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MINISTRY TO THE CONGREGATION ACCORDING TO THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

ABSTRACT

This article endeavours to extract the most important principles of congregational ministry (focusing on equipping the members) from Ephesians by means of an exegetical analysis of the Letter. The article also attempts to demonstrate the importance that principles, on which congregational ministry is grounded, should be developed by means of sound Scriptural exegesis. The article first investigates the structure of Ephesians, and then makes deductions that would be appropriate as principles of ministry. Based on these deductions, the article suggests a few guidelines for the pastoral ministry of congregations and critically compares these with the opinions of other researchers. Finally, the article concludes that it is necessary to ground principles of ministry on Scripture by means of a thorough exegesis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Abundant research has already been done on the Letter to the Ephesians (cf. Hoehner 2004:xxi-xxix; Fowl 2012:xi-xvii). However, there is a paucity of research on the meaning of Ephesians for practical ministry in local congregations, focusing on equipping the members. According to Purves (2004:xvii),

My broad concern is the seeming lack of connection between exegesis of the Scriptures and the central Christian doctrines, on the one hand, and the theology and practice of ministry today, on the other ... Pastoral theology, in my view, has largely abandoned the responsibility to speak concerning God.

This article accepts the challenge of these words to ground pastoral theology on an in-depth exegesis of Scripture. The purpose of this article is to suggest guidelines, based on an in-depth exegesis of the Letter to Ephesus, for the practical pastoral ministry of the congregation.

2. STRUCTURE OF EPHESIANS

Because of the focus of this article, the different viewpoints regarding the structure of Ephesians will not be considered in detail.¹ There is consensus that the document is in the form of a letter.² In this article, the text at hand is used and Paul is indicated as the final author.³

Because several themes are continuously addressed, there are several opinions on the purpose and central themes of the Letter (Barnard 2009:167).⁴ After an in-depth study by means of thought-mapping, Bhae (2000:176-184) is convinced that the Letter focuses exclusively on the church (cf. also Floor 1981:37-212). Bhae (2000:176-184) finds that the core of the Letter is summarised in Ephesians 1:15-19, and identifies the following three aspects: “The hope of God’s calling (1:18c)”; “God’s glorious possession of the saints (1:18d)”, and “God’s great power to the believers (1:19)”. Stott (1991:29, 87, 143, 211) views the central theme as the renewing creative work of God. Some researchers are convinced that Ephesians 1:13-14 is an introduction that briefly mentions all the themes touched upon in the remainder of the Letter (Petrenko 2011:79; Barnard 2009:167). After having studied the themes and the purpose of the Letter, as proposed by several researchers, Hoehner (2002:106) concludes that the central theme is love, namely God’s love for the human being and the believers’ love for each other. Hoehner (2002:106-114) identifies the following themes in the Letter: the Trinity, God as Father, Christology,

1 For these topics, cf. Hoehner (2002:64-69); Mbennah (2009:37, 44-45); Petrenko (2011:1-25). For a discussion of the author, addressees and general background of the document, cf. Hoehner (2002:1-60); Mbennah (2009:37-41); Cohick (2010:1-37); Fowl (2012:1-28).

2 Cf. Witherington III (2007:216-219) for an alternative opinion, viz. that Ephesians should rather be viewed as homily.

3 Cf. Schnackenburg (2001:32-38) for a more critical discussion of the background, author and purpose of the Letter. What Schnackenburg mentions about the purpose of the letter does not contravene any of the important findings in this article. Lincoln (1990:lxvii-lxxxvii) is of the opinion that the Letter was written to gentile readers only. He founds his opinion on what can be found in the text only. In addition, his further discussion of the purpose of the Letter does not contravene important findings in this article.

4 Cf. Hoehner (2002:97-114) for a discussion of different theories. Pretorius (2006:255) discusses the “elusive centre” of Paul’s theology.

pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology and reconciliation. Lloyd-Jones (1980:12-14) emphasises that the main difference between Ephesians and the other letters of Paul is that Ephesians is written from the viewpoint of heaven:

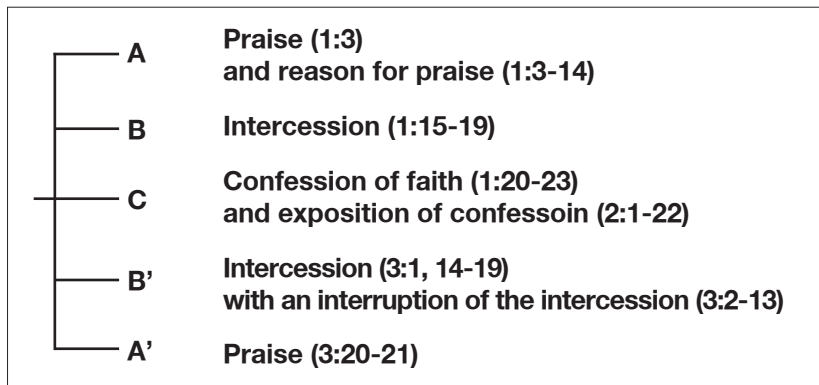
And that is the great theme of this Epistle: it holds us face to face with God and what God is, and what God has done ... [We] are told that we are going to be given a view of the glory and the majesty of God (cf. Lloyd-Jones 1980:13; Kangas 2009:4; Barnard 2009: 170).

Using different sources, the following central theme may be formulated: the Triune God accomplishes his eternal plan to collect all things in, and through his church under one Head, Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to the praise of his glory (cf. Pretorius 2006:256).

The majority of researchers indicate that the Letter clearly has two sections. The first section (Eph. 1-3) is the doctrinal aspect, and the second (Eph. 4-6) is the practical application of the first (Kruger 2005:534). However, Jordaan (1990) shows that there are both doctrinal and practical aspects in both sections, although the first one deals more with what God has done, and the second with the response of the human being to the grace of God.

2.1 Ephesians 1:1-3:21

Jordaan (1990:52) indicates that the first section of Ephesians is composed in the form of a berakah prayer (cf. also De Klerk 2002:3; Roberts 1984:139), with specific insertions forming part thereof. The structure of the first section of Ephesians may be presented as follows (Jordaan 1990):



When the reason for the praise (B) is analysed, it is clear that the spiritual blessings in heavenly places, with which God blesses his children, are described repeatedly (4a, 7, 11a, 13). It describes how the believers receive them (5, 8, 11b). It gives the purpose of these blessings (4b, 6, 10, 12, 14b), together with an indication of the time (4, 10, 11, 14; cf. also De Klerk 2002:4, 5). These blessings are a gift from the Father in Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jordaan (1990:52, 53) mentions that the turning point is found in the confession of faith (1:20-22) and that it describes the main theme of this section, namely Jesus as the Head of the church (cf. Wilder 2010:88). Floor's (2011) analysis of this section may be considered supplementary to Jordaan. Floor (2011:471) is convinced that the emphasis in this section falls on the execution of God's plan (*oikonomia*) (cf. Pester 2009:29). Every subsequent phase of the plan, which is a profound mystery, is fulfilled one after the other in the fullness of time. The core of the plan, which is executed according to the will and good pleasure of God, is that all things will be united under Jesus Christ as Head, so that there will be harmony in the creation again. Yoon (2011:16,17) mentions that, compared to other letters, Ephesians is the Letter in which the will of God is mentioned the most, the will of God being the complete salvation of the elect in Jesus Christ (cf. Chapter 1 only, vv. 5, 9 and 11). The will of the flesh stands in opposition to the will of God (2:3), and believers are called to try to understand the will of God (5:17) with all their heart.

According to Ephesians 1-3, the road of salvation may be described as follows (cf. Petrenko 2011:145). The problem of man's existence without God is found in his decision-making and motivational core, which is corrupt (dead) and, therefore, influenced (enslaved) by his inner rebellion against God and by evil powers (Eph. 2:1-3). This problem wreaks vengeance on man's life in the domains of his ethical behaviour (2:1-3) and of his relationship with other people and God (2:11-22; Petrenko 2011:99-110). The nature of the salvation that God gives is, therefore, entire renewal (life out of death), which flows into moral and spiritual renewal (2:1-5). God grants this renewal by blessing the church with all spiritual blessings that are in the heavenly places (1:3). The blessings include gathering the people who are saved from all regions and constituting them as a unity under Christ as Head, as well as continuously edifying this community (building/body) (2:8-10; 2:14-3:13; Petrenko 2011:11-128). The place where the saving renewal (soteriological transformation) takes place is, therefore, in the hearts and thoughts of the human being.⁵

5 Petrenko also calls this the 'the inner being' and 'the centre of decision and motivation'.

The soteriological work of the Holy Spirit is found in the fact that He brings the human being back to life together with Christ (Eph. 2:6) and that He brings about wisdom and knowledge (revelation) of God's plan (will/mystery) in them, as well as a deeper (experiential) knowledge of God (Eph. 1:17-19; Petrenko 2011:81-96). The Holy Spirit strengthens the inner human being ("the inner being as centre of decision and motivation") to enable him to understand the scope of Christ's love, within the love community of the congregation (Eph. 3:16-19). Thus, the congregation can demonstrate the fullness of Christ (1:23) and of God (3:19) in the knowledge that they have already been raised with Christ and are sitting at the right hand of God (2:5, 6). The believers' deeds increasingly demonstrate the fruit of this renewal in them (Petrenko 2011:131-143). In this way, they continue to live through the grace of God and thus reveal the mystery of God's plan to all who see them living (together) in their victory over the evil powers and their own sinful desires (Eph. 2:1-7; 3:10). All of this takes place through Him, who can do infinitely more than the human being can ask or think. All glory in the church through the generations must be given to the Triune God (3:20, 21).

According to Hoehner's (2002:64) structure, everything presented in Ephesians 1-3 describes the calling of the church. Ephesians 4:1 affirms his perception: the congregation is encouraged to live a life worthy of its calling. This exhortation is linked to the first section with the particle 'therefore' (*oun*); thus, it concludes what is said in the first section.

2.2 Ephesians 4:1-6:24

Hoehner (2002:500) shows that Paul uses the particle 'therefore' (*oun*) in this section of his Letter to indicate turning points in his argument. In conjunction with the particle, Paul repeatedly uses the concept 'to walk' (*peripateo*; Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). The only exception is Ephesians 6:10-20, where he uses the concept 'to stand' (*histemi*) together with 'therefore' (*oun*) as a structural marker. However, he introduces this section with the concept 'eventually' (*loipon*), indicating that he is writing the final matters before closing the Letter. After this section, only the final greetings remain (6:21-24).

Jordaan (1990:65, 66) also shows that the particle 'therefore' (*oun*) connects the paracletic section of the Letter (Eph. 4-6) to the first section of the Letter. According to him, the particle has a concluding function. The repetitive use of the particle suggests that the paraclese is the conclusion of the indicative that is posited in the first section of the Letter. Jordaan (1990:64) indicates how this indicative is repeated several times in the

second section, in which the indicative of the first is repeated and linked directly to the paraclese.

Hoehner (2002:vii, 62, 66-69; cf. also Fowl 2012:125-214) makes the following structural analysis of Ephesians 4-6 on the basis of these structural markers:

The conduct of the church (4:1-6:24)

- A. Walk in unity (4:1-16)
- B. Walk in holiness (4:17-32)
- C. Walk in love (5:1-6)
- D. Walk in light (5:7-14)
- E. Walk in wisdom (5:15-6:9)
- F. Stand in warfare (6:10-20)
- G. Conclusion (6:21-24)

Based on Hoehner's (2002:vii, 62, 66-69) structure, Ephesians 4-6 may be regarded as a description of how God's plan, described in Ephesians 1-3, is realised in the life of the church and of every believer. Petrenko's (2011:147, 148) description may be used as basis:

- The gifts that Christ as the conqueror bestows on his church (every congregation) to equip the believers serve as the basis not only for the life in which Christ is becoming increasingly visible (Eph. 4:4-16),⁶ but also for the unity of the church (4:3).
- The soteriological contrasts in the previous/current lifestyles of the believers, according to Ephesians 1-3 (then/now; dead/live; stranger/house-mate), are reflected in Ephesians 4-6 and described with the concepts darkness/light, foolishness/wisdom, immaturity/maturity, strife/unity (4:13-16, 17-5:2; 5:3-14; 5:15-22; cf. Hoehner's structure A, B, C).
- The contrasts regarding knowledge (the old/new structure of vision and knowledge) are reflected in Ephesians 4-6, when the believers are encouraged to remember their calling (4:1; cf. 1:4-10, 18, 23) and the purpose of God with their salvation in Christ (4:4-6; cf. 1:9-10; 1:20-23; 3:10), on the one hand, and when they are called upon to be renewed

⁶ Jordaan (1990:61) describes Ephesians 4:4-16 as an indicative island in the section of the Letter that contains mainly paracleses.

in the spirit of their minds (4:23) with what they have learnt and been taught, namely the truth that is in Jesus (4:20-21; cf. 1:13; 3:2; cf. Hoehner's structure D, E), on the other.

- The contrasts in the sphere of influence in which the human being lives (the old/new powers) are also present in Ephesians 4-6. What Christ brought about by his victory over the evil powers bears fruit in the lives of the believers. This is obvious in the fact that they are now standing in a new relationship with God as his beloved, who are following Him now (5:2, 8; 6:1, 5, 6, 7) and no longer their own desires; that they serve Christ (5:1; cf. 1:5) and are no longer slaves of the evil powers, and, finally, that they allow themselves to be led by the Spirit (4:30, 5:18) and no longer by selfishness and greediness (4:18-20). Christ's victory enables believers to live as new people in the unity of mutual love, so that the blessings of God with which He blessed them in Christ through the work of the Spirit will bear fruit in their lives (4:32). These blessings are summarised by the armour whereby the believers may be strengthened in the Lord and his great power, thus being able to withstand the evil powers and hold their post as conquerors (6:10-22; cf. Hoehner's structure F).

2.3 Deductions

The following deductions are made from the above exegesis:

- Ephesians describes the eternal will of God according to which all things disrupted by sin are re-united by his great power in a harmonious unity under Christ as Head (1:10).⁷
- The successful completion of the plan is found in the fact that each one of the Persons in the Trinity fulfils a part of the divine plan (*ekonomia*) in unison with the other Persons (1:1-23).
- The centre of this plan is that God the Father blesses his chosen people with all the blessings in the heavenly places. This was made possible by the predestination of the Father and by his gifts, namely the work of salvation by Christ (therefore, the chosen receive the gifts 'in Christ'⁸), and by the sealing of the Holy Spirit (1:1-13).

7 The verses given, in this instance, are simply examples from which the deductions can be made, but the deductions are made from all the preceding research results and not from single verses.

8 Cf. explanation at 3.2

- The heavenly blessings are of a dual nature. The Triune God grants certain gifts (such as the gifts of the Spirit, the predestination and the new life) to people, irrespective of their will and decisions (1:1-5; 2:4-10). Other gifts (such as knowledge, gifts of grace and mutual communion) are given to the believers to put to use in order to reap the benefits of those very gifts (4:1-16).
- The Holy Spirit uses the intimate personal knowledge of the Triune God's nature and his plan, which flows from his nature, to start and continue the process of renewal in the human being and in every congregation (4:17-5:20).
- The fulfilment of the will of God depended on the coming of Christ and his life on earth, as well as his victory over the evil (1:15-23; 2:1-7). The salvation He brought about means the deliverance of human beings not only from the power of the evil, but also from their own corruptness (4:17-32; 6:10-18).
- The road of human beings to the goal that God has for them in his plan starts with the certainty of God's grace in Christ and the sealing by the Holy Spirit. It runs through human beings putting off the old self, renewing their spirit and thoughts and continuously putting on the armour of God so that they may withstand the evil powers through his strength. To this end, they must allow themselves to be filled by the Holy Spirit so that they may grow towards maturity in faith and holiness (1:1-23; 3:8-21; 6:10-18).
- The church fulfils a cardinal role in the execution of the plan. The church is one in the one God and it must preserve this unity. The unity in the church grows when believers are equipped for their service with the special gifts that Christ bestows on his/her body, so that everyone can fulfil his/her function with a view to their edification and maturity (2:13-22; 3:8-21; 4:1-16).
- Both the equipment that believers, who constitute the church, give and receive and the service they give and receive make them steadfast in their struggle against heresy (4:11-16).
- The grace (blessings) that God bestows on believers is described as a calling (4:17). A life that is worthy of the calling of believers is a life that flows forth from the intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ (4:20, 21). The knowledge of who Jesus Christ is and what He did as Head of his body determines the words and actions of those who believe in Him (4:17-6:24).

- The change that the new life effects in the actions of believers starts with the change of what motivates them and the grounds on which their decisions are founded. The change is especially clear in their relations with other people, as well as in their moral life (4:17-6:9).
- The life of the church is governed by gratefulness for the blessings of God, and the gratefulness results in the praise of God (5:19, 20). The church and all believers know that they are regenerated, so that they would be in their very being to the praise of the glory of God. Thus, they must not only do certain things, but they must also be something. They are no longer what they were, and what they are now is what they must increasingly become, so that they may be to the praise of the glory of God.
- All of the above serve to make the church the vehicle through which God displays His wisdom to the world, so that they are called to believe in Him and be united to the body of Christ (3:10).

The Ephesian Letter thus contains material that is suitable for investigating pastoral ministry, because it describes God's plan for the salvation, change and growth towards harmony in the inner human being and in his relationship with others. This will be discussed in more detail later.

3. GUIDELINES FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY IN THE CONGREGATION⁹

In this article, the pastoral ministry of the congregation is regarded as the overall nurturing and equipping of members and non-members of the church, so that they may increasingly fulfil their divine calling. Pastoral counselling is considered a subdivision of pastoral ministry; it focuses on individuals and problem-solving (cf. Breed 2013:3).

3.1 Pastoral ministry is participation in the ministry of the Triune God

The grounds for pastoral ministry are, according to Ephesians, the blessing (1:3), saving (1:7; 13-14; 2:5, 8), renewing (4:23, 24; 5:8, 9, 25-27), uniting

9 Dialogue with recent literature about the *missio Dei* and the missional church falls beyond the scope of this article, but the results of this article can be applied to evaluate the emerging church movement as well as the diverse viewpoints in the *missio Dei* and missional church debate. Cf. Van Gelder & Zscheile (2011) for a summary of viewpoints, and Flett (2010) for a critical analysis of these movements.

(1:10, 11; 2:6, 11-22; 4:1-6; 11-16; 5:18-6:9), comforting (1:1-23; 2:1-22; 3:8-21; 6:23, 24), equipping (1:3, 7-9, 17-19; 2:10; 3:4, 14-19; 4:7-16; 5:14; 6:10-19), healing (1:15-23; 2:14-22; 4:20-32; 5:8-10), and glorifying (1:12; 18,23; 2:6, 22; 3:16) work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Triune God is part of his eternal plan according to which He steers all things, so that He will be praised for his glory (Eph. 1). In executing his plan according to His good pleasure, there is a time (hour) when certain parts of the plan become effective (cf. Robichaux 2009:44). This is part of the mystery that God makes known to, and through his church (Eph. 3:10). According to Anderson (2001:37), "Practical theology is essentially hermeneutical theology". The church is not allowed to make her own plans by trying to persuade God to adapt his will to fall in with her will. The church must allow the Holy Spirit to lead her so that she can distinguish hermeneutically what the will of God is (Romans 16:1-3) in the here and now of the ministry. Purves' (2004:3) statement is relevant:

Pastors do what they do because of what God is and what God does. Or more precisely, before it is the church's ministry all ministry is first of all God's ministry in, through, and as Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A crucial question in pastoral ministry is, therefore: Who is God here, now to us and to the people to whom we have to minister? One may also ask: What is God doing now in our congregation/church? What is He doing in the life of every congregant? What is he doing in the community? From another point of view, Van Gelder (2000:87) mentions that "[t]he biblical language places emphasis on our response to God's redemptive reign". Van Gelder (2000:89) elaborates on his view as follows:

The church is a people shaped by the redemptive reign of God. The church is not an end to itself. It has a distinct calling – to demonstrate the reality of God's redemptive power in the world.

Pastoral ministry is, therefore, always a response to the grace of God in the first instance, but secondly, also guidance as how to respond to the salvation that flows forth from God executing his plan. The response is not a fixed answer that can be captured in a confessional creed. What is written in confessional creeds should form the basis of an answer (a life worthy of their calling) that has to be deciphered here and now in this hour of God's execution of his plan, taking into consideration the questions put to the church by the current situation and the future.

The real theology of a congregation is often more clearly inferred from the lives of its members than from its confessional creeds. Chester and Timmis (2007:23) elucidate another aspect of this matter when they

emphasise that God does his work through the work and words of the church at this very moment in the same way as he did through Jesus here on earth (cf. John 14:10-12).

Viola (2012:23) states that the activity between the three Persons in the Trinity determines the essence of the church:

The biblical teaching of the Triunity is not an exposition about the abstract design of God. Instead, it teaches about God's nature and how it operates in the Christian community ... it should shape the Christian life and inform the practice of the church.

Paul was deeply aware of this truth, as is obvious from his use of the particle 'therefore' (*oun*) in the second section of his Letter to mark his intimate exhortation/encouragement (*parakaleo* – Eph. 4:1) of the congregations as fruit of the work of God, which he described in Ephesians 4:1. To this awareness attests the fact that he prays twice in his description of God's plan of grace (1-3) that God would enable the congregation to understand what this plan of grace comprises. Indeed, he structures the entire first section of his Letter as a prayer. He closes his Letter with the plea that the congregation would do everything in prayer and pray for him in his ministry (6:18, 19). The congregation must increasingly become part of the mutual love, communion, dependence, honour, submissiveness and unity that is found in the Trinity. In practical terms, this means that the congregation must be guided to come to know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the divine economy. By listening, serving, and growing in sanctification and glorification, they must experience their unity with God to the full. A congregation, elder, deacon, member must live praying and listening, and consciously ask what God is doing, for example in the family where a visit will soon be made. During pastoral counselling, the counsellor must ask where God is going with the people who are sitting before him. Then the purpose of pastoral counselling would not be problem-solving, conflict management or healing in the first instance, but above all, to have God's will done in the lives of those people and to guide them through knowledge of God to grow in being part of Him and his church (Fee 1996:66). Members must know their calling and be guided to live their lives worthy of this calling.

The knowledge that the church is doing the work of the Triune God makes the church humble in her overall approach to the ministry, according to Pennington (2011:110). A leader who acts arrogantly in his performance on stage or in a pastoral situation by commanding God, for example, to provoke a miracle or a healing, or by misleading people through mass hypnosis does not understand this truth (Brown 2011; Mendoza 2012).

A congregation ought to reflect continuously on the ministry strategies they are employing, as well as on the places where they minister. It is important to involve the congregation in such strategic planning and that the Lord will be consulted consciously and continuously about what He wants to be done (Eph. 5:15-17; Yoon 2011:17). This approach is opposed to, for example, what McManus (2005) calls the “Barbarian way”, in which passion from the heart becomes the dominating force and all existing conventions are abandoned (cf. also Janse van Rensburg 2011:76).

Participation in the ministry of God includes participation in the purpose to unite all things under Jesus. It is, therefore, essentially missional.

3.2 Pastoral ministry guided from, and to certainty

Throughout the Ephesian Letter, the emphasis is on both the struggle of the human being against evil/sin (2:1-5; 2:11, 12; 3:10, 13; 4:17-32; 5:1-18; 6:10-18) and the victory and dominance of Christ over the evil powers (1:21, 22; 2:5, 6, 14-16; 4:8; 5:23). The Letter also emphasises God the Father’s power, in which the believers have a share and may obtain a share in their struggle; the powerful work of God in believers (1:19, 20; 2:5, 6; 3:7, 16-21; 4:7, 8, 14; 6:10-18), and the sealing by the Holy Spirit, which was promised by God (1:13). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee (pledge) that the believer will receive everything that God promised (1:14; 4:30). Through Him they may receive wisdom, so that God will reveal Himself to them in such a way that they will truly know Him (1:17; 3:5, 16). Through the Spirit, believers have access to the Father (2:18) and they can thus live in peace in the unity that was created by the Spirit, because the Triune God is above them all, works through them all, and lives in all of them (4:4-6). The Spirit exhorts the believers to live worthy of the calling for which they have been called. Those who are still living according to the old lifestyle grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30). All these things can nurture the certainty in the believers that they are blessed with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (1:3), that God predestined them to be adopted as his children (1:4, 5), so that they received an inheritance in Christ, and that God is on his way with them to let them live holy and without blemishes before him in love (1:5, 6, 11; 5:27) – to praise Him for his glory. They were given life, raised from the dead with Christ, and God lets them sit at his right hand together with Christ (2:5, 6; cf. Pennington 2011:101). They are no longer far from God (Eph. 2:17-22) and they no longer live in darkness. They are no longer slaves of the evil powers and of their own desires (2:1-10). They can break with the works of the darkness and are able to live as new people (4:17-32) by continuously seeking to be filled by the Spirit of God (5:18), thus seeking their strength in God and his great power (6:10). All of this has only one purpose, namely

to gather everything under the one Head, Christ (1:10, 11, 22, 23; 2:13-22; 3:8-13; 4:11-16; 5:23).

The concept 'in Christ' is used throughout the first section of the Letter to describe the new position of the believers and the way in which they receive God's blessings (1:1, 3, 10, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21, 32; Kangas 2009:8). Due to the limited scope of this article, it is not possible to discuss in detail the meaning of this formula for pastoral ministry. Floor (1981; cf. also Fee 1994:12) made an in-depth study of the formula in the writings of Paul. He concluded (translated from Afrikaans):

As synopsis, we can finally conclude that the formula 'in Christ' means the believers are included with Christ, who, as their Representative according to a structure determined by God, suffered, died and rose from the dead, so that they, through their unity with Christ as their Head, were brought into a new order of life through the death and resurrection of Christ, and were withdrawn from a mode of existence that is governed by sin and death, and through which they may continuously have part in the salvation that Christ earned for them.

Pastoral ministry must use every opportunity to guide believers to understanding, certainty and utilisation of the wealth, which they in Christ received through the grace of the Father and the powerful work of the Spirit.¹⁰ Without this certainty, true and permanent change and growth is impossible (Pennington 2011:111). If this principle was respected, it would be a determinant for the contents and mode of pastoral ministry. The pastoral ministry would be executed with Christ's completed work as foundation, which was a gift to believers. In preaching, the imperative would not be separated from the indicative. The imperative would not be proclaimed as if the indicative were the gift of God and the imperative were the human being's own response to the indicative. The imperative, as Paul presents it in Ephesians, will be proclaimed as a fruit of the indicative. Thus, the imperative is proclaimed as the fruit of the Spirit in the human being that truly understands and embraces the indicative. For example, preaching should not result in a simplistic exhortation to obedience out of gratefulness, and it should not be a dilution of the imperative with a postscript assurance that Christ paid for our sins. The powerful work of the Triune God (through knowledge of the indicative), which unavoidably produces fruit, will be proclaimed with full acknowledgement of the mystery found in the relationship between the work of God in the human being and the human being's decisions of own volition. Paul perceives no opposition between intellectual knowledge and revelational knowledge (cf.

10 Cf. Pretorius (2006:261) for the role of the Holy Spirit in living from the certainty of God.

Viola & Barna 2008:199-219), as the Spirit of God illuminates the intellect to know and love God (cf. Stott 2007:23, 24).

De Klerk (2002:14), for example, emphasises the relationship revelation-dogma-doxa with regard to the liturgical song. He contrasts the song of praise that is grounded on the revelation of the Triune God, and that will, therefore, be pure dogma, with the 'Song of myself', which is a contemporary concretisation of hedonism, 'spectatorism' and sentimentality (cf. also Bingle 2000:128). Horton's (2003:105-138) remark about the future of postmodernism is relevant:

Whatever postmodernism is, it belongs to the fading dreams that cannot compare to the solid joys of Zion. Deep down, God's people know that the 'Song of Myself' must give way to the song of Moses: 'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously....' Exodus 15:1-2.

Another example may be taken from a home visit. An elder is making a home visit at people who do not attend the worship services and who are in no way involved in the gatherings or service groups of the congregation. The elder could merely implore the members to become more involved and quote commands from Scriptural sections as motivation. However, the elder then uses Scripture as a law to which the members ought to submit, even if they have no desire in doing so. The elder could also remind the members of what it cost God and Christ to save them and then demand gratefulness from them. The elder uses a guilty conscience as a lever. In fact, the elder should pray for wisdom to decide how to guide the members to meet the Triune God in all his grace and strength and to get them to know God better while they grow towards maturity. This would mean that the elder should determine whether the members lack (experiential) knowledge of God and whether there might be unprocessed trauma or injustice in their lives. Briefly, he should delve deeper than the mere fact that they are not involved. He should try to find out the primary causes of the situation, which he may then use as a gateway to guide the members to meet the Triune God (again). He will do this in prayer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In certain situations, the first step would be to start a friendship with these members. The love of God and belonging to the congregation, as well as follow-up actions, are thus practically ministered to them, in the expectation that the knowledge and experience of the indicative of the gospel will be used by God to change their hearts and thoughts. Every situation will be treated in a unique manner, but the principle is that the love of God will create love from which deeds will flow forth. From the certainty of the grace of God, the members are guided to good works, which will create further certainty of the grace of God, as

well as the desire to praise God their entire lives. There are no disciplinary actions before it has been ascertained that the members clearly know and understand their calling according to which they are admonished 'to walk'.

While bringing all things together under Christ is the ultimate purpose of God's plan, leading the believers to certainty must include equipping them to lead those outside the body to faith and certainty. The church must be an inviting body where people that are without God and far from the unity in Christ can be assured that they are part of the body.

3.3 Pastoral ministry is aimed at nurture and equipment

Despite the radical change brought about by the blessings with which the Triune God blesses believers, the church remains an immature church in distress. The church must, for example, seriously strive to keep the unity (4:3), and if the church does not grow towards maturity, she will still be "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (4:14 – NIV). The church is involved in a "wrestling match" (6:12 – GWA) against evil powers, and she needs God and his strength to survive (6:10-13). Therefore, the church needs both nurture and equipment. Ephesians 4-6 is introduced by the word *parakaleo* (4:1) and, in the closing section of the Letter, Paul assures the congregation of the 'comfort' (*parakaleo*) they will receive from Tychicus (6:21-22 – NIV). Ephesians 4-6 is, therefore, enclosed by the word *parakaleo* (an *inclusio*). The word *parakaleo* can have different meanings, for example 'to comfort someone' (Matt. 2:18; 2 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 6:22) or 'to ask for help' (Matt. 8:5; 2 Cor. 9:5). In Ephesians 4:1, it clearly means 'to admonish' or 'to exhort with authority' (Fowl 2012:128; Hoehner 2002:503).

3.3.1 Nurture

I shall now give an overview of the method of nurture that is implicitly described in Ephesians.

- Nurture and identity

Ephesians 1-3 may also be read as a description of the identity of the readers (Fowl 2012:125). They are people who have undergone a drastic change in their identity (2:1-10); their life and world view have changed radically (2:11, 12); they have become part of a total different community (2:11-20), and they have a new purpose in life (2:21, 22).

Twice Paul prays that they would understand what this new identity comprises (1:15-23; 3:13-21).

In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul describes the origin of this new identity as God's will taking shape in their lives. That makes them the elect, blessed, pardoned, adopted children and heirs of God, people who know the mystery of God's eternal plan, people who may be to the praise of the glory of God, people who are saved and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13). Paul views this new identity as a calling that will have a drastic influence on their lifestyle (4:1-6). In part, their identity means that they are the called ones of God and their calling may introduce hope, wisdom and God's power of resurrection into their lives (1:16-23). In his Letter, Paul guides the readers in a nurturing way to gain increasing insight into their identity in Christ. He advises them on how to apply it practically in their lives, in order to renew their lives continuously. He encourages them to lead a life of harmony, love, wisdom and holiness (cf. 2.2). This life flows from being filled by the Holy Spirit and from love in mutual subservience, which influences relationships in marriage, the family and workplace.

Members are pastorally nurtured by guiding them to an increasing insight into their identity in Christ, as well as in practically living up to their identity in all facets of their lives (cf. Stott 2007:19-34; Fowl 2012:126, 127). Reaching out to unbelievers and leading them to discover their identity in Christ is part of the identity of the body of Christ.

- Nurture and prayer

As indicated earlier (cf. 2.1), Ephesians 1-3 is written in the form of a berakah prayer. Two prayers form part of this section, and Paul uses them to assure the readers of his intense involvement in their new lives as children of God. Paul also involves the readers in his ministry by asking them to pray for him and to persevere in continuously praying for all God's people (6:18 – GWV). In their struggle to remain at their posts, they must also continue to pray (6:18). Paul thanks God for them, because they came to faith and he asks them to pray for him to declare the gospel in boldness. The prayers of the congregation for their own nurture can never be separated from prayers for those still outside the body.

- Nurture and unity

The aim of God's plan is set out in Ephesians 1:10 as the gathering of all things under one Head, Christ. Ephesians 2:14-22 describes the fruit of Jesus' work. Through his work, all alienation, enmity and separation are undone; a wide variety of believers build a room together to be a

dwelling of God. In Ephesians 3:18, 19, Paul prays that the reader will understand the love of Christ “with all of God’s people” (GWV; “with all the saints” – NIV), so that God will be glorified in the congregation (3:20, 21). Ephesians 4 starts with the call on readers to maintain the unity established by God in peace, patience, humbleness and gentleness. This unity is experienced in the assembly of the one body, in the liturgical acts of confession of faith, baptism and preaching, which proclaim the one God and Father of all (4:4-6). The chapter (4:29-32) ends with the call that the congregants’ interaction with each other should be entirely edifying, friendly and full of compassion, while they forgive each other as God forgave them in Christ. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul explains how every member fulfils his/her function through their service work in order to reach maturity in Christ. This edification can take place, because the congregants adhere to the truth in love. In Ephesians 5:19-21, Paul introduces the exhortation of submitting themselves to each other in the fear of the Lord, with the call that they experience their unity by singing together. One melody should lead them while they are thanking God the Father for everything “in the name of our lord Jesus Christ” (KJ21, NIV). The chapter ends by teaching husband and wife to be one, thus reflecting the unity between Christ and the congregation. Chapter 6:1-9 describes the road to harmony in the family and workplace, and at the end of the chapter, a call is made for prayers in which the addressees identify themselves with the situation of fellow-believers and the work of Paul (6:18-20).

It can be inferred from the above-mentioned that nurturing the believer is inseparably linked to mutual nurture that presupposes and promotes mutual unity in Christ. This mutual unity is experienced and developed by being part of the unity in the gathering of the body in the liturgical acts of the worship service (4:4-6; 5:19-21), and also when members visit, comfort and admonish each other. Mutual trust to proclaim the truth in love to each other and to come together in the light of God is an important aspect of nurture (Chester & Timmis 2007:131, 132; Crabb 2009:87-92).

The principle of nurture is contrary to an approach where, for example, the organisation of the congregation provides for small groups only. This means that congregants who are not members of a small group will not receive special nurture. Small groups must be open to serve others and to reach out to those still outside the body of Christ.

3.3.2 Equipment

Although the entire Letter to the Ephesians may be regarded as equipment, Ephesians 4:4-16 describes the role of equipment in executing God's plan in a unique manner. Jordaan (1990:61) describes Ephesians 4:4-16 as an indicative island in the section of the letter in which mainly parables are found. Ephesians 4:4-16 describes the link between the believers' lives that are worthy of the calling whereby they were called (4:17-6:22) and the description of this calling (1-3). Kruger (2005) describes equipment according to Ephesians 4 as a process in the making, as the believer is guided to become what s/he is in Christ and to attain proficiency in living up to this calling.

In his summary of the composition of Ephesians 4, Hoehner (2002:57, 58) elucidates the role and importance of equipment. Verses 1-6 provide the basis of the unity to which believers are called. In verses 7-10, it is said that every believer received a gift as Christ apportioned it according to the right deserved by Him to do it. Verses 11-16 explain the distribution of the gifts in the body. The fundamental gifts (4:11) are given to equip believers, so that they can apply their gifts towards the edification of the body. The service work has a dual purpose, namely to protect the believers against errors and to enable them to grow towards Christ. As such, every member contributes to the growth of the body. Every member is responsible for the growth, even though everyone has a unique gift and ministry. Special ministries (offices) can only be distinguished from the ministries of other believers with regard to their particular function.

A congregation that does not endeavour to equip every believer to use his/her gifts in the service of the others may fall prey to error and stagnation. A congregation must nurture its members by addressing their needs, but also by equipping them and exhorting them to service work. This service work must also be directed to seek and find those who belong to the flock, but are still outside.

4. CONCLUSION

Ephesians offers important guidelines for ministries in the congregation. Based on the exegetical results, these guidelines were developed and posited against contravening opinions. As such, it indicated the importance of subjecting current tendencies in congregational ministry to the test of Scriptural exegesis.

This article has not exhausted the wealth contained in the Ephesian Letter, and further research in this regard is necessary, especially regarding the missional task of the church.

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