

Agonology

The Doctrine of Struggle. A study of the believer's daily struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

The new believer must be immediately oriented to the battlefield conditions of the angelic conflict. The youngest and weakest of any species is the most vulnerable to hostile predators. So it is with the preying enemies of Jesus Christ. A baby believer without armor or weapons, and the training to use them is a very attractive target. The world, the flesh and the devil are hostile predators against born again believers in Jesus Christ. Consequently, Basic Doctrinal Studies needs to orient the babe in Christ to this struggle, and begin equipping him to deal with it.

A disciple is not above his master (Lk. 6:40). Our Lord faced agony in His struggle (Lk. 22:44), and we must likewise do the same (Jn. 15:18-20).

The key word for this study is *agony*. Our English word comes from the Greek words that form the substance of this study. The nouns ἀγών Greek Strongs #73 & ἀγωνία Greek Strongs #74, and the verb ἀγωνίζομαι Greek Strongs #75 are very fruitful word-studies. The very sound of agonizomai says "agonize, oh my!"

Believers in Christ will encounter tribulation, and various multiplied trials, but ours is a struggle with a guaranteed victory (Jn. 16:33). The believer who thinks that they somehow should not have to experience such hardship is a believer who has no desire to truly know his Savior (Phil. 3:10). Neither will they truly know victory (Rom. 8:17; 2nd Tim. 2:12).

The babe in Christ can draw comfort from his hedge of protection, and the Sovereign protection he receives from the Lord (Job 1:10; Ps. 34:7; 91:11-16). That said, the babe also needs to understand that the Father who protects him calls for him to grow up and become an active participant in the struggle (Heb. 5:12-14; 10:32). It is a good fight that we must fight (1st Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2nd Tim. 4:7). This is the race (ἀγών Strongs #73) set before us at the moment of our salvation (Heb. 12:1).

The struggle will be manifest on three simultaneous fronts: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

We are in the world, but no longer of the world (Jn. 17:6,11,14,16). We must identify with our blessings in Christ (Jn. 17:6). We must identify with our Father's name (Jn. 17:11). We must occupy our minds with the Word of God (Jn. 17:14). We must function in our new nature (Jn. 17:16).

We are not to submit to the flesh (Rom. 6:19). The desires of the flesh in opposition to the Holy Spirit have already been detailed in the study of Peripatology.

We must resist the devil (1st Pet. 5:8-9), put on our armor and stand firm (Eph. 6:12-17). Some may object that these angelic conflict passages are more descriptive of mature believers than baby believers. Perhaps its best to consider that the essence of these passages is humility (1st Pet. 5:6) and as such it is applicable even by the babe (Matt. 18:3-4). Are there deeper and more advanced areas of teaching that relate to Satanology, Demonology, and the Angelic Conflict? Of course! The schemes of the adversary must be learned and countered at every stage of maturity, but at the most basic level the angelic conflict can be summarized: casting all your anxiety on Him (1st Pet. 5:7).

Boulology

The Doctrine of the Plan of God. A study on God the Father's grace eternal plan of the ages for the maximum glorification of Jesus Christ. Includes the nature and description of Dispensations.

God the Father is the author of the Plan. God works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). Everything He has planned, and everything He does is perfect in His eternal wisdom. God's eternal purpose is the maximum glorification of Jesus Christ (Jn. 5:23; Phil. 2:10,11; Col. 1:18,19; Eph. 1:10).

Pastor Bob's expanded title for the Plan of God: God the Father's grace eternal dispensational plan of the ages for the maximum glorification, pleasure, and blessing of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Plan of God is presently underway and fulfilling the Father's purpose (Eph. 1:11). Believers in the Church are God's fellow workers (1st Cor. 3:9), and must therefore be adjusted to the Father's plan (Prov. 19:21). God's purpose is for all things to work together for Good (Rom. 8:28).

God has unfolded His plan to and through a variety of vested stewards. This progressive unfolding began with the angels, then progressed to the creation of man in Adam, then the race and nation of Israel, and presently the unfolding of the Plan of God is revealed through the Church. Understanding the basic outline of this dispensational progression is an important part of Boulology.

The Unfolding Plan

Two important foundational principles need to be established at this point. First, Basic Doctrinal Studies has already established that God is outside of His created realm of time. As angelic and human beings apprehend God's unfolding plan, we come to identify it as unfolding from our viewpoint in time. From God's viewpoint, the plan is an eternal plan (Eph. 3:11).

Secondly, it must be understood that the unfolding plan withheld certain information until its proper revelation. The Dispensation of the Church is most especially this sort of "mystery" doctrine (Eph. 3:3,4,9). Along with a progressive revelation, the eternal plan of God entails particular planned obsolescence (Heb. 8:13; 2nd Pet. 3:7; Rev. 21:1).

Key Passages to Establish the Alpha to Omega Overview

There are certain passages that are "mile markers" so to speak providing vital assistance in diagramming the Plan of God from eternity past (Alpha) to eternity future (Omega).

Eph. 1:10 establishes the end-game objective that God the Father has never allowed Himself to lose sight of: The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times. As already demonstrated, the Father's plan is dedicated to eternally exalting The Son.

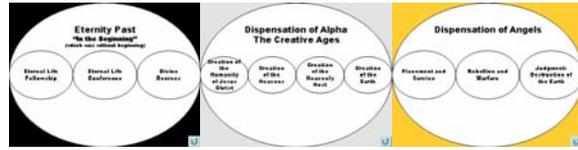
Prov. 8:22-31 portrays the hypostatic union of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. True humanity and undiminished Deity are united forever in the Person of Christ. The Father's "begetting" of the "only begotten Son," the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15) is an unfathomable glory.

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Col. 1:16 demonstrates that creation encompassed both the visible (human, physical) and invisible (angelic, spiritual) realms of existence. No time-frame or sequence is there indicated, and the Gen. 1&2 account only details the physical realm.

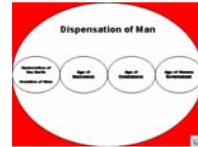
Job 38:7 ascertains the angelic presence at the creation of the Earth. Isa. 45:18 demonstrates that the Earth was not created a waste place (תֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ *tohu wabohu* HebrewStrong's #8414) and Jer. 4:23-

26 describes the rebellion and Divine judgment that caused the formless and void (תֹהוּ וָבוֹהוּ *tohu wabohu*) condition (Gen. 1:2). Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-19; Rev. 12:3 do not supply any time markers, but provide additional context for the fall of Heylel ben Shachar (Satan) and his angels.



Heb. 1:14; 2:5; & 1st Cor. 6:3 delineate the exalted place that man has over the angels in God's eternal plan. Unlike the angels, Man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27a). Unlike the angels, Man was created male & female (Gen. 1:27b) with procreative privilege (Gen. 1:28).

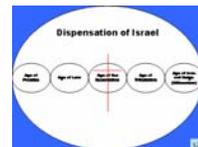
The Dispensation of Man (Gentiles) encountered great angelic conflict. The fall of Adam and Eve was prompted by Satanic temptation (Gen. 3:1-7). The flood of Noah (Gen. 6-8) was judgment in the context of fallen angelic intrusion into the human realm (Gen. 6:1-4,11-12). The empire of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12; 11:1-9) fixed Babylon (Babel) as the apex of rebellion against God (Isa. 13:1-14:27; Rev. 17:1-18:24).



Gen. 12:1-3 highlights the exalted place that the descendants of Abraham have over the Gentiles. Gen. 26:3-5 fixes Isaac over Ishmael as the heir of Abraham. Gen. 28:13-15 fixes Jacob over Esau as the heir of Abraham. Jacob is given the new name of Israel (Gen. 32:28) and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6) guarantees the stewardship blessings upon Israel (Gen. 50:24; Ex. 2:24).

The Dispensation of Israel is a vital study for understanding the Alpha to Omega plan of God. The Jewish race had every advantage and benefit in contrast with the Gentiles. A prime advantage was the written Word of God (Rom. 3:1-2). No part of the Bible was written during the Dispensation of Man (Gentiles). Other prime advantages for Israel include their national adoption, national glory, eternal covenants, standard of perfection, temple holiness, prophetic hope, and patriarchal heritage (Rom. 9:4-5a). The greatest advantage of Israel is the birth of the Christ (Rom. 9:5b) through Whom all the nations of the earth are blessed (Gen. 12:3).

The Covenants are matters for Intermediate and Advanced Doctrinal Studies. As far as Basic Doctrinal Studies is concerned, two observations will be made. First: the Adamic and Noahic Covenants were enacted by God during the Dispensation of Man (Gentiles), and the Abrahamic, Palestinic, Davidic, and New Covenants were enacted by God during the Dispensation of Israel. Secondly: The Church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 9:24; Eph. 2:16,18) and our understanding of the Covenants reflects that. On the other hand, The Church is made up of neither Jews nor Gentiles (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 3:15) and our relationship to the Covenants must also reflect that. Thirdly: unconditional and eternal covenants cannot be broken or superseded.



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Matt. 16:18-19 pinpoints the establishment of The Church as a future work of Jesus Christ. This passage also stipulates the activity of The Church to be both earthly and heavenly, engaging both the physical and spiritual realms of creation.

Eph. 3:1-12 expounds the nature of the Mystery of Christ: how The Church was purposefully hidden throughout former Dispensations. Other passages to support this include Rom. 16:25; Heb. 11:39-40; & 1st Pet. 1:10-12.

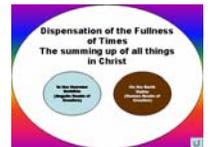


So, we arrive in this study to the present. Here we are right now in The Church. Unlike history books which can only look backward through time, we have in the Bible the privilege to look forward through time. Prophetic studies are for the most part Intermediate and Advanced, but Basic Doctrinal Studies will include short studies on prophetic matters in order to complete the Alpha to Omega overview.

There remains an unfulfilled promise pertaining to the conclusion of The Church. The Rapture of The Church is a prophetic study which in the Alpha to Omega overview marks the conclusion of the Dispensation of The Church and the resumption of the Dispensation of Israel.

There remain MANY unfulfilled promises pertaining to the unconditional and eternal covenants with Israel. Tribulational and Millennial prophetic studies develop these matters and help us to diagram the future Age of Tribulation and Age of iron-rod (Millennial) Reign. It is important to note that the time-limited iron-rod Reign of Jesus Christ does not totally satisfy Israel's covenant promises. Something beyond the Millennium must take place.

There also remain unfulfilled elements of the Father's plan pertaining to the unconditional and eternal Adamic & Noahic covenants with the Gentiles. Additionally, unfulfilled promises by the Father to exalt and magnify Jesus Christ require fulfillment beyond the time-limited iron-rod Reign (Millennium). These matters are developed in the Advanced Doctrinal Study of the Dispensation of the Fullness of Times.



Now . . . does all of this overwhelm a babe in Christ? Maybe. Don't let it! The babe in Christ can grasp an overview or a framework. The babe in Christ can pinpoint his place in that framework. The babe in Christ can be encouraged that all his future studies will properly fit within this basic framework. The babe is now equipped to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2nd Tim. 2:15).

In summary: God has unfolded His eternal plan progressively. God has entrusted stewardship responsibilities mostly in sequence. The glitch in the strict sequence is the Dispensation of the Church which exists within the Dispensation of Israel during a period in which God's dealings with Israel are momentarily set aside.

The babe in Christ ought to be able to properly identify the stewardships (Dispensations) of Angels, Man (Gentiles), Israel (Jews), Church, and Fullness of the Times within the Alpha to Omega overview.



Ecclesiology

The Doctrine of the Church. A study on the Universal Church and the purpose and function for the local church.

In the study of God's plan, several distinct stewardships were detailed. The present stewardship of the Church needs to be accurately taught in order for believers today to function appropriately. The Basic Doctrinal Study of Ecclesiology will have three overall objectives: 1. Establishing the distinctions between Israel and the Church. 2. Teaching the aspects of The Church (universal) and the local church. 3. Describing the basic structure of local church organization.

Israel and the Church Contrasted

Lewis Sperry Chafer developed twenty-four contrasts between Israel and the Church (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, p.47). These contrasts are simple, short, and presented for even the baby believer to appreciate. Eleven of Chafer's contrasts are now to be considered.

III. The seed of Abraham. The seed of Abraham promise was given with two different figures—the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) and the stars of heaven (Gen. 15:5). Jacob's children are the earthly descendants and constitute the nation of Israel. When Abraham's promise is confirmed to Jacob, only the dust of the earth figure is given (Gen. 28:14), and not the stars of heaven figure. Members of the Church are the heavenly "descendants" of Abraham on the basis of faith (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:6,7,9).

IV. Birth. Israelites become what they are by physical birth. Christians become what they are by spiritual birth.

VII. Nationality. Israel belongs to the earth and to the world-system. Though above all nations in Jehovah's reckoning, they are still in the world as one of its nations. Over against this and forming the strongest contrast is the fact that the Church is composed of all nations, including Israel, and sustains no citizenship here, but instead the believers are strangers and pilgrims.

XII. The Father. To Israel God is known by His primary titles, but not as the Father of the individual Israelite. In distinction to this, the Christian is actually begotten of God and has every right to address Him as Father.

XIII. Christ. To Israel, Christ is Messiah, Immanuel, and King with all that those appellations imply. To the Church, Christ is Savior, Lord, Bridegroom, and Head.

XIV. The Holy Spirit. Only in exceptional instances and for unusual service did the Holy Spirit come upon an Israelite, and the Spirit withdrew as freely as He came, when the purpose was accomplished. The strongest contrast is to be seen here, in that the Christian is indwelt by the Spirit; in truth, he is not saved apart from this relation to the Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

XV. A Governing Principle. For fifteen centuries the Law of Moses was Israel's rule of daily life. Unlike this, the members of Christ's Body, being wholly perfected in Him, are under the beseechings and directions which grace provides.

XVI. Divine Enablement. The law provided no enabling power for its achievement. To the Church, however, as certainly as superhuman requirements are laid on her members, so certainly supernatural power is provided for every demand (Rom. 6:14).

XVIII. The Promise of Christ's Return. Christ returns to Israel as her King in power and great glory, at which time she will be gathered from every part of the earth by angelic ministrations and into her own land (Deut. 30:1-8; Jer. 23:7-8; Matt. 24:31). Over against these great events promised to Israel is the return of Christ for His own Bride, when He takes her with Him into heaven's glory (Jn. 14:1-3).

XXI. Priesthood. Israel *had* a priesthood. The Church *is* a priesthood.

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XXII. Marriage. As a nation, Israel is likened by Jehovah to His wife—a wife untrue and yet to be restored (Jer. 3:1,14,20; Ezek. 16:1-59; Hos. 2:1-23; Isa. 54:1-17; cf. Gal. 4:27). In marked distinction to this situation respecting Israel, is the revelation that the Church is to Christ as one espoused and to be married in heaven (2nd Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7-9).

The Universal Church and the Local Church

The Church is the Body (Col. 1:18,24; Eph. 1:22-23) and Bride (Jn. 3:29; Eph. 5:25-33; Rev. 19:7-8) of Jesus Christ. Every born-again believer from Pentecost to Rapture is a Member of that Body (1st Cor. 12:27; Eph. 5:30). When referencing the universal Church, it is customary to capitalize the word.

A local church is a small portion of The Church. Specifically, a local church is a particular flock entrusted to a gifted shepherd. Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd, and He oversees the flock of the entire Church, but He has designated and delegated under shepherds (pastors) to shepherd the flock of God “among them” (1st Pet. 5:1-4). A local church is a family/body in a given geographical location assembled together for the corporate functions of the body and bride (Rev. 2&3). A local church is not a building, but a living body of believers in Jesus Christ. Any assembly of believers under the shepherding oversight of a Pastor-Teacher is a local church.

A local church may be without a Pastor for brief periods of time, but they cannot stay that way for very long! Sheep without a shepherd become scattered and devoured. A true local church must have at least one man with the spiritual gift of Pastor-Teacher. That one man exercising that one gift cannot fully edify the body of Christ. All believers exercising every gift supplies the maximum edification for each Member and provides the maximum glory for the Head of the Body—Jesus Christ.

Local Church Organization

The Church is an edifice (Eph. 2:19-22; 1st Cor. 3:19; 1st Pet. 2:5) and all things in the Church must be done for edification (Rom. 15:2; 1st Cor. 14:12,26; Eph. 4:29). This principle helps define the parameters for local church organization.

The local church must maintain order rather than allow confusion to reign (1st Cor. 14:33,40). Jesus Christ provides order to each local church by walking in the midst of each lampstand, by holding each star in His right hand (Rev. 1:12-16,20), and by providing written instruction in the New Testament (1st Tim. 3:15).

One man trying to do everything gets worn out (Ex. 18:17-26). The Apostles recognized this, and also recognized the necessity for priorities in the local churches (Acts 6). Deacons were appointed to take care of various matters and free the spiritual leaders to pursue prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4).

As the foundation of the Church was laid by the Apostles and Prophets (Eph. 2:20; 3:5), the local churches began to be identified by their Overseers and Deacons (Phil. 1:1; Bishops & Deacons, KJV). These offices describe functionality within a local church, and do not speak to gift or maturity status.

Gifts, Offices, and Maturity Statuses

The study of spiritual gifts (Charismatology) will comprise Basic Doctrinal Studies #10 at the conclusion of Ecclesiology. The discussion here will simply contrast gifts & offices, as well as the separate aspect of maturity status within the grace and knowledge growth spectrum (2nd Pet. 3:18).

Spiritual gifts are given by grace at the moment of salvation. No believer may earn or deserve any gift. The offices of Overseer and Deacon on the other hand are described with particular qualifications and disqualifications. First Timothy 3 breaks down the Overseer (vv.1-7) and the Deacons (vv.8-13). These are the only two offices cited in Phil. 1:1 and stipulated with qualifications and disqualifications 1st Tim. 3:1-13. Modern English typically refers to the Overseer office as Pastor. Thus, many church constitutions describe a Pastor, Assistant Pastor(s), and Deacons. The basis for the Pastor and Deacons governance of a local is church is the New Testament pairing of Overseers and Deacons.

There is no spiritual gift of Deacon. Tested men of any gift may serve in the office of Deacon (1st Tim. 3:10), provided they do not forfeit that trust in some way. In a similar way, there is no spiritual gift of Overseer (or Elder; the interrelated terms Overseer & Elder will be examined shortly). Non-novice men of any gift (1st Tim. 3:6) may “aspire” to the office of Overseer (1st Tim. 1:1), provided they do not forfeit that trust in some way.

The terms Elder and Overseer are used in parallel, and thus we observe an interrelationship between these two terms. Neither term is a gift; Elder is a maturity status and Overseer is an office. The Elders of Acts 20:17 are called Overseers in Acts 20:28 and are expected to shepherd the flock. Likewise, the Elders of Titus 1:5 are called Overseers in Titus 1:7. The Elders of 1st Pet. 5:1 are commanded to shepherd and oversee the flock in 1st Pet. 5:2.

So, even though an Overseer/Elder may have any gift, the spiritual gift of Pastor-Teacher is the one most supernaturally adapted to the shepherding expectations of the Overseer/Elder. There are actually two present-day gifts which may propel a man into the Overseer office and the Elder maturity status faster than other gifts. Ephesians 4:11-12 outlines a total of four spiritual gifts that the Lord Jesus Christ assigns to local churches for the edification of those local churches. Apostles and Prophets are spiritual gifts that ceased when the foundation of the Church was completed.

Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers continue to be given to local churches for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:13-16). Men with these gifts may be appointed to the office of Overseer at younger biological ages than men with other spiritual gifts. Men with these gifts may be set apart for full-time financial support sooner than Overseers with various other gifts. Men with these gifts may serve in the office of Deacon while they train and prepare for the office of Overseer.

A good example in the New Testament is Philip. He’s called Philip the Evangelist (Acts 21:8), and presided over his four virgin daughters in their gift of Prophetess (Acts 21:9). The Lord used him to witness to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:5ff.), but prior to all of that he served as one of the first seven deacons (Acts 21:8 cf. 6:5). So, Philip received the spiritual gift of Evangelist the moment he was saved. After being tested, he served in the office of Deacon. Ultimately, he grew

into the maturity status of Elder and the interrelated office of Overseer in the local church at Caesarea.

Timothy is another excellent example. Although still biologically youthful (1st Tim. 4:12), Timothy was gifted, trained, and placed into office as an Overseer in the local church at Ephesus (1st Tim. 1:3). He was expected to appoint other such Overseers as well as Deacons in that local church (1st Tim. 3:14-15; 5:17-22). A young man, still growing in maturity status may be placed in the office of Overseer as a consequence of his spiritual gift (1st Tim. 4:11-16).

So, while an Overseer/Elder may have any gift, the shepherding function of the Overseer/Elder makes it natural for men with the gift of Pastor-Teacher to be placed in that office. A Pastor-Teacher by gift will be spiritually empowered to fulfill the Overseer office better than an Evangelist by gift. Both the Pastor-Teacher and the Evangelist by gift will naturally fall into the office of Overseer as per Eph. 4:11-12., but other non-preaching and non-teaching Elders are certainly possible (1st Tim. 5:17).

Now, all of this may seem to unduly exalt the Pastor-Teacher above all other gifts. This is absolutely not the case. Every spiritual gift is needed for the benefit of the Body. This study actually encourages the Evangelist, Exhorter, Leader, Administrator, Teacher, etc. to serve in the office of Deacon during their maturity status of Young Man, and enter into the office of Overseer when they “retire” from their ministry as Deacons, or when they are promoted into a vocationally full-time ministry upon their maturity status of Elder.

Plurality of Elders, Singularity of Angels

Local churches in the Age of Apostles had a plurality of Elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17 & often). Multiple Elders did not cause confusion or violate the need for orderliness as every Elder fell under the authority of the Apostles.

Beyond Paul’s instructions in the Pastoral Epistles, the Apostle John gives us a tremendous insight into post-apostolic local church polity in his letter to the seven local churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3). Each of these local churches undoubtedly had a number of Elders. Nevertheless, in each case, there was one and only one man held in Jesus Christ’s right hand and addressed as the Angel of that particular local church (Rev. 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14).

If a given local church has three Pastors (for example) two of those Pastors must acknowledge that they fall under the Pastoral authority of the one Angel (messenger) that Jesus Christ holds in His right hand. In our common terminology, these Pastors are referred to as Assistant Pastors. In New Testament vocabulary, all three men would be considered Overseer/Elders, but only one would be considered the Angel of that local church.

Another way to think of it is that the Angel is the one Overseer/Elder in the local church who does not fall under the authority of any other Overseer/Elders. He falls immediately under the Lord Jesus Christ as he is held in His right hand.

What About Women?

In Christ there is no male nor female (Gal. 3:28), and thus we have gender equality within the Body of Christ. In terms of authority orderliness, however, Jesus Christ has established that a woman is not “to teach or exercise authority over a man” in the operation of a local church (1st Tim. 2:12). This is not a social peculiarity limited to the first century and outdated by the twenty-first century. This is a principle that stems from the pattern of authority and help-mate structure of Adam and Eve.

Women in the Apostolic Age of the Church received the spiritual gift of Prophecy and are rightly called Prophetesses (Acts 21:9). Having a communication gift, it is expected that these Prophetesses communicated. Indeed the practice was for them to do so with heads covered (1st Cor. 11:4-5), so as to make very clear in the angelic conflict that they were not usurping the place of the men in the local assembly (1st Cor. 11:10). In the event where multiple Prophets were communicating to a local church (1st Cor. 14:29-33,37-40), the women (Prophetesses) were to remain silent (1st Cor. 14:34-36).

In the present Age of the Local Church, prophecy has been done away (1st Cor. 13:8). There are no more prophetesses, but how might we handle an Evangeless, Exhortationess, Teacheress, etc.? 1st Tim. 2:12 precludes a woman from the office of Overseer, but communication gifts are certainly valid in ministries and effects that edify other women as well as ministries and effects that edify children.

What About Denominations?

There is no New Testament basis for any structure of hierarchy above or outside the local church. Each individual “star” of each individual “lampstand” is equally within the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cooperation and fellowship between local churches is Biblical (Acts 11:27-30; 2nd Cor. 8:1-4,23-24; 9:1-5), but apostolic jurisdiction over multiple local churches ended when the Apostolic Age of the Church ended.