out assembly), was started by Christ, and built by Christ while He was here in the flesh. That is why in Matthew 18:17, Jesus can say to His disciples that if your brother does not reconcile, “*tell it to the church.*” They did not have to wait until Pentecost to tell

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the church. That is also why on the day of Pentecost “*there were added to them 3000 souls...*” You cannot add to something unless it is already there. Jesus started His church with saved, Scripturally baptized people. It grew from those first two to four, then to twelve, then to seventy, then to 120 men and women on the day of Pentecost in the upper room. Christ now is seen standing in the midst of His churches in Revelation, chapter 1. The seven candlesticks are the seven churches. His last words recorded in the Bible are spoken to His churches.

Because the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodist, Congregationalists, (and all those others who with these compose 75% of professing Christians) believe they need to go back to the Book of Acts to get their church polity and organization, I tend to disagree with their ways of church polity. This is especially true because all of them disagree with each other as to what the Scriptures say as to how a church is to be run or governed. They cannot all be right, and truly, all but one, or all of them, must be wrong.

### **3. What constituted the early church that Jesus called?**

- A. Each one was saved by repentance and confession of sin (Matthew 3:1-8). This continued to stay true as the pattern in Acts 2:38, 41.
- B. Each one was Baptized (by immersion) (Matthew 3:6 and Acts 1:21-22). This is also the pattern of Acts 2:41.
- C. It was to this church that the Lord’s Supper was given, and it was only to saved, baptized believers (Matthew 26:26-29). This also continued to be the

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case in Acts 2:42 when they “*continued steadfastly in the apostles ... breaking of bread...*” This was confirmed by Paul to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

- D. This church was independent in its polity and Christ was the head. The members (disciples) were equal as brethren. Matt 23:8-12 “*But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*”
- E. Christ was the Shepherd over this church. (Matt 26:31) “*Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*” (John 10:11) “*I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*” (John 10:14) “*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*” (1 Peter 2:25) “*For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*” (1 Peter 5:4) “*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*”
- F. The preeminent one in His church was Himself, and because of this, He taught that they were not to set up church authority like the world did. They were

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not to set up authority like Israel had either. Matt 20:25-28 *“But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* Luke 22:24-27 *“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.”*

#### **4. So what do you believe about the early churches in Acts and the Epistles?**

The book of Acts (during which all the epistles were written) is a transition book. Several transitions take place. One is the transfer of Jesus Christ to heaven and the Holy Spirit to earth to guide the churches. Another is the transition of Jewish believers' from the Synagogue to local churches. Another is the transfer of Saturday rest to Sunday

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worship. Another is the transition of the Gospel going from the Jews to the Gentiles and the calling of an Apostle to the Gentiles. Another slower transition (which would not be completed for several hundred years) was that of adding the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament to the Hebrew Scriptures. Another transition was a phasing out of the Apostles, as a new type of leadership was given to the churches.

#### **5. So who is this “new type of leadership” in the churches?**

I believe this to be a called servant-shepherd in each church. The servant-shepherd is to be an example to lead all others in the church to become servants. This servant of Christ is to be called by his Master, obedient to his Master, and accountable to his Master. There is no one higher, or lower, in the church.

#### **6. Do you have any Scripture to back this up?**

Yes. I believe the first servant-shepherd was Jesus. The second servant-shepherd was James, the brother of the Lord. Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection (1 Corinthians. 15:7). After that time, James had a particular role in the church that Jesus started. Peter, after getting out of prison, tells the prayer meeting at Mary’s house, “*Go shew these things unto James...*” (Acts 12:12-13). At the meeting in Acts 15, Paul refers back to James as a “*pillar*” of the church (Gal. 2:9), along with Peter and John, both of whom would leave to go to other areas to start churches. James declares the sentence in Acts 15:19-21. James sent

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men to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 2:12). Paul reported to James at his house in Jerusalem, and all the other elders happened to be there at that time (Acts 21:18). Early church historians refer to James as the overseer of the church at Jerusalem (cf. Eusebius, Hegesippus, and even Josephus, who was not a Christian, but was an impartial reporter of these things). In the letter James wrote to the dispersed Jewish Christians, he begins: “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*” James referred to himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus, while others referred to him as the overseer of the church at Jerusalem, the one Jesus started. He believed himself to be a servant of the Master who was head of this church.

#### **7. The Bible does not say James was a bishop or a pastor.**

George Washington was the first president. The Bible does not say that, but the truth of history bears it out by those who knew him, and who would not lie. The Jewish historian Josephus had no axe to grind, nor did he profit one bit from writing about James the Just who was the overseer of the church at Jerusalem. Clement of Rome wrote that “the Lord, after His resurrection imparted knowledge to James the Just.” He also called James the “bishop of Jerusalem.” Hegesippus, a second century contemporary with Clement, wrote “James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the church...” Eusebius, fourth century historian, speaks of James in great detail as the bishop of the church at Jerusalem. John Chrysostom, of the fourth century and the first commentator of the Bible, stated in his commentary on Acts 15 the following about

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James:

“This James was bishop, as they say, and therefore he speaks last, and herein is fulfilled that saying, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." (Deut. 17:6; Matt. 18:16.) But observe the discretion shown by him also, in making his argument good from the prophets, both new and old.[1] For he had no acts of his own to declare, as Peter had and Paul. And indeed it is wisely ordered that this (the active) part is assigned to those, as not intended. To be locally fixed in Jerusalem, whereas James here, who performs the part of teacher, is no way responsible for what has been done, while however he is not divided from them in opinion. [\*] (b) "Men and brethren," he says, "hearken unto me." Great is the moderation of the man. His also is a more complete oration, as indeed it puts the completion to the matter under discussion....) Then, what makes his word authoritative--"Saith the Lord, which doeth all these things:" and, for that this is no new thing, but all was planned from the beginning, "Known unto God are all His works from everlasting."[\*] (v. 18.) And then again his authority (kai axiwma palin) as Bishop: "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from

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pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood... There was no arrogance in the Church. After Peter Paul speaks, and none silences him: James waits patiently, not starts up[2] (for the next word). Great the orderliness (of the proceedings). No word speaks John here, no word the other Apostles, but held their peace, for James was invested with the chief rule, and think it no hardship. So clean was their soul from love of glory. "And after that they had held their peace, James answered," etc. (v. 13.) (b) Peter indeed spoke more strongly, but James here more mildly: for thus it behooves one in high authority, to leave what is unpleasant for others to say, while he himself appears in the milder part."

#### **8. Do you base your "leadership" on any other Scriptures than the ones about James?**

Yes. For there to be a Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), there must be shepherds who are under Him. This word Shepherd (Poimen) is the same word as is used as a verb in verse 2 when Peter writes: "*Feed (poimein) the flock of God...*" There can be shepherds under the Chief Shepherd who are servants of the Chief Shepherd. Another name for shepherd is pastor. Jeremiah prophesies for God in Jeremiah 3:15, when he writes, "*And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*" Those gifts came to fruition in Ephesians

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4:11-13: “*And he (Christ) 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 come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*”

Wycliffe Bible Commentary says concerning Ephesians 4:11: “Pastors and teachers. These two terms go together. The first word means shepherds. Those who are the shepherds of the flock are also to be teachers. The true pastor should carry on an expository preaching ministry of the Word.”

**9. Why are there different names for pastor? Why is a pastor called bishop and elder. Are these names interchangeable or are they different people with different offices?**

First, I do not understand why a person cannot be called by more than one name. We are “*children of God*” because He is our Father. We are “*children of the kingdom*” because we are born into His kingdom. We are “*children of Abraham*” because we are spiritual descendents of Abraham. We are called “*brethren*” to denote that we are all equal in Christ and joint-heirs with Christ. We are “*believers*” because of our faith in Christ. We are called “*sheep*” because Jesus is the Shepherd. We are called “*disciples*” because Christ is our Teacher. We are called “*Christians*” because we are like Christ. All these names relate to different aspects of a Christian and are interchangeable. No one ever questions

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this by saying, “A Christian is not a disciple or a child of God or a brother or a believer. They must all be different people or different levels of church attendees.”

Second, there are several names given for a local church, also. A church is referred to as a “*flock*,” “*body*,” “*the house of God*,” “*a building fitly joined together*,” “*the pillar and ground of the truth*,” “*the temple of God*,” and many other names. Several times the Holy Spirit even places several names together so that we know that the “*assembly*” is the “*body of Christ*.”

The different names for a pastor are simply his different functions in the local church. As “bishop” he is the overseer of the “temple of God.” As “steward” he is the servant in the “house of God.” As “pastor” he is the shepherd of the “flock which is among you.” As “minister” he is the servant of Christ. As “preacher” he is the proclaimer of the Word. As “elder” he is viewed as a mature leader. As Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words states:

“Note: Presbuteros, "an elder," is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term "elder" indicates the mature spiritual experience and understanding of those so described; the term "bishop," or "overseer," indicates the character of the work undertaken.”

In Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown, Whole Commentary on the Bible, it states:

“That the "pastors" here were the bishops and

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presbyters of the Church, is evident from Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-2, where the *bishops'* and *presbyters'* office is said to be "to feed" the flock. The term, "shepherd" or "pastor," is used of guiding and *governing* and not merely *instructing*, whence it is applied to *kings*, rather than prophets or priests (Ezekiel 34:23, Jeremiah 23:4). Compare the names of princes compounded of "pharnas," *Hebrew*, "pastor," Holophernes, Tis-saphernes (compare Isaiah 44:28)."

In Newman's A Manual of Church History, volume 1, page 133, it says:

"In Gentile churches the appointed and ordained elders were commonly designated "bishops" or "overseers."

According to Presbyterian Philip Schaff, Church History, Volume one, section 59:

"The terms Presbyter (or Elder) and Bishop (or Overseer, Superintendent) denote in the New Testament one and the same office, with this difference only, that the first is borrowed from the Synagogue, the second from the Greek communities; and that the one signifies the dignity, the other the duty... *b.* The same officers of the church of Ephesus are alternately called presbyters and bishops. *c.* Paul sends

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greetings to the "bishops" and "deacons" of Philippi, but omits the presbyters because they were included in the first term; as also the plural indicates. *d.* In the Pastoral Epistles, where Paul intends to give the qualifications for all church officers, he again mentions only two, bishops and deacons, but uses the term presbyter afterwards for bishop. Peter urges the "presbyters" to "tend the flock of God," and to "fulfil the office of bishops" with disinterested devotion and without "lording it over the charge allotted to them." *e.* The interchange of terms continued in use to the close of the first century, as is evident from the Epistle of Clement of Rome (about 95), and the *Didache*, and still lingered towards the close of the second."

The word "Bishop," from Fausset's Bible Dictionary states:

"Greek episkopos (NT:1985), applied to the inspectors sent by Athens to her subject states, to inquire into their state, to rule and defend them. The Greek speaking Jews or Hellenists applied it in the Septuagint to officers who had "the oversight of the tabernacle" (Num 4:16; 31:14), "the officers overseeing the host" (Ps 109:8, "his charge of overseeing let another take," quoted in Acts 1:20 "his bishopric"; Isa 60:17, "thine overseers righteousness." Presbyter or elder was the term in the Christian church at Jerusalem for

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the pastoral superintendent; episcopus or bishop was naturally adopted in Gentile Christian churches, the word being already in use among the Greeks. The terms were originally equivalent; presbuteros (NT:4245) (whence "priest" comes by contraction) marking the age, rank, and respect due to him, episcopus marking his official duty. Bishops and deacons are the two orders alone mentioned in Phil 1:1. The plural shows there was more than one bishop and more than one deacon there. Those called "elders" (presbyters) are also termed "overseers" (bishops, Greek) as if the terms were interchangeable (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7). The presbyters discharged episcopal functions, i.e. overseeing the flock (1 Tim 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2)."

The word "Bishop" from Nelson's Bible Dictionary says:

"An overseer, elder, or pastor charged with the responsibility of spiritual leadership in a local church in New Testament times. Before the church was founded, the Greek word for bishop was used in a general sense to refer to local gods as those who watched over people or countries. The word was later applied to men, including those who held positions as magistrates or other government offices. And eventually the term was extended to refer to officials in religious communities with various functions, including those who supervised the revenues of pagan

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temples. The SEPTUAGINT (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses bishop to refer to those who exercise power; sometimes it indicates those who hold positions of authority. It represents a Hebrew term that refers to those who are overseers or officers (Num 4:16; Neh 9:9). In the New Testament, Jesus is called the "Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). In this passage the word is associated with the term shepherd. It is also used to identify the leader of Christian community or the one who filled the office of overseer. In Acts 20:28 the elders of the church at Ephesus summoned to meet Paul are identified as overseers. Their responsibility, given by the Holy Spirit, was "to shepherd the church of God." In Phil 1 bishops are associated with deacons, and the qualifications are outlined in 1 Tim 3:2-7 and Titus 1:7-9. Included are standards for his personal and home life, as well as the bishop's relationships with non-believers. In Acts 20:17,28 and Titus 1:5,7, the terms bishop and elder are used synonymously. Also the word bishop, or its related words, appears to be synonymous with the word shepherd, or its equivalents (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2). In his work, the bishop was to oversee the flock of God, to shepherd his people, to protect them from enemies, and to teach, exhort, and encourage. He was to accomplish this primarily by being an example to his people. He was to do this willingly and with an eager spirit, not by

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coercion or for financial gain. To desire a position as bishop, the apostle Paul declared, was to desire a good work (1 Tim 3:1). Also see ELDER.”

In John Calvin’s Institutes, Book 4, Section 3, Calvin states:

“In giving the name of bishops, presbyters, and pastors, indiscriminately to those who govern churches, I have done it on the authority of Scripture, which uses the words as synonymous. To all who discharge the ministry of the word it gives the name of bishops. Thus Paul, after enjoining Titus to ordain elders in every city, immediately adds, “A bishop must be blameless,” etc. (Titus 1:5, 7). So in another place he salutes several bishops in one church (Philippians 1:1). And in the Acts, the elders of Ephesus, whom he is said to have called together, he, in the course of his address, designates as bishops (Acts 20:17).”

#### **10. Is that all, or are there other passages that speak about a pastor over a church?**

I believe, along with the majority of fundamental Bible teachers and church historians that the “angels” in the book of Revelation, chapters one through three are speaking about pastors of these seven churches. Here are the verses in the New Testament that translates the Greek word “angelos”

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with the word “messenger” or “messengers.”

Matthew 11:10 “For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger (angelos) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

Mark 1:2 “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger (angelos) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

Luke 7:24 “And when the messengers (angelon) of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?”

Luke 7:27 “This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger (angelos) before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”

Luke 9:52 “And sent messengers (angelon) before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.”

2 Cor 12:7 “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger (angelos) of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”

James 2:25 “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers (angelon), and had sent them out another way?”

Note the following Bible students of the Word. Note also that there is only one angel per church.

1. John Gill, in his Exposition on the Bible over 260 years ago said concerning Revelation 1:16 –

“The angels or pastors of the seven churches,  
(Revelation 1:20). The ministers of the Gospel

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are compared to stars, because of their efficient cause, God, who has made them, and fixed them in their proper place, and for his glory; and because of the matter of them, being the same with the heavens, so ministers are of the same nature with the churches; and because of their form, light, which they receive from the sun, so preachers of the Gospel receive their light from Christ; and because of their multitude and variety, so the ministers of the Gospel are many, and their gifts different; and chiefly for their usefulness, to give light to others, to direct to Christ, and point out the way of salvation, and to rule over the churches: nor was it unusual with the Jews to compare good men to stars, and to the seven stars. The Targumist says, the seven lamps in the candlestick answer to the seven stars to which the righteous are like. These are led and held in Christ's right hand; which shows that they are dear unto Him, and highly valued by him; that they are his, in his possession, at his dispose, whom he uses as his instruments to do his work; and whom he upholds and sustains, that they shall not sink under their burdens; and whom he preserves from failing, and so holds them that they shall stand fast in the faith, and not be carried away with the error of the wicked:"

2. Gill, in writing on Revelation 1:20 states:

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“That is, the seven stars which John saw in Christ's right hand, represent the angels, or pastors of the seven churches of Asia, and in them all the pastors and ministers of the churches in all the periods of time until Christ's second coming. Here it may be observed, that the ministers of the Gospel are not only compared to "stars"; but likewise to "angels", which signifies "messengers", as ministers are sent forth by Christ with the message of the Gospel to publish to the sons of men; and as the angels are Christ's ministering spirits, so are the preachers of the Gospel the ministers of Christ, that wait upon him and serve him in the ministry of the word, and in the administration of ordinances; and there is some agreement between them in holiness, knowledge, zeal, diligence, and watchfulness, in their work; as also they may be so called for the honour and esteem in which they are, both with Christ and his churches; and who like the angels rejoice at the conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the interest of Christ:”

3. The 1599 Geneva Study Bible states in the footnote to Revelation, chapter 1, verse 20:

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels (1) of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks

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which thou sawest are the seven churches.

(1) By angels he means the ministers of the Church.”

4. Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown’s Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, written over 100 years ago states concerning Revelation 1:16:

“**angels**--not as ALFORD, from ORIGEN [*Homily 13* on Luke, and *Homily 20* on Numbers], the guardian angels of the churches, just as individuals have their guardian angels. For how could heavenly angels be charged with the delinquencies laid here to the charge of these angels? Then, if a human angel be meant (as the Old Testament analogy favors, Haggai 1:13, "the Lord's Messenger in the Lord's message"; (Malachi 2:7, 3:1), *the bishop*, or superintendent pastor, must be the angel. For whereas there were many presbyters in each of the larger churches (as for example, Ephesus, Smyrna, &c.), there was but *one* angel, whom, moreover, the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls holds responsible for the spiritual state of the Church under him. The term *angel*, designating an office, is, in accordance with the enigmatic symbolism of this book, transferred from the heavenly to the earthly superior ministers of Jehovah; reminding them that, like the heavenly angels above, they below should fulfil God's mission zealously, promptly and efficiently. "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in

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heaven!"

### 5. JFB's Commentary on Revelation 2:8 States:

**“2:8. Smyrna**--in Ionia, a little to the north of Ephesus. POLYCARP, martyred in A.D. 168, eighty-six years after his conversion, was bishop, and probably "the angel of the Church in Smyrna" meant here. The allusions to persecutions and faithfulness unto death accord with this view. IGNATIUS [*The Martyrdom of Ignatius* 3], on his way to martyrdom in Rome, wrote to POLYCARP, then (A.D. 108) bishop of Smyrna; if his bishopric commenced ten or twelve years earlier, the dates will harmonize. TERTULLIAN [*The Prescription against Heretics*, 32], and IRENÆUS, who had talked with POLYCARP in youth, tell us POLYCARP was consecrated bishop of Smyrna by St. John.”

### 6. Philip Schaff in his Church History, volume 1, section 59 states:

“The Angels of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor must be regarded as identical with the presbyter-bishops or local pastors. They represent the presiding presbyters, or the corps of regular officers, as the responsible messengers of God to the congregation.”

### 7. Faussett's Bible Dictionary, written over a century ago

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states:

“The superintending pastor of each of the seven churches is in Revelation called its "angel," (the abuse of the term "apostle" by pretenders led to its restriction to the twelve and Paul, Rev 2:2) just as in Old Testament the prophet Haggai (Hag 1:13) is termed "the Lord's messenger (angel) in the Lord's message." In the larger churches, as Ephesus and Smyrna, there were many presbyters, but only one angel under the one "chief Shepherd and Bishop of Souls," the term "bishop" thus being applicable to the highest pastoral superintendence (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4). The enigmatic symbolism of Revelation transfers the term of office, angel, from Jehovah's heavenly to His earthly ministers; reminding them that, like angels above, they should do God's will lovingly and perfectly. The "legate (angel) of the church" (sheliach tsibuwr) recited the prayers in the name of the assembled worshippers in the synagogue; the apostles, as Jews, naturally followed this pattern, under God's providential sanction: compare James 2:2, "assembly," Greek synagogue," 2 Cor 8:23.”

8. Charles Spurgeon, in his Lecture to My Students, Lecture 2, The Call to the Ministry, states:

“The Apocalyptic title of *Angel* (Revelation 2:1) means a messenger; and how shall men be

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Christ's heralds, unless by his election and ordination? If the reference of the word *Angel* to the minister be questioned, we should be glad to have it shown that it can relate to any one else. To whom would the Spirit write in the church as its representative, but to some one in apposition analogous to that of the presiding elder?"

9. Also, Spurgeon, in a message delivered on January 3, 1897, entitled "A Portrait No Artist Can Paint," stated:

"When John looked at Christ's right hand, he tells us that in it he saw seven stars. These are generally understood to be the ministers of the seven churches of Asia; we are told, in the twentieth verse, that "the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches," and I do not know who the angels of the churches can be unless they are the messengers of the churches, those ministers of whom Paul wrote, "they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ." At any rate, we shall take it for granted that these stars represent the pastors of the churches, the ministers of Christ."

10. Joseph Seiss, in his Exposition of the Book of Revelation says about these "angels:"

"And he had in his right hand seven stars" (Rev 1:16). "The seven stars are the angels (ministers) of the seven churches" (Rev 1:20), and, as such,

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they are distinct from the candlesticks. Christ walks among the candlesticks, but he holds these ministers in his right hand. The democratic idea of church organization, which makes all power proceed from the members, and makes the ministerial position nothing more than what inheres in every Christian, is thus scattered to the winds. Ministers have relations to Christ and to the Church, which ordinary church members have not. They partake directly of Christ's authority, and are responsible directly to him, and are upheld by his right hand, beyond the power of human beings or angels to displace them. What a lesson for ministers, as to the holiness of their office, the solemnity of their responsibilities, the necessity of unswerving fidelity, and the exercise of every confidence in their sacred functions."

"They are in Christ's hand. If they are unfaithful none can deliver them out of that hand; but if true to their position, none can touch them, or quench their light. They shall shine as the stars forever and ever. What a lesson for the people as to the authority of those ministrations which they are so prone to despise. Dealing with the regular ministers of the churches, you are dealing with the jewels on Christ's right hand. And what a lesson for all as to the divine majesty and glory of our Lord! The Pauls, and Johns, and Husses, and Luthers, and Cranmers, and Knoxes, and Wesleys, and all the

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hosts of those who have been teaching and guiding the churches for these 1,800 years, are no more than the rings upon his fingers. But they are jewels to him. He holds them as precious. Disregarded as they may be by people, they are dear to him. He holds them, as a man holds what he most esteems. He holds them, for service now, and for judgment when he cometh. He holds them, for success against the hosts of evil, for glorious honor if they are faithful, and for eternal disgrace if they are not.”

11. Matthew Henry’s 1706 unabridged Commentary on the Whole Bible analyzes Revelation 1:20 and 2:1 thusly:

Rev 1:9-20 “He had in his right hand seven stars, that is, the ministers of the seven churches, who are under his direction, have all their light and influence from him, and are secured and preserved by him.”

Rev 2:1-7 “To whom the first of these epistles is directed: To the church of Ephesus, a famous church planted by the apostle Paul (Acts 19), and afterwards watered and governed by John, who had his residence very much there. We can hardly think that Timothy was the angel, or sole pastor and bishop, of this church at this time,- that he who was of a very excellent spirit, and naturally cared for the good state of the souls of the people, should become so remiss as to deserve the rebukes given to the ministry of this

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church. Observe, from whom this epistle to Ephesus was sent; and here we have one of those titles that were given to Christ in his appearance to John in the chapter foregoing: He that holds the seven stars in his right hand, and walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, Rev 1:13,16. This title consists of two parts:- He that holds the stars in his right hand. The ministers of Christ are under his special care and protection. It is the honour of God that he knows the number of the stars, calls them by their names, binds the sweet influences of Pleiades and looses the bands of Orion; and it is the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ that the ministers of the gospel, who are greater blessings to the church than the stars are to the world, are in his hand. He directs all their motions; he disposes of them into their several orbs; he fills them with light and influence; he supports them, or else they would soon be falling stars; they are instruments in his hand, and all the good they do is done by his hand with them.”

Final note: Should anyone wish to find the scholars who believe that the “angels” in the book of Revelation are guardian angels, I found only two such persons: Stephen Alford and the 5<sup>th</sup> century Origen. Origen was the one in Alexandria who perverted the Greek text to cause the stream of false Bibles (Latin, Catholic Douay, Westcott and Hort 1881 translation). Origen was the one who held that the last chapter of the book of Mark was not part of the

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Bible. Stephen Alford was the person whose modern Greek text is the rival of the Textus Receptus. Alford's Greek New Testament is the text for all the modern translations of the Bible (RSV, NIV, NASB, etc.) Alford leaves out or changes tens of thousands of words in his text. Both of these men believed the angels in Revelation 1:20 were heavenly, guardian angels.

### **11. What is the authority or rule a pastor has over a church?**

The ruling authority of a pastor is peculiar in its kind. Though bearing some analogy to that of a father in his family, or of a governor in civil society, it differs from these. Christ distinguished His rule from that of earthly kings by the absence of coercion: "*If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight*" (John 18:36). So the spiritual rulers under Christ have no coercive power over the persons or property of those under their authority. A well marked distinction between their authority and that which is exercised by civil rulers, is drawn in these words of Christ: "*Ye know that the princes of the gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant*" (Matthew 20:25-27). Another peculiarity of their rule is that they cannot govern at their own will. This would be to act as lords over God's heritage. Such power, if exercised by them, is a usurpation, and does not legitimately belong to their office. The only rule which they have a right to apply is that of God's word; and the only obedience

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which they have a right to exact, is voluntary. The civil ruler is armed with the sword, and coerces obedience. Jesus Christ, as head of the local church, has put no carnal weapons into the hands of church rulers, and all coercion is inconsistent with the nature of the authority entrusted to them. No submission to the Lord is acceptable but that which is voluntary; and the same kind of submission which the ancient Christians rendered to the Lord, they rendered to their spiritual rulers:--"*They first gave their own selves unto the Lord and unto us by the will of God*" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

The surrender of their property was voluntary. Peter's address to Ananias and Sapphira proves, that this was true, even in the general surrender which was made by the first church; and it is clear that the contributions afterwards made by the churches, were made not of constraint but willingly. They who claim or indirectly exercise a coercive power over the property of church-members, are taking the oversight for filthy lucre's sake, and have no sanction from the authority of Christ, or the example of his apostles. Since the obedience of churches cannot be coerced, no one can begin or continue the exercise of spiritual rule over them, but at their will.

#### **12. Is there a distinct classification between a minister of Christ and a Christian?**

Yes. The ministers of Christ are a separate class of persons, distinguished by a special divine call to preach the word. These Christians are those given by Christ to the churches: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-

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teachers. The ministers of Christ are, like ordinary Christians, separate from the world. They are partakers of the heavenly calling, by which men are brought out of the world, and made the servants of Christ. In all his epistles to the churches, Paul claims to be a fellow-saint with them, a member of the same spiritual family, and an heir of the same heavenly inheritance. Throughout the Scriptures, the ministers of Christ are spoken of as persons who love Christ, and are from the heart devoting themselves to his service. They must therefore be of the number who are "called to be saints."

The ministers of Christ are also separate from ordinary Christians. They are one with ordinary Christians, as being called in one hope of their calling; but, besides the call to repentance and faith, which they have received in common with their brethren, they have been called to special service in the Lord's cause. It is a truth, from the Holy Scriptures, that there were, among the first Christians, persons to whom the work of the ministry was specially entrusted. Paul says, concerning these, God "*hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:18). "*Giving no offence, that the ministry be not blamed*" (2 Corinthians 6:3). "*Who hath made us able ministers of the new testament*" (2 Corinthians 3:6). He speaks of himself, as counted faithful; and put "*into the ministry*" (1 Timothy 1:12), and of the special grace given to him, that he should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8). The bestowment by the Holy Spirit of special qualifications for special service in the Lord's cause, is plainly taught in 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. The questions, "*Are all apostles? are all prophets?*" (1 Corinthians

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12:29) show that the offices designated did not belong to the whole body of the saints. Saul and Barnabas were separated unto the work to which the Holy Ghost had called them; but this separation did not take from them a place among the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus.

The special qualifications which the Holy Spirit bestows, bind him on whom they are bestowed to use them in the service of Christ. They are given to fit him for this service, and they constitute a divine call for him to engage in it. They are not given to confer a privilege merely, but they are a solemn call to duty--a call demanding the service of the whole life.

The apostles, when called by Christ, immediately left their secular employments, and gave themselves ever afterwards to the service of their Lord. Paul, when called, conferred not with flesh and blood. The work of the ministry did not cease, when these holy men left the earth; but other persons have been fitted to carry it on, by the same Spirit that qualified them for the peculiar service. He bestows his gifts "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Ephesians 4:12-13).

The special service for which the ministry is designed is the preaching of the word. The obligation to spread the knowledge of Christ is shared, to some extent, by all Christians. The effectual call of the Holy Spirit, by which any man is brought to repentance and faith, imposes on him an obligation to show forth the praises of him who hath

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called him out of darkness into his marvelous light; to let his light shine before men, that they, seeing his good works, may glorify his Father in heaven; and to hold forth the word of life. Every Christian is bound to do what he can for the conversion of others, and for spreading the knowledge of the truth. But special gifts are conferred on some, accompanied with special obligations. These constitute a special call to the ministry of the word.

During the Savior's personal ministry he made many disciples: but he did not entrust to them equally and indiscriminately the work of spreading the knowledge of his religion. He sent forth seventy with a special commission to preach the kingdom of God. He chose the apostles to be his immediate attendants and special witnesses, and gave them a commission--"*Go preach the gospel to every creature....Go make disciples, teaching them...*" Preaching and teaching were prominent and important parts of the service required of them. When Paul was made an apostle, the commission to him, as explained by himself, was to preach the gospel: "*Christ sent me, not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*" The obligation which he felt to perform this service was beyond that imposed on ordinary Christians, and was exceedingly pressing: "*Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel*" (1 Corinthians 9:16). With him, to preach the gospel was not to utter a proclamation in a brief sentence; but at Troas he preached to a late hour of the night. In his ministry teaching was conjoined with preaching, and included in it: "*Whereunto I am ordained a preacher and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity*" (1 Timothy 2:7).

The obligation of particular men to give themselves to

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the ministry of the word was intended to be a continuing arrangement, and not confined to the ministers appointed by Christ in person, like the apostles and Paul. Timothy was specially appointed to this service, and was commanded, "*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine.*" (2 Timothy 4:2) "*Make full proof of thy ministry.*" (2 Timothy 4:5) "*Neglect not the gift that is in thee.*" (1 Timothy 4:14) A special gift and a special obligation are here recognized, and the duty to be performed is preaching, in the comprehensive sense in which teaching is included. Paul had committed the gospel to Timothy; nor was the succession to cease in him. "*The things which thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*" (2 Timothy 2:2) Special ability and special obligation to preach and teach were to be continued in men, separated to the service from the body of Christ's disciples.

**13. If ministers are ordained or chosen by God with a special call, why is there a need for an ordination service and the laying on of hands by man? If an ordination service does not make a minister of Christ, and does not prove a man to be a minister of Christ, then why do it? Isn't it useless?**

Though an ordination service does not make a man a minister of Christ, nor does it prove a man to be a minister, it is, nevertheless, of great usefulness; and if we were wholly unable to see any usefulness in it, yet, as the will of God, we ought to observe it. Timothy was chosen by God to be a minister, yet that did not stop Paul and the Elders from