

Headship,
Leadership
&
the Body

Another Look at Consensus in the Church

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Introduction

The earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was a truly RADICAL MINISTRY. The English word “radical” comes from the Latin word, *radix*, meaning “root”. The Spirit of Christ is never “topical”, He always goes to the “root” of the issue – “The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.” (Proverbs 4:23; Psalm 51:6; 1 Samuel 16:7; Cf. Matthew 3:10) “God is Spirit”, therefore the “root” and the “heart” of the things of God are always *spiritual* rather than *soulish*. (John 4:24)

Thus, there is a difference between truly RADICAL MINISTRY and REACTIONARY MINISTRY. REACTIONARY MINISTRY is always a "pendulum swing" in reaction to the abuses of humans in the name of Christ. It is a *soulish* reaction to *soulish abuse*. It therefore ALWAYS falls left or right of *spiritual truth*. RADICAL MINISTRY is a response to the Holy Spirit, rather than a reaction to human spirits. It is true because it is a response to the Spirit of Truth. REACTIONARY MINISTRY too often results in the abandonment of

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scriptural principles, patterns and practices in reaction to human abuses. e.g. abandoning the New Testament scriptural realities like the “ascension gift ministries” which “He gave” (Ephesians 4:11). [Also: manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit-ordained scriptural patterns for the life and ministry of the church, et al.] The heart attitude of truly RADICAL MINISTRY says, “If what has been done has been wrong, then let's ask God to help us do it right.” (rather than arbitrarily deciding what scriptural practices are going to be ignored. Jesus is the Head of the Church - we do not have the right or authority to make those arbitrary decisions. The Latin phrase *“abusus non tollit usus”* fits well here: *“The abuse does not bear away the use”*, or in other words, the abuse should not obscure or negate legitimate use.

The Role of the Headship of Christ in the Church

It is currently in vogue in certain movements in the Western Church to criticize church leaders for usurping the Headship of Christ in the Church. I agree that, generally speaking, this is a valid criticism. But, I but would like to also point out that people in general usurp the Headship of Christ much more often than church leaders. This makes sense simply because of the fact that there are more people than leaders in the Church. But, the more accurate statement would be that human beings, church leaders and people alike, are very guilty of usurping the Headship of Christ in the Church.

I am absolutely for the Headship of Christ in the Church – it is my passion. I just don't think that the Headship of Christ is contrary to leadership in the Church. And, obviously, leadership in the Church should not be contrary to the Headship of Christ! In fact, leaders are gifts given by the ascended Christ (Ephesians 4:8-16) for the purpose of helping to discern the Spirit of Christ and maintain the Headship of Christ in the Church. Often this

needs to be done by pointing out when people are usurping Christ's Headship i.e. speaking in His name when, in reality, it is their own human spirits they are putting forth. While church leaders are certainly not "infallible" in their interpretations, scriptures like Hebrews 13:17 (cf. v.7) indicate that Christ has appointed them to "lead" – and part of "leading" is being able to discern and communicate the will of Christ. If they are not able to truly discern and communicate the will of Christ, they are obviously not appointed by God for leadership. The issue is the Headship of Christ - not whether leaders get to "push their weight around" and "run the show", nor is it about whether all the people get the opportunity to "share what's on their hearts" and "have their say". The issue is the pre-eminence of Christ (Colossians 1:18) and "hearing what the Spirit is saying to the churches". (Revelation 2 & 3)

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The New Covenant & The Priesthood of ALL Believers

The priesthood of the New Covenant has Christ as its High Priest. This is the only legitimate priesthood in the New Covenant, for there is only “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5) The New Covenant priesthood consists of ALL BELIEVERS who are IN CHRIST. (Cf. Romans 8:9-11) If you are IN CHRIST, you are IN HIS PRIESTHOOD. This is commonly known as “the priesthood of all believers”, a doctrine restored to the Church through the efforts of Luther and Wesley, upheld by various groups such as the Plymouth Brethren and some Baptist groups, pursued and practiced by all those desiring to live in the New Covenant. This “priesthood of all believers” is the New Covenant fulfillment in the Church of the Lord’s Old Covenant desire for Israel. That is, the Lord desires “a kingdom of priests”. (Exodus 19:6) This “kingdom of priests” is synonymous with a New Covenant People – a people who “all know the Lord, from the least to the greatest of them”. (Jeremiah

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31:34; Hebrews 8:10-11; Cf. Isaiah 54:13 & John 6:45)

This was the Lord's purpose in redemption. (Revelation 5:9-10) This is the calling of the Church – “You are a chosen race, a royal PRIESTHOOD, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

In this priesthood, there is Christ, the High Priest, and there are ALL the believers. There are no other levels of priesthood in between. As with the priesthood of believers, so it is with the leadership of believers: The risen Christ has given the gift ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and shepherds. (Ephesians 4:7-11) *Shepherds are elders who oversee* the flock. There are not three separate ministries of elders, shepherds and overseers – these are merely three descriptions of one ministry, which some people have taken to calling “pastors” and bishops”. (1 Peter 5:2; Cf. Acts 20:17 & 28) In the New Testament, there is no such thing as a “leading pastor” who is over other pastors. There is only One Chief

Shepherd, and that is Jesus (1 Peter 5:4, Strongs # 750, Greek: *archipoimen*) – all others are under-shepherds of the Flock of God. Although he was an apostle, Peter called himself a “co-elder”, not an “Arch-elder”, that is, he was of the same standing as the other elders he was writing to in 1 Peter 5:1. (Strongs # 4850, Greek: *sumpresbuteros*)

As it was stated, *shepherds* are *elders* who *oversee* the flock. It is a well-known fact that sheep instinctively follow any other sheep that moves first. It is purely instinctive; there is no premeditated awareness of whether the move might be into good pasture or into danger. This is probably why, the Lord appoints leaders in His Flock – those who are fellow-sheep, of the same standing as the other sheep, yet gifted and appointed by God to communicate **His Leadership** to His Flock.

I strongly defend and endeavor to practice New Covenant realities such as the priesthood of ALL believers. But, **none of this negates the fact that God has appointed leadership in the Church.** (Hebrews 13:7, 17,

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24; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Philippians 3:8) Obviously, Christ-like leaders are those who feel called to serve rather than be served. (John 13:1-17) And, Christ-like leaders do not lead by lording over people with control techniques (Strong's # 2634, Greek: *katakuriuo*), but lead by example, as a model for the flock to follow. (Strong's # 5179, Greek: *tupos*, Cf. Philippians 3:17).

From the beginning, the Lord desired “a kingdom of priests” – even with Israel. (Exodus 19:6) Yet, He also appointed the Levitical priesthood. (Exodus 29; Leviticus 8) Israel rejected God as their King by asking for a human king in Saul. (1 Samuel 8) But that was NOT the case with Aaron and his sons. The Levitical priesthood was not asked for by the people of Israel. God ordained the Levitical priesthood – it was God’s idea. Israel, in fact, did fail in its calling to be “a kingdom of priests”; but even before they had a chance to fail, the Levites were appointed by God as a particular group along side of “the kingdom of priests”. To say they were the priests of the priests, would violate New Covenant theology. (1 Timothy

2:5) But, it would be better to say that they were to be exemplary models of the priesthood for “the kingdom of priests”.

The name “Levi” means “joined to the Lord” (Genesis 29:34, *“Bible Names and Their Meanings”* by Jack Enlow, *“The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names”* by Cornwall and Smith, *“Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names”* by J.B. Jackson) The Levites were to be exemplary models of the intimacy of relationship with the Lord that is required for the priesthood.

Some theorize that the “Nicolaitans” of Revelation 2:14-15 were leaders who “overpowered the people”. Actually, a more likely interpretation from the context would be a 1st century sect that “held to the teaching of Balaam”, and “corrupted God’s people by suggesting compromise with the culture of the day.” (Peter H. Davids, *“Hard Sayings of the Bible”*) In any case, the Levites in no way “overpowered the people” – they had no earthly clout over their brethren in the other tribes. Their calling was to serve rather than be served. They were, in fact, “a

disadvantage group” in Israel in the sense that they were not allotted land to provide for themselves and their families. They were servants of God who were dependent upon their brethren for food offerings, and were ultimately “joined” in dependency to the Lord. (Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 18:1; Joshua 13:14, 33; 18:7; Ezekiel 44:28)

Again, Jesus is the Head and the Builder of His Church; we do not have the privilege or authority to choose which New Covenant realities we want to embrace, and which we want to ignore. So, while the priesthood of all believers negates the false separation between “clergy and laity”, it does not negate the fact that God has appointed leaders in His Flock. We cannot interpret away the fact of New Covenant leadership in the Church. But, instead, we can pursue an accurate understanding of its true nature and character, and endeavor to practice it in a way that does not grieve the Lord of the Church.

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The Role of Leadership in the Church

Actually, the 1st century Church demonstrated that apostolic workers, local church leaders, as well as, the people of the local church can all be in unison and harmony as the one Body of Christ, agreeing on the will of Christ in the Church. A wonderful example is seen in Acts 15, where the 1st century Church together discerned the mind of Christ regarding essential New Covenant doctrine and practice. The leading of the Holy Spirit is clear, and clearly sets the precedent for the Body of Christ in the Church Age. What we see is not Episcopalian, the rule of regional leaders; nor is it Presbyterian, the rule of elders; nor is it Congregational, the rule of the people. It is a Theocracy, the rule of God – the leading of the Holy Spirit as discerned by apostles, elders and people TOGETHER.

In v. 2, we see that extra-local and local leadership was definite and was definitely engaged: “Paul and Barnabus and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning the issue”. V. 4 “They were received by the church and the

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apostles and elders. V. 6 “The apostles and elders came together to look into this matter.” (Cf. Peter: vv. 7-11 & James vv. 13-21)

But we also see in this passage the engagement of THE WHOLE BODY DISCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH CONSENSUS: v. 22 “It seemed good to the apostles and elders, **with the whole church**”. v.25 “It seemed good to us, having become of one mind.” V. 28 “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.”

Indeed, the simple goal of leaders and people alike (which is not so easily accomplished) is that the Holy Spirit would communicate to the whole Body the will of the Head. It is the will of the Head that is important – not who pronounces it, be it a “father”, a “young man”, or a “little child”. (1 John 2:13) It is not so much a matter of agreeing with leaders as it is agreeing with the Head of the Body – leaders and people agreeing together with the Head.

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Obey your leaders/Leader

But let's look at Hebrews 13 and gain some insight into the nature of "obeying" leaders in light of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:33-34) and in the context of the Headship of Christ. What we have too often is reaction to leadership abuse rather than an authentic response to the Holy Spirit – a "throwing the baby out with the bathwater" as it were. In reality, there need be no dichotomy between the Headship of Christ and leadership in the Church – it is not an "either or", they are not "mutually exclusive". So, let's look at two related verses in Hebrews 13.

Verse 7: "**Remember** those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." The leaders the writer is encouraging the Hebrews to remember and imitate in faith are Hebrew leaders, including Moses, the prophets, and those judges and kings of Israel who knew and followed God.

Verse 17: "**Obey** your leaders and **submit** to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an

account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” Whereas v. 7 is referring to leaders in the Hebrews’ past, v. 17 is in present tense and referring to the leaders present with them. There are two Greek words translated “submit” in English. One is *hupotasso*, which is a military term meaning to place oneself under leaders. That is NOT the word the writer used here. He used the word *hukeito*, which means **to defer to, to acknowledge the merit of the judgments of leaders.**

If we now look at the word translated “obey”, we’ll see the difference even more clearly: There is a Greek word, *peitharcho*, which means to obey those in authority, like magistrates. That is NOT the word the writer uses here. He used the Greek word, *peitho*, which in the passive voice, as it is here, means **to be persuaded to agree with leaders.** W.E. Vine says: “The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.” He goes on to explain that it is obedience which results from belief, distinguishing it from the unbelief of the

Israelites in the wilderness which resulted in disobedience. (Hebrews 3:18-19). It is an obedience that results from being persuaded by truth when communicated by leaders. Again, leaders are not infallible, but hopefully they communicate truth most of the time. If they don't, they are obviously not ordained by God.

We see this kind of **persuasion by truth** in the period of the judges and kings in Israel's history, at least when there were godly judges and kings - and God-fearing people. The **obedience resulting from persuasion by the word and Spirit of God** is very different in nature to obedience to secular laws. In the world system, as in ancient Rome, Caesar is declared lord; therefore, one must obey the commands of human rulers for fear of punishment – or to earn favor. **Persuasion by truth** is an obedience which results when leaders fulfill their God-given role of helping to guide people so they understand, agree with, believe in, and live according to the laws of God's kingdom. It is not the law of leaders that people

must obey; it is the law of God's kingdom that leaders and people are pursuing together.

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Just a little bit about ourselves ...

We have been married for 37 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Being an avid student by nature, I have done formal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology.

We served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years helping to establish churches and train church leaders. Our Bible teaching ministry has also taken us to other countries like Zimbabwe, Brazil, and England, as well as, throughout the United States.

We have pastored several churches, and as an itinerant Bible teacher, I have ministered in hundreds of churches on four continents. As a writer, I've authored many publications which are distributed to church leaders worldwide.

We have ministered together speaking in churches, leading spiritual formation seminars, personal mentoring, and administrating an international partnership of church leaders.

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