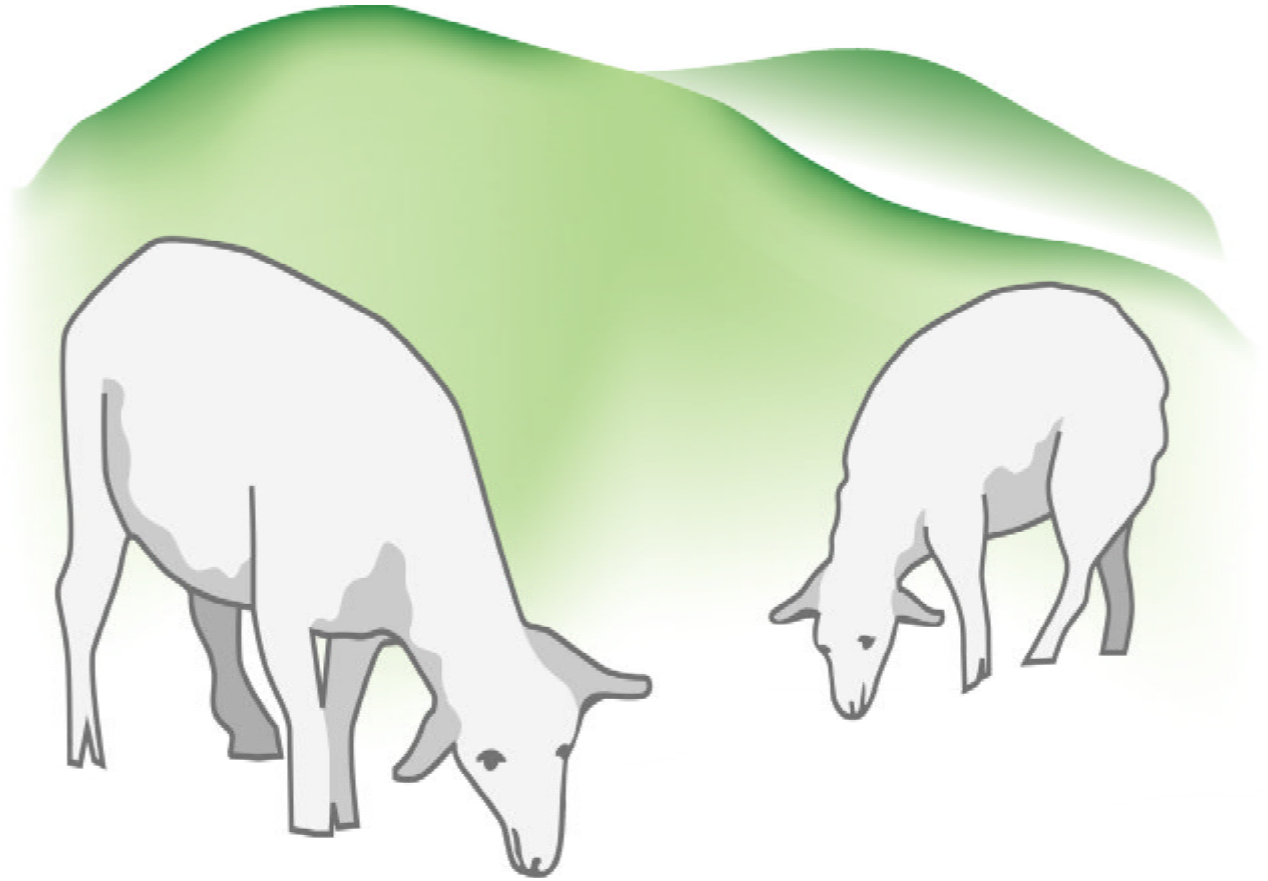


BIBLICAL PATTERN FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

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In today's churches we encounter a variety of leadership types. We see church hierarchies, solitary pastors, male and female pastors, diaconates that function more like elderships, and a variety of other leadership types. The important question is not which one is functional, but which one is biblical.

This article explores four aspects of biblical leadership and recovers the biblical pattern for spiritual leadership in Christ's church:

- (A) Biblical Leadership Roles
- (B) Spiritual Leadership in the Early Church
- (C) Appointment of Spiritual Leaders
- (D) Congregational Attitude toward Spiritual Leaders.

A. BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP ROLES

Christ's Leadership as the leader of His people and the Head of His Church

- The LEADER of His people - Acts 5:31, Hebrews 2:10; 12:2 (check the Greek).
- The HEAD of the Church (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19)
- The CHIEF PRIEST (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14,15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21)
- The CHIEF SHEPHERD (1 Peter 5:4)

Apostles: "Sent ones", either by God, by Christ (the 12 & 70), or by a Church (Barnabas & Paul Acts 14:14)

- Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1) – sent by God
- the Twelve (Matthew 10:1-4) – sent by Christ
- the Seventy (Luke 10:1 – the verb form used here) – sent by Christ
- Paul (Rom.11:13) – sent by Christ to the Gentiles
- Barnabas & Paul (Acts 14:14) – both sent by the church on missionary journey
- Paul, Silas & Timothy (1 Thess.2:6) – sent by Christ

Elders, Overseers, Shepherd=Pastors, Leaders

These words are used synonymously for the office of spiritual leadership in the church. They merely show different attributes of the church leaders:

- Elder = he is older, especially in the Lord, i.e. spiritually mature
- Overseer = he has the spiritual and practical oversight over the congregation
- Shepherd = he feeds and cares for God's sheep (i.e. the congregation)
- Leader = he lead by example, but also has the authority to lead and direct

Note: specific scriptural references are given on the next page under the heading 'Spiritual Church Leadership'

Deacons

These are men appointed by the church to take care of practical ministries such as finance, building and grounds maintenance, etc. They are NOT SPIRITUAL LEADERS.

- 1 Tim. 3:8-13 gives the necessary qualifications for the office of deacon: 'deacons must be...'
- We see the appointment of Deacons in Acts 6, when the apostles appointed 'the Seven', as they are called in Acts 21:8. Although 'the Seven' are never called Deacons, it is obvious that they were basically doing Deacon work, for the Greek word for deacon is used three times in Acts 6:1-6. They were looking after the financial arrangements for the widows. Thus Deacons have a delegated responsibility to relieve the spiritual leaders of a church of some of the more practical sides of Church government, so that the spiritual leaders of the church are free to devote themselves to the spiritual needs of the flock (Acts 6:1-4). The Deacons are obviously UNDER the authority of the Elders. That is why the Elders are also called OVERSEERS - they oversee and have ultimate responsibility for all the affairs of the church.

B. SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Scripture shows that the three terms of 'elder', 'overseer' and 'shepherd-pastor' are interchangeable and synonymous:

- In Acts 20, Paul called for the ELDERS of the Church in Ephesus (v17). Then in verse 28, Paul says to them: 'Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the FLOCK, among which the Holy Spirit has made you OVERSEERS, to SHEPHERD the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood'. This one group of men were referred to by all three names Elder, Overseer and Shepherd.
- In 1 Peter 5, Peter uses all three of these same expressions again when writing to the ELDERS (v1), urging them to SHEPHERD the flock of God (v2), serving as OVERSEERS (v2).
- In Titus 1, Paul tells Titus to appoint ELDERS (1:5). In verse 7, listing their qualifications, he then says, 'For an OVERSEER must be blameless ...'.
- In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 we read about the qualifications of OVERSEERS. However, when we turn the page and read 1 Timothy 5:17-18, we read about ELDERS.
- In 1 Timothy 5:17 we read 'Let the ELDERS who LEAD well be counted worthy of double honour'.

Three Different Aspects of the Same Role:

Different terminology simply depicts different perspectives of the same leadership role/office. However, everyone occupying this office needs to be able to lead and to teach. The following explains the three perspectives:

▪ ELDER

The word 'Elder' does not simply mean someone who is OLD. Rather it refers to someone who is oldER (than another). Just like we have the words 'good, better, best', so we have the words 'old, ELDER, eldest'. Of course, this does not refer to their PHYSICAL AGE. There are some Christians who have never made any progress in their Christian life since their Sunday School days. The term Elder therefore primarily suggests **SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**. This person has 'been there, done that' in the Christian life, or at least, has been through a wide variety of experiences in the Christian life that have fitted them to be able to pass on their experience and advice to others when it is asked for.

A second implication of the term Elder is that he is an **EXAMPLE** to the rest of the Church in the way the Christian life should be lived. Some people may have been Christians a long time, but they are still not good examples to the rest of the Church members.

The third implication of the term Elder is that the man is held in the high **ESTEEM** of the rest of the Church, because of his experience, because of his example and also because of the office that he holds in the Church, Peter emphasises this in his first letter, Chapter five. After having spoken to the Elders in verses 1-4, he says in verse 5, 'Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves to your elders'. Just as respect for the elderly is a principle of natural morality, so too, it is a principle of spiritual behaviour in the Church.

The word Elder therefore primarily emphasises the PERSONAL qualifications and attributes of someone who is a leader in the Church.

▪ OVERSEER

This is the least used word of the three and literally means one who 'watches over' or 'supervises' others. What does this term teach?

Just as in the natural realm, where our supervisor at work is our BOSS, so in the spiritual realm the word 'overseer' emphasises the **OFFICE** that the Leader in the Church holds. This is particularly seen in Paul's first letter to Timothy where, in Chapter Three, Paul lists the qualifications - not of the 'elder' or 'shepherd' - but of the overseer: 'If any man desires the office of an overseer, he desires a good work' (1 Tim. 3:1). Now, of course the word 'office' is not really there in the original. It would be more accurately translated, 'If any man desires OVERSEERSHIP ...', but what is 'overseership' if it is not the position or office of an overseer?

However, why does Paul use the word 'overseer' here at all? The reason is because 1 Timothy is primarily a letter about Church ORGANISATION and ORDER - and this is the aspect that the word 'overseer' emphasises. For example, 1 Tim. 1:4 reads, 'nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly ADMINISTRATION (or, ORDER)' - NOT 'edification', as in AV. 1 Tim. 3:15 tells us that the purpose of the letter is to inform us about 'how you ought to BEHAVE (or CONDUCT yourself) in the house of God'. God's Church, God's house, is to be characterised by order. To this end, Paul gives a number of administrative lists in the letter, so as to set certain things in order in the Church - qualifications of overseers, deacons, widows worthy of the Church's financial support, regulations concerning prayer and the women's place in the Church.

So the word overseer primarily emphasises the Church leader's OFFICIAL position, his governmental status and function.

▪ SHEPHERD = Pastor

The word SHEPHERD (or, pastor), on the other hand, refers not so much to the PERSONAL or OFFICIAL sides of the Church leader, but to the PRACTICAL side of his life - the WORK that he has to do.

Let us go back to Psalm 23 and remind ourselves what a shepherd does. I suggest four things we learn about a shepherd in Psalm 23:

A Shepherd's primary task is to **FEED** God's flock. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want (or LACK any good thing). He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside the still waters'. A Shepherd's job is not to pat the sheep on the head or even to put his arm round their shoulders and tell them that life wasn't meant to be

easy or that they've never had things so good. Rather, it is to make sure that the sheep are fed. It is not the job of the sheep to provide food for themselves, either. It is the responsibility of the shepherd to take the sheep to places where they can find good food.

The shepherd's job is to **LEAD** God's flock. 'He LEADS me beside the still waters, He restores my soul, He LEADS me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I WALK through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and staff, they comfort me'. A Shepherd is to be a Leader. That is, he is to have some vision, some foresight, some awareness of the pressing needs and possible solutions. He has to be like the men in 1 Chronicles 12:32 who had 'understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do'. The shepherd does not force or beat the sheep to go before him along the path. Rather, the shepherd goes on before and the sheep follow because they trust the wisdom, courage and care of the shepherd.

The shepherd's job is to **GUARD** the flock. 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies'. Paul had to warn the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29, 'for I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore WATCH ...'. In what way is the Shepherd to guard the flock? One example is seen in the qualifications of the Elder in Titus chapter 1. He must be 'holding fast the faithful word, as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those WHO CONTRADICT. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision'.

Lastly, and in summary of all of these, the motivating reason for the shepherd's activity is LOVE. The shepherd must have a real personal **CARE** for the people of God. Otherwise, he will not bother to see that they are fed, led and protected. 'The Lord is MY shepherd'.

C. APPOINTMENT OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Twice in the New Testament we read of Elders being appointed. In Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabus appointed elders in every church that they had established on their first missionary journey. Then, in Titus 1:5, Titus was instructed by Paul to appoint Elders in every city.

- New Elders should be appointed by those who are spiritually mature. The sheep do not appoint the shepherd! In the case of a newly-planted church, the evangelist or missionary will do so when he feels the time has come to move on because the flock has reached a point of spiritual maturity where gifted local leaders can take over. In the case of a long established Church, the existing Elders will have the responsibility to watch out for developing spiritual leaders who will be able to take over as the existing Elders get older and pass on to their reward.
- Elders are MADE by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28)
Whilst there is therefore a human element in the appointment of Church leaders, there is also a Divine dimension. Acts 20:28 tells us that the Holy Spirit makes (or literally in the Greek, 'places', 'sets') Church leaders.

- Elders are GIFTED.
We are told so in Ephesians 4:11. There we are told that one of the gifts of the risen Lord is a 'shepherd'. God therefore sets leaders in the church by giving the necessary spiritual gifts to function as such. There is also the gift of 'leading' – Rom. 12:8.
- Eldership is an ASPIRATION.
Paul tells Timothy in 1 Tim. 3:1 that 'if any man DESIRES the office of overseer, he desires a good thing'. Therefore, whereas God will give a man the gifts needed, there is again the human element in the process. A man can aspire to be a Church leader - and there is nothing evil about such a desire. It is a good desire. In fact, such a desire is an essential element in the appointment of an Elder. There should be no compulsion in the appointment of Elders. What sort of elder will a man make if he has no heart for the work?
- 5. Eldership is a WORK (1 Tim. 1:3)
'If any man desires the office of an overseer, he desires a good WORK'. Now, of course, the usual lesson drawn from this verse is that being an Elder is not simply a matter of sitting on a board. Eldership is not so much an office, but a work. However, there is another important point here, too. The man who is fit to be appointed as an Elder should already be doing the WORK of an Elder/Shepherd/Overseer. How else is he to be recognised as fit to be an Elder? Being appointed as an Elder is not like a job promotion where a man suddenly starts to learn how to do a new job. Rather, the man is appointed BECAUSE he is already shepherding God's people.
- 6. There are QUALIFICATIONS that must be met.
These are listed in detail in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. If a man does not measure up to the high spiritual, moral, personal and family standards that God sets for Elders, then a man should not be appointed.
Without going into all of the qualifications (and without trying to belittle the INDIVIDUAL requirements as if they do not individually matter), it seems to me that there are TWO outstanding general qualifications. Firstly, the potential Elder must be able to GOVERN. He must be able to govern himself - with regard to his temper, money, drink - and he must be able to govern his family and his worldly affairs. How can he govern in God's house if he cannot govern these other areas of life? Secondly, he must CARE. Notice the use of this word a number of times in 1 Timothy 3. He must care about God's people and God's Church. While we are on this note, in both lists of qualifications, we are told that the man must be able (and experienced) in teaching God's word. Why? Because a shepherd must CARE enough about the sheep that he is always looking to feed them.
- 7. An Elder is RECOGNISED by the Church
1 Thess. 5:12 reads: 'We urge you, brethren, to recognise those who labour among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you'. Here the Church as a whole has a role in the appointment of Elders.
We should not take this the wrong way. The Church is not being called upon to VOTE for an elder, as is so often the case, but rather it is another checklist item to help determine the worthiness of a prospective Elder. The prospective Elder should have the high esteem of the whole Church precisely because of the high standard of spiritual life he displays and because of the fact that he is already doing the work of shepherding and feeding God's people.

(D) CONGREGATIONAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SPIRITUAL LEADERS

The implication of the term Elder is that the man is held in the high **ESTEEM** by the rest of the Church, because of his experience, because of his example, and also because of the office that he holds in the Church:

- 1 Timothy 5:17: ‘Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine...Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.’
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13: ‘And we urge you, brethren, to recognise those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.’
- Hebrews 13:17: ‘Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.’