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Leadership in the Church

Everyone looks for leadership models. It is part of the way God has made us—it is the nature of the learning process. John’s learning from leaders has gone through three stages that might sound familiar to you.

Stage One. As a boy he grew up in strong denominational churches with strong single head pastors who directed the affairs of the church in strong and sometimes loud manners. Although he still appreciates much of what he learned in those childhood experiences, he concluded that pastors are the single and final authority on matters of God and man.

In his younger adult life this image was reinforced in strong nondenominational Bible churches. Again the strong and dynamic single head pastor did most of the preaching, directed the focus of the church, and functioned principally as “president of the corporation.” He did find himself wondering where the headship of Christ would fit in this structure, but then he would put his head between his knees until the feeling passed! To his understanding, that was church leadership.

Stage Two. In both seminary experiences, as well as in his pastoral responsibilities in the first two churches he served with, leadership

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was said to be multiple in form, commonly called a “plurality of elders.” He did notice that more men seemed to be more involved in leadership, and he was thankful for that. But it still seemed that one man served as the focal point, the “senior pastor,” the final answer on matters of faith and practice in the church. John did most of the teaching, as in the churches in stage one, and had special ministry responsibilities that were distinct from the lay leaders in the church. For all practical concerns, there were two types of elders modeled for him (and by him!) in stage two as well as stage one.

Stage Three. Eventually he found himself serving on a pastoral team with other elders who represented both secular and sacred vocational pursuits. They began to reevaluate the New Testament passages on leadership and came to some surprising, and for John, painful conclusions. It became harder and harder to make qualitative distinctions between clergy and laymen (staff and non-staff) elders. They could not find two types of New Testament elders. This pastoral team worked with him patiently for over a year as the traditional leadership models and areas of personal pride in his life began to be peeled off. They began to examine what the Scriptures says about leadership and how indeed Christ is *the* Head of His church.

Leadership models? Few questions grip the church with quite the same fervor or frequency. Many of us have grown up under the nurture of godly church leaders and have at times assumed that what we have seen *is* the biblical model for leadership. But before we pour concrete over our conclusions, we need to evaluate our ideas in relation to the Scripture.

What is a leader? There is no agreement—at the definitional level:

- The ability of one person to influence or direct others (J. Oswald Sanders).
- The ability to rally men and women to a common purpose. It is a man who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who

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can pull others after him (Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery).

- It is the ability to get others to do what they don't want to do, and like it (President Harry Truman).
- There are three types of people: First, those that are movable; second, those that are immovable; and third, those that move them (Li Hung Chang).

In the world of imagery, we could have described a dynamic despot, a superhuman salesman, or a stirring strategist. Is the church leader a self-convinced, multi-gifted, corporate president? Is our mode for the church—not to mention the many parachurch organizations—the American corporation? Where does ambition fit, or does it? A. W. Tozer offers some alternative considerations:

A true and safe leader is one who has no desire to lead, but if forced into a position of leadership by the Holy Spirit and external situations. A reliable rule of thumb is as follows: A man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. A true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage. He is rather ready to follow as well as lead.¹

Is this description closer to the biblical model? Is there a place for a young man or woman *desiring* church leadership? A survey of pertinent biblical passages will help us with these questions.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MALE LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

In any study of church leadership in the Scriptures, three principle tasks are at hand. First, there is a need to identify the biblical backdrop to the question—from the framework of the Old Testament

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and the gospels. Second, there needs to be an assessment of central passages in the New Testament as applicable to the church. Finally, there needs to be some understanding in distinguishing male and female leadership and responsibilities in the church.

LEADERSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE GOSPELS

Abundant evidence in matters of spiritual conduct and leadership are available for the pages of the Old Testament. The history of Israel is the heritage of God-ordained leaders—men and women who found their adequacy in God. The model of the theocracy provided for a man to stand as the leader for the nation. Under the instructions of Yahweh, the ministries of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and others provided a man, chosen by God, to be the go-between between God and the nation. Later, under the combined leadership of Saul, David, and Solomon, the rule of a king in Israel was instituted. Though the weaknesses of these men also affected the nation, they were used in significant ways in Israel. Therefore, the precedent of a single leader (usually seen in the king motif) is clearly established in the Old Testament. Does this precedent become the proof for the authority and posture of the modern-day pastor?

In the gospels we begin to see a “changing of the guard.” Jesus, who was and is “God with us,” Emmanuel, established Himself as heir to the claims and promises of Messiah and Lord. Later, as Peter proclaimed, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). For Jesus, in His Person and ultimately in His work on the cross, became *the* Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

The essentials of leadership in the gospels can be reduced to one passage: Matthew 20. Although numerous passages speak of the priorities and patterns of discipleship, leadership is defined in the gospels strictly in terms of *servanthood*. Greatness. First place. Top rank in the kingdom. Christ speaks to all those issues, and

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concludes: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28).

Here, as developed in chapter four, is the *model and motive* for leadership. The model is the Son of Man—Jesus Himself. All that is known of greatness, of success, of first place in the kingdom is seen in Him. It is seen in His serving rather than being served. Jesus, for whom all things were created and by whom all things are sustained, left the majesty of the heavens and equality with God the Father, determined to serve and die for those dead in their trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1-5; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:15-17)! That is mercy.

If Jesus is the model for servanthood, the motive is self-sacrifice. Just as Jesus was the ransom for us, even so we are to give our lives for the flock of God. Peter speaks to this in his instructions to church leaders scattered throughout the Roman provinces:

So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. 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 (1 Pet. 4:19-5:1).

Ministry, suffering, and glory are seen as companion principles. Elders in the churches are to continue to do good, along with all the believers—understanding the relationship between suffering and sacrifice, and the glory and reward of serving the chief Shepherd (cf. 1 Pet. 4:1; 5:4). This becomes the leadership seedplot for growing ministry principles for church leaders in the epistles.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the epistles the activities and responsibilities of church leaders come to full blossom. Seven central passages contribute to the picture. From this, we should be ready to develop biblical principles for male leadership in the church.

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In the New Testament three terms are used interchangeably to describe church leadership. They are *pastor-teachers*, *elders*, and *bishops*. The term pastor-teacher, taken from Ephesians 4:11, is one who shepherds. The pastor is guardian of the flock. Likewise, bishops were overseers for the church. Both terms look at the function of the church leader. The term elder speaks to the office, or position, of church leader. Although these terms may have slightly different emphases, they all speak of men who are given the ultimate human responsibility for the care of the church.

Leadership Respect and Service. Church life—cafeteria-style! So is the description of some concerning the selection of and commitment to a local assembly. The New Testament cautions against too casual an assessment of a believer's relationship to his church. Rather, there is to be careful appreciation and respect—recognizing the value of the contribution of other lives to ours and a recognition that there is mutual accountability as believers voluntarily submit to those over them.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.

If there were any illusions about the demand of the ministry on leaders in the church, that passage lays such thoughts to rest. At Thessalonica, the church had experienced the ministries of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Now others were over them “in the Lord.” Among the general admonishments for encouraging one another and building up one another (1 Thess. 5:11), the believers were reminded that they were to appreciate the labor of their leadership. Again, leaders are spoken of in the plural in the church of Thessalonica.

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Hebrews 13:7, 17

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith....Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

A number of rich truths concerning the life of the Body of Christ are given not only in these verses, but also throughout the chapter. These believers, struggling under the confusion of the relationship of the Old Testament to the faith (Heb. 2:1-3:18) and under the crucible of suffering and public humiliation (Heb. 10:32-39), are reminded of those that serve them in leadership in their assemblies. Through remaining unnamed, these leaders evidently lived exemplary lives. The writer of this epistle can confidently remind these believers of the leadership models they have, and encourage obedience for the advantage of the whole assembly.

Again, as in the Thessalonian passage, leadership is plural. There is no singling out of one as more significant than the others. The leaders both taught and lived the truths associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ. These believers were to aid in the ministry by cooperating with those over them. By now, the New Testament precedent was clearly set. God had reestablished a plurality of elders in each assembly for the purpose of shepherding the flock.

One final note. One case against plurality of elders among some is the affirmation that each believer is now a priest to God—that our need is now no human mediator—and that our access is to God in Christ directly. This is true and is repeatedly taught in Hebrews. But it should be noted that in this epistle that affirms the believer-priest status so clearly, we also find some of the strongest references to the leadership of elders in an assembly and the accountability of the individual believers to the leaders even as the leaders are accountable

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to God. The teaching of the believer's direct access to God in no way conflicts with the teaching of plurality of elders in the church.

Leadership responsibilities and shepherding. Recently John gained another new appreciation for a shepherd. At 1:00 A.M. he and his wife were launched out of bed by the haunting call of coyotes just beyond the pasture where the sheep were sleeping. Within two minutes John was with them in the pasture, talking to and comforting them, and leading them into the safety of the barn.

Settling back into the sack thirty minutes later, John was again impressed with the function of a shepherd. He is the one who stands between his sheep and danger. He is the one willing to take on the predator for the sake of his sheep. He is the one who has built trust among his flock so that, when danger comes, they follow him to safety. Talk about a crash course in practical theology! John should have had his pastoral students out in that field with him.

A pastoral ministry is very similar. Yet shepherding extends beyond the physical needs of the sheep to emotional and spiritual needs as well. The New Testament is fond of drawing on this agricultural model.

Acts 20:28

Guard 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.

This passage is a strategic Scripture for teaching a number of things about the church. The principal work of the leader is to guard and to shepherd. These functions both protect and provide for the sheep. The leader is the overseer who understands the joy of spiritual nurture and encouragement. Further, the clear message of this text is that the church is a work of God, for God, and by God.

The church is a work of God. The elders of the church at Ephe-

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sus are here called overseers. They are designated as officers of the church by the Holy Spirit Himself. The historical precedent for this is the church at Antioch, where the Holy Spirit through the church said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). The agency for appointment to church office is two-fold: the Holy Spirit and a spiritual assembly.

The church is a work for God. The work of the overseers is shepherding. Yet the work of human husbandry is toward the church, which belongs to God. The church’s Head is Christ. The source of its leadership is the Holy Spirit. Thus, leaders are never laboring in *their* churches. They are shepherding the believers who make up the church that belongs to God.

Third, the church is a work by God. The last phrase of the verse reminds us that Christ, being God, has bought or redeemed the church by His blood. The work of Christ on the cross has bound Him and His body together for eternity. Any labor among church leadership is done recognizing that the ministry is accomplished on sanctified turf—it is with a body of believers whose identity is “in Christ.”

The clear emphases of Acts 20 show who is the Pastor of the church! A few years ago a leading Christian journal interviewed two Christian authors on the subject of the church. The first author, well-known, likened the church to an orchestra. At first it was a volunteer effort—largely informal and without much organization—which slowly over the months becomes better known, larger, and in need of the organizational and leadership skills of a conductor. This picture, to him, illustrated the church, which is God’s, and the need for a singular man to lead the group.

The second author responded with remarkable insight: “Well, yes, that is a beautiful illustration of the growth and cooperation of the church. The only difference is that you and I would disagree on who was the conductor.”

All too often we miss the perspective of the divine because of our focus on the human. Indeed, God uses human shepherds to serve

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the flock of God. But we cannot lose sight of the fact that it is His church, not a man's; He is the Chief Shepherd, not a man; and that with Him as Master Conductor, the church has not a human but a divine Head.

Notice again that in both Acts 20:17 and Acts 20:28, we find elders or overseers (plural) with the church (singular). For the twentieth-century church, which is used to its billing and preoccupation centering on the single head pastor, he is yet to be found in our study. Actually, we shall discover in the New Testament passage that the single head pastor is conspicuous only by his absence.

1 Peter 5:1–5

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; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

This remarkable passage further confirms our initial conclusions about leadership in the church. Note first the relationship between Peter and these elders. His words, his appeal, is as a fellow elder. Peter has learned the lesson of Matthew 20. No more maneuvering for position. No more preoccupation with comparisons. Now he refers to himself simply as a co-laborer—an equal. His expectation for these leaders is the same (1 Pet. 5:5).

As in the case of Paul's appeal to the Ephesian elders, here Peter

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challenges these leaders with the agricultural imagery of the sheep farmer. They are to care for their flocks even as a shepherd cares for his sheep. With an obvious parallel to Acts 20:28, Peter reminds these men that the believers in their churches are “under their care.” They are cooperative caretakers of the flock of God. As such, they have three principal standards for conduct.

First, they are to serve out of personal motivation, not from obligation. They shepherd the flock because that is what they want rather than what they must do. Have you ever observed a parent caring for his child out of obligation? It is painful for the observer and for the child. That attitude pours acid on relationships. Leaders in the church dare not serve on the basis.

Second, they are to serve with enthusiasm. But here enthusiasm can be at one of two levels. A leader can be enthusiastic for the ministry, or he can be enthusiastic for the money. This is a caution repeated elsewhere (cf. 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5). In areas of service to a church, a leader needs to be careful that his decisions and ministries are not motivated by personal gain.

Third, and most appropriately, leaders are to serve as examples, not as lords. In wording taken directly from the Gentile-style leadership mentioned in Matthew 20, Peter reminds these elders that you lead by following. The picture is of leaders who take advantage of their position. They lord it over those entrusted, or given to them. They influence by position. Peter warns that leaders in the flock of God are models, not manipulators. Rewards from God are given in relation to the servant style of leadership (5:4).

As Peter writes this letter to be circulated and read in the churches, his instructions in the text speak to “elders (plural) among you.” The exclusive illustrations of leadership in the New Testament assemblies are according to the model of multiple leadership.

Leadership roles among the saints. One of the old features of the twentieth-century church is what might be called the Little Jack

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Horner syndrome. Just as the poetic Jack, in the midst of breakfast, discovered his identity and significance with the plum, so church leaders today, particularly the younger variety, are encouraged to come to Jack Horner conclusions concerning their worth and ability in the ministry. The New Testament is much more cautious and encourages a consensus relationship that, in the least, looks to a local church for confirmation and direction for the ministry. Whether the leadership issue was service, or staff-relationships, the roles were defined within the context of the life and needs of the church.

Acts 14:23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.

As the gospel spread from its hub in Jerusalem to the Jewish and Gentile communities, Paul and Barnabas, from the church in Antioch, began to plant churches. These churches matured to the point where elders could be appointed. Being in familiar territory and with believers who had previously come to the Lord under their ministries, Paul and Barnabas appointed men to leadership positions. This is the first occurrence of elders in the New Testament church outside of Judea.

Notice carefully that elders (plural) were appointed in each church (singular). The beginnings of the principle of plurality of elders is seen in this passage. Each local assembly had a multiple of elders. Certain converts in these assemblies had matured as disciples of the Lord and, being given final instructs by Paul and Barnabas, were then appointed as elders in the church (cf. Acts 14:21-23). Evidently a church body can exist before elders are appointed. But elder appointment, when qualified men develop in the assembly, is an important feature of the maturing church.

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James 5:14

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

In one of the earliest New Testament epistles, James writes to believers scattered among the Roman Empire. His instructions include spiritual remedies for spiritual/physical problems. The dilemma here could be exclusively physical or, from the preceding and following contexts, could include complication caused by sin. Regardless, the sick or weak one is to call for the elders so that prayers can be offered (and, presumably, confession, if applicable) for the recovery of the saint. Notice that again we see elders (plural) for the church (singular). Evidently plurality of elders, in each assembly, was a leadership principle begun early in the history of the New Testament church, and was broadly observed throughout the Empire.

1 Timothy 5:17

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

To many churches today, plurality of elders is a fine concept as long as a distinction of leadership is retained: (1) a *lay* class of elders who usually administer the programs of the church; and (2) a *professional* staff of elders, compensated as the paid staff of the church, who shepherd the spiritual affairs of the church. First Timothy 5:17 is often given as the proof-text for this view. While the text does make distinctions among elders, these differences are of degree, not kind. That is, distinctions will focus on diligence of effort, not ability.

The text does give some unique guidelines vital to the biblical

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leadership of the church. In order to understand this verse, we have to separate certain facts in the verse, evaluate them and then bring our observations together in light of the implications for the church today.

Note first that again, as is the New Testament pattern, we have elders (plural) who are serving this Ephesian church (singular). Even in this text which will give guidelines for differentiating among elders, there is still a plurality in each distinct group.

The Greek word “direct” is *prohistemi*. It is the same word used earlier in 1 Timothy 3:4 in relation to an elder’s family. The word is used in Greek literature to speak of one who is a champion, protector, leader, or manager. The imagery is one who has run the race, or is setting the pace, in relation to the ministry. In other words, an elder in the church is to have a proven record in family life and conduct, and might also have a similar posture in ministry activities. Note that even director or manager in the text is in the plural. There is no one man who is *most* significant as a leader in the assembly, even though the verse does make a distinction among elders. While all elders are to lead or manage their families well (1 Tim. 3:4), not all elders will equally lead or manage in the church.

At this point, an interpretational generation gap might already be forming in the reader’s mind. From our twentieth century perspective, we use words which can mean different things to different people. Remembering that this verse is *the* verse most often used by traditional church leaders to justify a unique or special position over other “lay” elders, those men might overinterpret their significance for the church.

We can conclude that while all men are to be equally qualified in relation to family, some will be distinct in ministry tasks outside the home. Such elders of distinction “are worthy of double honor.” All elders are worthy of single honor in the assembly—that is recognition for status and service (cf. “honor” in relation to women in 1 Tim. 5:3, and elders in 5:17ff)—but, some elders are worthy of

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an additional, or double, honor of financial compensation for their labor (5:18).

Two important observations follow from the latter part of the text. First, the Greek for “work” is *kopos*, which means to labor or toil. Emphasis is on the effort taken to accomplish a task. Paul recommends that the elders are to recognize the need for a remunerative schedule that appreciates the extra labor expended to accomplish ministry tasks.

In the New Testament churches utilized plurality of elders, together shepherding the flock. This means they were ministering to the sick (James 5:14), admonishing and teaching (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7), and guarding the flock against error (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). They ministered to individuals, small groups, and believers who gathered regularly.

As these elders served the church, certain ones surfaced as working harder in the ministry. The distinction was not based on gifts or abilities, but on diligence of labor. From Ken’s experience, on a basketball team, all five players dribble, pass, and shoot. But certain players go all out. It is obvious to those who know the game, that regardless of the level of ability required to play, some players are more intense than others. They simply work harder. Just as extra effort is rewarded on the court, so it is to be rewarded in the church.

There is a second observation to be made. The English translation “especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” is somewhat confusing. The double honor seems to be reserved for *the* preacher. This fits with the practice in most churches today. But the better translation would be “especially those who labor in the word (*logos*) and doctrine (*didaskalia*). The word “word” is a verbalization of truth, while the word “doctrine” is the internalization of a system of thought or teaching. The former is what one says; the latter is what one thinks. “Doctrine” issues into “word.” These two words are combined in the same manner in 1 Timothy 4:6; 6:3; 2 Timothy 4:2-3; Titus 1:9; and Titus 2:7-8.

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The verse does not, translated correctly, distinguish between laymen and real elders—ones who preach at the church meetings and perform the spiritual responsibilities associated with shepherding the flock. Distinctions among elders come from differences of effort, not ability.

Based on the list of qualifications for all elders from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, *each* was responsible to study and understand the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 1:9) in order to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2, 24) in the church. Our twentieth-century Sunday meetings “prove” that only some of our church leadership—namely “the pastor(s)” —study and teach the Word. But in the first century, and from the New Testament, we see that *every* elder was responsible for studying and teaching believers in the assembly. Consequently, the focus of 1 Timothy 5:17 is a distinction based not on a preaching ministry, but rather based on the intensity of effort spent to accomplish the same tasks.

As the church responds with the financial support that the diligent ones deserve, these men are able to do two things: (1) continue to do what they are doing; and (2) have a teaching and modeling effect on both the body and the other leaders. They are demonstrating, by their lives, what is the high and commendable task of pastoral care. They function as resource staff who teach other leaders how to serve with similar diligence.

Yet it is at this point where some of the greatest mistakes of church leadership are made. Due to a Christian leader’s educational credentials, ministry reputation, or even experience, a church will apply corporation mentality and place this man (or men) over other leaders. The church asks a man to do the shepherding that all of the elders are responsible to do. That is the mistake. But a biblical ministry of shepherding by any man is always limited. Every man can maintain only so many relationships—outside his necessary commitments to his wife and family. The key point of the verse is that the church is to let these diligent elders do their job well by

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giving them the time to minister, rather than making them support themselves and their families. Let those men do their jobs well—and most effectively—and let all the elders continue to shepherd the flock. To misconstrue that text is to overwork a few and deprive the assembly from the combined ministry and wisdom of all the elders who are to pastor and teach the flock.

First Timothy 5:17 remains a strategic verse for the shaping of a biblical philosophy of leadership. It cannot be used as an exegetical club to bludgeon all other passages into submission, but neither can it be disregarded. Acknowledging differences among elders based on diligence rather than extra-biblical credentials reaffirms the New Testament conclusions that there really is only one type of elder.

Equality does not mean sameness among elders any more than in the Body of Christ. A wise church will be able to both recognize the contributions of its individual leaders and hold up all the elders as valuable shepherds given to them by God for the body's welfare. Of course, it also follows that leaders in the church equally understand these principles!

LEADERSHIP: BUILDING UP ONE MAN, OR ONE ANOTHER

The Scriptures speak with forthrightness in matters of leadership and ministry. Issuing from our Lord's model of ministry in Matthew 20, several New Testament authors reaffirm the fact that the church is to be led by men who shepherd the flock of God. The following conclusions follow from these texts.

First, biblical church leadership embraces the dual principles of plurality and parity. A church is to be led by a group, not by an individual. In this group, or board, all are equal. No vote or contribution becomes, by itself, determinative. Each man recognizes a responsibility to contribute to the shepherding of the assembly; he also recognizes the value of each other man on that board for contributions and decisions. Although current opinions differ on

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matters of consensus, we have always believed that unanimity is appropriate for decision-making on the board. If God has brought a man into church leadership, though his dissenting opinion might be a minority opinion, we are committed to waiting for genuine consensus before moving ahead. It may be slower, but we have found it to be honoring to the Lord in our assemblies. This principle of unanimity is less clear in the Scriptures, though, than the principles of plurality and parity.

Second, biblical church leadership is one among, not one over. An elder or pastor in the church is not the quarterback or the head coach. He is a player-coach among other player-coaches. He is a member of the body. He also has additional responsibilities for which he is accountable. But he leads by serving and by guarding the parity of the board.

There is a well-kept secret going through Wall Street. A number of Fortune 500 Corporations have been experimenting with what they call “presidential teams.” That is, they are recognizing that the demands of a corporation on one man may not be the most profitable way to run a business. Someone ought to tell the church. Why is it that in a recent survey, one out of every four pastors is discouraged and ready to quit? In major part, it has to be the demand put on him by the church or by himself, that he has to be super-minister. That does not work in the church. It might not even be working in corporations.

Third, biblical church leadership is able to emphasize unique personal contributions. There is a difference between parity and parrotry. Equality is not sameness. The New Testament recognizes the need for diligence associated with the ministry. It provides recommendations for compensation based on the labor and time requirements of ministry tasks. Yet even these decisions should be made corporately by the leadership and not through individual assessment alone. Plurality of elders does not result in a uniform “Polly want a cracker!”

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

Before finishing the subject of leadership, it would be inappropriate not to add some observations about the place of women in the church. Recognizing that books have been written on this subject and that we have less room here, nevertheless some general observations and two pertinent New Testament passages are in order.

There are currently only two men who do not appreciate women. One of them is dead, and the other one is not yet born. It would be folly to diminish the value and importance of womanhood. In the Old Testament Eve is received by Adam with a joyous shout. Sarah becomes a model godly woman. Zipporah is a woman of courage and quick mind. Miriam brought praise to Yahweh along with Moses. Deborah judged among the nations. Ruth and Esther became examples of spiritual resolve. Widows carry a special place as well.

In the gospels, who are the stable followers of the Lord? Who understand the implications of His teachings on His death? Who provided the support and worship? Who were the first to the tomb? Who is the supreme model of giving and of prayer? It was again women. So it would be pure folly to demean the value of women in both life and ministry.

Given that backdrop, two important passages offer guidelines for leadership and ministry for women. The first is by way of prohibition, the second by way of prescription.

1 Timothy 2:12–14

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, than Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

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In this chapter Paul begins to give guidelines to both men and women concerning proper conduct in the church (1 Tim. 2:8-11). In his letter to Timothy at Ephesus, he gives a clear principle. Women are not to teach or exercise authority over a man. What does this mean? From other word usages, we can conclude that, at least, it means that a woman is not to do the kind of teaching to men that Timothy is commanded to do (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:1-2). That is, when dealing with major doctrines of the church, it is the place of men to teach men. Any activity or responsibility given to a woman that violates this principle is wrong. Likewise, the authority that accompanies the teaching of male leadership is not to be given to women. Although some church situations are less clear, such as when a boy becomes a man, and some Scriptures are hard to place in relation to this principle (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5 with 14:34), nevertheless the principle is clear.

The reasons for this principle are two-fold. The first is the order of creation (1 Tim. 2:13). We should understand and believe this prohibition because of the fact that Adam was created first and then Eve. Even a casual reading of Genesis 2 supports this conclusion. Second, from the order of deception (1 Tim. 2:14). Now whether it is because of vulnerability or as a judgment for Eve's conduct in Genesis 3, women are not to have a place of teaching and authority over a man. The first reason is pre-Fall. The second is post-Fall. Both are supracultural. They tell us that there are boundaries to a woman's ministry in the church that are as applicable today as they were in the first century.

Titus 2:3-5

Likewise, teach the other women to be reverent in the way they live, not as slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and

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pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the work of God.

In the book of Titus, commonly referred to as the “Epistle of Good Works,” Paul writes concerning ministry guidelines. In many senses the book is parallel to 1 Timothy. Paul give Titus things to teach the older men, the younger men, the older women—then he stops. Truths that must be taught the younger women are to be taught by the older women. It seems Paul understands that men have a particular inability to communicate to young women matters vital to marriage, ministry, and godliness. That is to be the job of older women. Further, this is such a worthy ministry task that Paul notes that success at this ministry level will have a direct bearing on the attitudes people have about the Scriptures.

What are the implications of the truths in this passage? In our judgment, men are unable to minister effectively and regularly to women in the way that women are. The last time we checked, the Body of Christ was at least half women. That means that there are major ministry opportunities available for women in the church.

It follows directly from that that there should be staff positions available for women of proved spiritual character in the church. If they are to minister, they need time. That would seem to mean that, unless support comes from a husband or others, it should come from the assembly. Likewise, it seems that churches should respect these servants and co-laborers in the same sense that Paul commended Phoebe (Rom. 16:1).

We have done a double disservice to women in the church in the past. First, we have at times given them teachings and seminars which simply say, “Go get ‘em. You can do it. The world—and the church—is waiting!” But that is simply not true and not fair. It is not true in that churches do not yet value women as they should. It is not fair unless guidelines and boundaries for ministry, from the Scripture, are equally given.

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The second disservice is that we have said at times the opposite of “Go!” We have said, “Stop!” But what does stop mean? We have emphasized 1 Timothy 2:12 without mentioning the Phoebe and the Aquila and Priscilla teams. Scripture is not interested in shouting “Stop” to women. Rather, it says, to both men and women, “If you desire ministry and leadership, that’s good (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 3:1). Now plan out your efforts within the prohibitions and prescriptions of the New Testament.”

The issue at hand concerning the place of women in the church is not ability. If we were to choose our pastor based strictly on communication ability, we would choose . . . Ethel Barrett! Talk about communication! But the issue is the principles of maleness and femaleness laid down from the Garden of Eden to the guidelines for Ephesus. The task of the church is both to believe the guidelines and to hold up our women who co-labor in leadership and ministry as valuable and worthy parts of the Body of Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

A farmer can contain his cows with an electric fence. Though the wires are small, they pack a wallop! When the wires are removed so that the cows can move from one pasture to another, they always balk. In fact, it is sometimes practically impossible to drive them through the opening. Though the obstacle, namely the wire, is no longer there, they rely on habit and fear to resist being moved.

So it is in the church. The fence is down. It packed a wallop called tradition and habit. There is now no reason that God’s people—leaders and members of the body—should not go through it. There may still be some fear. But, some have gone through; others are considering it. Don’t be left behind!