

THOUGHTS ON LEADERSHIP

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NORM YOUNG

SEEKING CHRIST



PUBLISHERS

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FOREWORD

This thought-provoking series of articles on leadership in the church is seemingly simple, yet very profound. In some cases the Scriptures presented will seem radically new to many of us. This is because the ideas presented here do not seem to fit with what is commonly practiced in churches today or what “comes naturally” to mind when we think of human leadership.

Norman Young, the author, has been a diligent student of the Bible for decades, a student of theology and an expert in New Testament Greek. Yet he would be the first one to tell you that this series is not just a product of his study and thoughts. Instead, he would tell you that this series came out of much interaction with other believers on the subject matter, including some who were moved to study these things afresh because of their own personal experiences under leadership as it is often practiced today.

It is hoped that all those who wish to honor Christ and His Word will consider the ideas presented here and have open fellowship with one another about them, examining the Scriptures to see if these things are true. What we see as true should then certainly move us to practice the truth.

Looking at the composite picture presented by these articles, I believe it is true that the precepts put forth here supremely honor Christ's unique Headship, give genuine meaning to the body of Christ as a functioning organism with each member living directly under that Headship, and promotes the experience of Christ the Servant living in us.

I have learned much from this series. It is truly eye-opening and freeing!

Tom Finley

1

GOD HIMSELF IS OUR TRUE LEADER

For the past several months, the Lord seems to have been stirring within my heart a desire to learn, from His Word and from His Spirit, something concerning the role, gift, and function of *leaders* among God's people. By the Lord's grace I feel that some light has been given and some ground gained in this regard.

At a recent prayer meeting among the saints in Wake Forest, a hymn was sung that left a deep impression upon me. The hymn was, *All The Way My Savior Leads Me*. I was touched afresh that all leadership begins with God Himself. He is the *Ultimate Leader* --- *our* Leader --- and He is our example for all leadership.

As global events continue to unfold, it is becoming evident to many that there is much corruption in the leadership of this world. Wicked dictators are wide-spread across the nations, ruling as absolute monarchs.

Despite these evil leaders, our Bible assures us that there is One Who retains His position over all of them. This is God Himself! He is the King of Heaven and of Earth (Daniel 4:37; Psalm 47:2b).

Evil rulers still persist, as allowed by our God (Romans 13:1), but our God preserves, for Himself, the position of Sovereign King over all.

Though Satan holds his own usurping title as the "Ruler of the Authority of the Air" (Ephesians 2:2), our God is above all! Our God and Father has bestowed all authority in Heaven and on Earth to His Son --- our Lord and God --- the Lord Jesus (Matthew 28:18). Our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, has been exalted above all other rulers and authorities (Ephesians 1:20-21).

There is a wonderful chorus which expresses this well:

JESUS IS KING, AND I WILL EXTOL HIM!

GIVE HIM THE GLORY AND HONOR HIS NAME!

HE REIGNS ON HIGH, ENTHRONED IN THE HEAVENS,

WORD OF THE FATHER, EXALTED FOR US!

He is our King, our Absolute Monarch, our "Benevolent Dictator," so to speak. When we get a glimpse of Who He is ---- we, like Isaiah of old, become "undone" --- for our eyes *behold* the King! (Isaiah 6:5).

2

GOD IS OUR LOVING FATHER

While recently musing over the different functions of Christian leadership, I began to consider the role of “fathering” among God’s people.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that they did not have many “fathers” in Christ, though he (Paul) himself was a father to them (1 Corinthians 4:15). Paul was also a father to Timothy, and Paul sent this faithful “son” in the faith to his Corinthian “children.” Paul was truly an example of a spiritual *father* to the saints.

The Scriptures testify, over and over again, to the fatherhood of God. On the one hand, God presents Himself as a Father to all humanity (Ephesians 3:15). But in the strictest sense, God strongly rejects any notion that He is Father of any who have not received His life in the new birth. Jesus told the religious, unregenerate Jews that they were “of their Father, the Devil” (John 8:44).

God claims us believers as His children because we have received His very life (John 1:12-13; 3:6-7). God loves us, protects us, and provides for us, as is so beautifully pictured in the parable in Luke 15:11-32, commonly called “The Prodigal Son,” but

perhaps more accurately called “The Parable of the Loving Father.”

I was personally blessed with a natural father who not only gave me life, he also provided love, protection, and provision. There is one fatherly function that I experienced from my earthly father that I do not often hear much about. This was my father's function of what I call “nudging encouragement.” I was somewhat unsure of myself growing up. I was the youngest, smallest, and the least athletic of my Dad's three boys. As I now look back, I think that it is because of these areas of personal weakness, that I can now perhaps better appreciate the nudging encouragement that I received from my father. Dad would always go with me, stand behind me, and “nudge” me on when I did not personally feel very adequate. His hand of discipline was there, particularly in the younger years, but it was always tempered by his persevering love for me.

My experience with my earthly father gives a vivid picture of our Father God. When we do not quite feel that we can go on, our God is there and says, “You can; I am with you, --- I am your Father!” Our God is a Father of infinite love, protection, provision, discipline (Hebrews 12:6; Proverbs 3:12), and yes, even “nudging encouragement,”

When our hearts are touched by the reality of just *Who* is this God and Father of ours --- the respect and security that we experience is beyond description.

May we all, like the Apostle Paul, be those who “father” others to the faith --- leading them to receive God’s life, nurturing them in God’s Word, and “nudging” them along in their Christian experience.

3

ALL AUTHORITY RESTS IN HIM

Our understanding and usage of modern English can act as a barrier when we seek to understand word meanings in their Scriptural contexts. "Authority" is a word often misunderstood in this way.

In simple terms, "authority" simply means "the legal right" (see John 1:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:4). Strictly speaking, it is God Himself Who holds all of the legal rights. In Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God the Father highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him all authority in the Universe --- commanding rights, governing rights, and ownership (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:21; Philippians 2:9). Thus, at the present time, all authority is at the disposal of our Lord and Savior.

It is Jesus Himself Who administers authority to earthly rulers and governments. Jesus has also administered authority (rights) to His followers over evil forces (Mark 3:14-15; Luke 10:19; Acts 16:16-18), authority to serve the saints, authority to proclaim His Gospel message (Romans 1:1 and 16; Acts 4:12), and authority to use His name in prayer.

The Lord Jesus committed Himself to His followers to be custodians of His name. His Church, His believers, are to function as His true representatives. They are authorized to use that exalted name. His name and authority have been entrusted to us. He has committed Himself to His Church and has provided no other means for completing His purposes on the earth. Does this not invoke in us a sense of sobering responsibility? He has entrusted to *us* such an involvement!

Jesus said that He would give to His overcomers of this present age authority in the future --- the future right to politically govern in the next, coming age of the Kingdom (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21; 12:5; 20:4 & 6).

Although His authority and name have been entrusted to His followers, over sickness and evil forces, it is noteworthy that Jesus has never entrusted specific authority or legal right to local church leaders, to be exercised over the remainder of the saints in the assembly. In fact, Jesus warned against this in His discourse to His disciples (Luke 22:24-26a; Matthew 20:25-26a).

Let's also look for a moment at the matter of *disciplinary* authority. The Lord Himself disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6, 10b, & 11). The Scriptures, likewise, are given to be used by believers for personal correction and instruction (2

Timothy 3:16). However, the idea of local church leaders functioning to discipline, punish, correct, or otherwise adjust the saints is foreign to the New Testament. Such a notion goes against the grain of the teaching and the examples given in the New Testament writings.

Jesus is never said to have given authoritative rights or position to local assembly leaders (that is, to elders/overseers/shepherds) over their fellow-believers. It should be noted at this point that local church leaders are nevertheless to be honored, respected, and followed. Leading ones are to be followed, as *examples*, because of their earned respect and service to the Lord and to His Body --- not by virtue of position or legal right (authority) granted to them by the Lord Jesus or His Holy Spirit.

In the modern English-speaking world, the word “authority” has become narrowed in its scope. It has been narrowed in the direction toward restricting its meaning to notions of lordship or ruling. Today, the word authority most often conveys the idea of dominance, position, and the power to make decisions or give orders. It is unfortunate that this narrowed scope is often used in today’s conversation, to refer to local church leaders. Thus the lordship or ruling ideas of dominance, position, and the power to make decisions or give orders, naturally have been projected upon local church leaders. However, it should be carefully noted that

no such narrowed scope of authority was taught by the New Testament writers, nor was such a notion at all conveyed by the example set by the assembly leaders described on the pages of the New Testament.

4

SAVIOR, LIKE A SHEPHERD LEAD US

(Hymn by Dorothy A. Thrupp/William Bradbury)

A few years ago I had the privilege of visiting Israel. We took a bus ride, towards early evening, up the old Jericho Road on the way to Jerusalem. The bus pulled to the side as we gazed down along the slopes of the countryside. One of the Tour Guides pointed out a scattered flock of sheep wandering along the slopes with a few bedouin shepherds looking after the sheep.

The scenario looked very much like something I had once seen in a movie about Biblical times. As I stared at the scene, I imagined young David the shepherd protecting the sheep from lions and bears.

As I continued pondering, I found myself gazing up into the sky, looking for something that might resemble the Star of Bethlehem. I could picture, in my mind, angels appearing and announcing the birth of the Christ Child.

The Tour Guide impressed upon us that the type of picture we were viewing has remained largely unchanged for thousands of years --- since Biblical times.

The Shepherds we saw were dressed in long robe-like clothing, with turbans wrapped around their heads. It looked like a Biblical Act from a Christmas Pageant; but we were seeing it in real life.

It was very educational and inspiring to watch the lead-shepherd, cane in hand --- an obviously older man --- walking ahead of the sheep through a narrow passage. The younger helpers, in their nomadic garb, spread themselves out toward the rear, behind the sheep, tapping sticks on the ground to prompt the animals forward through the passage way. The sheep were being directed to follow their chief shepherd to the other side of the narrow gap. The younger helpers appeared to be young sons of the chief shepherd.

That whole scene left an unforgettable picture on my heart and mind.

David, in the Old Testament, was a shepherd as a young man. He tended his father's sheep (1 Samuel 16:11; 17:15, and 34). When David ultimately became King of Israel, he again was a shepherd --- but this time not of animals, but of people (whom the Lord likened unto sheep).

David, although he was a shepherd of God's people, also realized that he himself was, in another sense, *simply one of the sheep*.

“We are *His* people and the *sheep* of *His* pasture....” (Psalm 100)

“The Lord is *my* shepherd....He leadeth me....” (Psalm 23)

As the Lord in the Old Testament revealed Himself as a Shepherd of His people, so the Lord Jesus presents Himself in the New Testament as the Shepherd of His new people --- a new flock of sheep (John 10:11, 14, 16 and 27; Hebrews 13:20).

What are the functions or duties of one who is a shepherd of sheep? Certainly a shepherd leads his flock to water, and to good pasture land for feeding and rest. A shepherd also functions to protect the flock from enemy predators.

Our Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, leads us to Himself, Who is Himself the true rest (Matthew 11:28-29); and He leads us to the true spiritual food and drink --- Himself as well (John 6:35, 51, and 63; 7:37-38). In addition, the Lord Jesus is, in His own person, our very refuge and protection from our Adversary, the Devil. The Lord Jesus is truly our Good Shepherd.¹

We as believers are sheep, following the Lord Jesus, our caring Shepherd. There are times, however, in our Christian lives when we ourselves must take on a shepherding role in the lives of other Christians. We are at times called upon to lead, to

nourish, and to provide oversight and protection to other Christian believers. We are called upon to prompt and encourage others to follow their one true Shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

Some Christian brothers are particularly gifted and commissioned by the Holy Spirit to function as under-shepherds of God's people, in the local assembly. These men would be analogous to the young bedouin helpers, taking their position at the rear of the flock, tapping the ground to prompt the sheep to go forward to follow their chief shepherd.

Under-shepherds of the local church congregation have a thankless job. While all saints are admonished in self-denial (Luke 9:23), the under-shepherds are admonished more strongly (Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3). Both Jesus and the Apostle Peter gave strong warnings to those who would function as under-shepherds of His people:

“...The Rulers of the Gentiles lord-it-over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them... *it is not to be so with you....*” [emphasis mine] (Matthew 20:25-26a).

“...Be shepherds of God's flock...*not lording-it-over* those entrusted to you...” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Shepherding of God's people is truly an enormous and sobering responsibility. It takes much discernment and courage to protect the Lord's sheep from spiritual wolves and their destructive teachings. Under-shepherding requires much humbling grace of the Lord in order to labor daily as examples, and to fight against the personal and continuous temptation toward pride and the undervaluation of others.

May we all seek the heart and mind of our loving and caring Shepherd, the Lord Jesus. May we seek to have a proper heart both to shepherd others, and to fully appreciate those whom the Holy Spirit has placed to shepherd us.

¹ There is no picture painted in either the Old or New Testaments of shepherds "beating" or "punishing" sheep. There are secular stories about shepherds breaking lambs legs (and some of these stories have crept into Christian sermons) --- but there is nothing in the Scriptures to paint such a picture as a function or practice of shepherds. New Testament shepherds do not "break legs," or in any way beat or punish God's people, God's sheep.

5

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!

Part One – A Satanic Hierarchy

There has been an evil strategy, initiated in ages past, and designed and implemented by God's Enemy, in order to foment rebellion against God's absolute rulership.

There is a very important distinction between the way that God operates with his servants and the way Satan operates with his subjects. God operates by the *leading* ministry of the Holy Spirit. When God desires for a work to be done, He has the ability lead his servants to the work through an internal "prompting." Because of this, He is able to lead and guide his people as an organic body. Satan does not have this ability.

Satan, because of this deficiency, has developed his own strategy. This strategy involves the Enemy forming his own "hierarchy" or pyramid-shaped structure of rule. This is necessary because Satan must operate by *compulsion* rather than by organically leading the way that God does. By utilizing this pyramid structure of leadership by force, Satan is able to control far larger organized systems than he otherwise could. Such a hierarchy is seen

among wicked spiritual rulers in aerial realms, as is touched upon in Ephesians chapter 6 (vs. 12) --- Satan himself being at the apex, the ruler of the authority of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

Satan has also endeavored to make this same design operate upon the earth among human rulers of this world-system. The Apostle John wrote,

“...The whole world lies in the power of the Evil One.” (1 John 5:19b)

The Wicked One has persisted in forming his own hierarchy or pyramidal structure of earthly rulership (human beings); a key figure, or “puppet” is at the summit, and Satan himself is behind the scenes exercising his own control. This situation has existed from the earliest time of man’s history, beginning shortly after his fall. Satan’s “pyramids” can be seen, ever so vividly, as one reviews the major empires, dynasties, dictatorships, and kingdoms of man throughout recorded history. Satan, as the secretive ruler of this evil, rebellious structure, is a usurper of the rulership that rightfully belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan himself desired to be like the Most High. Then he tempted Adam, enticing him with the same desire and the twisted promise that he (Adam) would be like God, knowing good and evil.

After God's judgment in the Great Flood, the rebellious genetic line of Ham (son of Noah) produced the Tower of Babel (interestingly, and perhaps symbolically, somewhat of a physically pyramid-shaped structure, or Ziggurat). The rebellion at Babel gave birth to essentially every man-centered, man-conjured, religion seen throughout history. So, Satan has strategically extended this evil hierarchy of rule into what has come to be known as *religion*. This religion amounts to nothing more than something that *outwardly* involves worship of God, but in reality, intrinsically promotes quite the opposite --- allegiance and worship of God's Archenemy, the Devil.

A cursory look at each of man's major so-called religions reveals characteristics of this pyramidal hierarchy. If the Evil One can control the "puppet" at the top of the religious pyramid, then he can have total control over the whole extensive structure, all the way down to the seemingly insignificant members at the broad base. And, in fact, this is precisely what he has done in all of the widespread religions of the world. Satan himself was the controller behind all of the religions' founders, and he continues to control the present leaders of each of these false religious systems. This can be seen by examining both the historical founding, and the present organization of such widespread religions as Islam and Mormonism, and can also be recognized

by a careful scrutiny of the occultic so-called “secret societies” such as Freemasonry.

Egyptian and Babylonian paganism, as well as the religions of the east, clearly exhibit this prevailing, devilish deception. The inimical hierarchical pyramid of the Enemy is most vividly seen today in the world’s largest religion, the Roman Catholic Church. The structure, symbols, rites, ceremonies and practices of Roman Catholicism leave a clear and unmistakable trail, tracing back through history, all the way to Babel.¹

Part Two – Lord, Master and Ruler

The Scriptures attest to the fact that Jesus Christ is the true Lord of all (Ephesians 4:5; Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 19:16). However, at the present time, the rulership of this world-system is being directed by Satan (1 John 5:19b). Nevertheless, God has sovereign control over all, and the earthly governing authorities that exist, are under God’s allowance and control (Romans 13:1). One day, the Devil will be ousted from his occupied position. The Lord Jesus will take back His rightful, visible position of rule over this earth from the clutches of His usurping Enemy.

Until that time of Jesus’ visible rulership, however, Jesus is doing a secret, *spiritual* work in the lives of His believers. This work involves the

inner transformation of His followers, preparing them to share with Him in His future rulership. He will reveal this rulership when He bodily returns to the earth and makes known to all that He is, in fact, the KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:16). We as believers do not yet see the Lord Jesus in His open and manifested rulership (Hebrews 2:8). In the realm of the Spirit, it is nonetheless true, that He is, in fact, at this moment, ruling and reigning. It is also true in the spiritual realm that we have been, in truth, rescued out from Satan's "authority of darkness" and have been "transferred into the kingdom of God's Beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). This is a present spiritual reality.

The Lord Jesus rules our outward circumstances; this much is true. However, His purpose for us at the present time, as members of the Body of Christ, is that He would rule in our inner being by His Spirit (1 John 2:27). The Lord desires to rule each of us *individually*. Jesus does not need to rule, as the evil one does, by way of an authoritative hierarchy or pyramid. Rather, he commands and instructs each one of us individually. This means that each of us is individually and personally privileged and responsible to hear from the Lord for ourselves, and to heed His word. We cannot blame anyone or any outside party (any "pastor," "priest," or "elder,") --- who may be construed as an earthly mediator, "up the pyramidal ladder," so to speak --- for our not

hearing or responding to the Lord's speaking. With respect to hearing and responding to the Lord, the "buck stops with us." What an awesome privilege, yet sobering responsibility, this is!

A word of caution should be given here. Because our privilege and responsibility is toward the Lord individually, and not by way of someone "above" us in position --- it is easy to become independent, self-reliant, and arrogant concerning the Lord's speaking to us through other saints. We need to be careful to avoid falling into this error, as the other believers are of vital importance to our Christian life, and even to our ability to hear from the Lord properly. This word of caution will be addressed in more detail in future chapters, especially as we look at the related area of *Headship*.

Part Three – His Lordship in Our Lives

As Lord and Ruler of our lives as Christians, the Lord achieves His goals in us in three ways. First, as He works in us inwardly, we consecrate ourselves to Him. This begins as we present ourselves to Him as if to be laid alive across a burning altar of sacrifice (Romans 12:1). This consecration has been beautifully expressed by the final verse and chorus of a hymn by our late Brother Howard Higashi:

LORD, TAKE MY LIFE, I PRESENT IT TO YOU!
IF I HAD A THOUSAND, I'D POUR ALL ON YOU!
NOTHING WITHHOLDING, MY ALL IS FOR YOU.
MY LIFE AND MY FUTURE, DEAR LORD, IS ALL FOR
YOU.
YOUR LOVE CONSTRAINS ME TO GIVE MY ALL TO YOU.
LORD, I CAN'T HELP IT; MY HEART IS DRAWN TO YOU!
OH, WHAT A PRIV'LEGE! I GIVE MYSELF TO YOU!
I LOVE YOU, LORD, DEAREST LORD. I LOVE YOU! I
JUST LOVE YOU.

Our consecration grows as we feed upon the Word by the Spirit (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 6:5a; 5:12b-14; John 6:63); thus are we strengthened in our inner being (Ephesians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 4:16).

A second way in which the Lord exercises His rule over us, and achieves His goals in us, is through His arranging of our circumstances or environment. This is the Lord's discipline (Hebrews 12:6, 10b, & 11). Through the Lord's hand of discipline, in ordering and allowing what happens to us, our outer man, or fallen self is broken down (2 Corinthians 4:16), and we begin to bow under His rule for our lives. The Lord, as our Ruler, will use whatever means necessary in His discipline to reach His end in our lives, conforming us to His image. Our friends may become alienated from us; we may lose

our job; we may suffer family hardship or physical infirmities; we may be slandered or misunderstood; our reputation may be tainted. All of these areas are outside of our direct control, but are under the control and direction of an all-knowing and all-caring Lord; they are brought about, or allowed, by His sovereign intention, to gain His will in our lives.

A third way in which the Lord rules our living is by directly regulating us from within. He does this by the inner “anointing” --- His Spirit who abides within each of us (1 John 2:20 & 27). As we obey His inner speaking by His anointing, a *peace* arises within our hearts, arbitrating and confirming that we are, in fact, following the Lord’s rule from within (Colossians 3:15a).

By these three processes --- our consecration, His loving discipline, and His regulating us from within, --- Jesus exercises his rulership in our lives, and we experience Him as Lord.

Part Four – The Uniqueness of His Rule

The Lord Jesus is a jealous Master --- He does not, at this time, share His rule with any. No member (or members) of the Body of Christ, in this age in which we live, is vested with a position of lordship or ruling. Jesus had strong words of rebuke toward those in Christian leadership who would attempt to usurp or wield lordship over other believers (Matthew 20:25-

26a – see below). The temptation for usurping Christ's lordship is particularly great among the leaders of the local assembly. The Apostle Peter exhorts church elders in this regard:

“But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, You know that the leaders of the nations lord-it-over them, and the great ones wield authority over them. *It shall not be so among you...*” -Matthew 20:25-26a

“The elders among you I exhort --- I, who am a co-elder, a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed --- shepherd the flock *of God*, which is among you, exercising oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for base gain but eagerly; not as lording-it-over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples of the flock. And after the Chief Shepherd is revealed, you shall receive the unfading laurel of glory.” -1 Peter 5:1-4

Four very highly misunderstood and improperly translated Bible passages have been often used to cloud the issue, confusing leadership with lordship

or rulership. These passages are: 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:5; and Hebrews 13:17a (see below). It should be noted at this point that *every instance* in the various translations of the New Testament where the English word “rule” has been used to translate the Greek, when referring to local church leaders, --- the word could be more accurately translated, without exception, using the English word “lead” instead of “rule.” There do not appear to be any New Testament sections of Scripture that, properly translated, convey the notion that local church leaders are to rule, or are to be obeyed, simply by virtue of their position. Leadership in the New Testament is very much *functional*, not positional. There is no hierarchy among the community of saints --- no place of lordship or ruling among the members of the Body of Christ.

“Let the elders who lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and teaching.” -1 Timothy 5:17

“But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, be mindful of those *laboring, leading, and warning* you in the Lord. Highly esteem them, in love, because of their work.” -1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

“Now if anyone does not know how to *lead* his own household, how will he *care for* a church of God?” -1 Timothy 3:5

“Allow yourselves to *be persuaded* by those *leading* you, and *yield* to them,” - Hebrews 13:17a [Note: *Persuade* vs. Obey; *Lead* vs. Rule; and *Yield* vs. Submit. The majority of English versions miss these subtle, but very significant, differences in translation].

¹ For a more thorough explanation of these topics please see G.H. Pember's *The Great Prophecies: Volume 3 The Church, the Churches, and the Mysteries* (Pember, 1998) and *Mystery Babylon the Great* (Pember, Mystery Babylon the Great and The Mysteries and Catholicism, 1988)

6

HEAD OVER ALL THINGS

“Lordship” (Rulership) and “Headship” are related but not synonymous terms. Lordship demands obedience, as with a master and servant; it involves more of an outward or objective relationship between two separate parties.

Headship, on the other hand, is a more *inward* or subjective connection. The relationship of members of a body to the head is, not so much one of *obedience* as it is one of organic *submission*. The body parts naturally submit (or are *under subjection*) to the head.

Christ Himself is, of course, the Head of the mystical Body of Christ, the church. Christ is the Head, and the believers are parts, or “members,” of this Body.

An illustration of our relationship to Christ as Head can be seen in the husband-wife marital bond. A husband and wife are *one* (Ephesians 5:31 and 28). The husband is spoken of as being the head of the wife, and the wife is instructed to submit (Ephesians 5:23-24). The husband is not *lord* of his wife, and she is not specifically commanded, strictly speaking, to obey him, as if he were her lord.

Marriage is more of an inward, intrinsic relationship, than it is one of “master and slave,” or “lord and servant.” As head of the wife, the husband loves and gives himself up for her; the wife, in turn, maintains an attitude of submission and respect towards her husband (Ephesians 5:23-25 and 33).

When we obey Jesus as our Lord, then we do what He says, with no questions asked. He is, in fact, our Lord! We are His servants, and our goal is to hear what He says, and to obey His commands.

But our connection with Christ as our Head, is more of an inward one. We submit ourselves to Christ, our Head, in much more of an internal and intrinsic way. The head of a physical body does not merely command a body part and say, “Hand, pick up that object.” The head merely conceives the notion, and the hand spontaneously begins to carry out the desire of the head --- most often in coordination with other body members. Each of us, as a member of Christ’s mystical, corporate Body, has a direct connection with the Head, and praise the Lord for that. But it is also true that each of us is connected to *one another*, to other members of the Body of Christ. Christ’s Headship (His will, His word, His direction, etc.) is supplied and made known to the Body through *every supplying joint* (i.e. every member), not strictly from the Head directly to me, or through me (Ephesians 4:15-16). Each and every member of His Body is precious, valuable, and

useful to the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:14 and 27; see also vss. 22-24), and it is through all of them that He chooses to make His Headship known to all of the other members (see footnote).¹ There is no place for independence, self-reliance, and arrogance among the members of the Body of Christ in their interrelationships with one another; and this especially holds true for those members who function in leadership roles.

¹(Taken from the Ministry of W. Nee, published as a Daily Devotional by Christian Fellowship Publishers):

Rise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. Acts 9.6.

What the Lord meant by this was: I will not tell you what you are to do, but somebody else will do so. The Lord used someone else to tell Paul. This is a revelation of the body of Christ. On the first day of Paul's salvation, the Lord revealed to him the law or ***principle of the body***. Though Paul is to be a vessel mightily used by the Lord, the Lord nevertheless uses *other people* to help him. Hence let us never think we do not need to depend on others as though we are to get everything directly from God alone. True, this is not meant to teach us to follow other people blindly, but it does admonish us not to entertain such a lofty attitude wherein we believe we by ourselves may receive the word of the Lord and solve all problems singlehandedly. [italicized and emboldened emphases mine.]

So, we have seen the distinction between “headship” and “lordship,” and how both of these concepts relate, in their unique ways, to our relationship with our Lord Jesus. Jesus is our “Lord” in that He is our Master to whom we render absolute obedience. Jesus is the organic “Head” of His Body, the Church, in that He makes the decisions and we, the many members spiritually respond to Him with heart-felt attitudes of submission.

While there are certain human interactions in which these concepts of lordship and headship do apply (as we saw, the relationship of husband and wife is one of “headship”), it is imperative that we see that relationship of the leaders of the local assembly to the rest of the saints is *not* mentioned or described in the New Testament as being one of either headship or lordship. The notion of leaders as heads or lords is a false one, despite the sad fact that it is widely held among Christians today. Jesus Christ is clearly depicted in the Scriptures as being the *unique* Head (Colossians 1:18a), as well as our *one* true Lord (Ephesians 4:5). Jesus warned His disciples against the sin of worldly hierarchy and the oppressive use of “position.” The Apostle Peter was among those whom Jesus gave this warning. Apparently grasping well Jesus’ words of warning, Peter himself later warns the local church leaders (elders) against usurping the position of Head by

controlling, and dealing heavy-handedly with the saints (1 Peter 5).

7

ELDERSHIP

Throughout the Scriptures, throughout the course of human history, and across the globe --- there has been a universal honor and deference given to those of advanced years. The Lord Himself is exalted as the *Ancient of Days* (Daniel 7:9), and Jesus is spoken of as our *Elder Brother* (Hebrews 2:11; Romans 8:29; John 20:17). For most of human existence, there has been high respect and value placed upon older people.

Older ones, or *elders*, have been recognized for their wisdom, experience, history of dedication, and ability to counsel or advise (Deuteronomy 32:7).

Elders, in the Old Testament, are mentioned with respect to the Nation of Israel (Exodus 19:7; 24:1). Elders are also mentioned with respect to the cities of the Gentiles (Genesis 50:7; Numbers 22:7; Joshua 9:11).

The Jews of the New Testament had their elders (Mark 14:43; Matthew 15:2; Luke 7:3), and the Christian churches are mentioned as having recognized elders as well (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17; James 5:14).

Elders among the New Testament believers can be viewed in three categories:

1. Older ones (in age):
 - Men: 1 Peter 5:5
 - Women: Titus 2:3-5
2. Appointed leaders among the mature ones
 - Titus 1:5b
 - Acts 14:23
3. Appointed leaders who labor in word and teaching:
 - Thessalonians 5:12-13 – “Now, brothers and sisters, we ask you to appreciate those who work hard among you, who *lead you* in the Lord and teach you. Respect them with a very special love because of the work they do.” (NCV;ICB)
 - 1 Timothy 5:17 – “The *elders who lead* the church well should receive double honor, especially those who work hard by speaking and teaching.” (NCV;ICB)

It behooves all of the saints, in the local gathering of believers, to recognize, honor, listen to, consult, and yield to the elders, those older in years and maturity,

and those who function in a leadership capacity. A common phrase that expresses much wisdom:

“Respect your elders!”

8

OVERSIGHT

An *overseer* is one who “keeps an eye on things” with respect to the local church. The overseer does this under the direction of the Lord’s leading, and out of love and concern for the welfare of the local expression of Christ’s Body. Overseers must be careful, however, not to tread too far in this direction. They must be careful to avoid keeping an eye on others’ personal affairs. This is called “meddling” (1 Peter 4:15), and is an all-too-common snare and sin among God’s people.

The terms “elders,” “overseers,” and “shepherds” --- referring to *undershepherds* --- are used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe church leaders. A few passages of New Testament Scripture show this to be true:

Acts 20:17 and 28 – “Now from Miletus [i.e. Malta] Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him the *elders* of the church....Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the *flock*, in which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God....” (ASV).

1 Peter 5:1-3 – “The *elders* among you I exhort *shepherd* the *flock* of God which is among you, exercising the *oversight*....” (ASV).

Titus 1:5b and 7 – “... appoint *elders* in every city... for the *overseer* must be blameless....” (ASV).

The Lord Jesus is our Elder, our Shepherd, and our Overseer. Jesus is, in a very real sense, our Elder Brother (Hebrews 2:11; Romans 8:29; John 20:17). He is our Good Shepherd (John 10:11); our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Our Lord Jesus is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25).

Satan, our Enemy, reveals himself as a roaring lion, seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). He and his deceiving followers are also seen as snatching and scattering wolves (John 10:12; Acts 20:29-30).

On the one hand, Jesus assures us of His ever-available voice of direction, and that He holds us in His hand, never to be snatched away from eternal life (John 10:27-28). On the other hand, the Holy Spirit warns the church leaders, through the Apostle Paul, of their protecting role against coming wolves who are bent on destroying the flock and twisting the truth (Acts 20:28-30).

Jesus watches over (“oversees”) us; He is our Overseer, in the real sense of the word. Local

church leaders also function to oversee and protect the believers. In addition, each of the saints may take the initiative and, under the Lord's direction, look out for (or "oversee") the needs of others. But all of the brothers and sisters must be careful, though, making sure they do not tread too far in this direction of "over-seeing" --- so as to avoid the all-too common sin of meddling in others' personal affairs.

9

SUBMISSION, OBEDIENCE, AND YIELDING

Part One – Application to All Believers

Jesus was the prime example of submission, obedience, and yielding (Philippians 2:5-8).

Scripture Reading:

-James 4:7 – “Subject yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (Darby)

-Romans 13:1 – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” (ESV)

-1 Peter 2:13-15 – “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing

right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.” (NASB)

-Ephesians 5:21 – “Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.” (ASV)

Submission (being in subjection) and obedience are closely related ideas in the New Testament. Christians are taught to submit first and foremost to God (James 4:7). Obedience to God is emphasized in multiple contexts. Christian believers are instructed to submit to one another, and particularly to those laboring and serving (1 Corinthians 16:15-16). Christians are also taught to subject themselves to human institutions and government leaders (1 Peter 2:13-15; Romans 13:1). Young believers are exhorted to submit to older ones (1 Peter 5:5). Submission and obedience applies to family relationships --- wives to husbands, children to parents (Ephesians 5:22 and 6:1).

Finally, Christian brothers and sisters are encouraged to allow themselves to be persuaded by local leaders, yielding to them.

-Hebrews 13:17a – “Allow yourselves to be *persuaded* by those *leading* you, and *yield* to them,....” [Again, note: *Persuade* vs. Obey; *Lead* vs. Rule; and *Yield* vs. Submit].

This involves a *yielding to persuasion* rather than a blind obedience and submission. It should be noted that there is to be a “leading” relationship between local leaders and saints --- as opposed to a “ruling” one. The above verse (Hebrews 13:17a), properly understood, best expresses Biblical leadership in the local assembly.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 of this work, although Christians are, in fact, disciplined by the Lord Himself (see Hebrews chapter 12) --- although Christians are, in addition, corrected and instructed by the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16) --- and, although Christians are exhorted to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), there is no mention of local church leaders functioning to discipline, punish, or correct the saints. Such a notion is not present in the New Testament Scriptures --- neither by way of direct instruction, nor by way of example.

Part Two – A Word to Leaders

The Holy Spirit instructs us in Ephesians chapter four, that the gifted servers (or “ministers”) --- i.e. Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds (or “Pastors”) and Teachers --- were given by the ascended Lord Jesus to His church (the Body of Christ) --- for a specific, primary purpose. And what is that purpose? The primary purpose that Christ gave these gifted-ones to His church, is expressly

stated to be: "...the maturing of the saints [i.e. the members of the Body of Christ]."

The Lord had a secondary purpose for this maturing. This further purpose is also expressly stated in Ephesians chapter four. This secondary purpose is, "the work of serving" --- the saints are to be "matured" for "the work of serving."

Finally, Jesus had a third, ultimate goal in mind. This ultimate purpose is the spiritual, edification, (ie. the "building-up") of this corporate, many-membered, Body of Christ.

-Ephesians 4:11-12 – "And He [the ascended Christ] gave some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, and some Shepherds and Teachers for the maturing of the saints, for the work of serving, for the building-up of the Body of Christ."

So, to reiterate, the ultimate goal of our ascended Lord's "gifting" is the building-up of the Body of Christ. That is done directly by the *serving of all of the saints*.

How precious is the purpose of our Lord! The job of the gifted-ones is to help the saints to mature.

A main objective in this maturing, is the increased dependence upon the Lord's guidance within. Discerning overseers (or workers) can, at times,

sense the Lord's hand and working in the lives of certain saints, particularly timid ones, or ones reluctant to step out in obedience to the Lord's prompting. In such situations, the shepherding ones can, under the Lord's direction, "nudge" or "encourage" these saints to step out in obedience to the Lord.

However, we should be clear that it is not the job of gifted-ones or leaders to select "tasks of service," or "areas of ministry" for individual believers, nor is it their job to "assign duties" or to "hear from God" for other saints. Assigning areas of ministry (service) is the job of Christ the Head, made known directly and inwardly to the believer, through the Holy Spirit. In a personal letter, Tom Finley phrased it very well: "...a guiding principle in true leadership is for the leader to always point the saint to deeper fellowship with Christ Himself and His headship over the individual....Leadership is practiced in error when it makes the saint dependent upon (looking to) the leader, instead of more dependent upon Christ...."

It is very much in order for a leader (either on the Mission Field, or in the local gathering) to exhort saints to be diligent to the service committed to them by the Lord. The Apostle Paul demonstrated this in encouraging young Archippus to "...take heed to the task of service that was committed to him by the Lord...." (Colossians 4:17). But leaders must be very careful to avoid "playing the Holy Spirit" in

pushing saints to do some specific ministry. The saints must only get this kind of direct guidance and direction from the Lord Himself.

10

QUALIFICATIONS

There seems to be three root qualifications for any believers who aspire to leadership.

#1 – Must be a Believer:

-Romans 8:9b – “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him.”

This qualification seems to be obvious, but unfortunately outside, secular, and worldly areas of accomplishment and rank are often mistakenly viewed as crossing over, or as being transferable to God’s Church. This, in my view, is a grave error. These areas of accomplishment include:

- Social status
- Education
- Success
- Achievement
- Wealth
- Having an understanding of human relations and culture

- Training of principles of psychology, sociology, and behavior management

Jesus said, "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63 ASV). Of the saints in Corinth the Apostle Paul asked, "Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Nothing that comes from the sinful, old nature is of any use in building up God's spiritual house.

#2 – Must be Spiritual:

-1 Corinthians 2:14 –"But he who is governed by the soul does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for to him they are foolishness --- he is not able to know them because they are spiritually discerned."

On this topic, Brother Watchman Nee phrased it better than I ever could:

“ IF A PERSON CANNOT SPEAK BEFORE GOD SPEAKS, CANNOT MOVE EXCEPT GOD MOVES FIRST; IF HE MUST LOOK TO GOD, WAIT AND DEPEND ON HIM, THEN THAT PERSON AND THAT ACTION ARE *SPIRITUAL*... SELF-ANALYSIS WILL NOT ONLY FAIL TO SHOW US THE REALITY, IT WILL EVEN CREATE SPIRITUAL PARALYSIS.

REAL SEEING AND UNDERSTANDING COMES ONLY FROM GOD'S ILLUMINATION...WE THEREFORE DO NOT NEED TO ASK OURSELVES QUESTIONS...WE NEED TO...ASK GOD TO CAUSE HIS WORD TO SHINE IN US, FOR THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND MOST EFFECTIVE.” (W. NEE DAILY DEVOTIONAL).

#3 – Must Exhibit Humility and Self-Denial:

These two are related.

- Humility – the realization of personal lack of resources (“I myself cannot...” “I do not have what it takes...”)
- Self-Denial – refusing to yield or give over to the fallen nature any recognition, or any ground for its expression.

Andrew Murray stated that all Christian virtues are summed up in humility:

“HUMILITY IS NOT ONE OF MANY GOOD CHARACTER TRAITS; IT IS THE ROOT OF ALL OF THEM....

Watchman Nee said that all of the items of the fruit of the Spirit are just different ways of expressing selflessness and self-denial:

“THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT... ARE NONE OTHER THAN *SELFLESS* ACTS...*LOVE* IS LOVING OTHERS WITHOUT THINKING OF SELF...*JOY* IS LOOKING AT GOD IN SPITE OF SELF...*PATIENCE* IS DESPISING ONE’S OWN HARDSHIP...*PEACE* IS DISREGARDING ONE’S LOSS...*GENTLENESS* IS OVERLOOKING ONE’S RIGHTS...*HUMILITY* IS FORGETTING ONE’S MERITS...*TEMPERANCE* IS THE SELF UNDER CONTROL...AND *FAITHFULNESS* IS SELF-RESTRAINT. AS WE EXAMINE EVERY CHRISTIAN VIRTUE, WE WILL DISCERN THAT OTHER THAN BEING DELIVERED FROM SELF, A BELIEVER HAS NO OTHER VIRTUE.” (W. NEE DAILY DEVOTIONAL)

Positive Qualifications

The Scriptures give us some qualifications that must be met for any believer who is aspiring to leadership within the local assembly. Most of these qualifications are in the letters of the Apostle Paul to his co-workers Titus (specifically in Titus chapter 1) and Timothy (specifically in 1 Timothy chapter 3). According to the Word of God, leaders must be:

- Self-controlled
- Forbearing/Yielding
- Faithful in all things

- Sober
- Reasonable/Rational/Sensible
- Well-ordered
- Devout
- Just/Fair/Righteous
- Friend of virtue (“lover of good”)
- Reputable
- Above reproach
- Blameless
- A Steward of God
- Holding firmly the truth
- Skillful to teach
- Able to contradict those who contradict the truth
- Tested
- Faithful in marriage
- Family leader
- Transparent/Forthright
- Friendly to strangers
- Open and honest (vs. inward and secretive)

Negative Disqualifications

Likewise, the Scriptures give some disqualifications for leadership. Again, many of these are found in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. Some disqualifications are also found in Matthew 20:25-26. A leader, according to these passages, ought not to be:

- A new convert
- Self-pleasing (arrogant)
- One who “lords-it-over” others
- Quarrelsome/Argumentative
- Pugnacious (belligerent, combative, violent, a bully)
- Double-tongued
- Slanderous
- Financially-focused (Money-loving)
- Under bondage (to alcohol, pride, sin, etc.)

Two Scripture passages which speak well regarding these qualifications and disqualifications are:

-1 Timothy 3:4-5 – “[An overseer must] lead his own household well, in respectful manner keeping his children submissive. For if anyone does not know how to direct his own household, how will he care for a church of God?”

-Matthew 20:25-26; 23:8 – “But Jesus called [the twelve] to Him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the nations lord-it-over them, and the great ones exercise authority over them. It will not be so among you....’ ‘For *all ye are brethren.*’”

Again, Brother Nee explained it well:

“IT IS NOT ONLY UNSCRIPTURAL, BUT ALSO A VIOLATION OF THE COMMAND OF THE LORD TO HAVE A RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY....WE SHOULD FAITHFULLY SERVE THE LORD AND SEEK TO PLEASE HIM ONLY. IT IS SINFUL TO ENTERTAIN THE THOUGHT OF GAINING A HIGHER POSITION THROUGH SERVICE.” (W. NEE DAILY DEVOTIONAL).

Again, Hebrews 13:17a, properly translated, expresses this idea perfectly:

-Hebrews 13:17a – “Allow yourselves to be *persuaded* by those *leading* you, and *yield* to them....”

I would encourage any believers who find themselves directed by the Lord toward leadership, to prayerfully labor over the list of Positive Qualifications and Negative Disqualifications for

leadership in Titus Chapter One and First Timothy Chapter Three (listed above). But I would also say, avoid the temptation to treat these chapters as a simple “chart” or “check list” for one to set out to achieve. Rather, seeking the Lord for His in-wrought virtues of humility and self-denial should be the goal, not only of all Christians, but especially of those who are being called toward leadership.

11

DECISION-MAKING

Part One – “Who’s Running This Show?”

While growing up, I had the blessed opportunity of working with my father, on a few occasions, in his rather rugged landscaping business. (My two older brothers were much more “blessed” than I --- as they worked with Dad for longer than I did.)

Our father was old school. Once on the job, he became a rather tough task-master. According to Dad, “There’s got to be a boss on every job,” and whenever any questions would arise as to just who, in fact, was in charge --- a direct and simple reply by Dad, in the form of a question, would stop all mouths. “Who’s runnin’ this show?” Dad would ask. We all would get the message. Dad’s motto was, “You’ve got to take charge, to get the job done!”

My father was a bit hard --- no, I’m being kind --- He was a bit of a dictator! But, in fairness to Dad, I must say that he was a “benevolent” dictator (but a dictator, nevertheless). His ruling was always tempered with overwhelming kindness. He was clearly “the boss,” but his employees (often his sons or other relatives) respected and loved him.

For several years I ran a private business, and I am now working at a Federal Institution. Over these past several years, I have seen over and over again how Dad's way of running things, not only works, but is often the most efficient way to accomplish a task at hand.

In the secular world, and in running a personal business, this way may be viewed as acceptable, the "end justifying the means." That is, the end result of more efficient productivity, justifies (or makes acceptable) the means of "taking the reins," "bossing around," and "getting the job done."

In Christian community, however, the adage "the end justifies the means" *never* applies. Yes, God is doing something --- *He* is trying to get something done, but there are no "bosses" down here. There is only *One* Lord, *One* Master, *One* Ruler, *One* "Boss," *One* Head. Thus, there is only *One* Decision-Maker!

I recently heard a series of messages on leadership, recorded a few years back, by Brother Stephen Kaung. Our brother repeatedly stated a particular phrase in those messages, and this phrase continues to nudge me to this day. When addressing his fellow-laborers in the gospel and ministers at various local assemblies, the phrase that this seasoned saint would use was, "Brothers, it's not your church." We all can sympathize with the temptation to think that we know best or that we

ourselves can solve whatever issues come up among God's people. But to this day I can still hear the voice of our brother meekly, but boldly saying, "It's not your church." Among and within the gatherings of His people, God indeed has a great many servants and he delights to use them all for His purposes. But we cannot forget that there is only *One* Head. Whatever service or leadership capacity that we get called to, we must always remember *whose* church it really is. Brothers, it's not our church.

Part Two – It's a Body Matter

I grew up just outside of Detroit, Michigan --- at one time the production capital of America (or perhaps of the world!). Engrained in my thinking --- and I'm finding that it is engrained in many others' also --- is what I will call the "production mentality."

The reader will soon find that the stance that I am presenting in this discussion cuts across the grain of this mentality of "I can do it," "get it done," and "there's got to be a boss on every job." But I would indulge all readers to prayerfully read over the following verses and to ask the Lord to prepare their hearts for the second half of this "thought on leadership," --- *decision-making*.

Scriptures:

-Hebrews 13:17a – “Allow yourselves to be *persuaded* by those *leading* you, and *yield* to them,...

-Philippians 1:1 and 2:2 – “Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.... Make my joy full that you(pl) be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Introductory Words:

It is interesting to note to whom the books of the New Testament were addressed. There were a few books that were addressed to specific individuals, like with Luke’s gospel and the book of Acts, or the letters of Paul to Philemon, Titus, and Timothy. Others were written to more general audiences, as with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and the more general epistles of James, Peter, and Jude.

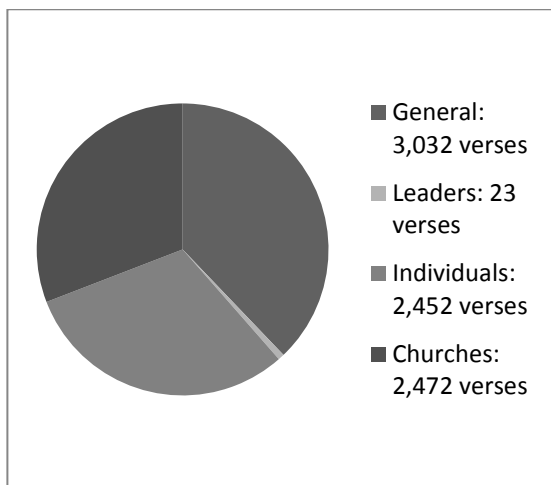
However, the thirteen Pauline Epistles, along with Hebrews, were written to *churches*, including all of the attending members. These fourteen New Testament books contain the bulk of the instruction to believers meeting corporately as local assemblies. See, for example, the introduction to the letter to the

Romans: “To all God’s loved ones, called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). Or notice his introductions in 1 and 2 Corinthians: “To the assembly of God which is in Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1).

So we can see that the New Testament Scriptures were written directly to Christian believers --- very often to *assemblies* of believers. The point to be noted, is that a very small portion of the New Testament specifically addressed local assembly leaders, per se. Most was written to all of the saints.

There seems to be just two small portions of the entire New Testament that were specifically addressed to local assembly leaders. The first is Acts 20:17-35; the Apostle Paul wrote a word of instruction and warning to the elders at Ephesus. The other portion is 1 Peter 5:1-4; Peter wrote a strong word of exhortation specifically to church elders.

So, the bulk of the writings of the New Testament were addressed to *all* of the Christian believers, rather than to a select few in *leadership* roles in the local assembly. The following chart illustrates just how little of the New Testament is addressed specifically to church leaders, versus the amounts written to entire assemblies:



Keeping this key point in mind, let's look at a few specific verses in order to bring into sharper focus just how decision-making was done in the New Testament assembly.

Example One:

-Matthew 18:17 and 20 – “And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to *hear the church* also, let him be unto thee as a Gentile and a Publican... For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (ASV)

In Matthew chapter eighteen, Jesus gave instructions to a disciple who was offended by another Christian believer. He said to go to the disciple's offender alone. If no results, then he must approach him with one or two additional saints. If still no results, the matter must be taken to the *local assembly*. If the offending one continues to refuse to listen, he is to be excommunicated.

It should be noted here that it was upon the grounds of the offender's refusal to hear the *collective assembly*, that he was removed from fellowship. Why? Because Christ's Headship and Authority are expressed through the *collective body*! ---- "Where two or three are gathered together...there *I am* in the midst..."

Nothing is spoken here with respect to local church leaders as the ones making the decision to excommunicate the offender. It is the local assembly itself to whom the offender refuses to listen, and it is by the local assembly that the offender is to be thus cast out of fellowship.

The decision is made (and honored by God Himself - 18:18) by the *assembly itself* --- not by a select few. This decision, --- one involving church discipline ---- is clearly a corporate one.

Example Two:

-1 Corinthians 1:1-2a; 5:4a, 13b –
“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, *unto the church* of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *ye being gathered together*...Put away the wicked man from among yourselves.” (ASV)

In First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul wrote to the assembly at Corinth concerning a Christian brother living in immorality. The church had been apparently doing nothing about the situation, and this was damaging to the Lord's testimony. Paul exhorted the church to, “Put away the wicked man from among yourselves.” Note that Paul, in his letter, was addressing the *entire assembly* --- “Paul...to the church of God that is in Corinth...” (1 Corinthians 1:1,2). He was exhorting them (the entire assembly) to excommunicate the immoral brother. It was the duty of the *assembly* to decide and execute such a decision. It was not the job or responsibility of the local leaders, nor the job of the Apostle himself (5:4a, 13b). This is another illustration of decision-making (again, involving

church discipline) being commanded to be done corporately.

Example Three:

-Acts 6:1-6 – “Now in those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily food distribution. And the twelve called together *the whole community of disciples* and said, “...Select among yourselves seven... whom we will designate over this duty...and what [the apostles] said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen..., Philip..., Prochorus..., Nicanor..., Timon..., Parmenas..., and Nicolas....*they* had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.”

In a similar way, the Apostles in Acts chapter six exhorted the local saints to deal with the practical problem of food administration to the Grecian widows. The Apostles neither directly took care of the situation themselves, nor did they exhort the local elders to remedy the situation. Instead, the Apostles exhorted the whole group of local saints to

take care of the problem. The local saints acted to remedy the situation by designating seven faithful local men to serve and correct the problem. This is another example to illustrate that practical *decision-making* involves *all* of the saints of a local assembly, and is not restricted to local elders.

Example Four:

-Acts 15:22a and 25 – “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, *with the whole church*, to choose men out of their company...it seemed good to us, *having become of one mind*, to choose men to send to you...”

In Acts chapter fifteen, a major problem was presented to the saints in Antioch of Syria. Some brothers had come from Judea, teaching that Judaistic circumcision was required for salvation (15:1). The *local assembly of saints* in Antioch chose and sent Paul, Barnabas and others to go to Jerusalem to speak with the Apostles and Elders there concerning the problem (15:2-3).

When those from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by *the whole assembly*, including the Apostles and Elders (15:4). After much deliberation, Paul and Barnabas addressed the *whole assembly* at Jerusalem. James also spoke, addressing the group, and gave his *judgment* (Gk.

κρίνω – vs. rendering his *decision*, as some translations would have it. - 15:19). The *whole church* (with the Apostles and Elders) reached a consensus to send some from Jerusalem (Judas and Silas) back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to share with the saints there regarding the fellowship that had occurred among all those who had just met in Jerusalem (15:22 and 25).

On arriving back in Antioch, Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas gathered together the congregation, and delivered to them the message that the Holy Spirit had made known, through the saints who had just deliberated together at Jerusalem. Just like what happened in Jerusalem, the *congregation of saints* at Antioch rejoiced and, after much encouragement, released the brothers to return to Jerusalem (15:28, 30, 31, and 33).

A careful look at Acts fifteen --- particularly viewing those phrases highlighted above in the preceding three paragraphs --- reveals an important truth: It is the assembly, the church, the congregation of believers, through whom the Holy Spirit makes His will known to all. It is through the deliberation of the *corporate assembly* --- not the ruling of a sub-group of local leaders --- that the Holy Spirit's decisions are arrived at and executed in the local church.

Role of Leaders:

So, if “decision making” is done by the corporate assembly, what role do local church leaders perform in this process? In short, local leaders are to be involved, but not in a “ruling” sort of way. Rather, the leaders are to be counselors and advisors, ones who *help* the saints to contact the Lord for His direct leadership. They assist the process along as the saints themselves corporately make decisions. Leaders are *under*-shepherds. In this way, the leaders (overseers, elders, shepherds) function in their God-ordained way of helping to build up the Body of Christ.

Leaders in their proper role are self-sacrificing, humble, and highly respected servants of all. They are just as much members of Christ’s Body as any other member. In reference to proper, godly, and serving elders, we, as members of a local church, are exhorted to “allow ourselves to be persuaded by those leading us, and yield to them.” (Hebrews 13:17a). Proper leaders are invaluable in counseling, advising, encouraging, and helping the saints to arrive at the mind of Christ in corporate decisions of the local assembly.

12

SERVING

Part One – Make Me A Servant

(Chorus)

MAKE ME A SERVANT, HUMBLE AND MEEK
LORD, LET ME LIFT UP THOSE WHO ARE
WEAK.

AND MAY THE PRAYER OF MY HEART
ALWAYS BE:

MAKE ME A SERVANT, MAKE ME A SERVANT
MAKE ME A SERVANT TODAY.

Serving is the final area to be searched out with respect to its application to Church Leadership. Note first of all that Jesus Himself came, in His first coming, for the purpose of *serving* (Mark 9:35b). His life on earth was one of service to others. He healed the sick, He fed the hungry multitude, He washed His disciples' feet, and He gave words of hope and life to all with whom He came in contact. While on earth, Jesus is recorded to have repeatedly emphasized, to His followers, the importance of

serving (Luke 22:24-26; Matthew 23:11-12; Mark 9:35b).

In His ascension, in leaving this earth, the exalted Christ was still *serving*, in the giving of gifts to men (Ephesians 4:8). In His exaltation, the Lord Jesus not only gave gifts to individuals, but he also gave special ministerial giftings (Apostle, Prophet, et al.) to specific believers, and gave these individuals, as gifts, to His Church. The Lord Jesus did this in order to equip the great Body of His people, His saints, for a special purpose --- the work of *serving* (Ephesians 4:11-12). The Apostle Peter understood this truth when he gave the instruction, "As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, each of you serve one another with whatever gift you have received... Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies..." (1 Peter 4:10 & 11b).

The Apostle Paul followed the example laid down by the Lord Jesus by living a life of *service* to others. In living such a life, Paul, in turn, left us an example, "You yourselves know that these hands have served my needs and the needs of my companions. In all this, I have given you an example..." (Acts 20:34-35a).

The Apostle Paul not only demonstrated serving the saints with his own life, but he instructed others in the Lord to do the same, "And say to Archippus,

‘Take heed to the task of service that you received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.’” (Colossians 4:17)

What does it mean to serve? One who serves is simply an attendant, one who waits on or attends to others. In the home, this type of server is a maid, or a butler. In a restaurant, the server is a waiter or waitress. A server (or servant) is one who attends to the needs of others.

The crux of the Christian life is self-denial and the serving of others.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Whoever aspires to oversight desires a good work.” (1 Timothy 3:1). While this is a true statement, the “good work” involved in local church leadership is not something of glamor and glitter. It does not involve lordship and limelight. The “good work” of New Testament church oversight is altogether something of commitment and of sobering responsibility --- it is a work of serving.

All of the saints in the local assembly are called to self-denial and service --- the *leaders* so much more! Leaders’ service (or “ministry”), to the Lord and to His people, goes beyond being mere outward “errand-boys.” It is truly an *inward* matter. Serving is something issuing from Christ’s out-working from the depths of one’s being (Romans 1:9), and labor is performed, “...as to the Lord and not to men.” (Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 6:7).

In serving the Lord's people, local church leaders (elders/overseers/shepherds) are invaluable to the coherence, the growth, and the proper functioning of the local expression of the Body of Christ. Leaders' maturity, insight, wisdom, --- and just their presence --- adds to the stability and equilibrium of the community of believers. Saints of the local congregation would do well to take care of --- to prop up, to show appreciation to, to provide financial assistance to, when necessary --- to overall care for those functioning in leadership capacity. Shepherding elders who provide oversight need constant prayer and encouragement ---- as do all of the members of Christ's Body.

Part Two – Priests

An area of the Christian life involving our service to the Lord, is our *priesthood* as believers. Just what is a “priest,” as described in the Scriptures? A priest is one who goes between, or mediates between two parties. God originally intended the whole nation of Israel to be priests (Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 7:6) --- standing between, so to speak, God Himself and the remaining nations on the earth. (In the thousand year Millennial Kingdom, this original intent will be fulfilled - Zechariah 8:3-8, 13, 22, and several other passages from Isaiah 1, 2, 4; Joel 3, Zechariah 1, 8; Ezekiel 20; Micah 4; Psalm 135; and Romans 11).

After Israel's golden calf incident in the Old Testament, God temporarily stripped Israel of that national priesthood, and gave the priesthood, for a time, to the Aaronic lineage of the tribe of Levi (Exodus 32; Numbers 18; Hebrews 7:12). Aaron himself became the first High Priest, and this High Priest position was to be passed on, from generation to generation, to the firstborn of Aaron's line (Exodus 28). The Aaronic priests and the Levitical tribe performed mediatorial duties of religious service for the rest of the nation. They stood between God and the rest of the people. In a very real sense, they served God *for* the rest of the people.

In the New Testament, the situation is entirely different. At Jesus' death, the veil of the Jewish place of worship was torn, by God, from the top to the bottom --- dissolving the Levitical, Aaronic Priesthood.

The Lord Jesus has now become our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; Romans 8:34) of an entirely different priestly order. The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy that there is one mediator (High Priest) between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). The Apostle clarified to believers that they themselves are now priests to God --- Jesus of course being the High Priest. All other religions and schemes of man that have set up hierarchical "priestly" systems, do not have their origin in God, and should be abandoned.

There has developed in history --- from the Roman Catholic Church, down through the Protestant and “unaffiliated” Christian groups --- a frame of thinking that Christian leaders are, in some way, “priests,” while non-leaders are not priests, but rather “*laity*.” This mindset is in contradiction to New Testament Apostolic teaching. Brothers and Sisters, leaders are *not* “priests.” You who are in leadership, remember that you do not perform spiritual service “for” anyone else. Leaders are not “mediators;” the saints do *not* go to them in order to contact God; and they do not “go to God” on behalf of the other saints.

While we, as Christian believers, *do* often find ourselves “standing in the gap,” so to speak, in prayer and intercession for other saints (Ezekiel 22:30; Isaiah 59:16; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 John 5:16), we must always bear in mind that we should never view ourselves (or others) as mediating or serving God *on behalf of* other believers. Fellow Believers: “Ye are...a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). We all, as believers, are priests. Jesus Christ Himself is our High Priest, our Mediator. We have no other.

13

A WORD OF SUMMARY

One of the most comforting sentiments that a Christian can hold in his or her heart is the realization that God Himself is the greatest Leader of all! We have a Father Who took the initiative to send His Son to bring about the glorious plan of salvation. We have the Lord Jesus, earlier revealed as the *Captain of the Lord's Host* --- now having become our Pioneer-Leader, the "*Captain of our Salvation*" (Hebrews 2:10). We have the Holy Spirit, Who earlier brooded over the surface of the deep (Genesis 1:2), then later is seen (by the discerning eye) to be the Sovereign Leader and "behind-the-scenes" Arranger of the explosive working and moving of God in the New Testament Book of Acts, and beyond.

We do not have a distant God Who merely created us, and then just tossed us into the world to fend for ourselves. No, we have a very close God, Who created us to need Him. He did this so that He could reveal Himself as the ever-present *Leader* that He is!

The Bible is not an instruction book for us, concerning "How to Be a Good Leader." Rather, the

Scriptures lay out for us, by way of example, many who have demonstrated, by their lives, what it means to be good leaders. In the Old Testament we have Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Esther, Daniel, and Zerubbabel, to name a few. In the New Testament, we see Mary stepping out in leadership to simply and openly trust and yield to the Lord's selection and command. The twelve disciples are seen taking the lead to follow the Lord Jesus to carry out His commission. Stephen leads out, proclaiming, with power, the convicting message of the Gospel, then giving us an example of forgiveness in the face of murderous persecution. Brother Barnabas leads with his keen discernment in recognizing God's chosen vessel in Saul of Tarsus. Martha and Mary of Bethany lead us, by example, in the area of practical service and in the pouring out of one's very best upon the Lord Jesus. Leadership is further demonstrated by the lives of Priscilla, Aquila, Timothy, the entire group of missionary companions of the Apostle Paul, and of course, by the Apostle Paul himself. We have numerous lives in the Scriptures who have painted for us beautiful "portraits" of what it means to be good leaders.

We saw, in the pages of our study, God's kingship, His love, His authority, and His position and function as Shepherd, Lord, Master, Ruler, and Head. We looked at, in our study, local church eldership, oversight, shepherding, and some of the

expressed “qualifications” for New Testament leadership responsibility. We touched upon the areas of submission, obedience, yielding, decision-making, and the priesthood of the believer in the local assembly. The final area dealt with, and perhaps the most critical, was the area of serving. If we, as Christian believers, miss what it means to be servants of the Lord and of His people, then we, Brothers and Sisters, have missed it all!

If you or the gathering of believers with whom you assemble are interested in reaching out for further fellowship about this subject, or if you are interested in obtaining additional resources regarding this subject, as well as other subjects pertaining to the building up of the assemblies of God's people, please visit:

www.seekersofchrist.org

