

Church Leadership

- John 17:20 – 23
 - For whom was Jesus praying?
 - What qualities did Jesus pray that they would have?
 - What would be the result of Jesus' prayer being answered?
- Ephesians 4:7 – 16
 - What gifts of grace are in this context?
 - Do these gifts have an expiration clause?
 - Does the context support that some of these gifts will continue and others not?
 - Who will take over the edification function?
- Matthew 23:8 – 9
 - Jesus did not like religious titles
 - Would we consider calling someone a prophet today because he spoke forth the word of God? Apostle because he was sent? Evangelist because he brings good news? Rabbi because he teaches?
 - Why do people use religious titles?
- What other passages recommend exercising gifts?
 - Romans 12:6 – 8
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 31
 - 1 Peter 4:7 – 11
- How were elders (bishops, pastors, and equivalent) appointed?
 - Titus 1:5
 - Acts 14:23
 - Acts 16:4
 - 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7, 5:22 (Timothy was not told to appoint.)
 - 1 Peter 5:1 – 4 (Peter did not mention appointing)
- Were any congregations encouraged to appoint elders?
- What problems of leadership are mentioned in the New Testament
 - Galatians 2:11 – 21
 - 3 John 9 – 10
 - Acts 20:28 – 30
 - 1 Timothy 4:1 – 4, 6:3 - 5
 - 2 Timothy 3:6, 4:3 – 4
 - 2 Peter 2:1 – 3
- Is enforcement ability granted to elders (or equivalent) in the New Testament? Fiscal responsibility? Organizational responsibility?
- What instructions are given to followers?
 - Ephesians 5:21
 - Galatians 5:13
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12 – 31
 - 1 Peter 5:5
- Hegemony, following another because it makes good sense to the follower, is the New Testament generic word for leadership, meaning that this type of leader is granted the role because it makes sense to the followers to do so. Not everyone in a congregation necessarily follows the same leaders.
 - Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:12 - 15

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- Matthew 2:6
- Luke 22:26
- Acts 7:10, 14:12, 15:22
- Even hegemony can be overdone, but has its own cure (1 Corinthians 1:10 – 17, 3:4 – 23)
- In the synagogues, why was Paul allowed to speak?
- In the early church, who taught? (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- Control of teaching and control of money have become the two downfalls of church leadership. How can these two man-made stumbling blocks be removed?
- Is every Christian a follower? Is every Christian a leader?

How should the church be governed? Various models have been developed, all with some connection to the Scriptures. Regardless of the vigor with which a particular style is defended or supported, history shows that all leadership structures focus on control of the teaching and the money. Those who have usurped leadership roles because of their lust for power or their greed are not at issue. Bad motives by practitioners do not invalidate appropriate methods, or the church itself should be abandoned.

The church is a body, not a group of single-celled organisms that happen to be in the same general location. Paul's illustration in 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 31 is of a body, the parts of which have differing functions. Even though the context is addressing those with miraculously received gifts, the point is that we have different functions. Romans 12:3 – 21 contains a very similar picture, with only one blatantly miraculous gift being mentioned. 1 Peter 4:7 – 11 is perhaps a better example, the context being non-miraculous: speaking and serving. As a body, some parts initiate action; other parts, at the moment, are along for the ride. But all the parts are necessary. One is not more important than another. Further, separating gifts into miraculous and non-miraculous is artificial, a point not made in the New Testament. Wisdom is just as "miraculous" as raising the dead. The difference between the two artificial classifications is that sometimes God needed to endorse an individual, sometimes not. The "age of miracles" has not passed; the "age of endorsement" has passed.

All the most popular models for church leadership center on elders, bishops, presbyters, or pastors, all of which are interchangeable descriptors in the New Testament. The various models assume that, since Jesus (Ephesians 4:7 – 16), Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:23), and Titus (Titus 1:5) all appointed elders, elders are something we should have. Whether Timothy appointed elders is not given, although the descriptors of an elder are given in 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7. Timothy was told "not to lay hands upon anyone too hastily" (1 Timothy 5:22), but the context included more than elders. And, unlike Titus who was told to travel around Crete, Timothy was to remain in an area in which Paul spent over three years. The appointment process could have been completed in that geographic area before 1 Timothy was written. Whether Timothy was to be included in the list of those who appointed elders or not, all the elders of whom we have knowledge were appointed by special people. No congregation was told to appoint elders.

The argument that evangelists appoint elders begs the question, since one cannot show that evangelists exist today, either. The evangelists-and-elders argument results in one class appointing the other, so the church could not spring naturally from the Word alone. Only a physical visit from an authorized evangelist or elder could keep the cycle alive. Only the Roman Catholics have preserved that doctrine of necessary continuity. The same argument that would continue the office of elder (or evangelist) into the present time could be used equally well to justify apostles today. Zechariah 13 and Daniel 9:24 – 27 mitigate against the continuation of

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prophets. And, the term, evangelist, and the appointment of elders are never in the same context. The assumption that evangelists appoint elders is speculation.

Most importantly, the passage that specifies “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11) has an expiration clause in verse 13. Many have come to the conclusion that we have not “all come to the unity of the faith,” so some of the five functions of verse 11 will remain in the church until Judgment. This creates three problems.

First, although the continuation of prophets can be denied using Zechariah and Daniel, the other four functions cannot be separated logically. Yet, few assert that apostles are still with us, although some do. The functions of evangelists, pastors, and teachers do not appear necessarily to include the exercise of endorsement powers, so anyone can claim to occupy those functions without providing physical evidence of God’s endorsement. The fact that such functions were gifts from Jesus can be asserted to be continuing because there is no physical test for the validity of the claim. Further, Jesus did not bestow these gifts at one instant in time, since Paul became an apostle well after the others, and the other functions appear at various times through Acts. So, one can assert that Jesus is still bestowing three of the five gifts, although the logic for separating the functions is tenuous.

Secondly, part of Jesus’ prayer in the Garden (John 17:20 – 21), specifically names unity as a future proof that Jesus was sent by the Father. In the same prayer, “glory” and “perfect” are two other descriptors used by Jesus concerning future believers. Asserting that the expiration clause of Ephesians 4:13 will not happen until Judgment causes Jesus’ prayer and His proof to fail.

Thirdly, the numerous mandates concerning unity in the New Testament become encouragements to a status that has been assumed to be unattainable. The numerous promises of transformation to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) and perfection (Hebrews 12:23, *et al*) also become unattainable.

No other passage in the New Testament provides any indication that these leadership endorsements would continue beyond the tenure of the other miraculous gifts such as healings and tongues. The point of Ephesians 4:8 – 16 is that Jesus provided leadership by direct means without human help.

If the Biblical job titles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have expired, how does the church function? Historically, people have found leadership a necessary evil. To summarize nearly two thousand years of sad history, if we assume that most of those leaders had the best interests of God at heart (leaving out those motivated by power and greed), church leadership has been found to be necessary for control of teaching and control of money. "False teachers" don't come with nametags, so church leaders have felt the need to protect the flock. First, this shows a perception by leaders toward the sheep - that followers are basically incapable of recognizing error. Second, the result is a body that lacks an immune system, like a child raised in a germ-free environment. When they go out in the world, they get really sick.

The control of money issue is common to this world; the Kingdom can do better. Church leaders make financial commitments in all good conscience, and the leaders want to be able to satisfy those commitments. Again, church leaders demonstrate a lack of confidence in the followers, so they legislate giving and control spending because the sheep can't be trusted to do the right thing.

An example of poor leadership is Diotrephes, in 3 John 9 – 10. Making the assumption that Diotrephes had good motives, he found it necessary, in order to protect the flock, to ban

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even the apostle John. Perhaps his thinking was that even Peter and Barnabas had gone wrong once (Galatians 2: 11 – 21), so this may be John’s time to be wrong.

In Acts 20:28 – 30, Paul predicted that incorrect and divisive teaching would arise from among the elders of Ephesus, even though they were among Paul’s closest friends. Both Peter and Paul predicted a severe spate of bad teaching not long in the future to them (1 Timothy 4:1 – 4, 1 Timothy 6:3 – 5, 2 Timothy 3:6, 2 Peter 2:1 – 3). Paul even hinted at the future penchant for choosing our own leaders, but doing it badly (2 Timothy 4:3 – 4).

Nowhere in all of this does an inspired writer give any hint as to how to continue the office of elder or any of the other positions in Ephesians 4:11, but rather predicts that those offices will be the source of many future problems. Appropriating Biblical titles for people who have no endorsement proof seems unwise. Many use Biblical titles for the authority those titles imply in our society. At the least, use of such titles causes confusion among the less mature because they draw the natural conclusion that the title-holders in our time are equivalent to the people specifically gifted and endorsed by Jesus in the first century.

But, anarchy is not the answer either. Spiritual good sense tells us that the less mature need to seek out the more mature in order to develop. The concepts in Ephesians 5:21, Galatians 5:13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 imply that leaders lead because followers follow, and that each Christian ought to be seeking someone to follow. The wording in Hebrews 13:17 (and also verses 7 and 24) is interesting. The author does not mention any leadership position, but rather the generic word, leader, which is the root of the modern word, hegemony. As a simple definition, hegemony describes the situation in which people follow a leader because it makes good sense to them to do so. (The remaining usages of this root word may be found in Matthew 2:6, Luke 22:26, and Acts 7:10, 14:12, and 15:22.) The original recipients of the New Testament writings probably would associate the word primarily with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. But this admonition to followers has a more generic flavor.

The admonition is addressed to followers, not leaders, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – 15. Because we all have the ability to choose, and because we will be judged on the basis of our choices, each believer must either try to go it alone, or look for a trustworthy leader. The existence of the church as the bride of Christ implies that the relationship of hegemony is God’s choice, as opposed to each believer being entirely independent. When each believer is judged, no earthly church leader will be present to give an endorsement. Each of us must stand or fall on our own choices. Therefore, each follower must decide whom to follow, but remains responsible for the choices that were made on the basis of advice from one’s selected leader. Leaders are not inherently in control of the teaching and activities of the church. Even among the elders and evangelists gifted by Jesus, no enforcement capability was granted.

Of course, a system in which the less mature decide whom to follow can result in division, as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 17. However, the problem was not that followers learned from a favorite teacher, but that they turned a good practice into an opportunity for self-promotion. Paul had no quarrel with the existence of multiple teachers, and in fact endorsed the concept (1 Corinthians 3:4 – 23), if the follower would recognize that all teachers have a place and all work together. The key concept is in Hebrews 13:7, “Whose faith follow.” Followers are enjoined not to follow specific leaders, but to follow those who display (“considering the outcome of their conduct”) faith. Further, people develop faith at different rates, as illustrated in both 1 Corinthians and Hebrews. One could choose to follow the faith of someone of significant spiritual maturity, only to find that, after a time, that leader has stagnated or has been surpassed. Following the faith of those more mature is part of humility (Romans 12:3). Whose faith to

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follow is likely to change over time. We are enjoined to follow the faith, not the person or the office-holder.

So, the problem at hand is to facilitate a leadership structure in which followers choose whom to follow that also accomplishes the functions of the growth of the body. As noted previously, the two major sticking points are control of teaching and control of money.

Most churches have one person who does most of the teaching. Some spread that task across several people. But in both cases, the list of teachers is tightly controlled. For example, pulpits are generally not open to those of other denominations. Intentionally inviting purveyors of unfamiliar doctrines to speak feels like a bad idea. But this conclusion is more a result of our method of having few speakers rather than a need to control information.

In the first century, the Scriptures paint a picture that whoever wanted to present something to the group was allowed to do so. Of course, some common sense boundaries, such as length of message, would be necessary. But, apparently, those with odd ideas were granted time to speak (1 Corinthians 14:26). However, the speaker should be prepared to be contradicted on the spot (Titus 1:9). Paul faced this model in the synagogues. He was allowed to speak, but also was challenged by the elders.

That scenario needs to be re-introduced as a leadership style that will foster real growth among all members, to the point where followers will have the skills to become leaders. Men should be encouraged to prepare some remarks for every Lord's Day, but must also be prepared for contradiction without the difference becoming acrimonious. Of course, in an immature congregation, this would quickly degenerate into swapping ignorance with little or no edification. But, the goal remains to foster a climate in which the less mature give way to the more mature, and many ideas are defended or overcome. The result will be Christians with healthy immune systems, having been exposed to many ideas and with the tools to evaluate ideas.

Spiritual leadership develops through teaching an unbeliever. When evangelism is a natural facet of faith, each Christian becomes a leader and parents an expanding spiritual family over a lifetime, resulting in hegemony. If the leader stagnates, the follower has the responsibility to find another leader. Every Christian is a leader; every Christian is a follower.