



VISION  
MINISTRIES  
CANADA

## LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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## LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (PART I)

### I. Beginnings

#### A. Jesus chose, trained and commissioned the original apostles.

1. "Go make disciples of all nations...baptizing...teaching them to observe all..." Matthew 28:19,20
2. "...and you shall be my witness...even to the remotest part of the earth." Acts 1:8

"Jesus initially invited people to come and see.  
As their commitment increased, he invited them to come and die"  
Rick Warren

#### B. The Apostles Act in Obedience

1. The apostles were committed to carrying out the commission of Jesus.  
"...He ordered us to preach to the people." Acts 10:42
2. The apostles did this work in a variety of ways.  
"...every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Acts 5:42
3. The apostles were the primary spokesmen of the disciples. They were seen as the "ring leaders" of this movement and were imprisoned as such. Acts 5:17, 18
4. The apostles were men who exemplified faith, courage and boldness. Acts 2:42,43; 4:33,35
5. The apostles cared for needy individuals especially those who were believers. Acts 4:34; 6:1; Galatians 2:18; 6:10
6. The apostles provided leadership in problem-solving. Act 15
  - a. They listened to congregational concerns.
  - b. They engaged in dialogue on a variety of levels.
  - c. They provided a forum for discussion.
  - d. They summarized and concluded these discussions with workable solutions.
  - e. They communicated the conclusions arrived at to those not present.
  - f. They designated others to carry out responsibilities.
7. The apostles confronted error and false teachers. Acts 8:20,21; Galatians; II Corinthians
8. The apostles were willing to impart their lives for the sake of the Gospel. They did this with the gentleness of nursing mothers and in the manner of a father who implored his children. I Thessalonians 2:1-12
9. The goal of the apostles was to bring every believer to the point of being complete in Christ. Colossians 1:28

Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.  
John 17:11, 17, 18 NLT

#### C. The Apostles Share Responsibility with "elders"

1. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:30
2. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. Acts 14:23
3. ...so Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. Acts 15:2
4. ...they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Acts 15:4
5. The apostles and elders met to consider this question. Acts 15:6

6. Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15:22
7. They sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. Acts 15:23
8. ...delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. Acts 16:4
9. ...sent for the elders of the church. Acts 20:17
- 10....went to see James, and all the elders were present. Acts 21:18
- 11....and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5

#### D. An Emerging Picture

##### 1. Different terms used to describe elders

###### a. Elders (Greek: presbyteroi)

- i. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4; 20:7; 21:18; I Tim. 5:17,19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; I Peter 5:15
- ii. Eldership (Greek: presbuteros) I Tim. 4:14
- iii. Refers to the maturity of their Christian experience.

###### b. Overseers (Greek: episkopoi)

- i. Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7
- ii. Oversight (Greek: episkope) I Tim. 3:1
- iii. Is from the two words "over" and "to look" or "to watch". This term describes the nature of the work involved in being an elder. It is based on a loving concern.

###### c. Shepherd (Greek: poimen)

- i. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; I Peter 5:1,2
- ii. One who tends or herds flocks. This term describes the pastoral aspect of an elder's work.

Note: These terms appear to be used inter-changeably of the same persons.

##### 2. Different "Pictures" used to describe the church

###### a. Shepherd(s) and Flock

- i. Christ, The Good Shepherd. John 10; Hebrews 13:20; I Peter 2:25
- ii. Under-shepherds. John 21:16; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2
  - Oversee (Acts 20:28)
  - Protect
  - Give Example ( I Peter 5:3)
- iii. Primary Picture (leading and following)

###### b. A Building

- i. Christ will build His Church. Matthew 16
- ii. Christ, the foundation corner stone. I Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20; I Peter 2:7
- iii. Apostles and prophets - basic part of foundation. Eph. 2:20
- iv. God's servants are God's fellow-workers
- v. How God's "fellow-workers" build, to be done with great care, will be tested.
- vi. You are God's building. I Cor. 3:9
  - The temple of God is holy I Cor. 3:16,17
  - God is fitting it together, it is growing into a holy temple, a dwelling of God the Spirit. Eph. 2:20,21

vii. Primary picture. Christ is building. Human leaders assist Him; they with the other living stones are growing into a holy temple.

**c. A Race of Priests**

- i. Christ is the High Priest. Hebrews 7
- ii. Christians are a race of holy priests who:
  - offer spiritual sacrifices to God. I Peter 2:5
  - proclaim the excellencies of God
- iii. Primary Picture. All have the privilege of functioning equally before God and in the world.

**d. A Body**

- i. Christ is the head.
- ii. Christians are diverse parts of
- iii. The primary picture is one of an organism functioning spontaneously in response to perceived needs.

**e. A Household**

- i. We are Christ's house. Hebrews 3:6; I Peter 4:17
- ii. We are the household of faith. Galatians 6:10
- iii. Conduct or order in the household of God, Paul's reason for writing. I Tim. 3:15
- iv. Primary Picture. Order and Organization.

**II. Duties of elders**

**A. Carry forward the mission given to the apostles.**

1. This aspect has frequently been overlooked. Often elders view themselves as a governing board rather than people personally

Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion in people  
– Bill Hybels

entrusted with the mission given to the apostles by the Lord himself.

**B. Overseeing** (The emphasis is on supervision and providing direction)

1. Paul says they are stewards or household managers of God's house, the church. Titus 1:7
2. Elders lead (prohistemi - "to stand before, hence to lead") the church. I Thess. 5:12; I Tim. 5:17.
3. As a leadership group, the elders take the lead in directing the congregation through all major decisions. As the community's leaders, the elders provide leadership and supervision for the whole body.
4. In Acts 11:30, the Jerusalem elders administered funds sent by Antioch for the poor. See also Acts 20:35.
5. Along with the apostles they handled the major problems and communication with other churches. Acts 15:2,4,6,22. This procedure included the multitude (vs. 12) at some stages and in the end it seemed good to the whole church.
6. They, along with James, counseled Paul in a difficult situation. Acts 21:18-26.

**C. Shepherding** (The emphasis is on what we call pastoral care)

1. Protection of the flock from danger or destructive influences. Acts 20:29,30; Titus 1:9,10
2. Feeding (teaching) the flock. "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you on knowledge and understanding." Jeremiah 3:15 Jesus saw the multitude as sheep without a shepherd...and He began to teach them many things. Mark 6:34 Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ezekiel 34:2 Elders (pastors and shepherds) are to equip the saints for ministry. Ephesians 4:11-14
3. It involves knowing and caring for individuals.
  - a. They care for your souls. Hebrews 13:17
  - b. Prayer for the sick. James 5:14,15
  - c. They "seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick." Ezekiel 34:4,16

**"In most lands today Christian leadership confers prestige and privilege; and unworthy ambition may easily induce self-seeking and unspiritual men to covet office."**

*- J. Oswald Sanders*

**D. Delegating.**

1. Problem: Elders who love to do the ministry frequently find it difficult to delegate well to others. This failure can easily lead to frustration among the members, especially those who also have leadership gifts.
  - a. Delegating well means that we entrust to others both responsibility and authority to fulfill the task being delegated.
  - b. Delegating does not mean abdication; it includes ongoing accountability to those who do the delegating.
2. Indicated by the apostles in Acts 6 and by the establishing of deacons in I Timothy 3.
3. Because God gives gifts of leadership to people other than elders.
4. In order that they may preserve their own primary calling.
5. Elders should delegate whatever they can trust others to do so that they are free to do what God wants them to do.

### III. Qualifications. Character

I Timothy 3; Titus 1

These qualifications relate mainly to character and maturity: not ability, giftedness or ministry functions. Different individuals possess these qualifications in varying degrees. These passages should not be treated as a simple black & white "*check-list*", rather they provide a composite picture of spiritual maturity to which all Christians should aspire.

#### **Above Reproach**

Cannot be legitimately charged with wrong-doing or questionable practices.

This is an over-arching qualification

#### **The husband of one wife**

Lit. "One wife's husband" not that he must be married, rather this assumes faithfulness to his marriage partner, exemplary, entirely true and faithful to her, not referring to widower who remarries, not flirtatious.

Divorced and remarried man? Depends on interpretation of Matt 5 & 19 Depends also on whether such a person would be viewed as above reproach within the culture of the church.

#### **Temperate**

Refers to tastes or habits; free from excesses, well-balanced and steady

#### **Prudent**

Sound judgment, sensible thinking

#### **Respectable**

An orderly life, Literally "outward demeanour and dress". Paul could appeal to his own as a well ordered life. II Thess. 3:6-12

#### **Hospitable** –Literally a "friend of strangers"

Loving, receiving, providing for strangers, expresses generosity, within the context of Christian love.

#### **Able to teach**

Not necessarily the gift of teaching but must to some extent, know scripture in an exemplary way, be keen to share it and have a capacity to communicate it.

#### **Not addicted to wine**

Not "beside wine" or stuck to it or pre-occupied with, addicted to alcohol

#### **Not pugnacious**

Not a quick-tempered quarrelsome person likely to strike, fight or abuse physically.

#### **Gentle**

Makes allowance for the weaknesses, ignorance and the failing of others. This is a characteristic of God. Ps. 86:5

#### **Uncontentious**

Not a quarrelsome disposition, see II. Tim. 2:24-25. May have to confront, but not looking for controversy

#### **Free from the love of money.**

Example in this area is important

#### **Manages his own household.**

Church in many ways is like family, does not manage his family through harshness, but with dignity, has obedient and respectful children

#### **Not a new convert.**

Not a reference to age but to spiritual maturity. Timothy probably 34-39 years old

#### **A good reputation with those outside the church.**

Non-Christians have watchful eyes, does he practice what he preaches?

If inconsistent, snare of Satan is close by.

#### **Having children who believe.**

Better translated, faithful, dutiful. Responsible children; age limit? None is given. The behaviour of children is inescapably linked to parents.

#### **Not self-willed**

Literally "self-pleasing", should not be inconsiderate of others' opinions.

#### **Not quick-tempered**

Out-bursts of anger

#### **Lover of what is good**

Unwearying activity of love

#### **Sensible**

Or, see prudent

#### **Just**

Morally upright, conduct in accord with moral principles, can be counted on

#### **Devout**

Faithfully observes his spiritual "duties"

#### **Self-controlled**

Able to curb sinful desires

#### **Holding fast the faithful Word**

Both to exhort and refute. Solidly committed to the truth of God's Word. Urges others to similar walk and truth and is able to refute that which is false

**IV. Elders must be people of Influence**

- A. In many churches the emphasis on elders has been too limited. The focus has been on Biblical qualifications, overseeing and shepherding. The church needs leaders that exert powerful influence that advances the mission of God.
- B. An elder should be one who:
  - 1. Impacts people for God, moving them from a life of sin toward a life of holiness.
  - 2. Can communicate accurately the Word of God.
  - 3. Is able to unite and lead people.
- C. Not all elders will have the same degree of influence but all should reflect some of this capacity.

**Quotes**

- D. "Disunity in the Body of Christ is the scandal of the ages." - Paul E. Billheimer
- E. "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal, but a divine reality." "He who loves his dream of what a congregation could be, more than the congregation itself, becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial."  
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- F. Influence and authority are the by-products of character, gifting and service.

## LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (Part Two)

### Introduction

Describing what they did is more straightforward than agreeing on how we should practice church leadership. Humility and grace are essential.

### I Three forms of church governance

#### A. Episcopacy - Bishops Hi-lighted

1. It is the system in which the chief ministers of the church are bishops, others being presbyters (or priests, this is the word commonly translated elder) and deacons. Those who hold to this system point to the apostolic role, their delegates, ie. Timothy and Titus and to the leadership roles within each local church.
2. This system is practiced in a variety of ways. It has clear advantages in terms of overall co-ordination and in the clarity of knowing exactly who is responsible.
3. It is not common among evangelicals in Canada

#### B. Presbyterianism - Elders Hi-lighted

1. In the New Testament it is beyond question that the presbyters occupy an important place. They are identical with the bishops, and form the principal local leadership ministry. In each place there appears to have been a number of presbyters who formed a leadership team which was in charge of local church affairs. That is the natural conclusion to which exhortations like Heb. 13:17; I Thess. 5:12 f., etc., point.
2. This system is also practiced in a variety of ways. In some cases it is practiced in "independent congregations" but also finds application in regional or national hierarchal forms.

#### C. Congregational - Congregation Hi-lighted

1. A third form of church government stresses the role of the individual Christian and makes the local congregation the seat of authority. Two concepts are basic to the congregational scheme: autonomy and democracy. By autonomy we mean that the local congregation is independent and self-governing. There is no external power which can dictate courses of action to the local church. By democracy we mean that every member of the local congregation has a voice in its affairs.
2. In such churches individuals are appointed to specialized leadership roles as required by the congregation or body.
3. There are two additional systems not addressed here. The "state church" (in Europe and others) and "no government" (the Holy Spirit directs everything) views are also practiced and advocated by some.

- D. Regarding forms of church government Leon Morris says, "A consideration of all this evidence then, leaves us with the conclusion that it is impossible to read back any of our modern systems into the apostolic age. If we are determined to shut our eyes to all that conflicts with our own system, then we may find it there, but hardly otherwise. It is better to recognize that in the New Testament church there were elements that were capable of being developed into the Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational systems, and which, in point of fact, have so developed. But, while there is no reason why any modern Christian should not hold fast to his particular church polity and rejoice in the values it secures to him, that does not give him license to un-church others whose reading of the evidence is different."

## II The Appointment of Elders

- A. The raising up of spiritual leaders involves a blending of Divine activity and human responsiveness.
- B. God not only raises up leaders, but He causes them to be recognized as such by others. *Moses* - Ex. 4:14-16; 14:31; 19:9; *Joshua* - Josh. 3:7; 4:14; *Samuel* - I Sam. 3:19-20; *David* - I Sam. 23:17; 24:20; I Chron. 17:7; Ps. 18:43-45; *Paul & Barnabas* - Acts 13:1-2.
- C. Jesus chose, trained and commissioned the original leaders of the church.
- D. The apostles and those delegated by them, ie. Timothy and Titus, appointed elders in the churches. Those in existing leadership roles played a primary part in the appointment of new leaders.
- E. It is clear from Scripture that the congregation's voice was also heard and significant in its impact. See Acts 1:21-26; 6:1-7; 13:1-3; 14:27; 15:2-3,22. Leaders are the servants of all. Luke 22:25-27; Mt. 23:8.
1. Discipline is an issue for the whole church. Mt. 18:15- 17; I Cor. 1:2; 5:1-13.
  2. Letters were addressed to churches as a whole not only to its leaders.
- F. Scripture does not spell out exactly how these appointments occurred but it does identify the key players; God, existing leaders, and the people to be led. We should not require what God has not given in terms of process.
- G. Probable Arrangements:
1. In congregations where apostolic-like influence has been strong, those leaders would play a dominant role in appointment.
  2. In congregations where existing leadership influences are ambiguous, it would be better served by an approach that respects the congregation's capacity to recognize those God has gifted and is calling to lead. The process should include:
  3. A reasonable description of the elder roles anticipated.
  4. A means for all who wish to express their sense of who the leaders should be, to do so.
  5. Those whose names are put forward, by perhaps half of the respondents, should be approached as to their willingness to serve.
  6. An affirmation by the congregation of those individuals who are willing to serve (an obvious majority, perhaps 75% of respondents) would give them a sense of having a mandate to lead.

### III Terms of Office

A. The Scriptures do not say how long one should be an elder nor do they say how long anyone should hold any other office in the church. It appears to assume that they serve as long as they are effective.

B. Experience. Indicates some form of review to be of value.

1. Leaders sometimes are possessive of office.
2. Leaders sometimes link their own identity to their office or leadership role.
3. Leaders frequently fail to evaluate themselves and their effectiveness accurately.

C. Common Approaches

1. No terms of office. They serve as long as they believe God wants them to. There is good continuity but can become stale in leadership (common in church plants, but even in such situations it is better to state that so and so will be an elder for the "first x number of years at which time matters can be re-evaluated)
2. Specified terms of office. ie. Three or four year terms. In such cases some must agree initially to one and two year terms to avoid a complete turnover at the end of three years. Those whose terms expire may not be reinstated for one year. (There is diversity and needed change in leadership but often too little continuity)
3. Periodic affirmation of elders, adding and releasing as needed, with sabbaticals taken in turn after four - six years of service. This approach allows for greater continuity, change as needed with time off and with re-affirmation. (This is our preferred approach)

### IV Elder's Relationships

#### A. To Each Other

1. They must be capable of working individually and as a team.
2. They must decide what they are responsible for collectively and individually.
3. Elders should function primarily in their areas of giftedness.
4. "Follow people's faith in their realm of giftedness" - Bob Logan
5. They must have an agreed upon mechanism for decision-making.
6. Unanimity – when leaders are unanimous there is strength of resolve. Sometime when unanimity is required in order to decide, one person can block the whole group to the detriment of the whole team
7. Consensus – often groups will make decision on the basis of consensus, they find ready or easy agreement together. However decisions requiring great faith or courage are not so easily reached on the basis of consensus. It is easy for groups who value consensus to revert to a need for unanimity. This may result in frustration and in an inability to decide.
8. Majority - requires respect and faith.
9. A clear majority (75-80% of the members) can carry any issue or decision.
10. They should take time to listen and pray
11. Then they should decide
  - i If the group wishes to identify certain issues that require unanimity they may do so. Eg. Hiring a lead pastor, major capital acquisitions, relocation, major change in philosophy of ministry

**B.To The Congregation**

1. The Congregation must be both cared for and respected by its elders, or shepherds.
2. Congregational meetings should be like weddings and dedications, not a family feud.
3. Congregational meetings should be held:
4. To inform and explain.
5. To "talk over" specific concerns that are not requiring immediate decisions but do require collective listening.
6. To affirm, approve and celebrate decisions
7. Elders should not bring to the congregation for discussion matters which they themselves are not agreed upon

**Church leaders have a sacred mandate, to carry out the mission of Jesus in the spirit of the great commandment.**