

SAFEGUARDS AGAINST AUTHORITATIVE SHEPHERDING IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Deut 17:14-20

INTRODUCTION:

In speaking from this text of Deuteronomy 17, I am attempting to draw a parallel between leadership in the nation of Israel under a king (which was never God's preference but which He accommodated) and leadership in the NT church under some form of government that falls short of a true NT plurality of elders. God had set up the nation of Israel to function as a theocracy; they were supposed to look to their invisible Commander-In-Chief for direction and victory. Instead they demanded that God provide them a visible king like the nations around them.

I find that in the NT church we experience the same difficulty in trying to respond to the invisible Christ as the sole Head of His Church. Instead we tend to promote one man (or he promotes himself) to some special position of prominence (even if it is labeled as a Senior Pastor among multiple elders). We might say in theory that this does not create any type of hierarchy since we teach that all elders (including the "chief among equals") each exercise the same authority in decision making. But in practice we find that a hierarchy both exists and functions in church leadership. This mitigates some of the divinely intended checks and balances – especially in an autonomous local church context where there is no structure above the local level. An extremely humble leader may function quite admirably in such a setting. But the church exposes itself to the vulnerability of the situation deteriorating into some level of what I am going to term "Authoritative Shepherding."

Definition of Authoritative Shepherding: When one leader exalts himself to the point where he is lording it over the flock instead of exercising servant leadership in harmony with the checks and balances of the plurality of elders

"Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)

In reality it takes an incredible amount of love, humility and mutual respect for elders to minister together as a team in a true plurality. Each elder will still differ in his gifts, in his area of ministry focus, in his level of effectiveness, in the extent to which he is compensated financially (if any). But there will be no hierarchy operating to circumvent God's intended model. Who gets hurt when there is abuse is the flock. Sheep are mistreated, unnecessarily burdened with man-made, legalistic requirements, repressed (so that there is a climate of fear preventing open discussion of leadership issues), restrained from ministry, and even driven off in the name of maintaining overall unity – but too often from the self-serving goal of a Diotrephes attempting to maintain his selfish dominance.

"I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church." (3 John 9,10)

BIG IDEA:

ONLY SUBMISSION TO THE STANDARD OF THE WORD OF GOD PREVENTS THE PERVERSION OF GODLY LEADERSHIP DOWN THE PATHWAY OF AUTHORITATIVE SHEPHERDING

I. (:14-15) PATHWAY TO AUTHORITATIVE SHEPHERDING – HOW DOES SUCH AN ABUSE ARISE?

A. (:14A) Diverting Glory away from God for Ministry Success

“When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, And you possess it and live in it”

- The church belongs to the Lord – not to one particular leader despite his giftedness
- Any ministry success comes by virtue of God’s Grace as a Gift from God
- No room for personal pride or boasting – as if you have created this ministry or as if these positive effects are due to your leadership ability
- God is blessing the church corporately; not just blessing the ministry of one man
- It is very unbalanced to develop the growth of a church around the edification gift of predominantly one man
- Be careful what type of language you use: Robbing God of His glory --
“ my calling” / “built on my foundation” / etc. – starts to sound like Nebuchadnezzar

B. (:14) Substitution of One Visible Preeminent Leader for Invisible Leadership of Preeminent Christ who should be the Sole Recognized Head of His Church

1. Conformity to the leadership model of the World

“I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me”

Christ had much to say on this topic of servant leadership vs the model of the Gentiles:

Matt. 20:25-28

“But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

- wrong initiation – Who is driving this leadership model? Man-directed
- wrong motivation – Why would I want such a visible human king?
- wrong pattern of leadership style – How will such a leader govern?
- wrong expectations – What will such a leadership model produce?

There are many pragmatic and expedient arguments in favor of one, strong leader

- best way to achieve unity of doctrine and practice
- the only way to have strong leadership – like a Moses or Joshua
(but they are types of Christ ... not a Senior Pastor)
- look at how other similar models have been successful
- prevents paralysis and allows us to move quickly on agenda items
- strong charismatic personality attracts a loyal following
- need one central focus as the visionary and the primary indoctrinator

Only problem = the Bible sets forth Jesus Christ as fulfilling this position

Beware of titles of differentiation as well – such as demanding to be called “Reverend” -- What is the point of that?? What is being accomplished??

[See Appendix below for outline of **Matthew 23:1-12**]

2. Denial of Principle of Separation -- Believers are called to be different from the world around us

- members of a heavenly kingdom of righteousness
- separate and distinct from the world around us; not adopting their methods
- priesthood of all believers
- importance of principle of humility

3. Rejection of God’s Best Design = Safeguard against Leadership Abuses

= theocracy for Israel

= plurality of elders with checks and balances for the church

Key: The model is not what is being debated here; it is the pattern of abusive overly authoritative leadership

C. (:15) Recognition of God Appointed Authority = Innocent Beginning

1. Recognizing whom God has appointed

“you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses”

Church is not called to make anyone a leader; the Holy Spirit makes a man a leader; church merely recognizes the men whom the Holy Spirit has appointed

2. Adhering to Criteria for Leadership Ordained by God

“one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; You may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.”

Don’t set up your own criteria to circumvent what God has ordained;

Don’t make men jump through unnecessary hoops to prevent them from exercising the leadership that God has called them to

Under the cloak of a desire for “Excellency in Ministry” we can easily subvert other equally valid principles such as the value of “Simplicity in Ministry”

Do not place burdens on the people that are excessive and unrealistic

II. (:16-17) PERVERSION OF GODLY LEADERSHIP – WHAT WILL EGOTISTICAL SHEPHERDING LOOK LIKE?

A. (:16) Relying on the Flesh (vs. Depending on God)

1. Placing Reliance on His Own Ministry Giftedness and Powers

“Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself”

2. Placing Reliance on Other Human, Worldly Models of Success

“nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses,

Since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’”

B. (:17) Selfish Orientation (vs. Sacrificing for Others)

1. Pursuing Political Advantage and Popularity
(Alternative View: Pursuing the Lusts of the Flesh)

“Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away”

Acting as if the standards of God’s law do not apply to him; putting himself in a special category where he can live as he pleases

Danger: Losing the Focus of Devotion on God and Goal of Pleasing Him

2. Pursuing Financial Gain from the Ministry

“nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.”

Making decisions based on how he will benefit personally;

Overly concerned with his level of compensation, benefits, perks, etc.

**III. (:18-20) PROTECTION OF GODLY LEADERSHIP –
WHAT WILL PROTECT A LEADER FROM SUCH PERVERSION?
ONLY CONFORMITY TO THE WORD OF GOD**

A. (:18) Dedication to the Word of God in the Context of Submissive Accountability

“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests.”

B. (:19) Careful Obedience to the Word of God on a Daily Basis

1. Abiding in the Word

“And it shall be with him”

2. Reading and Meditating on a Daily Basis

“and he shall read it all the days of his life”

3. Personal Application for a Life of Wisdom and Fearing God

“that he may learn to fear the Lord his God”

4. Careful Obedience to the Entire Revelation

(without allowing himself any exception clauses as “the Lord’s anointed”)

“by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes.”

C. (:20) 3 Reasons to Remain Submissive to the Word of God

(vs. lording it over the flock via authoritative shepherding)

1. Protects Against Egotistical Pride

“that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen”

2. Protects Against Moral Transgression and Oppression of the Flock

“and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left”

3. Ensures Ministry Longevity and Productivity

“in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

IV. PATTERN OF NT CHURCH LEADERSHIP – JESUS CHRIST AS THE HEAD OF HIS CHURCH SHEPHERDING HIS PRECIOUS FLOCK THROUGH THE DELEGATED SERVANT AUTHORITY OF A PLURALITY OF GODLY ELDERS

[NT passages need to be investigated to fully develop this model]

* * * * *

Appendix: Outline of Matthew 23:1-12

SPIRITUAL LEADERS SHOULD BE CHARACTERIZED BY HUMBLE SERVANT LEADERSHIP THAT EXALTS JESUS CHRIST RATHER THAN BY AMBITIOUS SELF-PROMOTION

(:1) INTRODUCTION:

Context for Teaching on Servant Leadership

I. (:2-3) CONTRAST OF AMBITIOUS, PRIDEFUL, HYPOCRITICAL SPIRITUAL LEADERS

A. The Religious Establishment Seizes Positions of Authority and Control

B. Hypocritical Leaders Never Walk the Talk

1. The Proclamation of Truth Still Has Value
2. The Pattern of Hypocrisy Must be Rejected

II. (:4-7) CHARACTERIZATION OF THEIR BLATANT ABUSE OF POWER – EXPOSING 3 AREAS OF DEFICIENCY

A. (:4) Lording it Over the Flock vs Setting the Example for Loving, Sacrificial Service

1. Demanding Burdensome Service from Others – Insensitive, Demanding
2. Excusing Themselves

B. (:5) Prideful Motivation – Seeking Man's Approval Rather Than God's

1. Looking for the Praise of Men
2. Concentrating on External Signs of False Super Spirituality – Fake Piety
 - a. Spiritual Rituals and Ostentatious Piety
 - b. Spiritual Garments

C. (:6-7) Ambitious, Political Self Promotion – Contrast the Role of a Servant

1. First in Honor
2. First in Power
3. First in Loyalty
4. First in Teaching

III. (:8-10) CAUTION (CAVEAT) AGAINST THE USE OF GRANDIOSE TITLES OF EXALTATION – WARNING AGAINST 3 DANGER AREAS

A. (:8) Over Reliance on Academic Credentials

B. (:9) Relationship Dependencies

C. (:10) Shepherding Abuse

IV. (:11-12) CALLING TO HUMBLE SERVANT LEADERSHIP

A. Spiritual Leadership is All About Humble Service

B. The Way Up is the Way Down

1. Wage War Against Pride
2. Work at Humbling Yourself