

FREE, Please Take One. (EOCA, English 00)

A Biblical Response to 4 Questions regarding the End of the Church Age

Q1. Please show me in the scriptures that the leadership that Christ ordained (elders and deacons) would one day be abolished before He returns.

From the Bible's record, we learn that in many instances God's judgment commenced suddenly (Jer. 6:26; 1 Thess. 5:3), yet did *not* end in a flash (cf. 1 Sam. 25:37, 38; Jer. 4:27). This was the case with Noah's flood (Gen. 7:4, 12, 17), and the destruction of Israel (Is. 8:7, 8) and Judah (Jer. 25:11, 12). This is also true with God's judgment on the New Testament churches and congregations in our day (Jer. 25:29; Ezek. 9:4-6; 1 Pet. 4:17).

We must note the fact that the two witnesses, who identify as the "two olive trees," "two candlesticks" (Rev. 11:4), finish their "testimony," then are "killed" (Rev. 11:7) – then their bodies "lie in the street" for "three days and a half" (vv. 8, 9), *before* they stand on their feet once again (v. 11). In other words, there comes a time when the witness of the Gospel, via the means of the candlesticks, or the churches and congregations, ceases. **YES**, these would be events taking place **before** the Last Day. We can know this because of the biblical language that describes the loosing of Satan, followed by a *period of time* when he is to wreak havoc in the visible assembly:

And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

(Dan. 12:11)

...And there came out of the smoke locusts...and unto them was given power... [over] those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads...that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months....

(Rev. 9:3-5)

And I...saw a beast rise up out of the sea ...and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months....

(Rev. 13:1, 5b)

And when they [the two witnesses] shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them...shall overcome them, and kill them...The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

(Rev. 11:7, 14)

Furthermore, the Bible does teach that the time of the great tribulation is characterized by Satan, the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:3), ruling in the "congregation" (Is. 14:13; 2 Thess. 2:4). This effectively renders **all** that identifies with the "holy place" *unholy* (1 Cor. 5:6; Jas. 3:5, 6); it can no longer be deemed to have any God-appointed authority. God's judgment has come upon the churches, as a singular, collective entity, via the enemy, the Devil - and this has come to be *prior* to the Last Day. **All** that identifies with the visible church, the ordained offices of Deacons and

Elders, as well as the ceremonial laws of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, thus, are no longer to be:

The vision of Isaiah...which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem...Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider...the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it;

(Is. 1:1a, 3, 5b, 6a)

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God:

(1 Pet. 4:17a)

Nevertheless, God does focus on the sins of those who are the teachers of His word, the shepherds of the visible assembly - indeed, the Elders and Deacons of our day. These are they who are first accountable before Him, and who surely come under God's judgment along with the whole of the assembly:

Many PASTORS have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden my portion under foot....

(Jer 12:10)

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the SHEPHERDS...I will cause them to CEASE from feeding the flock...

(Ezek. 34:10; see also Is. 9:14-16)

For I know...that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them

(Acts 20:29, 30)

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be FALSE TEACHERS among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies...and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways...whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

(2 Pet. 2:1-3)

Q2. Please show in the scriptures where we should no longer observe the Lord's Supper and baptism.

Much of this question has already been addressed – God's judgment on the visible church is real, and comprehensive. Thus, all that constitutes the corporate, external representation of the eternal body is no longer.

However, let us look into one more point. There were no verses in the Old Testament canon, which, in simple terms, stated that the temple worship would one day be abolished, or that the priesthood would be no longer recognized of God. Nevertheless, it is a biblical fact that Babylon came into the gates of Jerusalem, and carried away captive her inhabitants (Lam. 4:12).

As mentioned earlier, however, there *were* verses which did teach that there would be sweeping, across-the-board judgment upon those who were called by God's name (1 Kin. 8:43; Dan. 9:19), Israel and Judah. Since the Jews were what we would call a church-state, their national destruction is exactly equivalent to their destruction as a religious entity. The Levites, as a simple example, were chosen of God for the specific purpose of serving in the tabernacle:

Bring the tribe of Levi near...And they shall keep his [Aaron's] charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.

(Num 3:6, 7)

This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: (Num 8:24)

Therefore, through language that teaches that the Temple itself was destroyed, utterly defiled, God makes clear that **all** religious activities related to the Temple in Jerusalem came to an abrupt halt:

And...came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD...with fire. And all the army of the Chaldees...brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about...And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the LORD, and the bases, and the brasen sea...did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried...to Babylon. And...all the vessels of brass wherewith they ministered, took they away. And...took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the door: And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence, which were found in the city, and the principal scribe of the host, which mustered the people of the land, and threescore men of the people.... Nebuzaradan...brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah: And the king of Babylon...slew them....So Judah was carried away out of their land.

(2 Kin. 25:8-10, 13, 14, 18, 19, 21)

These were catastrophic times for Judah, and especially for those who knew the Word of God. After all, God had indicated that many of the religious activities He Himself had ordained were those that had to be performed regularly, and without end – i.e., "perpetually":

And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

(Ex 30:8)

And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.

(Lev. 6:12, 13)

Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.

(Lev. 24:2-4)

With the Babylonian invasion and the utter destruction of the Temple in 587 BC - a direct expression of God's judgment upon His people - no longer could these commands of God be obeyed within the setting of the Temple in Jerusalem, the House of God. God Himself brought about conditions that made the observance of these ceremonial laws **impossible**. So too, today, God indicates that He has loosed Satan, and has allowed him to desecrate the churches and congregations (Dan. 8:9-11), rendering the whole institution of the visible church a cursed entity from which His children are commanded to

“come out” (Rev. 18:4). God has judged the “places of the assembly.” The “little leaven,” has leavened the “whole lump”:

And He [God] hath violently taken away his tabernacle...he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the SOLEMN FEASTS and SABBATHS to be FORGOTTEN in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. (Lam. 2:6)

Q3. Whenever believers are meeting together, that is the church (MT 18:20). Am I correct?

The Bible teaches that both the visible assembly, as well as the invisible, eternal assembly, are entities which are instituted upon God’s own set of rules, and are identified by God-ordained, God-appointed characteristics. They are not of a structure and character that are left to man’s ideas.

We have already discussed the fact that for the visible assembly of the Old Testament era, a particular group, the sons of Levi, was chosen, and consecrated of God for the service of the tabernacle. This appointment was no “small thing”:

Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? (Num 16:9)

Indeed, the whole of nation of Israel was instituted of God according to a set of rules. As a direct example, the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness was according to the most specific design on God’s part:

...priests that offer gifts according to the law...serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

(Heb. 8:4b, 5)

Such deliberate structure is also seen in how an individual became a part of Israel. A non-Jew could not become a part of the commonwealth simply by association, or by claiming piety for the God of Israel. Chiefly, the sign of circumcision was to be given as an external sign that distinguished the Jew from a Gentile (Gen. 17:10-14).

So too, for the New Testament era, God put forth not only the command that Elders and Deacons were to be ordained (like the establishment of the priesthood which consecrated the sons of Levi), but also their qualifications:

And when they had ordained them elders in every church.... (Acts 14:23a)

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ...ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound

doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. (Tit. 1:5-9; cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-13, 2 Tim. 2:24, 25)

Furthermore, for the New Testament congregation, it was the external sign of water baptism that was to be administered, in place of circumcision. Nevertheless this ceremonial sign served to externally delineate those belonging to a congregation, from those “without”:

...Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized...? And he commanded them to be baptized (Acts 10:46b-48a)

And a certain woman named Lydia...heard us: whose heart the Lord opened...And when she was baptized, and her household.... (Acts 16:14)

Returning to the Old Testament, do you recall the sin the two kings, Saul and Uzziah, committed? They made the mistake of thinking anyone could perform the duties strictly relegated to the Levites:

...And he [Saul] offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him...And Samuel said, What hast thou done?

(1 Sam. 13:9c-11a)

And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed... (2Chr. 26:18)

This the clear diversification of offices and their respective roles is also paralleled in the way God structured the New Testament visible assembly:

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office... whether prophecy...Or ministry...he that teacheth...he that exhorteth...he that giveth... he that ruleth...he that sheweth mercy.... (Rom. 12:4, 6-8)

...God hath set some in the church... apostles...prophets...teachers...miracles...healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:28)

...If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work...Likewise must the deacons be grave...And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

(1 Tim. 3:1, 8a, 10; cf. Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11)

Therefore, with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, foreseen already in John 20:22, the New Testament church era, during which the Holy Spirit would actively operate “in the midst” (Mt. 18:20) of those who “nameth the name of Christ” (2 Tim. 2:20; cf. Mt. 18:20), officially commenced. The Holy Spirit’s being “in the midst” is language that describes the Holy Spirit’s *positional relationship* to the visible assembly. It is akin to God’s nearness to Israel (Num. 14:14), demonstrated in His identification with that “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38) through signs and wonders (Ps. 78:11-29).

Indeed, we learn that God had always identified with His people in this manner – we are not to think that God’s presence “in the midst” is something unique to the New Testament churches and congregations:

For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them.... (Deut. 4:7a)

Yet Thou in Thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also Thy GOOD SPIRIT to instruct them.... (Neh. 9:19, 20a)

...Thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name; leave us not. (Jer. 14:9b)

His being “in the midst” of those gathered in His name, thus, indicates God’s guidance over and usage of the visible assembly for the direct purpose of sending forth the Gospel. It also meant that during the church era, He would maintain His identification with them. The language of Matt. 18:20, thus, does *not* in any way *define* for us what the visible body of Christ might be. For this information, we must turn elsewhere, to those passages that define the God-established structure of the New Testament visible assembly, discussed earlier. It is significant that God uses the expression, “whole church” (Acts 5:11, 15:22), and emphasizes this in the setting of 1 Corinthians 14:

If...the whole church be come together into one place... (1Co 14:23)

Furthermore, between 1 Cor. 11:17 and 1 Cor. 14:26, God uses the word, *sunerchomai* (“come together”) eight times, and in each case, the setting is that of the Corinthian assembly coming together with the intent to participate in a formal ecclesiastical activity: the first six occurrences are in the setting of the ceremony of the Lord’s Supper (cf. 11:20), and the last two, in the context of full, congregational worship, with “elders” (Acts 14:23, 20:17; Tit. 1:5), men, women (14:34, 35), plurality of teachers (14:26-31), and with potential for even the inclusion of unbelieving, first time visitors (14:23-25).

The children were also addressed in the epistles to the churches at Ephesus and Colossae (Col. 3:20): *“Wives...Husbands...Children, obey your parents in the Lord...fathers...Servants...masters”* (Eph. 5:22, 25, 6:1, 4, 5, 9).

The Old Testament confirms our understanding of the “whole church,” for example, as we witness the Passover being instituted:

Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying...they shall take to them a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. (Ex. 12:3, 4)

As the New Testament ceremonial sign of Baptism was applied to the whole house, that is, the family unit (Acts 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:15), regardless of actual, individual spiritual condition, so too, the Passover was to be that God-ordained activity in which the whole of the household partook (as signs, however, let us remember that circumcision corresponds to that of water baptism, and the Passover with the Lord’s Supper):

... when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service?...ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses
....(Ex. 12:26, 27)

All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. (Ex. 12:47)

Not only was "all the congregation of Israel" present in the observance of the Passover, but as well in the reading of the Law and public prayer – two activities identified with the worship of God:

When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:
(Deut 31:11, 12)

And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven
: (1 Kings 8:22)

And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court...And all Judah stood before the LORD, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.
(2 Chr. 20:5, 13)

Therefore, it in the setting of "the whole church" coming together "into one place" (1 Cor. 14:23) that God injects the rules of conduct for the participants, especially those who would be teaching as well as the women:

...when ye come together...Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted...Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church...Let all things be done decently and in order.
(1 Cor. 14:26, 29-31, 34, 35, 40)

It is this "midst" in which God would operate throughout both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament church eras. This is the reason why, as God begins to judge the visible assembly, He removes His presence from the midst – the candlestick has been removed "out of his place" (Rev. 2:5). In doing this He is detaching of Himself from the visible body, He is terminating His external identification with the church. God is declaring that He no longer recognizes the churches and congregations, and as an institution they would no longer be used for the purpose of evangelizing the world.

Having seen how God defines the visible assembly, let us now investigate one aspect of God's judgment upon it. The Bible teaches that as God first gave the warning, then followed with His departure from Israel, so too, in our time, God would remove Himself from the midst of the assembly that is called by His name:

And the LORD said...this people will...go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land...Then my anger shall be kindled against...and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because OUR GOD IS NOT AMONG US?
(Deut. 31:16, 17)

...Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I SHOULD GO FAR OFF FROM MY SANCTUARY?
(Ezek. 8:6a, b)

They have deeply corrupted themselves...therefore He will remember their iniquity, He will visit their sins...yea, woe also to them WHEN I DEPART FROM THEM!
(Hos. 9:9, 12)

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only He who now letteth will let, until He be taken out of the way [mesos, midst].
(2 Thess. 2:7)

In fact, God teaches that the place He had occupied in the midst of the assembly will now be given to another. This truth is seen in the destruction of Judah, as we find God being on the side of Babylon, and allowing that heathen nation to come into the "midst" of Jerusalem:

Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city.
(Jer 21:4)

In the New Testament era, it is Satan who is loosed of God Himself, and allowed to enter the visible assembly:

...the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.
(2 Thess. 2:3, 4; cf. Matt. 24:15)

The expression, "all that that is called God" of 2 Thessalonians 2:4, is a reference to 1) the Temple/churches and congregations; and 2) the people the Temple/churches and congregations pointed to, the people who identify with God:

If My PEOPLE, which are called by My name....
(2Chr. 7:14)

For the children of Judah...have set their abominations in the HOUSE which is called by my name
(Jer. 7:30)

For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the CITY which is called by my name
(Jer. 25:29a)

The terms "city" and "people" refer to the same entity:

...O my God: for thy CITY and thy PEOPLE are called by Thy name.
(Dan 9:19)

In the New Testament scriptures as well, those who identify with God are said to be "called" by His name:

...And the DISCIPLES were called Christians first in Antioch.
(Acts 11:26)

Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which YE are called?
(Jas. 2:7)

Following, the pattern established in the Old Testament, the people of God identify with the temple:

Know ye not that YE are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
(1 Cor. 3:16)

So too, the following verses indicate that the "midst" in view in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, like the "midst" of the "city" (Jerusalem) of Jeremiah 21:4, is that of the external assembly of those that name the name of God:

Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp...that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.
(Num. 5:3; comp. 1 Cor. 5:1, 2, 5-7)

O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem...for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction.
(Jer. 6:1)

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.
(Matt. 13:25)

Then let them...in Judaea flee to the mountains; and...them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.
(Lk. 21:21)

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.
(1 Cor. 5:2)

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord
(2 Cor. 6:17)

Q4. What Biblical sanction is there for church like organizations being used as the means of spreading the Gospel? They are accountable to no one. They should be accountable to a local body of believers - ruled by elders and deacons.

The Bible knows of no "church like" organizations. In this our day, with God's judgment having come on the visible church - the once biblically ordained institution - there is no longer an external entity that serves as an earthly representative of the heavenly kingdom. The only delineation now that exists among men is the actual, inner, eternal distinction between those who are the children of the devil and those who are the children of the King (Eph. 2:1-10; 1 John 3:10). We are either with Christ, or against Him (Matt. 12:30).

The disciples, too, once expressed their belief that if one did not belong to their group, identifying with Christ and the twelve, this individual's gospel endeavor ought to be stopped:

...Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.
(Mk. 9:38-40)

The question you raise actually is this: Could a believer share the Gospel on his own during the church age, independent of the support or guidance of his local congregation? The Bible's answer to this question is yes. The second question you are posing is, Is the proclamation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus valid only under the protective and supervisory umbrella of a healthy, flourishing visible assembly on earth? The Bible's answer is no.

Do you recall the rules governing women's proper conduct when the whole church came together? They were

to “keep silence in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34). It was even a “shame for women to speak in the church” (v. 35). Yet, we find, in 1 Cor. 11, the following statement (v. 5): *But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.*

With this verse, God teaches that a believing woman surely is to prophesy; yet her prophesying must be done *outside* of the context of a formal, ecclesiastical gathering. Moreover, God teaches that every believer has a prophetic role, and commands them to “*be ready to always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*” (1 Pet. 3:15); this the believer’s appointment is not based on a local congregation’s consensus or approval. An example of an unlikely witness is found in 2 Kings 5. Here we find a child (non-adult), a girl (non-male), and one who “waited on” the wife of Naaman the leper as a captive slave of the Syrians – an individual with no accountability to any political or ecclesiastical body of Israel. Nevertheless, it is through this “little maid” that our sovereign God was pleased to make known His healing, saving power:

And the Syrians had gone out...and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy
(2 Kin. 5:2, 3)

God causes this little slave girl to express her faith, her belief that the God she knew was able to heal Naaman of his leprosy through the prophet Elisha. Was she to remain silent, because she was accountable to no one? Was this “little” witness displaying early signs of apostasy, in her having been displaced from the oversight of the elders and priests of Israel? – no.

We also ought to remember the women at the tomb, who were commanded to go “tell” the disciples – and this prior to Pentecost, before any church body had officially commissioned them (Matt. 28:7; John 20:17).

The apostle Paul, too, makes it a point to make known the fact that following his conversion, he had no contact with the church in Jerusalem:

...immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter.... (Gal. 1:16b-18a)

Until the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas by the church in Antioch in Acts 13 (vv. 1-3), no believer, under the auspices of the church, had been set apart for the specific purpose of sending forth the Gospel. Any witnessing that was done was independent of any governing body. – preaching the word, being “instant in season out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2), as *all believers ought*.

The many within the visible assembly of our day (Ezek. 2; 3:5, 17) are not qualified to handle the word of God, for they do not know the One of Whom they speak (Jer. 2:8). In Psalm 50, God states His rebuke in this manner:

... unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. (vv. 16, 17)

Indeed, 2 Timothy speaks of the churches of our time when the teachers and those that are taught are “deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13; cf. 1 Tim. 1:7):

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts...heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

(2 Tim. 4:3, 4)

The Bible teaches that God is *sufficient* as the means by which He works to mold His own unto the last day:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life
(2 Corinthians 3:5,6)

The personal indwelling of God and His effectual working through His word is what guides, instructs, even chastens and rebukes His children. Nowhere in His word does God teach that the Elders and Deacons, the shadow offices of two facets of the Lord Jesus’ ministry, are *necessary conditions* for the spiritual growth of the believer. In fact, based on the way God defines His work of salvation (e.g., Ezek. 36:26, 27), we should seriously examine our spiritual condition if we find that our lifestyle becomes lascivious and unrestrained when other men, also earthen vessels, are not watching us. With the child of God, the incomprehensible fact that the Creator God knows his “downsitting” and “uprising,” and “understandest” his “thought afar off” (Ps. 139:2) ought to mean, and impact his life, so much more than “having men’s persons in admiration” (Jude 1:16).

Here is a sample list of verses that teach that upon salvation, the children of God are on their way to growing “as newborn babes,” “in grace” (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18), maintaining “good works” (Tit. 3:8), “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10), and mortifying the deeds of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5-10). Indeed, the “path of the just” will shine “more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18):

I will bless the LORD, Who hath given me counsel: my reins [the inner man] also instruct me in the night seasons. (Ps. 16:7)

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. (Ps. 32:8)

Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee. (Ps. 119:11)

Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors (Ps. 119:24)

Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the LORD my God (Jer 31:18b)
...I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...And they shall teach no more every man his

neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: (Jer 31:33, 34a; comp. 1 John 2:27)

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13)

...the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (1 Thess. 2:13)

All scripture is...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, THOROUGHLY furnished unto ALL good works. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)

For whom the Lord loveth HE chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth (Heb. 12:6; cf. Rev. 3:19)

Now the God of peace...Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.... (Heb. 13:20, 21)

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