

# LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH.

## Part 2

*The major message of the first article on this subject was to call for a radical reappraisal of the meaning of Church leadership in the light particularly of the specific teaching of our Lord Himself. We saw how deeply worldly concepts of leadership had invaded the churches, and how the pattern set by the Lord, both in His teaching and by His example, had been largely neglected or ignored.*

Much of the current teaching on leadership follows three main lines:

a) Old Testament leaders like Moses, Joshua and David are taken as examples for Christian leaders to follow. This teaching overlooks the fact that these three men were **types or foreshadowings of the Lord Jesus Himself**. He is the prophet like Moses, who was to be raised up and to whom we are to listen in whatever He tells us. (See Deuteronomy 18:15 and Acts 3:22) Jesus is our Joshua who leads us into the Sabbath rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:8-10) Jesus is great David's greater Son. We are no longer to look to charismatic human leaders, but rather to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "You have one leader, the Christ." (Matthew 23:10)

b) The teachings of the Epistles are taken and the leadership terms in them are expounded without giving due emphasis to the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus. **There can be no conflict between Paul or Peter and Jesus**. When the Epistles refer to leaders, it is surely to leaders in the pattern taught by the Lord and not in the mould of humanly conceived models.

c) Much weight is given to **modern business-oriented models of leadership**. Two examples from my own experience come to mind. I was told by a prominent Pentecostal pastor that the trouble with many churches was that the leaders lacked training in management principles, and that he would like to travel round holding teaching seminars to train them in these ways. The other was an article which appeared in the Bible College of N.Z. magazine, "The Reaper" of Feb/March 1988, giving the content of seminars for Baptist pastors conducted by an American Methodist leader. The title of the article was, "The Leader of the Team", and it was all about the function of the Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O.) who might be "the pastor of a local church, the Director of a certain ministry, the Bishop or General Superintendent of a denominational structure, or the leader of a para-church ministry." The article did not so much as mention Christ as Head of the Church, nor the Holy Spirit as Christ's executive agent. Instead it was full of nothing but worldly leadership principles, which might have been written for a corporate commercial project.

Clearly **a radical change of mind-set is needed** if we are to recover true New Testament leadership in the Church.

The second main thrust of part 1 of this message was to show that the emergence of true New Testament leadership does not depend, as so many think, on the existence of institutional churches, but that the Lord, by the life of the Holy Spirit will, in building His Church, bring forth leadership giftings and functions without the need for office or titles

*The purpose of this second article is to look at various scriptures from the Epistles*

*concerning leadership in the Church in the light of what we have been saying. We look first at what these Letters say about Elders and their function.*

In the A.V. **1 Timothy 3:1** reads, "If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." That, as it stands, would seem to demolish what our first message set out to establish. There it is in black and white, the Bishop (the title) and the office! But if you will go to the Greek New Testament and read the original you will find that there is not word there representing "office", and that what has been translated "bishop" simply means overseeing. The translators allowed themselves to be influenced by their ecclesiastical traditions and, in this case, to produce a translation accordingly. W.E.Vine in his "Expository Dictionary Of N.T. Words" says, "in 1 Timothy 3:1 there is no word representing "office." So all Paul is saying here is, "If anyone desires overseeing, he desires a noble task." He is talking function and not office.

In the Letter to **Titus 1:5** Paul instructs him to "appoint elders in every town as I directed you." Here there is no doubt that Paul was speaking of men who were in leadership in local churches. But again I must remind you, he was not speaking of multiplied denominational churches but simply of congregations belonging one Church in different localities. The word used for "appoint" is in the Greek "kathistemi", literally translated, "cause to stand." Vine says that this was not "a formal ecclesiastical ordination, but the appointment for the recognition of the churches of those who had already been raised up and qualified by the Holy Spirit and had given evidence of this in their life and service." Putting it in other words, we can say that function preceded appointment, and appointment merely recognised existing function.

In **Acts 14:23** we read of Paul and Barnabas that "when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed." In this case the word, "appointed" translates a different Greek word "cheirotoneo". Of this Vine says, " 'Had appointed' i.e., by recognition of those who had been manifesting themselves as gifted of God to discharge the function of elders." Again the idea of function rather than official position seems pre-eminent, and again the context is that of the local expression of the one Church.

In **Romans 12:8** we read, "He that ruleth", and in **1 Thessalonians 5:2** we have, "Those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord." In both these instances the Greek word for "rule" and "to be over" is "proistemi" which in literal meaning is "to stand before." Vine comments that the word implies "care and diligence", while Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon gives the meaning as "to be over, to superintend, to preside over' and also "to be a protector or guardian, to give aid" and further "to care for, give attention to." So, this word, far from being an authoritarian one, justifying manipulative direction and rule, is rather a fatherly, loving word, signifying people who care and protect in their leadership function. The same word is used of an elder "ruling" his household.

Coming now to **Hebrews 13:7,17 & 24**, where the R.S.V. uses the word "leaders" to translate the Greek "hegeomai", the A.V. again has "them which have the rule over you." In both verses 7 & 17 however the A.V. has an alternative marginal translation, "those who are the guides." Once again we see a word full of care and gentleness, and not carrying the authoritarian overtones so often given to it in some

church circles. *Hebrews 13:17* as it is translated in the R.S.V., "Obey your leaders and submit to them." has been worked overtime by those advocating strong directive leadership from pastors and elders and servile acquiescence from church members. But once again the original will not bear that interpretation. David Pawson pointed out that the Greek word translated, "obey" here is not the usual one, "hupakouo" but the much gentler word "peitho" which Vine says means, "Be persuaded or won over by". The obedience suggested is thus not unquestioning submission to authority, but submission resulting from persuasion. Likewise the word "submit" is not the more common "hupotasso", a military term, meaning to be in subjection as a soldier is, but rather "hupeiko", literally "to yield under, to give way to." So, it can be seen that this text really gives no support to the advocates of absolute obedience by servile sheep to authoritarian shepherds.

Another important passage concerning elders is in *1 Peter 5: 1-5*. Here Peter speaks, "to the elders among you" using the word "presbuteroi" which literally translated means "older men." This same word was of course used of the elders appointed by Paul and Barnabas as recorded in Acts 4:23, and also of the elders of the Ephesian church who met Paul at Miletus.(Acts 20:17) The fact that after Peter addresses the "presbuteroi", he then turns to address , "you that are younger" causes me to wonder if indeed this passage is referring to men with an authoritative role in the church, or simply to the older men in contrast with the the younger. In any case it is significant that Peter refers to the elders "among you", and that his command to them is to tend "the among-you flock of God." (Literal translation 1Peter 1:2) There is nothing remotely hierarchical or authoritarian here. This is further reinforced by Peter saying that that their shepherding functions not to be by compulsion and that there is to be no lording it over people (vs.2-3), and by his exhortation to all to "be girded with humility" (v.5) The fisherman apostle had learned well what Jesus had taught him when He washed his feet in the upper room in Jerusalem. Nor is it without relevance that the word used in v.2 for "flock" is a diminutive, "poimnion", suggesting that the elder was concerned with just a small group of people. The New Testament knows nothing of super-star pastors and mega-churches !

Quoting again from notes I made from an address by David Pawson on "Authority in the Church" he said that **certain boundaries** are delineated in the New Testament. Here they are:

- 1) Nowhere in the New Testament is there to be found one man leadership.
- 2) There was no translocal oversight.
- 3) There was no hierarchical structure in the New Testament. Our submission is to be horizontal to each other and only vertical to the Lord. No matter how efficient a hierarchy may be, it is not New Testament government.
- 4) No absolute obedience to church leaders. There is danger in teaching that we obey leaders no matter what. This causes dependence on men rather than the Lord.

Summarising then, there is no question of the presence of elders in the churches of the New Testament, men who exercised a guiding and caring oversight in the life of local churches, and whose ministry was recognised by other believers. In any locality there were only elders of the one Church and there is never any suggestion of denominationalism. To this I would add that I can find no brief in the New Testament for the "covering" teaching, which insists on believers being under some humanly established church authority. Eldership was a function within the Body, and not an office in an organisation or institution. Similarly with other ministries such as those of Ephesians 4:11. All were functions under the Headship of Christ.

## **Which Leaders ?**

What then are we to do in our present situation? If a churchman tells me that the Scripture instructs me, "Obey your leaders and submit to them.", I have to reply, "Which leaders ? Are they the priestly subordinates of the man who calls himself 'The Vicar of Christ on earth' the Pope in Rome? Are they the vestmented clergy of the Anglican church, or the ministers of the Presbyterians, or the Pentecostal pastors, or perhaps the Brethren elders? But the Pope doesn't recognise the Anglican ministry, and the Anglicans despise the Pentecostal pastors and the Brethren think they have all got it wrong. I'm sorry. It's so confusing! If only I could have lived in New Testament days when each town had only one group of believers known as the Church, and when no church buildings even existed. Then I could have known who my leaders were, to whom I ought to give respect and heed."

## **A Heavenly Church**

Is it not evident that present church divisions and denominations have grossly distorted the Church as it was first created by the Spirit? This is one of the reasons why I believe God has called me to come completely out of all these confusing systems, to cry to Him to restore His way of Church, and to hold myself in readiness to obey him, come what may. More and more are the Christians who are being led to take this step. As yet they are widely separated, but increasingly they are being joined together by the Holy Spirit. There is a sense of expectancy that God is moving, and that there will be again on earth a heavenly Church, without earthly headquarters or organisational hierarchy, but with the functioning structure of a living Body, depending on the One appointed by God to be "Head over all things for the Church which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." In such a Church I have no doubt that true elders will emerge, and that the five-fold ministries of Ephesians 4:11 will be restored.

In the meantime I am content to wait and pray for that Church, and I am determined to be no more part of any of those various church authority systems which have resulted in such confusion. Being severed from organised church, I am, with many others trusting in and holding fast to the Head, Jesus, so that He may fit us into His living Body, in which we will be nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments and participate in a growth that is from God. (see Colossians 2:19) Maybe He is also calling you to join us?

Jack Gray,  
10M/66 Avonleigh Rd.,  
Green Bay,  
AUCKLAND 1007.  
New Zealand.  
Tel. 649 8171831. E-mail <jackgray@clear.net.nz>