

Lesson #26

The Principle of Decentralization

Building A House For God

Destiny 101 is about defining (or redefining) the overall vision and general mission of the Body of Christ as a foundation to build on. We must have a vision of the whole, or the big picture, to develop our building strategies and goals. We reason from the whole to the part, but we build from the part to the whole.

As we saw in the previous lesson, *The Warrior Builder*, we are called to build. Though it may seem obvious, we should state clearly what we are building. What we are building is the house of God. You and I are living stones being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood (see 1 Peter 2:5). Common vision and our commitment to the Lord and one another is the mortar that holds us together and allows this building to grow. The passage below from Ephesians states it quite well.

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,

²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

— Eph 2:19-22 (NKJV)

Our vision (the appearing of the Kingdom of God) and our mission (to build the House of God) should be the same for everyone. But we begin to see wider diversity as we consider methods, styles, and individual building strategies.

A Key Building Principle

Since we are building the house of God, we must ask, “Is there a biblical church building model we can look to?” The Bible does not give us a precise step-by-step guide for the structural operation and building of the house of God. This is probably intentional because of the human tendency to rely on the method instead of the Maker. Building God’s house is more about knowing and obeying Jesus than about having the “correct” model or method. There may be many building principles that can be gleaned from scripture, but in this lesson, we will focus on a key building principle, the principle of decentralization.

The Tower of Babel

Man's desire to centralize power and authority is as old as Babel in the Book of Genesis. God's original instruction to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (See Gen 1:28). He gave the identical instructions to Noah and his family after the flood (see Gen 9:1). But at Babel we see man disobeying the command to spread out over the earth and consolidating to make a name for themselves.

⁴ And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, **lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.**"

— Genesis 11:4 (NKJV) emphasis added

Seeking to make a name for themselves is the sin of pride and self-glorification, which is one of the main roots of all sin. All that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not from God, but from the world (see 1 John 2:16). Pride was the root of the centralization of power at Babel and it is at the root of centralization today.

God's response to this rebellion was to confuse their language with the express purpose of scattering them across the earth. It was a decentralization operation carried out by God designed to get mankind to multiply and fill the earth according to God's plan, not man's. We read in Genesis Chapter 11 what happened. God said:

⁷ Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

⁸ So the LORD **scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth**, and they ceased building the city.

⁹ Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and **from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.**

— Genesis 11:7-9 (NKJV) emphasis added

Jethro's Advice to Moses was to Decentralize

When Moses led Israel out of bondage in Egypt, he became the central figure that the people looked to for counsel, justice, and leadership. This soon became a burden too heavy for Moses so his father-in-law Jethro offered a decentralization plan. Based on Jethro's advice, the people were organized into small groups which were part of a larger grouping with overseers at different levels. The passage below describes this structure as given by Jethro to Moses.

²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do.

²¹ Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

²² And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

²³ If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all

this people will also go to their place in peace."

— Exodus 18:20-23 (NKJV)

Israel Again Seeks Centralized Authority

After coming out of Egypt, the government in Israel was organized but decentralized. Prophets heard from God for direction and Priests taught the law of God to the people. By knowing the law, and listening to the prophets, the people were able to be relatively self-governing with God Himself as their King.

But as time went on, Israel desired to have a king over them, like the other nations. By asking for a king, they were actually rejecting God as king in favor of a human king and sought a centralized, top-down model of government (see 1 Sam 8:1-7). The prophet Samuel warned them against this, but they persisted until God gave them what they asked for.

Some kings were good and some were bad, but the problem with having a king is that kings are human and humans are subject to corruption. Centralizing power under one corruptible person (or even a small group - which is called a oligarchy) is a bad idea! God continued to work with them through the priesthood and various kings, but there was a better way.

God's Ultimate Decentralization Plan

Under the Old Covenant, only those from the tribe of Levi were allowed to be priests. But under the New Covenant, Jesus became the Mediator of a better covenant, which opened up the priesthood all who believe. The very definition of the New Covenant is a description of decentralization that gives every Christian direct access to God through the work of Christ. Only Jesus Christ is incorruptible and therefore capable of being a completely righteous King. And He is even more, He is Prophet, Priest, and King!

In simple terms, the New Covenant can be described as "knowing the Lord" as we see in the book of Hebrews:

¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

¹¹ None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

— Hebrews 8:10-11 (NKJV)

The New Covenant is a model of structural operation similar to the decentralized model from Exodus 18, only better. Where the Old Covenant believer learned the law through priests and prophets, each New Covenant believer is a believer/priest and can be taught directly by the Holy Spirit dwelling within. In other words, the law of God is written in our hearts.

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

— John 14:26 (NKJV)

We saw in Lesson #9, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, how the centralization of power and authority crept into the early church and proved to be a satanic plan to undermine the priesthood of the believer that was established by the New Covenant. This is a battle that continues today. However, it is important not to take decentralization to far that we become disconnected and isolated. God establishes leaders to help bring unity to the diversity that is created through decentralization, and to help bring God's people to maturity.

Unity with Diversity

Man often tends to see "*building the Church*" as getting everyone together in one place, saying the same thing, or following the same leader. This is often referred to as unity. But this is not unity, it is uniformity. We are exhorted to preserve, not simply unity, but the unity *of the Spirit*. We see this and the concept of unity with diversity from the passage from Ephesians below.

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, **bearing with one another** in love,

³ endeavoring to keep the **unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace.

⁴ *There is* **one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope** of your calling;

— Ephesians 4:1-4 (NKJV-emphasis added)

In verses 1 & 2 we see diversity in that we must bear with one another in love because we are not all the same. We each have different callings. In verses 3 & 4 we see that unity is "of the Spirit." It is a spiritual thing, not a natural thing which results from being led by the Spirit. We also see that unity is based in the fact that there is one body, one Spirit who is leading us, and that our diverse callings are based in one hope.

Unity of the Spirit happens when people are in a relationship with Jesus, are being led by the Holy Spirit, and are focused on His vision. This creates unity with diversity, not uniformity. It creates a choir with harmony, instead of a group of people all singing the melody. It like an orchestra with many different instruments (instead of a section of trumpets) all following the conductor. This is where it is important to understand the difference between vision, mission, strategy, purpose, and goals. The chart below illustrates Unity and Diversity based on these definitions.

<i>Vision:</i>	There is one vision. The appearing of the kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom. It is the message. It applies to everyone.
<i>Mission:</i>	There is one mission. Preparing the way for the kingdom by building the house of God. It applies to all who accept the assignment.
<i>Strategy:</i>	The general strategy is represented in the foundational principles, but there are various sub strategies for accomplishing the mission.
<i>Purpose:</i>	All disciples have the same vision and mission, but have a different emphasis based their individual purpose and calling.

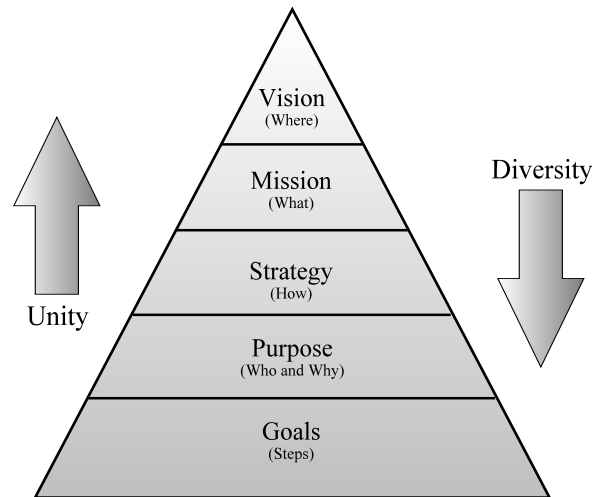
Goals: Goals are the offspring of strategy and individual purpose. We can begin by looking at the three institutions established by God as areas of emphasis and make measurable goals from there.

Where uniformity is substituted for unity, it is easy to become one-dimensional and dull of hearing as we just go with the flow of what everyone else is saying or doing. This opens the door for the religious spirit which, as we have seen, is a principality that causes dead works based on routine instead of faith that comes from knowing God and hearing His word. Again, this is why religion is the enemy of the first foundational principle: Repentance from Dead Works and Faith Toward God.

Unity Through Hearing God

Everyone who is led by the Spirit will naturally be in unity and headed in the same general direction because God is not schizophrenic. God has a building plan and His instructions do not contradict. But hearing from God and being led by Holy Spirit requires effort and diligence. This is why the writer of Hebrews found it hard to explain the deeper things of God to the Hebrews; they had become dull of hearing.

The word dull (*nothros* in Greek) means *sluggish* or *lazy*. In this context, just a few lines later,



we again find the word *nothros* translated as *sluggish* when we read, "... do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb 6:12). Though they had heard the foundations before, they had gotten lazy in their hearing and were not applying them.

As stated, the Bible does not give us a precise step-by-step guide for the structural operation and building of the Church. In other words, there is not one way to implement decentralization. But the Bible does give us principles and concepts and decentralization is one. The biblical principle of decentralization promotes unity with diversity, it encourages the priesthood of every believer without producing independence and isolation.

In the next lesson: *Building on the Foundation*, we will address the issue of moving on from the discussion of the foundational principles and then summarize this study.