

God's Model For Church Leadership

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(Note: This paper was originally written and distributed in 1999 as a foundation for our current form of church leadership. Some wording may reflect the process that the church was in at the time. Our current constitution can be read at http://www.calvarybaptist-eauclaire.org/files/CONSTITUTION_OF_CALVARY_BAPTIST_CHURCH.doc)

There are two words used in the New Testament by Jesus Himself to describe His character: gentle and humble. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matthew 11:29 Just think - Jesus Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Sovereign Ruler of all, was gentle and humble.

That concept of leadership has not only puzzled me, but also been foreign to me for too long. I have done rather well for myself using the world's systems of management and leadership based on authority. But where has that style of leadership gotten the Church of Jesus Christ?

Anyone who has been involved in a church has probably had the unpleasant experience of going through a church dispute. Unfortunately, the church of Jesus Christ has gained notoriety in the world on the basis of its conflicts. Now, if those conflicts were between the church and the world because of the church's commitment to truth, then we could stand united and strong against the world's persecution. But that is not the case most of the time. The world recognizes the church not for its unity in truth, but for its conflict within itself. Christians are not simply debating issues to arrive at the truth, but actually arguing and fighting over who is right and who gets to win. Church splits result. People are disillusioned with the church and leave it, some of them permanently, and call Christians hypocrites. They are correct in their judgment, for where are the gentle and humble representatives of Jesus?

This is a serious problem that primarily reflects the condition of our hearts, and it must first be dealt with at that level before any discussion can be held concerning a change in church leadership style or government. The polity of a local church will only be the reflection of the spiritual focus of the body of believers. The governmental style of a church is not there to create a spiritual atmosphere, but will be the product of the spiritual atmosphere that already exists. It is with that in mind that we begin this study with some personal challenges.

I. The Call To Gentleness

In Matthew 11:29 the King James Version uses the word *meek* while the New International Version says *gentle*. We must not imply weakness from these words, for Jesus was anything but weak. He demonstrated true Godly manhood by having all power and all authority *under control*. That is what *meek* means - to have power under control. The Greeks used that word outside of the context of the Bible in their literature to describe a bridled horse. The horse had the

power to throw the rider, but that power was controlled by the rider through the use of the bridle.

The Holy Spirit of God indwelling Jesus was His bridle. The Holy Spirit kept the power under control so that it was totally focused on the accomplishment of God's perfect will. There was never an instance where Jesus used His authority for personal gain or to accomplish a personal agenda.

The same Holy Spirit indwells us as individuals and corporately as a body of believers. There is never to be an instance in our personal lives nor in our church life where we use our authority and power for personal gain or to accomplish a personal agenda. Authority and power will manifest themselves through a person's position, opinions, preferences, interpretations and/or traditions. We must, as followers of Jesus, become like Him in His meekness, and surrender all areas of our lives and our thoughts to the will of the Father. It is in submission that God is exalted and His power is revealed.

I find it very interesting that of the four times this word *meek* is used in the New Testament, two of them refer to Jesus and two refer to us. We already shared Matthew 11:29 about Jesus. The other reference is in Matthew 21:5 - "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, **gentle** and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" Jesus was introducing Himself to the nation of Israel as their King, but He did it gently, on a donkey and her colt, not on a huge white horse as a political and military conqueror.

The two instances where *meek* refer to us are found in (1) Matthew 5:5 - "Blessed are the **meek**, for they will inherit the earth;" and in (2) 1 Peter 3:4 - "Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a **gentle** and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." In instance (1), we are told that we too shall be exalted one day to leadership of the earth in the reign of Jesus as King if we are *gentle*. In (2), although the context is written specifically to women, the words *inner self* are generic and refer to the very nature of men and women as God created them, and it is that very nature to be *gentle*. Satan has corrupted our created nature and given it a misdirected focus on power and authority and a need to find fulfillment in the expression of that power and authority. That is not the nature of God in us. It is God's nature to be *meek*.

We could go into much more detail, but I will limit my remarks to these and pray that the Holy Spirit does His work in our lives. My prayer is that we will be a people, both in our private lives and in our church lives, that are controlled by the Holy Spirit so that we plan, promote and pursue only the will of God.

II. The Call To Humility

Matthew 11:29 also uses the word *humble* to describe Jesus. In Philippians 2 we have a marvelous illustration of a true humble spirit.

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Humility, as I see it here, means having a fair and honest opinion of one's condition when compared to God. Jesus made Himself nothing by taking the form of man. That tells me what my condition is - nothing. In comparison to God I am nothing and apart from Him I can accomplish nothing, change nothing, earn nothing, and be worthy of nothing. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming totally dependent upon the Father for everything - His daily necessities, His strength, His emotional health, His wisdom for decisions, and His step by step direction for living, to name a few. That's humility: total dependence upon God because we have a fair and honest opinion of ourselves in comparison to God.

Pride, the opposite of humility, enters the picture when we do not have a fair and honest opinion of ourselves because we compare ourselves not to God but to others. When we do this, we open the doors for the pursuit of personal gain and the protection of personal rights. That's why Paul says in this Philippians passage to *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* It is essential that the spirit of the individuals in the church be one of humility, considering the needs and interests of others ahead of self, because the atmosphere and spirit of the church as a whole will reflect the condition of the individual's heart.

Another way to express this thought is with the word *servanthood*. Jesus said, *“Whoever would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven must be the **servant** of all.”* He also said, *“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve,”* and later demonstrated that by washing His disciples feet, giving us a model to follow.

When a church becomes the reflection of humility and servanthood, the world will take notice of our existence for the right reason, as it did in Acts 2:47 and in Acts 5:13 when the church was found in favor and highly regarded by all the people. The wisdom of God may seem to be foolishness to the world, but in their hearts they are really longing for an experience of true love and commitment. It is in the gentle and humble church that serves one another that the world will find what it is looking for.

Spend some time reflecting on these two characteristics of Christ, and pray diligently that the Holy Spirit would produce meekness and humbleness in you to the measure of the fullness of Christ. When we as individuals are sufficiently changed in our hearts to understand servanthood and live servanthood, then we can govern the church with servanthood and Christ will be exalted.

III. The Call To Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is the model of the Bible for the people of God. The foundation of servant leadership is this: *the leader is first and foremost a servant of God*. Servant leadership will only endure if the servant leader maintains a consistent focus on reflecting the heart and mind of God. The servant leader will then be the servant to God's people. We must guard against believing that servanthood is primarily horizontal; i.e. people directed. Servanthood is vertical; God directed.

If servanthood becomes horizontal, it can quickly deteriorate into selfishness through impure motives. Selfish servanthood is more than an oxymoron; it is far too often the reality. Selfish servanthood appears to be purely external, but the heart of the "servant" is seeking personal gain, from tangible benefits to ego-building responses. Only as the leader focuses totally on serving Christ and accomplishing His purposes for His gain and glory will servant leadership work.

This takes faith - faith in the unchangeable character of God; faith in the faithfulness of God to fulfill all His promises; faith in the Lordship of Jesus over all creation; faith in the Headship of Jesus Christ over His church. Faith can be defined in the context of this paper as *humility*, where humility means *having a total dependence upon God based on a fair and honest opinion of one's self in comparison to God*. It is this total dependence upon God and not on self or the world that is the foundation of servant leadership.

The examples of servant leadership are numerous. Abraham was called and qualified to be the father of Israel by faith. He depended upon God for everything (with a few failures mixed in, which gives hope to all of us to continue on in leadership even though we fail) and kept his focus on the vertical, not the horizontal.

*By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though **he did not know where he was going**. By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. **For he was looking forward** to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

*By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because **he considered him faithful who had made the promise**...*

*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice... **Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead**, Hebrews 11:8-19.*

Notice the highlighted sections that show the consistent focus of Abraham on God alone. It is faith like that that makes a servant leader.

Other examples would include Moses, who actually established the elder form of leadership for the nation of Israel; Joshua, who reflected God's directions to the people no matter how illogical and unreasonable they seemed; King David, a man after God's own heart; and the Apostle Paul, who humbly led churches into a deeper relationship with Christ without "lording it over them" (2 Corinthians 1:24) and endured suffering patiently because his focus was vertical not horizontal. These are just a few examples, but you can see the consistent thread that runs through the people in leadership of God's people, whether it is as a nation or as a church.

I believe that servant leadership is not only possible in the church today, but it is the mandate of Jesus Christ. I believe it is possible for a body of believers to fully surrender to an Elder leadership that is so God-focused in their servanthood that the body will entrust them with complete authority in any and all decisions. It is possible because first, Jesus has all authority in heaven and on the earth (Matthew 28:18); second, He gave that authority to his disciples in the great commission (Matthew 28:19); and third, He calls men to spiritual leadership and gives them as gifts to the church to accomplish His purpose (Ephesians 4:11-13). A local church demonstrates its trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ by submitting to the authority of the leadership that He has appointed.

It is with that in mind that we, the Pastoral staff and the Deacons of CBC, submit the recommendation that the current congregational form of government be changed to an Elder form of government. Here is what that means:

1. Following all necessary constitutional changes, the congregation humbly passes all authority for all leadership and decisions to the Elders. The Elders will include all Pastoral staff, plus those men from the flock who recognize a call from God on their life to be shepherds; who have proven themselves to be servant leaders; and who meet the Biblical requirements of Elders. The Elders will be named as Trustees of the Corporation to satisfy Wisconsin state law.
2. As servant leaders (shepherds), the Elders will be directly responsible for the spiritual care of the congregation (flock). Each Elder, including the Pastoral Elders, will oversee a specific portion of the ministry partners (sheep). Elders will learn the individual's spiritual gifts and ministry goals and will provide for their expression and accomplishment. The Pastoral Elders who are supported financially by the flock will continue to oversee the spiritual needs of the flock as a whole, but each ministry partner is encouraged to build a relationship with and seek the help of their specific Elder before calling on a Pastoral Elder.
3. As the Elders seek to know the mind of Christ for His church, they will provide timely information to their "flock" about ministry goals, direction and pending decisions. The Elders will seek input from the sheep, with the understanding that the sheep are also

listening to Christ. It is imperative that the sheep understand that the highest priority of the Elders is to obey Christ, and accept the possibility that some decisions may not be the majority consensus of the flock. However, all decisions made by the Elders will be unanimous in all instances, or the Elders will continue to seek the mind of Christ on the matter until unanimity can be achieved.

4. Each Elder will be an overseer of a specific area of spiritual ministry to the flock, called Shepherding Ministries. For example, at the beginning there will be a Teaching/Preaching Elder, a Missions Elder, a Christian Education Elder, a Youth Ministries Elder and a Worship Elder. Other Elders could be added to oversee Visitation, Small Groups, Outreach, etc.
5. The Elders may appoint, as needed, committees to assist them in the administration of the various Shepherding Ministries of the Church. Whenever possible, an Elder will serve on each appointed committee. Each person appointed to the Shepherding Ministry committees must be directly involved in that ministry. For example, to be a member of the Christian Education Committee, a person must be actively serving in the Christian Education Department as a teacher, AWANA leader, Small Group leader, etc.
6. The Elders may appoint Deacons to oversee the administration of non-shepherding ministries, such as Property (formerly Trustees), Finance, etc. The Deacons will be directly accountable to the Elders and must meet the spiritual qualifications of Deacons set forth in the Bible, and must be male. If necessary, there may be more than one group of Deacons with each group specializing in one specific area of service. It is from the experience gained as a Deacon that one may become qualified to become an Elder.
7. The Elders will seek the mind of Christ in the appointment of additional Elders who have become qualified for servant leadership. Most additional Elders should come from within the local flock, but not always. As Shepherding Ministries grow it may be necessary for the Elders to seek for an additional full time or part time paid Shepherd from outside the flock.
8. The Elders will conduct an annual Jubilee Celebration for the purpose of presenting the new Fiscal Budget and Shepherding Ministry reports. It will be a time of celebrating God's blessing and clarifying Christ's vision for the church. The Elders may, at any time and at their discretion, call for a meeting of the flock for the purpose of discussing a pending decision in an open forum.

This proposed church structure brings up some questions and concerns because it is so "untraditional." Here is an attempt to answer some of them:

1. *To whom are the Elders accountable?*

This is the toughest issue, as I see it, because it involves so much trust in Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. In the New Testament, the Elders from each local church were

accountable to the Apostles in Jerusalem, so it would appear there was a way to maintain the integrity of the Elders. But then the question must be asked, to whom were the Apostles accountable.

Ultimately all accountability is to Jesus Christ, and as each Elder seeks the mind and heart of Christ, there will be a consistent spirit of meekness and humility on the Elder Board. All business will be done in that spirit, and conflicts between Elders will be non-existent. (Notice I said conflicts, not differing opinions. Differing opinions will exist but will be handled with meekness and humility and will dissolve into unity as each Elder submits to the mind of Christ.)

When conflicts do arise, it will be obvious that someone is no longer being a servant leader, and the rest of the Elders will seek to correct, rebuke, and restore that person. If that Elder is not responsive to such correction, then it will be brought to the flock in a public forum. The purpose of that forum is not to spread gossip, but to bring the conviction of the Holy Spirit to bear upon the offender, so that they will repent and be restored. The flock must understand its role in this. It is not to convict and condemn, but to communicate the need for change for the sake of the spiritual health of the flock. The Elder must be brought back to the basics of servant leadership through this process. If that Elder still will not repent and be restored, then they will be removed from their office by a vote of the Elders.

Individual ministry partners may also notice things happening in the life of an Elder that are inconsistent with his office and are expected to bring such things to the Elder Board. A private meeting will be held with the Elder and the concerned ministry partner. If no resolution can be reached at that meeting, it will be brought before the congregation and handled as in the previous paragraph.

This same process will be followed for all ministry partners who are consistently involved in sinful behavior or who are not demonstrating a meek and humble spirit.

2. Does the congregation vote on anything?

I believe the congregational, democratic form of church government stands in direct opposition to the Christ-like spirit of servant leadership and shepherding. Christ modeled and then mandated that the church be a place of servanthood, where each person considers others better than themselves and considers other's needs ahead of their own. We have a system of government in place that contradicts and undermines that Christ-like spirit by promoting individual rights and advancing personal needs. People demand to be heard. Their opinions suddenly become truth. Divisions develop as people of similar views rally together for strength to influence the vote. Suddenly, seeking the mind and heart of Christ is irrelevant. It is the sheep's desire to shepherd that is the fundamental cause of all church problems. A sheep only becomes a shepherd by being exalted to that position by Christ based on his becoming the servant of all.

Our goal at CBC is to be a servant-led church, with servants leading servants. Giving any authority to the congregation will be a hindrance to that goal being realized. We are to be a Theocracy, subject to Christ, not a Democracy, subject to man.

3. How are Ministry Partners accepted into the flock?

By vote of the Elders, based on the following things:

- a. Request by the individual to be a ministry partner.
- b. Testimony of the individual's salvation and post-salvation baptism.

4. Why are the Pastors considered Elders?

First, because the New Testament uses the terms for Pastor (Bishop) and Elder interchangeably. In Acts 20:17, 28 Paul addresses the leadership of the church at Ephesus using both terms. There was no distinction between clergy and leadership in the New Testament church.

Second, because it makes the Pastoral Staff primarily accountable to Christ and not to the congregation. Too many pastors become people pleasers to keep their jobs. The Elder system liberates the pastors to follow Christ alone.

Third, because the man being recognized by the church as Christ's gift to the church for leadership is empowered, as a Pastoral Elder, to truly lead in cooperation with the other Elders. Most churches recognize that the pastor is to be the spiritual leader, but do not give him any authority to lead. He has no voice in the final decisions when he is just an ex-officio member of the deacons or elders or trustees. When he is an equal Elder, he can truly be a part of the spiritual vision and leadership of the flock. He takes ownership of it with the flock. It produces long-term commitment in the pastor to shepherding the flock. It produces increased accountability between the pastor and the Elders. It creates a deeper bond between the shepherd and the flock, rather than alienation based on position. I cannot think of a negative to this system.

Conclusion

It is my prayer that through this paper the Holy Spirit has started to give you, as He has me, a vision of the spiritual vitality that is possible in a church when its people are truly servants of one another, and its leadership is qualified for their positions by being the models of servanthood. I am excited about what God is going to do in and through a church filled with people that reflect the servant heart of Jesus. How great will be the impact on the unsaved when they see in us the compassion of Christ demonstrated in the sacrificial giving to them of our time, our energy, our possessions, and our hearts. How attractive to the unsaved will be the

church when it is the place of peace and love, offering refuge to the lost. How much more of the abundance of life will we each experience when we have no more inner conflicts between what we should do and what we want to do, having surrendered our wants and wills to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Remember, the changing of our church structure and government is not our ultimate goal. Our structure and government are to be the reflection of our spiritual condition. Therefore, we must reflect on our spiritual condition as servants in light of meekness and gentleness. Let the Holy Spirit convict, challenge, and change our hearts to be the pure reflection of Christ's heart. Let us begin immediately to express the heart of Christ in our actions by serving one another, building up one another, and encouraging one another; not out of obligation, but as a pure response to the love of Christ in our hearts.

Paul Harvey tells a wonderful Christmas story about a man and the birds. Perhaps you've heard it. The point of the story is that if the man could just become one of the birds and relate to them on their level, he could help them. That's what God did in sending Jesus as one of us. He related to us. He got involved in our lives. He put our needs ahead of His own needs. He sacrificed anything and everything to meet with us and help us. He experienced our hurts, pains and sufferings. Now Jesus wants to send us into the lives of others, to become one with them in their experiences and emotions, to sacrifice anything and everything to meet with them and help them so that we might show them the way to life.

That is to be the nature and spiritual atmosphere of our lives and our church. God, send your Holy Spirit to produce the character of Christ in us, so that we may be used fully for your glory to accomplish your purpose.