

# Leading God's People Effectively

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# Our churches and leadership

## A largely undiagnosed doctrinal tension:

- The Exclusive tradition (J.N. Darby): The ruin of the church – The NT teaches nothing about church organisation; the Holy Spirit alone leads the church; no formal offices – only charismatic leaders who come to be recognized somehow.

(The result: no one leads the local church, except for occasional men's meetings, or one person muscles to the front and appoints himself)

- The Open tradition (Groves, Henry Craik & George Müller): the NT practice should be restored – oversight and pastoral care by elders; plural oversight; every member ministry according to gift; the Holy Spirit still leads & no clear emphasis on leadership, as distinct from rule and management

(The result: variety (among 'progressives'); rigid patternism (among conservatives))



# New Testament & Church Structure

- NT NOT a primer or handbook or blueprint of church leadership or structure
  - Does not present a blueprint or pattern to be meticulously followed (contrast with *Exodus & Leviticus*)
  - Mainly descriptive accounts of what happened, but with some guidance in the epistles
  - Some historical development within early church (from apostolic leadership to local leadership)
- BUT there are clear **principles** which can be inferred or derived from the practice of the early church

# Spiritual leadership in the NT

- Apostolic leaders and apostolic delegates (Timothy, Titus, etc) (but Peter: 'a fellow elder' – *1 Pet.* 5: 1)
- Jerusalem church: 'apostles and elders, with the whole church' (*Acts* 15: 6, 22, 23)
- Local church leaders ('elders') (*Acts* 14: 23 & 20: 17 – 38) – and deacons (*Phil.* 1: 1 – 'To all the saints, together with the overseers and deacons')
- Leadership of the Holy Spirit (e.g., *Acts* 13: 1 – 3)



# Principles from NT practice

- Variety, but evolution towards 'elders' and deacons
- Plurality of leadership, despite prominence of an apostle (2x2; multiplicity of gift; collective responsibility)
- The importance of teaching (*1 Tim.* 5: 17, 18), prophecy (to strengthen – *1 Cor.* 14: 3), pastoral care, and evangelism (*Eph.* 4: 11)
- The importance of the whole church (e.g., in discipline)
- The unimportance of payment (as distinct from calling and gift) (but, balance *1 Cor.* 9 & *1 Tim.* 5: 18, 19)

# Gifts, ministry and leadership

- All believers are priests – they worship by word and work (see *Rom.* 15: 14–33)
- All believers have spiritual gift (*1 Cor.* 12), but varying in type, intensity and multiplicity
- Spiritual gifts are the engine of ministry
- Ministry is the work of the whole church as they use their gifts, and believers are accountable for their ministry (*Mt.* 25: 14-30)
- Church leaders need specific gifts [see below] & are accountable for overseeing, managing, ruling, leading, etc
- Church leaders enable gifts to be used in ministry (not just by themselves!); they have a duty to identify and liberate gift

# Confusing NT terminology

- ‘Elder’; ‘overseer’ → bishop; ‘shepherd’ (pastor); ‘leader’; even ‘ruler’
- These terms interchangeable & describe same office (*Acts* 20: 17 & 28; *1 Pet.* 5: 1 – 7) (which term is used is unimportant; it is function and recognition that matter)
- But the terms are instructive:
  - ‘elder’ = maturity of judgment
  - ‘overseer’ oversees and manages the whole
  - ‘shepherd’ = pastoral care
  - ‘leader’ leads
  - ‘ruler’ rules (well)
- All serve (diakonos, diakonia – *Mt.* 20: 20-28)

# Leadership in Scripture

- Terminology of 'leadership' not much used in Scripture; 'leader' is used in some more modern translations, but older ones used 'ruler'/'rule'.

The importance of leadership, as such, is a C20/C21 emphasis

- But human leadership is strikingly evident in Scripture: e.g., Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Peter, Paul

The OT question is not, should there be leadership, but is it good or bad?

- Brethren emphasis: God/Holy Spirit leads; humans should not.

Tendency to hobble/restrict leaders/leadership; to see it as conflicting with the plurality principle

- Scriptural principle: God leads *through* humans



# Are leaders and elders different from one another?

- A response to frustration when elders are not leading
- The eldership/leadership team of a church must lead
  - The group must lead, which means it must make clear decisions under God and give a lead in implementing them
  - The group needs leadership, even if one or two become more prominent than others
- Team, not committee
- Senior full-time workers must be part of the leadership, or a gap will open up between the full-time workers and the elders, and the latter will feel relegated

# Qualifications for the office of elder/leader

Three generic vectors, each and all essential:

- Personal characteristics/Christian character (see *1 Tim.* 3: 1 – 7, but note references to teaching and management)
- Spiritual gifts for the task
- Functional capability, according to gift (see *Acts* 20: 17-31, but note character in 32-35)

# Personal characteristics

- Spirituality and personal experience of the Lord
- Servanthood and humility ('Servant of the servants of God')
- Sacrificial commitment to the fellowship and to church leadership
- Prioritization of the fellowship in the leader's life and work (the tension between own family and church family)

# Spiritual gifts for leadership

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Evangelist
- Pastor
- Teacher
- Strategist/policy-maker ('administrator' = 'steersman')
- Ruler/leader
- Encourager
- Utterer of wisdom
- Discerner

NB: each leader is not likely to have all these gifts, and distribution and configuration in individuals will vary





# Leadership functions (what has to be done)

- Overseeing (supervising, managing, administering)
- Pastoring
- Teaching & discipling (systematic Bible exposition)
- Leading (enabling, inspiring, motivating: 'leadership is enabling people to get things done when otherwise they wouldn't' – Gen. Sir John Hackett)
- Strategy & policy (goals, and how we need to do things to get there)
- Ordering/ruling
- Praying/experiencing God/seeking His will together (not least)



# Strengths of plural/team leadership

- Contributions of various giftings and personalities
  - one person does not have all the gifts needed
  - different types of leadership (strategic, pastoral, administrative, etc)
- Different personalities suit different people & needs
  - strong, monarchical leaders repel some people
  - strategic leaders are often goal-, not people-orientated
- More total leadership time and resource available for congregation and work
- Enables gift and ministry to flourish
  - monarchical leadership cramps similar gift & ministry
- Mutual accountability of leaders is healthy
- Check on carnal and ebullient personalities

# Weaknesses of plural/team leadership

- Indecisiveness: slow decision-making, no decision-making
- Lack of clear leadership to the congregation
  - 'Who's in charge around here?'
- Lack of clarity about who does what within the team
  - dropped balls; things fall between the cracks; poor co-ordination; uncertainty about who to go to
- Leaving things to others in team; free-riding
- Lack of team-work (a committee, not a team)
- Mutual antagonisms, rivalries, jealousies within team

# Making plural/team leadership work better

- Build relationships/respect within the group/team
  - Needs time and informal circumstances (though working together helps)
- Encourage and affirm one another wherever possible
- Have confidence in one another's gifts, identify/recognize/affirm them, release members to use gifts
- Recognize and release the different roles and inputs that are necessary to an effective team
- Commit to one's own tasks in the team and help others
- Recognize that the team needs leadership and accept it!
  - But it may come from more than one (and they had better co-ordinate)
- Team work and esprit de corps

Good teams like being together & enhance contributions of members; bad teams eat each other; jealousy is the enemy of team



# Spiritual leadership: bad or good?

## ***Bad***

- Self-serving, ego-tripping, carnal in satisfying the leader's psychological need for power, position, status, admiration
- Ignoring views of others, independent, monarchical, autocratic
- Arrogant
- Bullying

## ***Good***

- Spiritual, evidently in touch with God
- Servant, humble, honouring others
- Decisive, courageous
- Prioritizes Christ, his kingdom and his church
- Hard-working

# Getting from here to there

- Review eldership (it does not have to be an office for life; elder emeritus)
- Appoint spiritual people who have the character, gifts, and commitment/willingness to make time for leadership (elders do not have to be old, so long as they are qualified!)
- Consult the congregation: they may know better who their leaders are than you do
- If the congregation lacks leadership gift (e.g., if it is small), bring it in from the outside either permanently, or, e.g, via an itinerant teacher
- Use gift in the congregation, even if it cannot be brought into the eldership