

Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century

THANK YOU!

Thank you:

- For your open discussions and frank comments;
- For speaking boldly yet with loving hearts;
- For your honest discussion and questions;
- For being unafraid to question others' opinions, sharing your thoughts while learning, too, from others.

I encourage you to continue to search your hearts and minds as you open God's word every day. I urge you to challenge your own thinking, shattering traditional doctrines and examining God's word as if you are reading it for the first time.

Sometimes our biggest obstacle to spiritual and numerical growth may be our own traditions.

I dare say that we do have our traditions. And I don't mean the "we" who are "the other christians" at other churches. I mean the "us", "we". I mean the Chelmsford "we". To say otherwise could be compared to saying that we are not sinners; that we have no human weaknesses; that we are perfect; one and the same with God Himself.

To say that we have no pride, no fear of being wrong, no ego, no traditions to give us paradigms that need protecting, and that we haven't "interpreted" the Holy Scriptures, would be like putting ourselves above mankind and at the very right hand of God.

God Himself encouraged reasoning and arguing in the proper frame of mind in:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

And in:

Isaiah 43:26 Put me in remembrance, let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right.

God also gave us His wisdom in His Proverbs, chapter 12 verse 15 where it says:

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice."

You know, I remember my early days as a visitor to the church of Christ when I was referred to scripture after scripture to teach me God's plan and his ways, and I was really moved by this new concept. New to me was the concept of actually reading the Bible and using it to guide our lives, recognizing it as God's Holy Word which was not open to interpretation by man. And then, my

faithful and well meaning teachers would continue to interpret what the Bible taught the middle 19th century American church leaders, who had figured out everything that the Bible had to say on all important matters.

Let's turn to today's scripture reading and read once more, but this time we will begin at 2 Peter 1, verse 12 and continue on through the end of the chapter.

- 12 Therefore I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.
- 13 I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to arouse you by way of reminder,
- 14 since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.
- 15 And I will see to it that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.
- 16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.
- 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"
- 18 we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.
- 19 And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.
- 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,
- 21 because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

I am not a Biblical scholar so I do not know if there are any deeper meanings embedded in this scripture than what I can read plainly and simply. So here are a few of the things that this scripture tells me:

1. It is okay to remind people and to be reminded; (Peter did it)
2. The apostles did not follow cleverly devised myths;
3. They have the prophecy of Christ made more sure;
4. No prophecy of scripture was a matter of the prophet's own interpretation.

I was led to believe that this meant that the prophecy of scripture was not subject to "our" interpretation because the prophecy was simple to understand; all figured out. All I had to do was to ask any long term church member who had the keys to understanding all of God's Holy words. Those keys to understanding came from American church leaders of old such as Alexander Campbell and others. What we often fail to recognize is that these "keys to understanding" sometimes may also be called "traditions".

So, my lesson today is intended to be *a reminder* of some things talked about over the past few months regarding elders and church leadership in general.

It may also be a challenge to some of our traditional thoughts. So let us reason together as we walk through God's scripture which was not written by the impulse or weaknesses of man, rather it was written by God Himself, the Holy Spirit, who guided the minds and hands of the prophets.

Now, what is an effective leadership?

In the 21st century, effective church leadership is: 1) visionary, and 2) flexible.

Visionary leadership:

- Will lead boldly, transforming dreams into reality, moving beyond the immediately visible and seeing those people who are not here yet.
- Will have conviction and a focus on the future, not settling for what exists at the present moment. Visionary leaders believe the call of God is always forward, always upward. They, like Paul, do not believe that they or the churches they shepherd have already been made perfect at any point in time. Phil 3:12-14 “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Flexible leadership:

- Needs to serve a diverse church (Chelmsford), people who have different educational backgrounds; socioeconomic differences; different age levels; different theological perspectives.
- Needs to be an expanding leadership. One of the earliest considerations of a Chelmsford eldership should be growing the eldership as well as appointing deacons and, dare I say, deaconesses.
- They need to delegate the management and administration to others because they are not a board of directors or merely an administrative body. That would be easy. Shepherding is NOT easy.
- We are a demanding lot. Our elders need to be good listeners and need to recognize that they will not be able to please everybody all of the time.
- They must be careful thinkers, not quick to give rote responses to every situation.

So, what sort of things do leaders do?

Leaders are Shepherds

- This is a great metaphor for an elder. So good, I wonder if it really is a metaphor or simple reality. Some of us may not have ever actually seen a real live shepherd with his sheep. The shepherd is the sheep's ultimate trusted one. The shepherd will seek out the single lost sheep and, when he finds it, he will return it to the rest of the flock, cradling it in his arms as he walks over the rocky hillside. The sheep recognize their own shepherd such that, if ten shepherds were to get together, allowing the ten herds to mingle, and then they were to part their separate ways, they would only have to call out their special call and their sheep will separate from the mega flock, following their trusted one. The shepherd will build a make-shift pen in the wilderness in the evening, lying down across the opening so that his sheep stay in the pen and that wild animals cannot get to the sheep except by passing by the shepherd, waking him to defend his flock.
- Let me share with you a true story of my own experience in Afghanistan.
 - New village outside of the army base we are building

- These Afghan people who returned from Pakistan had an elder in their village
- When we visited the village to bring clothing, it quickly became clear to us who the elder was. He was the one who did the communicating with us.
- Shepherds care for their sheep. They carry them, protect them, care for them when they are injured or sick, find them when they are lost, lead them to green pastures and still waters. Their rod and staff comforts the sheep, they do not beat them.

Leaders are Mentors

- A mentor is similar to a shepherd except that, while a shepherd feeds, protects, and cares for the sheep; a mentor pulls up along side people and models behavior, values, and faith through the shared life.
- The term “mentor” comes from Ancient Greek mythology. The story has it that Odysseus, when setting out for Troy, entrusted his house and the education of his son, Telemachus, to a character named Mentor. Hence, our dictionary defines mentor as “advisor; a wise and trusted counselor or teacher.”
- Mentor’s name does not appear in scripture, but his role does. Jesus mentored his twelve, but his leadership style stood conventional leadership on its head. Matthew 20:25-28, But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- Jesus was also a mentor.

Leaders are Equippers

- When Jesus zeroed in on twelve men, he equipped them for the service they would be called to give. Lynn Anderson says in his book, “They Smell Like Sheep”, that good equippers do it like Jesus did it: recruit twelve, graduate eleven, and focus on three. By spending so much personal, intimate time with a small group of people, Jesus was able to give the twelve the necessary tools to minister to many others.
- Our new elders will need to get close to us to help us develop the tools necessary to seek and save the lost.

But, what sort of people are elders?

Before we go into describing what sort of people elders are, I want to point out that any man or woman aspiring to be a better spiritual leader of any kind will find help in the practical guidelines presented here and in Lynn Anderson’s book, “They Smell Like Sheep”.

The following questions should help you to define what sort of people elders are:

- You’ve hit a snag and need a coach; you feel broken and in need of mending; you’ve just done the worst sin of your life – again; who do you call?
- You face a major decision (marriage, business, or career); you have a parenting challenge; your marriage is in trouble; a doctor just told you that you have a life threatening sickness; your faith is on the rocks; where will you turn for help?

- Who are you most likely to turn to when your back hits the wall?

Answer: Elders are not strangers merely plugged into a job. Elders are people who already have a flock.

The authority of an elder grows, not out of a title emblazoned across a church letterhead, but out of the quality of the elder's life. Elders are already elders before we elect them!

What are the qualities of an elder?

The "qualities of an elder" are described in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These have more traditionally been called "qualifications", but I would suggest that you re-read these scriptures with the term "qualities" in mind. Paul would likely be shocked to see his material used as a checklist.

Keep in mind that a good elder in one church may not begin to make a good elder in another.

Good elders are men of experience, character and vision.

- Experience
 - Men who have been around a long while (older men)
 - Men who have been around Jesus a long while (in His word and in His life)
 - Men who have been around the devil a long while (have struggled with sin, and have won!)
 - Experience with successful family relationships
 - Experience loving God, loving the people of God, loving the people who don't know God
- Character
 - They have consistency
 - They have self control
 - They have courage
- Vision
 - They have visionary leadership
 - They have flexible leadership
 - They have welcoming leadership – people are looking for church homes more than ever and their needs are much different than needs of the past
 - They have a multiplying leadership – they expand the leadership of the church (more elders and deacons)

What authority do elders have?

Some unfortunate vocabulary has inflicted long-term damage to our understanding of spiritual leadership – words like *rule*, *authority*, *submit*, and *obey*.

These words did not come from the Bible. That language was actually coined by seventeenth-century Anglican ecclesiastical tradition and was passed on to us through the King James translators. Paradigms of church course and gut feelings on the subject of ecclesiastical authority

– which have been shaped by those translators’ imprecise and sometimes downright distorted vocabulary – have left internal scars on the twenty-first century church.

Let’s look at some of the “elder role” words in the New Testament.

Office – First Timothy 3:1 often uses the translated word “office”. This sets our minds to an institutional paradigm of the church, and makes us think of elders as agents of institutional authority. This is completely foreign to the biblical models of the shepherd, mentor, and equipper.

Bishop – or episkopos, appears four times in the New Testament. This tends to carry an authoritarian aura from the seventeenth century to the modern church. This carry-over meaning is not at all the New Testament meaning of the word episkopos. It could be more fully translated as “guides”, “those who watch out for”, “those who are concerned on behalf of”, or “those who care for” the church – but not those who “*rule over*” it.

Rule – First Timothy 5:17 says “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor”. The translated word “rule” comes from the 17th century religious context, not from the New Testament. The Greek word, in this context, would be more accurately translated “...who *direct the affairs* of the church...”.

Obey and Submit – Hebrews 13:17 says “Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.” First, there are many scholars who believe this does not refer to elders. However, even if it does, 1 Corinthians tells us all to submit to each other, not only to elders. So I would suggest that this respect in Hebrews 13:17 grows out of a healthy relationship with the leaders who lead Jesus style.

Rather than dwell on the “authority” type language, let’s scan the beautiful, soul-nurturing, relationship-building functions God has in mind for spiritual leaders.

- Keep watch, oversee, shepherd – Acts 20:28-29
- Take care of God’s church – First Tim 3:5
- Direct affairs, preach, teach – First Tim 5:17; Eph 4:11
- Encourage, refute falsehood – Titus 1
- Pray over and anoint the sick – James 5:14
- Shepherd the flock, serve God’s flock, be examples to the flock – First Peter 5:1-4
- Prepare God’s people for works of service – Eph 4:11-14

Let’s open our minds to the true meaning of leadership and eldership in the church, dispensing of those traditions that are only traditions, searching the scriptures daily as if searching for the first time, and finally choosing elders, who have already been functioning as elders, for our church.

Let’s close our lesson with a prayer: