

## **The Pastor/prophet relationship**

Poor King Ahab! Nothing he did seemed to go right. Famine had struck the land. Everyone was complaining, and blaming him. He blamed the prophet Elijah, but couldn't find him, so he had to take the blame himself! With everything falling apart, he really needed a good day, but he wasn't going to get one. Elijah the prophet turned up! Ahab, frustrated by this prophet says "Have you found me you troubler of Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17) These words must have been echoed down the years by many Pastors, faced with the difficult character of a prophet in his assembly. It's hard enough leading a Church, without having one of these wild men turning everything upside down!

Poor Elijah! All he did was to obey God, and bring the people back to a better understanding of God's claims. God had answered him by fire, and in the strength of this power, he destroyed the 400 prophets of Baal who had dared to take on the God of Israel. But after his victory, when he was tired, he met Queen Jezebel. (1 Kings 19:2) She threatened to take his life, and he ran away into the desert. "Better to die" was his despairing word. Millions of prophets have felt like him in the centuries that have passed. Doing only what they felt God had called them to do, most of them have been ignored, persecuted and even killed. Who wants such a job?

Over the centuries, Prophet and Pastor have struggled to work together, to understand each other, and to serve together in the common cause of the Gospel. Centuries of misunderstanding haven't helped. Yet prophet and Pastors are joined together in the mind of God. In Ephesians 4, he put them together in the foundation ministries of the Church. So somehow, we have got to work it out.

Throughout this material, I have used the title "Pastor" to describe the one who leads the fellowship. Denominations use different titles to describe this person - Presiding elder, Overseer, Minister, Priest and others. Please accept the word "Pastor" as covering all these titles for the purposes of this material.

### **1. Common ground - One Character**

If we are going to make this relationship work, we have to establish common ground between these two ministries. Only on this foundation can we build any lasting relationship. In the character of the Christian leader, there are a number of principles which we share in common. Understanding these will give us a basis to understand each other.

#### **God centered (1 Samuel 17)**

In 1 Samuel chapter 17, David came down to the Israelite battle lines, and caught sight

of the powerful and threatening Goliath. Unlike the Israelites, including King Saul, he was not afraid of this demonic force. Taking only his sling and five stones, he advanced against Goliath, and in the face of derision, made a statement which every Christian who wants to have the correct character should know by heart:-

**“You come against me with sword and spear and javelin. But I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel who you have defied.” ( v 45) “the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” ( v47)**

David’s life was focused on the power and strength of God, not on his own character or abilities. He was God centered, and consequently undefeated in the presence of the enemy.

Our Christian character is formed as we develop our relationship with God. He is our centre and focus, and nothing else. I know that this must look like stating the obvious, but not all Christian leaders seem to have grasped it. Many go into leadership confident of their own abilities. This leads inevitably to disaster. Our power, focus and strength come from our God centeredness. Once we have learnt this lesson, then the Lord takes everything we are, everything we have and everything we have experienced, and turns it to good leadership experience.

### **Crucified the world. (2 Timothy 4:10)**

We don’t know much about Demas—only one good and one bad thing. The good thing was that he was a Christian and one of those who was with St. Paul. (Colossians 4:14) The bad news was that one fatal mistake destroyed everything. His mistake? He had not crucified the world in himself. So one day, the enemy came along and dangled before him all the attractions of the world. I’m sure he resisted for a time, but then, sadly, the Bible tells us, “Demas, in love with the world, has left me.”(2 Tim. 4:10) The Christian leader must have crucified the world, with all its attractions and ways, in himself. Here are some of the challenges of the crucified life:-

### **The Crucified life**

- \* The world loves power and success. **The crucified life** of the leader loves obedience and service.
- \* The world wants to control. **The crucified life** of the leader wants to encourage and release.
- \* The world likes to manipulate, to work in the darkness and in underhand ways. **The crucified life** of the leader works in honesty and openness, rejoicing in the light.
- \* The world loves riches. **The crucified life** of the leader looks to the provision of God and his work.

\* The world loves laziness, poor discipline and indulgence. **The crucified life** of the leader seeks to discipline his life, so that he can serve with effectiveness and endurance.

\* The world likes confusion in its thinking, diluting truth to suit its own needs. **The crucified life** of the leader loves the truth of God's word, and seeks to match this life to God's law.

\* The world hates the poor, despising them, or providing them with the minimum. **The crucified life** of the leader looks to the needs of the outcast, the poor, the oppressed and the helpless, knowing that in this way he is serving his Lord.

\* The world exploits sexuality, and pulls down family life. **The crucified leader** has control of his or her sexuality, and seeks in every way to build up marriage and family life.

It is tough to live this kind of life, and we cannot achieve it overnight. We live in an instant age, but the development of Christian character takes time. No leader can begin his ministry with all these things crucified to himself. In fact, he probably won't achieve them all in his lifetime. But he must start with the intention of doing so. If our heart desires these things, then God can teach and instruct us as we go along, and our character will form. But if we start expecting something else, we will inevitably stumble.

### **Obedient, whatever it costs. (Mark 10:32)**

It is easy to miss the power of this story. Jesus is striding ahead of his followers, determined to get to Jerusalem. But in Jerusalem were many people who wanted him dead, and they had the power to get him killed. Surely he would have been better striding away from Jerusalem, or at least creeping up to it quietly? But he positively marches out towards Jerusalem, and certain death. His disciples are astonished at this action, and his other followers are afraid. But Jesus knows his Father's will, (Phil 2:8) and he is determined to carry it through, whatever the cost to him. Obedience is not something to be played about with— we are either obedient, or we are not. Obedience has to be in the heart of the Christian character. If it is not, the leader becomes puffed up, arrogant, proud and confident in himself. Instead of obeying the voice of God, he becomes selective, choosing which things he will do and which things he will not do. Ultimately, this brings him to destruction, which is sad in itself, but even worse in its consequence, which is to damage the body of Christ.

### **Discipline - whatever it costs. (Acts 27:21)**

"Well - I told you so!" Apostle Paul would have been justified in saying this to his fellow travelers, as they all faced shipwreck and death. But he didn't. He was probably as anxious in his human spirit as they were, but he had already decided that "for me, to live is Christ, to die is gain." (Phil 1:21) He had already decided where his priorities were, so he was disciplined, even in the face of death. In our Churches today we do not often

hear about discipline, and if we do, it comes with many conditions imposed. Apostle Paul was not of this type. He “beat his body”, he ran for the prize, and he wanted to win. So when he found himself in a very tight situation, he didn’t panic.

The character of the Christian leader should be formed in discipline. It should be second nature to us. We need to know the basic disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible study and the Christian lifestyle. We also need to know the tougher disciplines of spiritual warfare, intercession, endurance, constancy under pressure, and an unyielding spirit, which will never give up.

### **Spirit filled. (Acts 4:8)**

Should this characteristic have come first? Perhaps it should, but I have grown tired of being told that there is no need for any of the things mentioned so far, because “The Holy Spirit will do it!” Of course the Holy Spirit will do it. That’s just what happened in the whole of the story in the Acts of the Apostles. But the Holy Spirit is the very one who brings discipline into our lives, and if he does that, we insult him by not allowing him to develop our full Christian character.

### **The Servant heart. (Mark 8:34-35.)**

Jesus had the servant heart nature, and of all who are part of God’s Kingdom, he was the one who least needed to have it. He was, and is, King of Kings. All authority rested, and rests, in his hands. Surely on visiting his own creation, he was entitled to be seen for who he was? Yet he had the servant nature. (Philippians 2:6-8).

The true leader must have the servant heart. This means the willingness to give away, to be considered nothing, to think nothing of personal gain, position, respect or honour. The true leader must work hard to guard this servant nature himself. Others will honour him for what he has done, or will hold him in awe, and try to elevate him to a position to which he does not belong. It’s so easy to be swept along by all this adulation, respect and emotion. It appeals to that which is human in us. For me, the servant heart is the key to a good Pastor/Prophet relationship. When we have this heart, we can serve each other, and as we serve, so we will discover the best in each other’s calling. When we are anything else but servants, then eventually we will come to conflict and disaster.

## **2. Common ground – One call. (Eph 4:11)**

Apostle Paul gives us very strong common ground in his exposition in Ephesians 4.

***“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service.”*** (Ephesians 4:11)

In this passage, we see our unity and inter dependence.

**Apostle** — The releaser of gifts and appointer of ministries. Must have a wide and deep view of Church.

**Prophet** — The interpreter of times and indicator of ways. His integrity must never be compromised.

**Evangelist** —The keeper of the door and voice of the Gospel. Must have passion and force.

**Pastor** — The shepherd of the sheep. Keeps open the bridge of love.

**Teacher** — The equipper of ministries and guardian of truth. A passion for teaching, but refusal to suffer fools gladly.

Within the God given five fold ministry, there needs to be harmony and unity, however hard it is to achieve them. One way to encourage this attitude is for each gift to see the blessings which the other brings to the Body. Perhaps if we concentrated on these areas, we would find our areas of friction much easier to deal with. Here are some of the blessings I see in Pastors and Prophets:-

#### **Blessings–Prophet**

He is a powerful spirit filled colleague.  
He is very committed to the growth of the Church.  
He is an extra pair of eyes—watching and warning of danger.  
He is an encourager of ministry.  
He gives confirmation to the Pastor’s ministry and direction.

#### **Blessings–Pastor**

With him, we are safe and well protected.  
He understands our personal needs.  
He binds us together as a body.  
He provides the spiritual food and direction we need.  
He drives off the enemy, and guards against division.  
He ensures that we receive only truth.  
He encourages us in our ministries.

## Areas of friction

It is my belief that these can be much smaller than we expect, if we approach with servant hearts, and a willingness to work together. Friction can come from different sources. It's important to recognise that there are:-

Theological conflicts.	"I believe this.."
Authority conflicts.	"You have no right to.."
Church order conflicts.	"You're not doing it right."
Personality conflicts.	"I don't like you!"
Internal conflicts.	"I'm not sure about myself, so I attack you"
Fear conflicts.	"You will upset.."
Bad history conflicts.	"This happened in the past..."

Both Pastor and Prophet can suffer from one or more of these conflicts. It helps to know where the conflict has its root, so that we know how to handle it. So how does friction arise:-

### Misunderstanding of each other's roles and each other's gifts

The root of this problem is the inability to see each other's ministry from the other person's point of view. The prophet feels he has the right to speak, and doesn't like it if the Pastor stops him. He does not appreciate that from the Pastor's point of view, it might not be a time to receive prophecy.

The Pastor feels that the prophet is pushing his way into the life of the body, regardless of the wider needs of the body which he, the Pastor, has to consider.

### A clash of authority

The prophet has a very strong will, and sometimes this can challenge the Pastor. However, the Pastor has the responsibility for the flock. The prophet would do well to remember this, and take to heart the model of David, who would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. (1 Samuel 24:6) At the same time, some Pastors, losing their servant nature, enjoy using their authority to stop ministry developing in the body, especially ministry which is hard to handle. The Pastor would do well to remember this scripture "Do not muzzle the Ox while he is treading corn."

### Lack of commitment to Church order on both sides

Apostle Paul criticises any lack of Church order. Who is at fault when disorder comes? The Pastor? The prophet? Where should the blame be put? The Pastors will, naturally,

blame the prophets, and the prophets will blame the Pastors! But the truth is that both are at fault for not respecting the principle of good Church order. For the prophets to be uncontrolled shows that they do not respect order in the body, and for the Pastor to allow it shows that he doesn't respect good order. Good Church order flows from the fact that God is a God of order. He created the world in an orderly fashion, and his plans and purposes run in an orderly way. We should expect the same in our fellowships. Otherwise, we are not behaving after the fashion of our God.

### **Frustration on both sides**

I have lost count of the number of times I have been told by prophets, "I'm going to leave my Church, because the Pastor never lets me speak." This is always a cause of great sorrow to me. I grieve that a prophet cannot speak, and I grieve that he thinks the answer is to leave the Church. Very rarely does leaving the Church solve the problem, because it means that the Pastor/prophet relationship has broken down, and that is bad for everyone. But I feel the anguish and frustration of knowing the mind of God, and not being able to share it. I have also lost count of the number of times Pastors have come to me and said "A prophet came to my Church. He interrupted the worship to speak, and his word has sown anger and dissent in my fellowship." I grieve that a prophet could behave in this way, but I have seen it again and again, especially in Africa. I grieve for the Pastor who finds himself in this position, and has to try and find some way out of the mess.

We have to try and see frustration from both sides, but this requires a good relationship between Pastor and prophet, and a willingness to help each other within the five fold ministry.

### **Thinking more of ourselves than we should**

"I thank you Father, that I am not like other men.." (Luke 18:11) These words from the mouth of the righteous man did not earn him any blessing. In fact the blessing was transferred to one who was apparently of little worth. Prophets and Pastors must guard against thinking that they are more worthy, more valuable, or more special than the other. It is a natural man centered emotion, and has no place in the Kingdom of God. Each of us must examine our hearts in this matter, and be sure that this bad emotion is not causing friction between us.

### **Wrong motives**

It is very easy for our motives to become unclear as we progress in our ministries. Instead of being content to be the servant (Luke 17:7-10) we begin to want other things. We want to be seen, to be respected, to be honoured, to have position and authority. The problem here is twofold. First, these things are incompatible with our servant

calling. Second, and this is nearer the truth for our study, we judge it in the Pastor or the Prophet because we really want it for ourselves! We are envious that the other is getting the things we want. Each of us must examine our hearts in this matter, to be sure that we are only seeking to be servants, and accepting nothing except the commendation of our Master.

### **Bad history on both sides**

Many Pastors have had bad experiences with prophets, and many prophets have had bad experiences with Pastors! This is part of the background of most of us. But the problem is that we allow this bad history to cloud our judgment today! When a baby starts to walk, it falls over many times. But it doesn't give up walking because of these painful bumps and bruises. It keeps trying until it succeeds. Pastors and prophets, with bad histories, do not follow the example of the baby. They don't keep trying—they give up! Pastors give up trying to use prophets, and prophets give up trying to work with Pastors. This is foolish, and only weakens the body. We have to have the courage to put the past behind us, and live for a good relationship today.

### **Unforgiving spirit**

We all make mistakes. Everyone knows this, and yet in the Pastor/Prophet relationship, this truth seems to have been replaced by "I never make a mistake—only you do!" We have to learn to accept our mistakes, and have a forgiving spirit towards each other. Jesus clearly teaches it (Luke 7:41-43) and warns that without it, we could easily find judgment visited on us. Remember these words: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive others.

(Matt 6:12)

### **No ability to rebuild bridges**

When bridges fall they are replaced, because without them, we cannot visit our friends, go to market, or do our work. But when the Pastor/prophet bridge breaks, we often make no attempt to rebuild it. We take up our positions, and refuse to change. What can we do? We just have to keep reaching out for each other. There is no other way. There is no secret code, or any quick solution. We just have to try again.

## **3. Putting things right**

There are many areas of conflict, but let's not concentrate on conflict, but on fellowship and growth. Let's look always to the positive. If conflict arises, there needs to be some understanding of how things can be put right. Many small conflicts get out of control, for the lack of simple understanding of how to put things right. Here are some suggestions:-

## **1. Preparing the heart**

We must keep the servant heart in our minds. Read of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, (John 13) and think about the parable of the servant. (Luke 17:7-10)

## **2. The time and place to put things right**

There has to be a right time to put things right, and a right place. Shouting at each other in the assembly is not it! But nor is an official summons to “meet the elders.” The beginning of bridge building is best done informally, in a relaxed attitude, and usually without a lot of other people present. One to one is ideal, but two or three people together can share without shouting. The discussion needs to be confidential, or no one will be honest and open. This in itself can also become a problem. When someone is honest and open, others look for the chance to use what they say against them on another occasion. I have been the victim of this myself, and it is very unpleasant, and totally unbiblical.

This is not a meeting to place blame, but to rebuild trust and friendship. There may be times ahead for repentance and confession, but that comes much later. First the bridge must be built and tested. What if one side will not meet? Then relax and keep praying. These things cannot be forced into a manmade timetable. There is a right time.

## **3. Willingness to share, not shout**

Calm tempers and gentle speaking is the right way ahead. Shouting at each other may make us feel better, and there might have to be a bit of it to clear the air. But shouting seldom solves problems. We have to have a willingness to share together, recognising that if there is fault, both sides have to accept some responsibility.

## **4. Honest look at the problems (John 8:32)**

Amazing things happen when two people look honestly at a problem. Usually, it gets smaller! So many of our problems are really misunderstandings, things put in the wrong way, or things said by others. When an honest sharing takes place, it is surprising how much of the problem disappears. An honest sharing will help find the root of the problem, and deal with it

## **5. Some decision to move forward, and plan for future conflict solving**

One bridge should lead to others, and the best bridge of all is the one which prevents friction and difficulty arising again. I often suggest that Pastors and prophets should sit

down together on a regular basis, to share ministries, and pray together. In this way even if a problem does arise, it will not have very long to fester before Pastor and prophet are sitting down together, and things can be sorted out.

## **6. Commitment from both to think before we speak**

The end result of all this problem solving will be a better relationship between Pastor and prophet. Once we arrive at this kind of relationship, we should be secure. I have to admit though, that not all problems are solvable. Occasionally, something happens which just cannot be resolved, and then a different course of action has to be taken. But I believe that these are very rare. Within the body, we can solve almost everything!

### **Building and maintaining a relationship (1 Samuel 20)**

The key to the Pastor/prophet issue is a good personal relationship. David and Jonathan managed to build and keep a very good relationship, despite all the conflicts which surrounded them. (1 Samuel 20) Neither of them had to surrender their integrity. Jonathan stayed loyal to his father, and David continued to respect Saul. But by having a good relationship, they were a blessing to each other, and conflict was kept out of their friendship. Building friendships like this are very risky, and take time. What happens when something occurs between a Pastor and prophet which cannot be put right? We have to accept that occasionally this does happen. What can we do?

**Pastor:** Has the ultimate responsibility for the flock. He has to find the way ahead which is a blessing for all, even for the prophet who may be the source of the problem.

**Prophet:** Has to accept that the Pastor has the responsibility for the flock, even if he, the prophet, feels that the Pastor is in the wrong, and is the one who is the source of the problem.

**Pastor:** Be careful of issuing public rebukes, which can sometimes just be a way of saying "I'm in charge here, and what I say goes!" I've heard a number of such rebukes, and they do no credit to anyone. If there has to be a public statement, write it in a loving way. It is a Pastor's responsibility to guard the flock. It is not the Pastor's duty to drive sheep away, and the prophet is also one of the sheep.

**Prophet:** Ultimately, the Pastor and leaders can ask you to stop speaking. You have the responsibility to obey them. If you cannot, you can only leave—sometimes that is the only route left open. But be very slow to adopt this route. We all have to accept the authority of the leadership, and if we leave, we will almost certainly be faced with the same problem in the new place.

Let's all be committed not to conflict, but to common service as we follow the Lord.