

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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“There is one body and one Spirit” *Eph 4:4*

All believers in Christ belong to “the body of Christ,” which is the Church. *Eph 1:22,23*.

The Word of God teaches that there is **only one Church in each city**, or smaller centre, e.g.

The Church of Thessalonica	<i>1Thes 1:1, 2Thes 1:1</i>	Cenchrea	<i>Rom 16:1</i>
Corinth	<i>1Cor 1:2, 2Cor 1:1</i>	Antioch	<i>Ac 13:1</i>
Ephesus	<i>Rev 2:1, Ac 20:17</i>	Jerusalem	<i>Ac 11:22, Ac 15:4</i>
Laodicea	<i>Rev 3:14, Col 4:16</i>	Philadelphia	<i>Rev 3:7</i>
Smyrna	<i>Rev 2:8</i>	Sardis	<i>Rev 3:1</i>
Pergamos	<i>Rev 2:12</i>	Thyatira	<i>Rev 2:18</i>

[The word “Churches” is used for provinces or regions, where there are a number of cities, each with its own Church. *1Thes 2:14*, (Judea), *Ac 16:41*, (Syria and Cilicia), *1Cor 16:19*, (Asia), *1Cor 16:1*, *Gal 1:2*, (Galatia), *2Cor 8:1*, (Macedonia), *Ac 16:4,5*, (Cities with their Churches).

Each local Church is identified by the Name of the city or town where it is located, eg “the Church of Corinth”. *1Cor 1:1*.

This is the only Biblical “denomination” or naming of the Church of Jesus Christ.

There is only one body of Christ and one Church in each communicable locality. (Melbourne City, of 3 million people, is divided into 14 areas, for communicable interaction as the Body of Christ. This is a man made scheme to assist the practical working of the City wide Church in Melbourne Pastors’ Network.)

In a large city like Jerusalem or Corinth, where there were many believers, they met together, for large gatherings and in smaller groups. *Ac 2:46, 1Cor 14:23,26*.

In the New Testament each local Church was under the oversight of a group elders, *Ac 20:17, Ac 14:23,26, 1Pet 5:1-4*. The Church elders were city wide elders. *Ac 20:17*.

In the New Testament , the “elder”, “overseer/bishop,” and “shepherd/pastor,” are all one and the same person. (Greek words are presbuteros, episkopos, poimen.) This truth can be established by considering *Ac 20:17,28, Titus 1:5,7, 1Pet 5:1,2*. For example, in the last reference, the elders are responsible to shepherd/feed/pastor the flock, serving as overseers/bishops. This is repeated in *Ac 20:17,28*.

In the Churches of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, planted by the apostles Paul and Barnabas, *Ac 13:14-14:24*, they appointed elders in each Church with prayer and fasting. *Ac 14:23*. (“Apostles” in *Ac 14:4,14*).

Elders are appointed by the Holy Spirit, *Ac 20:28*, through apostles, (*Ac 14:23*), or in the process of *Ac 13:1-3*, where mature believers with the giftings of *Eph 4:11*, are directed by the Holy Spirit as to who are to be elders.

Ac 11:19-26 describes the establishing of a Church, without any apostles mentioned as being present.

In v20, the “Hellenists,” were Greek Gentiles, who were converted in large numbers. See Living Bible, New Bible Commentary IVF, Jamieson -Fausset-Brown, whole Bible Commentary, Good News Bible, Expositors Bible Commentary.

This Church probably appointed elders by the process of *Ac 13:1-4* and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Decisions in the Church are not made by the process of “voting”. The Holy Spirit is the Director and makes the appointments. The process of “decision making” is described in *Ac 13:1-4*.

1Pet 5:1 indicates that apostles function as elders in the local Church when they are not ministering translocally . I assume that this applies to all the “Ascension Gift Ministries” of *Eph 4:11*. The eldership of a local Church needs to include those with *Eph 4:11* giftings, who are led together by the Holy Spirit to build and care for the Church.

From the founding of a local Church or as the eldership forms and develops, the spokesperson, leadership role in the eldership will be recognised by the anointing. (eg *Ac 2:14, Ac 15:13*).

Elders have to be mature in Christ and in the Spirit, **wanting nothing for self but everything for the Lord**. They must be full of truth, servant hearted, full of the Holy Spirit, prayer and faith, power and authority. They must live holy, righteous lives and be just and wise. Their families need to be honouring to the Lord and good examples of righteous living.

The supreme authority in any local Church is the person of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, working in the local eldership, as described in *Ac 13:1-4*.

Paul was the founding apostle of the Church at Corinth. *Ac 18:1-17*. In Paul's ongoing relationship with the Corinthian Church he does not assume a position of authority, **as in control**, over the local Church eldership. Paul says, "We do not have dominion or rule over your faith, **but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.**" *2Cor 1:24*. Here, faith is the revelation of the Word of God, to the Church eldership, by the Holy Spirit. *Rom 10:17*. For this reason no person has any authority over the local Church eldership. **The local Church eldership is required by God to obey what He says to them.** The local Church eldership, led by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, is the supreme authority in the local Church.

The role of the apostle, and the other *Ephesian 4:11* ministries, is to equip, empower, enable and support not to control. This ministry of equipping is specifically stated in *Eph 4:12*.

There are many "apostolic networks" in the current Church scene. Some of the apostles act like a "pope" and exercise control over the Churches they relate to. In some cases they issue decrees and expect the Churches to be obedient.

The authority of the apostle is through relationship with the elderships he relates to. The apostle earns respect through years of selfless service. Love in action is humility and servanthood. Jesus said, "I did not come to be served, but to serve". *Mat 20:28*. So when the apostle speaks and urges and pleads with the Church to act in a certain way, in line with the Word of God, the Church listens and takes his word seriously. *1Cor 1:10* "***I plead with you***". There were many major problems in the Corinthian Church. As an apostle, Paul, spoke strongly in line with the Word of God and urged the members of the Church to repent and live righteously. **This is the authority of the apostle.**

In fact **each individual believer is required to live by faith**, *Rom 1:17*. Each individual believer is required to live by direct revelation of the Holy Spirit, (who lives in them), and walk in obedience to God. Paul strongly tried to persuade Apollos to visit the Church in Corinth, but Apollos was responsible to act in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit not Paul. *1Cor 16:12*. Apollos refused to do what Paul was requesting.

The whole Reformation was based on a fight between Luther and the Pope on the "**right of private judgment.**" (The three issues in the Reformation were: justification by faith alone; the supreme authority of the Scripture; and the right of private judgment.) Luther maintained that the individual believer could, and should, "hear" from God and walk in faith obedience to God not the Pope.

On the issue of judgment, *Rom 14:10*, Christ shall judge each one of us, as to whether or not we have done what the Lord told us to do. **Each of us is personally responsible to Christ.**

If an individual, or a local Church eldership, or a married couple, can "hear" what God is saying to them, then no one has any authority to tell them to do otherwise. They have to obey what God says to them, no matter how hard.

If Dorothy and I had not acted on this principle of seeking God, listening, hearing and obeying what God said to us, we would never have been in Northland for the last 30+ years. The opposition from parents and others was huge. It took the powerful fear of God and fear of eternal damnation to get us to step out. This was more powerful than the issue of faith. There was no option if one wanted to avoid the fires of eternal hell.

Prophecy in the Church or among believers is never directional. It may be preparational or conformational, but never directional. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is present within and leading each believer. *Jn 14:26, 16:13*. The N.T. believer is to live a first hand, not second hand, Christian life.

Personal prophecy is good, but the individual receiving it, needs to hear from God too before taking action.