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# The Leading of the Church

## 1 Timothy 4:1-16

### Introduction

We have set aside the months of February and March to deal with a few aspects of church life. For March we have engaged a study that focuses on church governance and leadership. Much of what is being said is distilled from the “Introduction to Eldership” course that is offered periodically here in the Chapel ministry.

We have reminded you that the Leadership situation is distinctive here at Clearcreek Chapel. Even among churches that lead in similar ways and use the same words we use to describe leadership, the way that leadership is nuanced here is still somewhat different.

In beginning our study of the model of governance, we must begin where we began last week. So for a quick review, here is where we have been. In Ephesians 1 we found that Jesus

Christ is the Lord of the Church. Jesus is Sovereign Lord over the church. He, and He alone rules the church. As the Lord of the church, Christ is both the Head of the Church and the Builder of the Church. The Scriptures tell us that the Lord will build His church upon the rock of the apostolic affirmation of His deity and sovereignty.

And not only is Christ the Lord of the church, but he is the Chief Shepherd of the church. The New Testament texts are clear that Jesus Christ is the great, Chief Shepherd of the church. This is not merely a theoretical statement, but a blessed reality in the church. Christ physically, in real time and real space from the heavenlies, shepherds His people.

Then, last week, Pastor Chad concluded with this observation, that it is through the Scriptures and the elders to whom the scriptures have been entrusted through the apostles, that Christ, the Chief Shepherd, mediates his authority over His people. We submit ourselves in obedience to the scriptures as though Christ had spoken the Words Himself because Christ rules His church through the scriptures.

Even though there is a spiritual equality that we have before God in the priesthood of the believer, there are differing roles and responsibilities among believers. While all of us have direct access to God as a community of priests, we do not all have the same function. While the work of the ministry of the church is to be done by ALL of its members, that work of the ministry has various and differing responsibilities.

Our equality before God does not depend upon function. Christ has given differing gifts and abilities to the various members of his flock... and it is those gifts and abilities that determine the differing roles within equality.

God has given certain men to the church in order to equip, lead, have charge over the church and to speak the Word of God. God has intended the authority structure of the church to be patterned after the subordination within the equality of the Trinity. Authority and subordination, despite what some may claim, do not deny equality.

Further, the church does not operate by democracy, but by theocracy. The Bible's model is that of a theocracy, and this theocracy is not merely confined to the Old Testament, where we are traditionally used to relegating that thought. Christ, the Lord of the church, shepherds and governs His people through His Word. As the Chief Shepherd, Christ, through His Word, has assigned the governing of the church to a body of qualified men who are accountable to God and yet are subject to the discipline and censure of the corporate body, Christ's church.

He arrived at this by examining three basic words utilized in church leadership. He noted that "Christ has given elders to his church in order to mediate His shepherding and rule over His church. Here at the chapel, for the reasons I outlined earlier, we have chosen to avoid calling this oversight of God's flock "elder rule" or "elder leadership". Our preference is "elder governance". Christ mediates his authority through His Word, which he has entrusted to the elders. Elders are not to domineer, but to lead a submissive flock by example through the Word."

The word elder, at its basic level, stresses the maturity and dignity of a man. In the eyes of others, this man should be a man of spiritual maturity, experience, wisdom, authority, honor, and dignity. The title Bishop or Overseer emphasizes the elders' duty or function in administering or governing the ministries of the church, the house of God. Pastor or Shepherd, applied to those whom He gives to His church as leaders, is a biblical composite of authority and leadership on the one hand with self-sacrifice, tenderness, wisdom, hard, menial labor, loving care, constant watchfulness, and lowly servanthood. As a shepherd the emphasis is on the elder's leading, feeding and care of the flock.

Taken all together, in speaking of the leaders Christ has chosen to govern and care for His people, the elder, as one who has been recognized with wisdom and maturity, speaks to his character. Elder is who he is. The overseer, as one who superintends and governs with authority, speaks to his office. Overseer is the position he holds. And shepherd, as one who cares and feeds the flock of God as a humble servant, speaks to his function. Shepherd is what he does.

Tonight we will briefly look at how these individuals are to lead the church.

## The Activity of Elders

Looking at I Timothy 4 will introduce this segment. Especially as we focus on verses 11-16. [Read I Timothy 4:1-16]

The assumption in this passage is that as an agent for the apostle Paul, Timothy is a model for the work of ministry to be engaged by the elders that he is charged to establish in the churches. Timothy is not serving as an elder per se, but is continuing the process begun by the apostle.

In verses 11-13 we see an exhortation by Paul for Timothy to expend **energy** in his task. He is to model good faith and work to those who will observe him. An elder must work hard at becoming a skilled craftsman in understanding and handling the Scriptures. He is

to do so with the aim of having God's approval. His personal growth in the Word will both prepare himself for faithful ministry and profit his flock.

Verses 13 and 14 allude to his work in the Word, his ability to **explain** the Scriptures and make them plain. Elders must be able to minister the Word either privately or publicly. Elders will be expected to counsel with the Word, to respond to error from individuals or groups, to teach small groups and, if so able or gifted, the minister the Word in public teaching or preaching. It is clear that some elders will be more able than others, but all elders must be able to understand and handle the Word accurately in the midst of and for the sake of their flock.

Verse 13 speaks of his need to **exhort** from the word, to be able to challenge and correct when needed. Each elder will be assigned and will be responsible for a flock, a group of families in the church. He will be responsible to help with their spiritual growth in discipleship and in counseling. This will involve the time commitment to visit with, teach, shepherd and counsel his flock.

Verses 11 and 15 speak of his need to **example** the Word to his hearers. Each elder will be responsible to oversee different ministries and ministry teams in the church. It is our aim to have elders oversee ministries they have a heart, passion for and a skill in. It is possible for an elder to oversee a ministry where most of the real-time management is being delegated to the team.

This oversight requires a certain amount of administrative and people skills. A man who has little interest in this part of the ministry (or a man who sees this as all of his ministry) should carefully consider whether he should become an elder at the Chapel.

And lastly verse 16 speaks of his **enabling** others in and by the Word. All the elders together operate under the principle of shared authority. We together are responsible for the general welfare and oversight of the church as a whole. Our authority is corporate. Therefore, we have regular meetings to shepherd our flock and oversee the gathered church here. Authoritative decisions in the church are made, not by single, individual elders, but by the council or body of elders together. Elders overseeing ministry are delegated authority to make meaningful decisions for the ministry they are responsible for.

In view of all that the Bible teaches about unity and single-mindedness, the elders make decisions on the *principle of unanimity*. All elders must affirm a decision being made. There is no abstaining. The elders as a body may exclude an elder from a vote due to a conflict of interest (for example, a vocational elder does not vote on his own salary package).

In view of our own need to be *in submission* to one another, under the principle of unanimity, if a single elder is the only one to not agree with all the rest, then he should express his concern, but then humbly vote yes as an expression of unity and submission. The exception to this is in doctrinal issues. Our aim here is to keep rearticulating the doctrine until there is full and unreserved unanimity.

In Elder's Meetings, prayer, discussion, debate, etc. are all off the record. The final decision and any supporting documents or summaries may be entered. It is our desire to be free in our discussions, to be able to present and argue a position, to see the other per-

son's viewpoints. An elder may request that a discussion or viewpoint be entered and it will be if agreed to by the elders.

The elders have established an electronic method of presenting a motion and voting. This is reserved to emergency issues and for an elder who was absent from a meeting to vote on issues in the meeting.

## **The Accountability of Elders**

The power and wisdom of eldership governance is seen further in their accountability. The leadership of the church is not a law unto itself. They, individually and corporately are accountable in several directions. The accountability of elders recognizes their limited authority and their susceptible to sin.

### **Of their Shepherding to God**

Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5;

Elders, individually and corporately, are accountable to God. They will give an account to God for their faithfulness in the work God has placed them and for the people over which God has placed them.

### **Of Their Purity to the Church**

1 Timothy 5:19-22; Matthew 18

An elder is accountable to the body in matters of discipline as any other member. He does have one further protection from frivolous or mischievous accusations. According to 1 Timothy 5:19, an accusation against an elder must be substantiated by two or more witnesses. The elders as a body, receive, investigate and confront the sinning elder. If he continues to sin and does not repent, then he is subject to the discipline of the church (v.20). The elders involved in this process are distinctly charged to approach it justly and Biblically, without bias or prejudice (v.21).

### **Of their Ministry to Each Other**

1 Peter 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:17-22; Galatians 2; Acts 20:17-38

An elder is accountable for the exercise of his ministry to the other elders. The elder council should encourage, exhort, equip and confront one another in our devotion and duty so that our ministry is profitable to the church.

At the Chapel, one of the vocational elders has the responsibility to shepherd the elders. They are his primary flock. All that the elders are to do for their flocks, he is to do with the elders. This is the first level of accountability of the elders for life and ministry.

## **The Acceptance of the Elders**

The Scriptures are very clear on the congregation's responsibilities to the elders. The tension here is that elders must instruct the congregation in these matters as from the Word while

not demanding it in a self-serving manner. There has been much misuse by elders/pastors of these kinds of texts to exercise dictatorial control over the congregation.

### **To Know and Esteem for their Work**

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

This verse requests that the congregation “know them so well that they are honored and appreciated.” There are three verbs in this text. The congregation is to know (v.12), esteem (v.13) and live in peace with their elders who work hard, lead and instruct them. The congregation is to know their elders well and to love and honor them much.

### **To Emulate their Servant/Leadership**

Matthew 20:24-28; 1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:28

The Elders of the church are responsible for the type of servant/leadership that is worthy to be emulated. Elders are not to be lording but serving! They are to lead like shepherds, not driving the flock (commanding obedience, forcing submission) but by getting out in front and leading by example.

### **To Respect Them Properly**

1 Peter 2:17

The congregation of the church is responsible to respect the elders and show them honor. Though the elders should teach this from the Scriptures, they must not demand it. Honor and respect is earned when elders conduct themselves with humble leadership. This honor and respect will grow out of the practice of honoring one another.

### **To Obey Them in the Lord**

Hebrews 13:17; 1 Corinthians 16:16

The congregation is should obey their leaders and be in submission to them. This is not blind obedience but rather it is obedience within the perimeters of Scriptural limits. Anytime an elder or a body of elders expects obedience to what God has forbidden the congregation has an obligation to obey God first.

### **To Imitate their faith**

Hebrews 13:7

The congregation of the church is responsible to copy the faith of qualified leadership in their lives. The Elders should set the direction of the church, provide the example in leading that direction and the congregation should follow.

## **The Admonitions to the Elders**

The dangers in eldership are not related to its structure, but to unqualified men in the eldership.

## Lording it over the Flock

See Matthew 20:25-27; Mark 10:42-43; Luke.22:24-27; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 1 Peter 5:3; 3 John 9.

### Examples

- Determining God's will for the individual.
- Dictating personal affairs of God's people
- Taking non-biblical disciplining actions

### Solutions

1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6; Hebrews 10:19-22

The solutions are that qualified elders function within God's limits and accountability and the congregation functioning as God designed.

## Spiritually Unfit elders.

Failing to meet qualifications though fit when first affirmed.

### Examples

- Falling into moral sin
- Children grow up rebellious

### Solutions

Accountability to God (Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1)

Accountability to fellow elders (1 Peter 5:1; Galatians 2:11)

## Conclusion

Let's conclude by repeating the requests that Chad included last week:

**Pray for us.** The ministry of the word is hard work. It is difficult feeding the flock and dispensing the word in the mud and grime of life. The entrustment of the gospel is not a glamorous entrustment. We are broken vessels with lives shattered for the gospel. We need much, much prayer.

**Serve with us.** While the entrustment of the Word has been given to the elders, the ministry of the Word has been given to the entire church. All of us are to be about the task of serving and guarding in this garden we have been given called Clearcreek Chapel. Speaking the gospel as broken people into broken lives is not just the task of the elder, but is the mission of the church.

**Grow with us.** While Christ has qualified men to serve as his undershepherds, we have not arrived. Pastor Russ reminded us this morning that we are sojourners... and we are sojourners together.

**Encourage us.** Because the oversight of the ministry of the Word is a hard work, and because the enemy would have us be entangled with discouragement, you would be surprised at the impact of an encouraging word every now and then. "The" Word fitly spoken is like apples of gold on a platter of silver (Proverbs 25:11).