

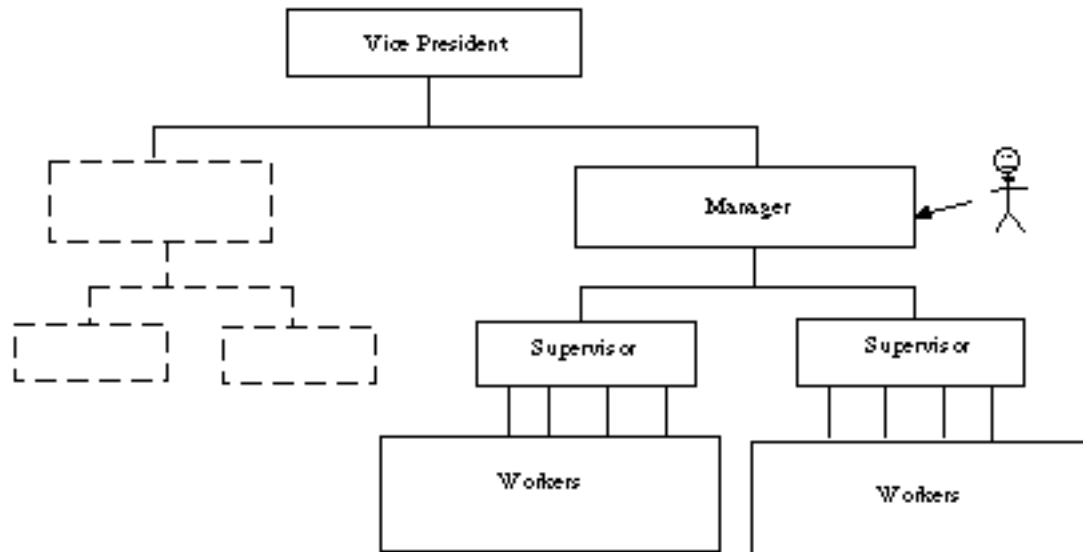
LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

by Paul Winslow

All around us people are looking for leaders. We are looking for leaders in the church, in business, and in government, certainly, right now. We know instinctively that we need leadership in all areas of our life. But where do leaders come from? How do we recognize them? How is authority and responsibility given to them? Most of us have been conditioned to think about leadership in a certain way. Some months ago I was in Portland, discussing leadership with a number of leaders of a particular church. I was struck by the fact that most of us, myself included, were talking about leadership in just the same way as we had grown up to think about it. Actually, if you had stopped in on that meeting, you probably would not have detected any difference between how we discussed leadership in the church versus leadership in any business. As we were thinking along those lines, I decided to search the Scripture to find out is leadership different in God's Kingdom, and if so, how different? So that is what we are going to be looking at this morning.

First, we need to set the stage a little bit. To do so, let us look at how we usually view leadership. There are at least two things we need to say. One is that leadership, as we usually think of it, is never divorced from an organization. That is, we are comfortable with organizations which arrange people in certain ways to accomplish their goals. Now I realize we could spend a lot of time maybe we could even get a degree or two discussing organizations and all that, but for our purposes this morning, I have drawn a simple sketch of typical leadership structure as found in the world.

Top-Down Management in the World



Leader/Manager is defined by organization as the boss
Individual is qualified through competing and achieving
Responsibility (job description) is defined by organization
Authority comes with the position
Evaluation is on a quantitative basis

is, he is evaluated on how many sales calls he or his organization makes, or how many widgets they produce in a week, or whatever it is. It is on the basis of numbers that he is evaluated. Now that sounds familiar to us; it sounds right and proper. (Actually, let me point out, as an aside, that one of the reasons leaders and others feel comfortable within an organizational structure like this is because the organization defines the job. So long as they live up to the job description and the quantitative evaluation process, they are OK. Their self-worth is not involved. If they produce the number of widgets the job calls for, OK. If they do not, then all they have to do is explain why they could not, and peace can be maintained.)

Now that description I just gave you is not very dissimilar to the responsibility and authority structure of many Christian organizations. If you notice, in the above diagram, there are some blank lines and boxes. If we were to write in some names we are familiar with, I think you will see what I mean. Say, for instance, in the top box we wrote senior pastor, and then underneath that, associate pastors, and underneath that, members of the church. For the vice-president we could, perhaps, write, superintendent of the district. Now we could make exactly the same statements about those people in those positions as are recorded on the chart for the secular organization. One of the things that strikes me about that is that even in a Christian organization, lo and behold, we find that authority is passed on by the organization. Because of the four aspects listed ahead, therefore, evaluation almost of necessity must be quantitative. Recently a fellow-pastor friend mentioned to me that he had just been evaluated. He said, "It was really interesting; they set five-year goals for me and that sounded good since having goals is the way one can really get the job done." So I asked him what kind of goals were given. He said, "Well, I was told that I had to have 300 more people in my division of the church within five years." In other words, the leadership was automatically establishing quantitative goals by which he would carry out his job responsibility. And he felt comfortable about that; he agreed with it. He thought he probably could get 300 more people into his ministry within five years. And he told me that they were going to keep check on him. Every six months he had to write a report to say how far he had gone in getting the 300 more people. I suspect that kind of thing is true in many, many Christian organizations.

So, let us go on to see what the Scripture has to say about that. First, it does not surprise me to find that the apostles, as they walked with Jesus, thought along very similar lines regarding leadership and authority. Mark 10:35-37:

"And James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying to Him, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.' And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' And they said to Him, 'Grant that we may sit in Your glory, one on Your right, and one on Your left.'"

The disciples knew from Jesus' teachings that a Kingdom was coming. It was a little different Kingdom from what they first thought, however. They were not yet quite sure how different, nevertheless they understood that they were within an organization. They recognized Jesus as the boss, therefore their reaction was, "We want to have a high position of responsibility and authority in this organization, so let us go to the boss and see if we can get that assignment, that job position." And, Matthew tells us, they got their mother involved in the act as well. She proposed the same thing to Jesus, that her sons be given high positions. Now what they really wanted was to change their relationship with the other disciples. In Matthew 23:8, Jesus was talking about the Pharisees and the rabbis and teachers and how they functioned and then he says:

"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers."

So they already understood that they were all to be on the same plane. One was not to be rabbi in authority over others, they were all to be brothers; and yet they wanted to make a change to that; they wanted to have seats of responsibility and power with Jesus.

Now let's see what happens next. Jesus, at first, seems to go along with them. He questions them about their qualifications for this job they are asking for. Verse 38:

"But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' And they said to Him, 'We are able.'"

Jesus is saying, "Now wait a minute. There are some qualifications to this job." He uses two metaphors, the cup, and baptism. He, of course, is thinking about the cup of experience that he is going to go through. (The psalmists use that phrase many times in the Old Testament.) Baptism, in this instance, means to be submerged in something. Of course, from our perspective, we know he is talking about being submerged in the death, the agony, the rejection and the hatred of the cross. He is asking them, "Are you able to participate that way? That is what the job calls for." They glibly say, "You bet. Tell us about it. We'll take care of it. No sweat." But Jesus, after explaining that to them, goes on to say that the Kingdom organization is quite different than they suppose. He gives us two clues. Verse 39:

"And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'"

The first thing Jesus says is that leadership positions are not granted by the organization. "I cannot grant you that position; the organization cannot grant you that." The second thing he says is, "Rather, the position is prepared for the person, not the other way around." So there are little clues that something different is going on. Unfortunately, I don't think the disciples were paying very close attention to the significance of what Jesus was saying. In verse 41 we are told:

"And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John."

The others did not hear because they were upset that they had not thought of it first; they were upset with their brothers for trying to get ahead of them in positions of power and authority. That is what they were thinking about. But Jesus, characteristically, explains what he meant by his words. Verses 42-45:

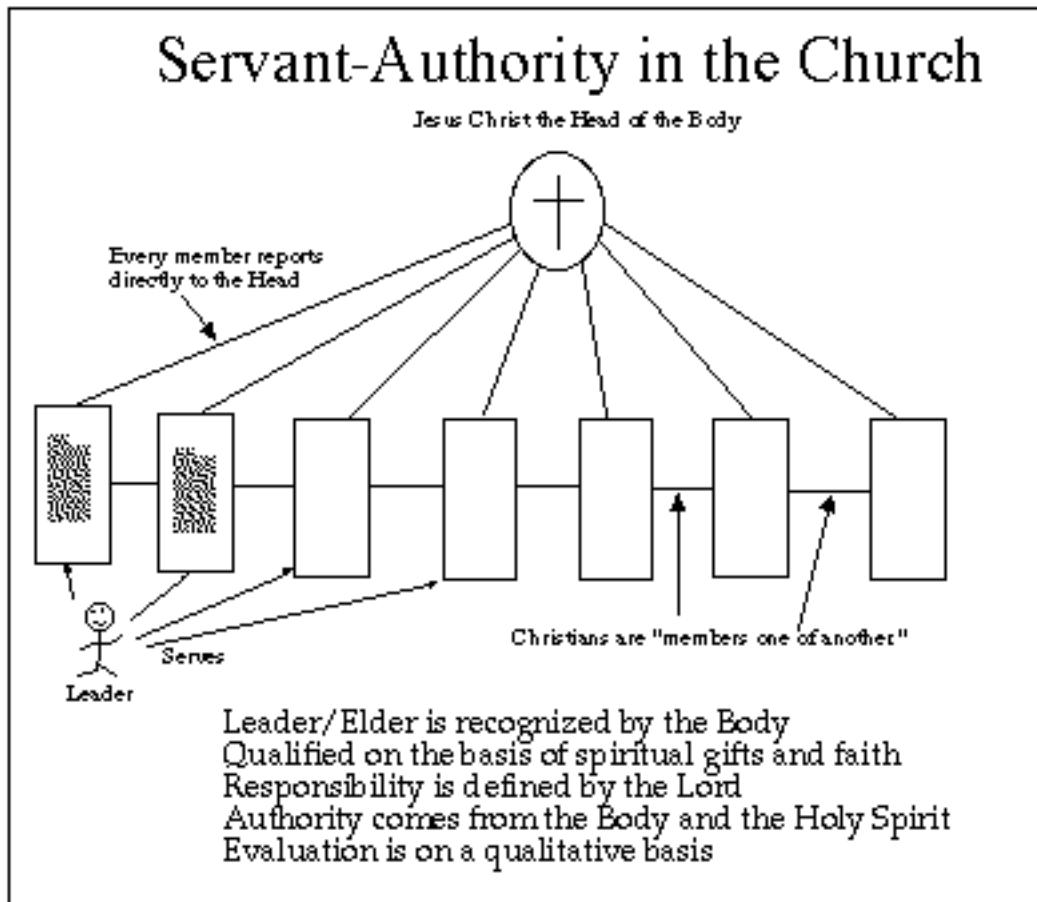
"And calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"

Do you see what Jesus is saying here? (Incidentally, I like the fact that he calls them to himself. Jesus realizes that there is friction between the disciples so he calls them to himself.) He gets their undivided attention and he says, "There is something about the Kingdom and how it functions that is quite different from what you are used to. There is a world system that involves authority and responsibility to be exercised over others. That is true; that is what you are used to. But there are principles to the Kingdom that are quite different that you need to know."

Let us see what they are. I find at least four here. The first is that the world's system will not work for the Kingdom. He says, "But it won't be so among you. It just won't work. There's got to be another way." Secondly, greatness, or leadership, does not come by appointment from the organization, but by servanthood. One has to serve. That is the basis of leadership. Thirdly, the criterion, or job description requires being a bondservant. (That is the word he uses.) Furthermore, it involves being last instead of first. Now that is a nice way of saying that the criterion is never one of achievement; it is not getting there first with the most. The criterion is serving and being willing to be last. Fourth, Christ, as a servant, is our example, for he gave up all of his rights; he gave up everything he had to serve others.

The church, therefore, it seems to me, must be quite different. Now let us go to the second chart. Notice I have attempted to draw what I see Jesus saying to these men. First of all, they are all brothers, on the same level. And they all report to Christ, the head. There is direct relationship between the head and the brothers, all on the same level. Now it does not mean there are no leaders. There are; but the leaders are not "over" someone, they are not lording it over in positions of responsibility. Rather, the leaders serve, from underneath if you want to see it pictorially. Again, we have our leader there to the left, and the characteristics that we can apply to him are listed for us. Notice that a leader (and in a minute we will talk about an elder), any leader in the body, is recognized by the body, not by the organization. The body identifies its own leaders on the basis of service.

That is what happens in Acts where the seven men, Stephen and Philip and so on, were chosen on the basis that the body brought them forward as men who were serving. They were full of the Holy Spirit, they were ministering, and they were accomplished in teaching God's Word. The body knew who they were; the apostles did not have to select them by means of an organization.



Second, they are qualified on the basis of spiritual gifts and faith. There is no competition, nor should there be. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul tells us the Holy Spirit gives gifts "as He wills." The Spirit distributes them to everyone in the body so that even the very ability to serve others in the body comes from the Holy Spirit. It is not something that the organization gives me. The Lord gives it to me. So we would expect the body to recognize something the Lord gave. That is the qualification. Now the responsibility is defined by the Lord. Again, in that same passage 1 Corinthians 12, the Lord Jesus assigns the ministry. It is his business. He wants some of us doing translation work with the Tarahumara; others he wants in the business field, etc., but he assigns the ministry. It is very unfortunate that some have thought that only when they are within the organizational structure of the church that they are really ministering full-time for the Lord. How sad. We are so caught up in thinking that way. Yet the truth is we are (or should be) full-time ministers wherever we are. Next it says the authority comes from the body and through the Holy Spirit. The people in the body recognize others who are serving and they willingly respond to their leadership. That is where the authority comes from.

Finally, and this is a key point, the evaluation is on a qualitative, not quantitative basis. Galatians 5:22 lists the fruit of the Spirit. Notice that they all relate to what I am, not what I do. You cannot put a quantitative criterion on the fruit of the Spirit, can you? It must be qualitative. That is why the numbers game does not work with leaders in the Kingdom. Nor should it work, because God might assign you to a ministry where you work ten years and only have one convert to show for it. Is that OK by God's standards? It can be. How can we guess what God is going to do when he is dealing with maturing men and women in Jesus Christ and building into

them the qualities of the Holy Spirit? How can we put a quantitative value on that?

Now, you may ask, what about elders? How do they fit in this scheme of things, because we do have elders and they are recognized by the organization? Well, let me suggest that much the same qualifications can be given with respect to elders as we have already seen with general leaders in the body. First of all, I believe that elders are recognized by the body. In the letters to Titus and Timothy we are given the qualifications for elders, that is, the means by which they can be recognized. If you look closely, you will see that potential elders have already been at work in the body with their gifts of teaching and hospitality, etc., so that the body is already responding to them. It is on that basis that they are identified as elders. I would say further that the Holy Spirit has a direct action involved in identifying elders. In Acts 20:28, where the Apostle Paul is talking to the elders of Ephesus, he says to them that "...the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." So the Holy Spirit is involved in identifying these men we call elders. They are qualified, as I have said, on the basis of spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit has placed within their lives. Through faith they have begun to respond and act on the gifts they have; they have begun to serve others. It is only on that basis that they can be so identified as elders, not because they belong to some particular ethnic group, or they happen to be the local banker or whatever.

When we talk about elders' responsibility the Word gives us some further clarification. Interestingly, it comes from Peter, who identifies himself as a "fellow elder." 1 Peter 5:1-3:

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

There are at least three major things Peter is saying about the responsibility of elders. He first identifies himself as a fellow elder, not as an apostle talking down to elders, but as a fellow elder. He says, "Shepherd the flock," and then, "according to the will of God." He is careful to put in this little section, "Be careful, you elders, don't lord it over. I'm not talking about a position of lording it over the flock." (Therefore being an overseer doesn't mean being the boss.) Then, finally, "Be examples."

Let us look at these in the order that he gives them. First, he says, "Shepherd the flock." I wonder what is in Peter's mind when he uses that word "shepherd?" We already have seen that in Acts the Apostle Paul uses the same word to the elders at Ephesus. In John 21, Jesus, after his resurrection, meets with Peter and the other disciples and he has a special word for Peter on this very subject. He starts out by asking Peter if he loves him. And he asks him three times. Each time Peter responds, not quite the way that Jesus asked, but he does respond. Each time Jesus talks about shepherding the flock, and he commands Peter to shepherd in terms of Peter's love for Jesus. The first time he says, "Tend My lambs." The word "tend" there is literally "feed", the emphasis is on providing food for the little lambs. Now a shepherd does that, not by bringing food to the lambs, but by guiding them to their mothers so they can feed. He uses a long staff so he does not even touch the lamb in case the mother would reject the animal. The second thing Jesus says to Peter is, "Shepherd My sheep." Now shepherding includes feeding, all right, but yet it encompasses a lot more than feeding. It includes running your hands through the wool of the sheep to remove all the burrs, and putting oil on the muzzle, and so on, to keep the flies from pestering them. It includes picking up a sheep that has been "cast," that is, a sheep that has gotten over on its back and cannot get up because of the weight of the wool. It includes fighting off the wolves and anything from outside that could come in and produce fear. It also includes, by the way, keeping sheep from being irritated with one another. How interesting. I got that from Phillip Keller's book, **A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-Third Psalm**. He was a shepherd in East Africa, and that was one of the things he had to do. When the shepherd was present the sheep did not butt each other as much; he was able to calm them down, and when they were calm they grew and were contented.

Lastly, shepherding involves bringing them to green pastures and cool water. The Lord wants to emphasize that, because the third time he speaks to Peter he says, "Tend My sheep." That is, "Feed My sheep." How do you feed spiritual sheep? By concentrating on teaching God's Word, by providing them with the whole counsel of God. I believe all the things a shepherd does is what Peter has in mind when he says to elders that

their responsibility is to "shepherd the flock." Next, he says, "according to the will of God." Now here is the place where elders do have a responsibility within the organization, if you will, because organizations need to have goals and directions set from time to time. "According to the will of God," I believe, means finding the will of the Head, what he wants done.

It is interesting that in Acts 15:28 the early church, in one of the most momentous situations that they had facing them (what to do with the Gentile Christians) the council at Jerusalem met, and, we find recorded in that verse, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us also," to do this for you Gentiles. That is, they had spent a lot of time seeking the mind of the Lord, finding out what the Holy Spirit wanted for his church. Once they discovered what that was, they led the church and gave their pronouncement according to the will of God. So elders find themselves leading by finding the will of God. Lastly, Peter said, "Be examples." I think the most helpful passage that we can turn to about being examples is found in Hebrews 13:7. Here the writer is not addressing elders at all, but addressing the body of believers. But he is talking about their leaders. Notice what he says:

"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; [that is, who provide the feed for you, etc.] and considering [or consider] the outcome of their life, imitate their faith."

The exhortation is for the body to "consider" those who led, consider those who shared the truth of Scripture with the body, provided it with food, counseled, helped, all those things of service, and, consider the outcome of their life, imitate their faith. The question that can legitimately be asked of elders is not what they do, how many paychecks they signed or how many committees they chair. The only question worth considering is, "What is your faith like? Is it worth imitating?" In other words, "What is the qualitative evaluation of your life? The sheep and elders are fellow sheep as well will follow a lead sheep only on the basis of the pattern of his life; not what an elder does so much, but the pattern of his life. The writer goes on in verse 17 to give his last statement to the body:

"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account..."

At first glance, it looks like we are going back to the old system. doesn't it? But that is not really so. The writer actually chooses two special words here. The word for "submit" is only found here in the New Testament. It does not mean "rank under" as the other words for submit used in Scripture do. Rather, it means to yield, or withdraw. That is a little different. As you consider the elders, the outcome of their lives and how they lead you through teaching the Scripture, are you willing to withdraw or to yield to the truth that they present? That is not the same as standing under, in a military sense. And then the word "obey" has in its foundation again a special word. It does not mean to accept orders. Rather, it means to be persuaded. Consider what these godly men say, be willing to be persuaded, but clearly, they must demonstrate the truth that God has them to speak. Do not merely take blind orders; but be persuaded. Now I trust that you have seen that an elder fits the same pattern as all the other leaders do. His authority, ultimately, still comes from the body and the willingness of the body to follow his leadership; and that his evaluation is also on a qualitative basis.

It seems to me that in the kingdom or structures of the world, the standard for greatness is really, how much power do I have, how many people do I control, how much money do I make? Those are the bases for any future advance. In the Lord's kingdom, however, the criterion is, How much service can I give?

PRAYER

Our Father, there is much truth here; and we have just scratched the surface. We pray that you would illumine our hearts and show us just how you wish your kingdom to function. May we take these words as encouragement, and may we respect those who are serving us, and yet at the same time take responsibility for being persuaded and accepting their service, so that we might grow up and be mature in Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mark 10:35-45
August 26, 1979
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