

Section 3

Biblical Leadership Clarified, or What Pastors Are

5

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

Back to the kingdom of the Church-of-today—traditionally defined. Leaders have been theoretically defined as the rulers or regents of local principalities (called local churches). They are looked to for authority and direction. They rule with power. And, they bow to the King—on parade days, and special occasions.

But, on a day-to-day basis, if the observations of Tozer are correct, these pastors are the law of the land:

Among the gospel churches Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol. 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name' is the church's national anthem and the cross is her official flag, but in the week-by-week services of the church and the day-by-day conduct of her members some one else, not Christ, makes the decisions....Those in actual authority decide the moral standards of the church, as well as all objectives and all methods employed to achieve them. Because of long and meticulous organization it is now possible for the youngest pastor just out of seminary to have more actual authority in a church than Jesus Christ has.¹

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

Again, the words cut deep into the traditions and practices of the Church. Beloved symbol? Official flag? Those in actual authority?

This is not as it was intended to be. The real King of this kingdom of COT (Church-of-Today) is not pleased. Just as He is benevolent and merciful toward His subjects, so He is the Just and Sovereign Ruler of His Kingdom. While He has given derived authority to His undershepherds for the good of *His* people, He alone is their true Head. His perceived role as titular head is misconceived, and the realities of eternal rewards will show Him, and us, for the Kingdom as it should be.

In the kingdom of COT, as the name suggests, most of its subjects are asleep—or at least dozing. Ask one of them about how their relationship to the King affects their week-to-week lives? You might hear, “Well, yes, I know him. He is my king and lord.” Or, “I think of him once a week, but he expects me to interpret his laws in a modern way that fits my trade.” And, occasionally, you could hear someone say, “What I know of my king, and his laws, comes from our local regent. I trust his professional opinion for understanding the king’s laws in much the same way as I trust my local barrister as my counselor-at-law for understanding the laws of the land.”

Now these same subjects had been taught to distrust an adjacent kingdom’s way of understanding. In this kingdom of the Church-of-Peter the Pope (COPP), individual citizens were taught that there was one vicar who, all the time, rightly interpreted the wishes of their king in “Thus says the king” manners. But, for our citizens of COT, they often wondered: if, indeed, in the kingdom of COPP, the citizens were wrong for trusting the words of a vicar as being the words of the king, why was it more right for them, following the local rulers, to trust them similarly? If one leader for the land of COPP was wrong, why were local leaders, who functioned and spoke similarly in the realm of COT, right? Or, in the language of the 20th century, if a Pope over the whole Church is wrong, why is a pope over every local church any better? Good question!

ELDERS AS PASTORS

In reviewing, and rethinking, New Testament blueprints for leadership, we quickly conclude: someone has blown the blueprint! We mean to cast no personal blame per se, but the facts remain: we have gotten away from the divine guidelines.

In the New Testament, there are three terms used to describe church leadership: they are pastor-teachers, overseers or bishops, and elders. While any of these three terms are adequate for describing the New Testament leader, the term “elder” provides excellent general guidelines. The term occurs 67 times in the New Testament as it applies to local church leadership—as compared to nine times for overseer, and three times for pastor, or pastor-teacher. An elder was a man. And this man, from the model of the Jewish system of government in the synagogues,² provided the elderly and mature counsel and experience.³ He was to be the local undershepherd who served in the name of Christ, and who, along with the brothers and sisters of the assembly, was similarly subject to the same Lord. Therefore, the term “elder”, which predominates the New Testament writings, is an adequate term for generally representing the leadership of the New Testament churches.

One interesting addendum: the term “pastor” which we, along with others, use to represent the office of church leadership, may not have been a office-of-reference in the New Testament. The term is used only three times: once as the noun “pastor or shepherd” (Eph 4:11), and twice as the verb “to pastor or shepherd” (Acts 20:28 and 1 Pet 5:2). Consequently, it is safe to assume that pastors, as a term, were known in the New Testament more for what they did than what they were called! As long as we think clearly in matters of authority and function, the rule of “no harm, no foul” would follow here, and we will interchangeably refer to elders as pastors and pastors as elders. Nevertheless, we should not over interpret this term with an implicit authority that begs the question of the proper place of leadership in the Church.

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

In order to understand elders as pastors, we need to look at the two central passages that provide instruction in this matter. From the writings of Luke, speaking of the final ministries of Paul, and, specifically, his instructions to the Ephesian elders, we note:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

Further, and with similar benefit, Peter instructs the believing assemblies of Asia Minor:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be (1 Pet 5:1-2).

In these two strategic passages, the strong similarities outweigh the differences. There are similar responsibilities. In each text the elders are told to shepherd the flock. Contextually, as well as topically, this includes leading, feeding, and protecting.

PASTORS AS LEADERS

Virtually every written discussion of Christian pastors as leaders starts with an admission of givens: leaders as servants who represent the Living Head. But, as we have noted, what is assumed is soon forgotten, or even eventually denied.

Leaders as servants. We find no better definition for leadership in either the Old or New Testament.⁴ Matthew pointedly notes:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matt 20:25-27).

Not so with you! With these words, Christ stands straight against the world’s system of aggression and ambition, and declares that the ones at the feet of others will, someday, have the reward from the Head.

Servant-styled leadership is rarely taught in our churches or schools. In fact, observant young believers see much that actual *defies* this godly pattern. Leaders who talk more than listen; men who place ministry over the needs of marriages or family; pastors who insist on unchallenged authority, or unquestioning loyalty—all of these things teach—but, they teach the wrong thing.

Servants are private more than they are public. They are content to meet needs wherever they are—rather than ministering in predetermined manners. They are sacrificial in giving of their time, possessions, money, and relationships. They are careful to avoid self-serving emphases. Simply, they are other-centered, not self-centered: their primary focus is on obeying God, serving men, and bringing the two together! No better eternal epitaph befits the real Christian leader.

The ability to lead, according to word usage, is seen in the word *prohistemi*, which is translated “rule, lead or manage.” This word occurs eight times—carrying the force of a proven leader. He is one who has run the race. He has a demonstrable and proven ability. The word was used in Greek literature of the Olympiads and athletes who would be recognized—publically—as proven winners.

Without all the external analogies of pastors as modern-day athletic heroes, the sense of this word is seen. Pastors are leaders who diligently (Rom 12:8) rule well in matters of the home and ministry (1 Tim 3:4-5, 5:17). This is a similar requisite for all believers (cf Tit 3:8, 3:14)—using the same word—but it is certainly true for elders who are pastoral leaders.

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

If a man has not demonstrated proven ability to lead others—which we have already defined as the ability to obey God, and serve others—he should not be given the office and responsibilities of elder. It is not sufficient that he desires the office, or that he has been trained for the office. This capacity requires the gift or ability—however you want to look at it. Either way, there must be a track record which demonstrated a proving of this ability in the lives of the congregation.

Four additional notes: First, the place of being proven by local leadership, and congregation, was essential to New Testament leadership. In the first century, the churches knew nothing of bringing in foreign shepherds, virtually unknown, to shepherd the flock.⁵

Second, there is a careful appreciation in the New Testament for *elder-rule* and *congregational-involvement*.⁶ The pattern is from Acts 6 where leaders and believers cooperate together in the designation of servant-leaders, later known in some circles as deacons, for the necessary decision-making of the assembly. The analogy is similar to marriage where a wise and godly husband will, at the same time, provide for careful involvement and insight from his wife, and at the same time recognize his responsibility to provide the essential direction and focus for the marriage.

Third, we need to tread very softly on this issue of desiring leadership. The Scripture affirms, or at least admits to, the value and realities of this: “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (1 Tim 3:1).” While we should affirm this desire similarly, we need to be careful. In American corporate terms, this can be seen as an aggressive and assertive approach to preparation for serving as leaders in the assembly. This is inappropriate. The only model, ultimately, is one who is a slave of Christ, and a servant of others similarly (cf. Matt 20:20-28). There is no room for encouraging a Gentile-approach to leadership, which usually is seen as someone getting ahead by stepping on others’—heads!

Fourth, it should be noted that the single-head pastor is con-

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

spicuous by his absence in the New Testament!⁷ Consequently, this pastor as leader must be a *one-among* man, and not a *one-over* leader. There is no such thing as first among equals for New Testament leadership.

The twin truths of plurality and parity are the watershed marks of New Testament leadership.⁸ He must be a servant—proven among the local leadership and congregation—and he must understand the principles of working with others for common good. If he is a maverick, or if he is good at tasks, but ineffective in relational skills, he is not the shepherd (yet!) of the New Testament. Paul warns, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22a)” in this regard.

PASTORS AS FEEDERS AND PROTECTORS

Strategically linked to leading is feeding. Here, the New Testament description of *equipping* joins pastors with the Word, or the Scriptures, in a joint venture. Pastors are to use the Word as the eternal food which defines the will of the Father, and causes the growth of the saint:

Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32, cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17).

As will be developed shortly, this means more than just giving your testimony! It involves the ability of the elder to use the Scriptures in a way that gives direction and warning.

Speaking of warning, the elder who shepherds is also to protect:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard (Acts 20:29-31a).

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

Many other passages concur. The pastor is to be an elder who understands the dangers as well as the joys of serving others in the name of God. That is, he is to provide the protection for the flock—by means of the Word, and by means of his life and concern—following the example of the Good Shepherd (cf John 10:7-15). Spiritually speaking, serving as pastors or elders is not compatible with being faint-hearted!

ELDERS AS TEACHERS

From our study of elders as pastors, we now enter into the twilight zone! Let us explain. If we talk of elders as pastors, half of those who have thought through the issue of Church leadership nod in agreement. We have seen changes in the last few years in this area. A number of good books have exhorted the Church similarly and a number of local bodies are beginning to think in terms of shepherds.

Well, not really—but kind of! The problem is still, in part, in the term *layman*. We have not yet really discarded the clergy-layman distinction in the Church. This becomes evident when we talk about elders as teachers.

Actually, that isn't entirely correct. We do let *laymen* teach—they can teach in small group bible studies, Sunday school, and other ministry contexts. But this is considered *non-authoritative* teaching. That is, if you really want to know the truth on a subject, you (1) determine *the* pastor's view, or (2) use the sermon as your ultimate guide, or (3) depend on the church or denominational doctrinal statement—again, written by the religious professional.

You will see this illustrated in the church by the *titles or names* that are given to leadership. It is more popular today to talk of elders in the church. But when it comes to the clergy, we call them pastors—as contrasted with elders—or we call them senior elders. Thus, the division remains. Laymen are taught to minister—even

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

teach—at a non-authoritative level. And we continue to defer to the clergyman, who serves as the real authority—the real pastors—in the church.

The problems that accompany this distinction are many. First, as we have noted, Christian leaders—no matter how well meaning—have effectively taken the authority from Christ in the Church. Second, we teach our *non-professional* church leaders to depend on others more than to search out the meaning of Scripture for their lives, and the lives of others in the assembly. Third, and following from that, we essentially strip our saints of any real courage or confidence that they can—without knowing the original languages or going to seminary or bible college—understand and teach the Scriptures effectively. The end result is a perpetual infancy in the Church.

For these, and other, reasons, we say “kind of” in relation to encouraging elders as pastors. If, in fact, they do not have an essential facility or confidence in the Scriptures, they not only are not teachers—they are not even pastors in any true sense! Pastors (elders) are not men who simply empathize with the struggles of the saint. Pastors (elders) are not simply hand-holders. They are men who can lead others from the fog of confusion or grief or fear to the bright side of conviction and comfort and faith. They can open the Scriptures, and give direction.

TEACHERS AS ORAL INSTRUCTORS: VERBALIZING THE TRUTH

Biblical teaching is *always* twofold: first, it is teaching by word and fact. It is propositional truth. It is the Scriptures. Second, it is teaching by life and example. It is truth as seen by skin and bone—and hearts and minds. It is the oral, and the moral.

Great confusion exists in this area—by even the best of Christendom’s expositors. The reasons are two: first, because of a misunderstanding of the qualifications listed in the New Testament for church leadership, and secondly, because of an attendant confusion

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

in issues of gifts and qualifications for clergy *as opposed to* laymen in the church.

First, what are the qualifications for church leadership in the New Testament?

CRITERIA FOR ELDER LEADERSHIP⁹

Knowledge	Quality	Ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not a New Convert• Holding Fast the Faithful Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Above Reproach• Husband of One Wife• Temperate• Sensible• Respectable• Hospitable• Not Given to Wine• Not a Striker• Gentle• Uncontentious• Free from the Love of Money• Children in Subjection• Good Witness with Those Outside• Blameless• Not Self-Pleasing• Not Quick-Tempered• Not Fond of Sordid Gain• Lover of What is Good• Just• Devout• Self-Controlled	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leads Well His Own House• Able to Teach

Beyond the general benefit of seeing the high standard God expects for *all* leaders in the Church, look at the list of abilities. You will see that there are two: the *ability to lead*—which we also called the ability to rule or manage, and which we have developed under the section of *Pastors as Leaders*. And secondly, the ability listed as *able to teach*.

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

Being “able to teach” means more than just being able to give your testimony at short notice, or the personal attribute of being teachable! “Able to teach” is co-terminous with pastoring.¹⁰ Author after author fall into this trap of *qualitative* distinctions between Teachers (defined as staff pastors, or trained professionals, or men with singular authority in the church due to unique giftedness) and teachers (defined as laymen who need only to conduct class or group studies, give their testimonies—or, at least, defer to the instruction of the real Teachers).¹¹ The Scriptures insist on a definition of the qualification that supercedes these arbitrary distinctions.

Being “able to teach,” categorically, means much more than just being teachable, or able to give your testimony. Case-in-point: the only other time this phrase, “able to teach”, occurs in the New Testament, is in 2 Timothy:

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 2:24-25).

Notice the emphasis on content: “gently instruct,” “knowledge of the truth.” There is no way to avoid the conclusion that elders as teachers (*Teachers*, if that emphasizes the point more!) are to have a working knowledge and facility in faith and doctrine that allows them to teach, guide, refute, and correct in matters of biblical fact. There is no biblical *escape clause* that allows Christian men, as simply *good old boys* who have a good Christian testimony in the business community, to qualify as teachers. Regardless of community standing or vocational prestige—or lack thereof—the issue is personal knowledge of the Scriptures, and the ability to instruct and lead the saints accordingly.

Building from these observations, and noting the second reason confusion exists as what is the place of elders as *real* teachers, is the

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

further observation that these elders, as teachers, are to be diligent in matters of doctrine and instruction:

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially the ones who work in word and doctrine (Greek, cf. KJV, NASV of 1 Tim 5:17).

There are a number of strategic observations that come from this verse—one of the most important—in the New Testament on the subject of leadership. First, there are some elders of special distinction within the larger group of elders in any assembly. But, they are *not* distinct based on ability. They are distinguished by their work-ethic, or diligence. Staff responsibilities, part-time or full-time compensation, and special ministry assignment are all over-and-above the regular responsibilities for all elders—that is, pastoring and teaching. As men work hard at these areas, and particularly show a diligence in “word and doctrine,” then they are to be compensated in a way that unmuzzles them (1 Tim 5:18) and allows them to serve additional needs in the assembly without taking away the work or responsibilities of all of the elders to pastor and teach.¹² As non-compensated elders, they have proven themselves as worthy of eventual compensated, or staff, positions.

Second, these men of distinction are still *plural* in each assembly. This is, outside the apostolic leaders and representatives model, always the pattern in the New Testament (cf. Acts 14:23, 20:17-32; James 5:13-14). Unless a man sees himself as an apostle, or uniquely as a Timothy or Titus who are not called elders or pastors, and who clearly operate under the authority of the apostles, he will never be able to legitimately build a case for singular importance or authority in local church leadership. Even in this text of 1 Tim 5:17, where there are points of distinction, the reference is not singular, but plural.

Third, remembering our former conclusions on pastors as leaders, and elders as not prophets or preachers, we conclude that there

The Biblical Leader: Elders Who Pastor, and Who Teach

is still only one type of elder in the New Testament: an elder who pastors (leads, rules) and teaches. There are not two types of elders: all who rule, and some (i.e. one in any church) who teaches. This text establishes comparisons based on diligence, or “work, labor,” but not on ability. All elders are to have two abilities: shepherding, and teaching.

Fourth, this diligence in “word” and “doctrine” is a diligence in the internalization and verbalization of the truth. “Doctrine” indicates the personalizing of truth, which leads or issues into “words,” or the speaking and teaching of the truth (cf 1 Tim 4:6, 6:3; 2 Tim 4:2-3; Titus 1:9, 2:7-8). Consequently, what one thinks issues into what he says. As a man works diligently in these areas, he joins the team of staff elders who are assigned additional responsibilities for the board of elders, and the assembly.

And, finally, the conclusions of this text build on the things already noted about 1 Tim 3, and 2 Tim 2. That is, *all* elders are to be “able to teach”—able to use the Scriptures in a way that brings direction, and refutes error. In other words, all elders are to have a *working* facility in matters of doctrine—while some will display greater than normal diligence in these same areas.

Therefore, 1 Timothy 5:17 reaffirms some things that are to be true of all elders, and some things that may be true of only some elders. *All* elders are to rule, lead, or manage. All elders are to be teachers of the flock, and thus minister in word from their doctrine. *Some* elders will demonstrate additional diligence in “leading well” and “work” in word and doctrine, and, for that reason, are to be a worker who deserves his wages. The standard or rule is elders who, without compensation, shepherd and teach the flock. The exception is elders who, working hard at the same things that all elders are to be and do, accept compensated labor for the assembly.

It is the unavoidable conclusion of the New Testament that all elders are teachers of doctrine for the church. They are to be able to guide, feed and protect through their use of the Scriptures, and, as such, function as pastors and teachers.

TEACHERS AS MORAL EXAMPLES:
VISUALIZING THE TRUTH

To this point, we have discussed only half of what an elder as teacher is to be. He is one who knows, and speaks, the truth. Additionally, he is one who believes, and lives, the truth.

Any number of passages on the necessity of both facts and faith, within the context of modeling, will demonstrate this truth:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Phil 4:9, cf. 3:17; 1 Thess 1:5-7; 2 Thess 3:7-9).

“What you have...seen...put into practice.” The responsibilities of modeling, which is to lead to life-application. The regular emphasis of teacher and learner, is a full-orbed relationship that both instructs (verbalizes) and models (visualizes). Seven times, in the New Testament, Paul enjoins the saints to imitate him just as he imitates Christ. The Scriptures demand that biblical teaching be by word and life.

Again, the implications are powerful. First, true teaching and learning is the understanding and applying. Christian education is not the transmission of facts, but the transformation of lives! It not only is not finished until this happens, it hasn't happened until this happens! Truth was never intended, exclusively, for the sterile environments of pulpits or classrooms. It was to be seen, and lived out, as a way of life.

Second, numerous references employ the saints to remember the way of lives known, and lived out, by elders who taught them (cf 1 Thess 5:12-13, Heb 13:1-7,17). If the sheep only know lives of the shepherds as they are *spoken*, then they will lack the quality of relationship or loving accountability that encourages growth. No wonder we suggest that small gatherings are more of an asset than a liability! In terms of the relationship between leaders and believers that really counts, and which better approximates the New Testament

model, big is not beautiful—even if bald is. The Scriptures demand a knowing, and being known, relationship among all brothers and sisters in a local assembly.

Third, the distinction of life coupled to word is an unbeatable context for developing leaders. Sheep never thrive in the confines of a herd! While we work hard, in the bible college and seminary context, to prepare leaders, we are limited in what we can do. We teach doctrine, and the Bible. But the sizes of most schools limit our ability to develop relationships with our students.

Further, we have no long-term, life-related contexts that reflect the multifaceted needs of any church body. So, we do well with what we have. But the parachurch—namely schools, mission boards, ministry internships—can never replace the balanced context of the local church for producing balanced teachers for the church. Elders are to be men who can think it, speak it, and understand a corresponding responsibility to live it—both in front of—and with the saints calling themselves the church.

ELDERS AS PASTOR-TEACHERS, NOT SUPERSTARS

Over lunch, Ken was discussing the principles of this chapter with a senior pastor of a large evangelical church. Obviously understanding the implications, the pastor said, “What would I do then? Ken immediately responded, “Make disciples, of course!” The pastor countered, “But my gift is preaching (*authoritatively teaching*). Everyone does it that way, that is what I am paid to do, and God has seemingly been blessing my ministry. Therefore, it must be right.”

When culture, rather than biblical principles, mandates ministry (and we have been trained to fit into the cultural mold), one becomes perplexed when it is suggested that he rethink his role as superstar and conform to biblical principles. With terror showing in the eyes, they ask, “What would I do then?”

A New Testament Blueprint for Church Leadership

“Make disciples” is the command to all believers and when the church gathers the primary responsibility of the pastor-teachers is the “teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.” Yes it would involve instruction delivered in large group settings. However, the *impartation of facts* is only half the work in the teaching ministry of the pastor-teachers (elders). *Transformation of lives* (“to obey”) is the end product of biblical teaching, not just the *transmission of words*. Therefore, intimate exposure and modeling is necessary to meet the requirements of the biblical pattern. Christ demonstrated the pattern during His earthly ministry. Likewise, Paul continued the pattern:

- Be imitators of me (1 Cor 4:16)
- Be imitators of me (1 Cor 11:1)
- Follow my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us (Phil 3:17)
- The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things (Phil 4:9)
- Become imitators of us (1 Thess 1:6)
- Follow our example....Follow our example (2 Thess 3:7, 9)

The biblical mandate has not changed. Therefore, men must not only share the domain of the platform with others, but must develop intimate relationships with leaders and potential leaders in a true discipling (instructing and modeling) ministry. In turn, these leaders will be equipped to do the same.